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City, Culture and Society

#BLM and the city
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Abstract:	The hashtag 'Black Lives Matter' (#BLM) has become a major force to compose the city, culture and society at a world scale. We critically engage with the challenges faced as well as the transformations called by anti-racist and decolonial movements.

Dear Editor-in-Chief

We would like to thank you in advance for your consideration.
Our suggested editorial aims at addressing one of the most pressing issues that cities, cultures and societies are facing globally: one of racial justice.
We hope that this submission will meet the journal's expectations; and will be given an opportunity for publication.
We look forward to your reply, which we hope to be positive.

Best regards,

Jenny & Diana

#BLM and the city

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#BLM and the city

The city has always been the site par excellence of contestation; and, as such, an active and activated arena of all powers and a touchstone for structural inequalities. It is where we strive to get by, to work, live, learn, love, be and breathe. This journal's previous editorial reminded us how the last half-century has been characterised by a global decline of faith in the power and legitimacy of the state to serve the public purpose, and nowhere is this more clearly expressed than in the eruption of urban protests in cities across the globe in 2020.

The question of 'the public' is key here and even more so when global crisis hits, as it has recently with the COVID-19 pandemic. As our cities have emptied out, essential services have continued to be sustained by low paid, undervalued and often marginalised outcasts of societies – those racialised minorities, including precarious migrants, who are required to work and cannot just 'Stay At Home', who have less access to healthcare, and whose disproportionate risks of infection and death are staggeringly high.

Perhaps this is not surprising. The contemporary city, its first massive expansions in Europe and the US built on the state-sanctioned idea that some human beings could be abducted, legally owned and forced to work under threat of violence, is the epitome of what has been called necro-capitalism (Banerjee 2008). Cities are cultivated, and their stories are enforced; who is and who belongs to the *polis* is put on display and is always protected; those who are not are, at best, brutally made invisible and exploited or, at worst, bluntly eliminated.

In the spirit of citizen-activism, seizing on social media to wrest back power, contest dominant storylines, give voice to invisibilised experiences, and shape public debate anew, we bring readers some 'signs of the times' in hashtags (#), rather than news headlines.

#BlackLivesMatter (BLM)

The global city, the capital city, the headquarters of the nation. And when the United States Capitol – symbol of the USA's democracy – is assaulted in quasi-full impunity, we remember Miriam Carey who in 2013 sought to pass through the White House check-point and was summarily executed: as activists have said, her crime like many others, was 'driving/walking in the city while Black'. The global city is increasingly the militarised, securitised and weaponised city. Justice in relation to physical integrity and mental health is always in balance. For those people and children whose very embodied presence constitutes a suspect threat, the 'right' to go about one's own everyday business in public space – to drive one's car, to walk to the shops to buy Skittles and iced tea, to play with a toy gun – or even in private spaces of one's own home or bed – to live, to sleep, to breathe, – are arbitrarily suspended.

#WalterScott   #TrayvonMartin   #TamirRice   #BreonnaTaylor…
#NoJusticeNoPeace   #SayTheirName   #ICan'tBreathe

The city, where parades take place, is also a site of celebrations with joyful marching and dancing during carnivals. Neighbourhoods once feared for their 'diversity' become sought after by white middle-classes seeking the next urban hotspot or trendy neighbourhood to settle. Yet, while some may soon become disenchanted by 'the noise and smell' as a French President, Jacques Chirac, once dared to put it, their new presence only serves, if not to force out Black and other racialised minorities, to escalate police violence against them, often with lethal consequences. As the culture of cities is sold, bought and traded, policy-makers invest in urban development, renewal and regeneration projects that, with the support of racialized security regimes, systematically alienate, threaten and destroy communities. As 18 year-old Mike Brown's case of 2014 demonstrates, spaces scarred by radical demographic changes, are also ones where fatally wounded black bodies can be left uncovered for hours in full view of their families, friends and neighbours.

#Ferguson

The city, however, remains a site of tactics and survivalist strategies where people deploy their always limited and constrained means to ensure their mere existence and subsistence. The city, then, is also site of demonstration, protest and rebellions of citizens (and sometimes non-citizens) bursting out against the blatant injustices carried out against them on an everyday basis. Protests over police brutality and systemic racism erupt on bridges, roads and highways, as public rights of way become both channels for grief and rage as well as assertions of belonging to nation via the claiming, re-appropriating and owning of infrastructure. Global solidarities across social movements emerge to confront the regimes and technologies of neo-colonial states in the Global North and Global South alike (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

#DefundThePolice   #EndSARS

The city is also the place where lived culture and heritage are contested; where points of views, references and historical perspectives are shared but also debated and hierarchised. Urban culture is articulated in public spaces where the official narrative is glorified with its version of the past and the present, and multinational corporations not only commodify racial difference but also engage in 'woke-washing', where brand marketing simultaneously enables the visibility *and erasure* of intersectional, feminist and Black social justice activism (Sobande, 2019). Dominant images however are also challenged by spontaneous, organic, emergent collectives animated by the desire to disturb, debunk and re-imagine a present and future from which they have historically been excluded and ostracised. Flags are pulled down, buildings are renamed and statues are defaced, displaced, rolled through city streets and thrown into harbours to presage the (wished-for) fall of white supremacy. As the great poet-activist, Gil Scott-Heron (1983) would put it: "[…] If the interpreting was left up to me, I'll be sure that every time folks knew that this version wasn't mine, and which is why it is called *HIS*tory"

#RhodesMustFall

The urgent task of re-imagining our cities, cultures and societies is intimately linked to questions about what kind of learning, education is authorised, permitted and encouraged. Justice in relation to education and research relates to what and whose knowledge is recognised, who gets to write whose stories, who are the teachers, researchers and storytellers supported and funded by 'public' institutions. As such, it remains crucial to cultivate ways for teachers and learners who seek to engage in the formation of radical and liberating spaces in the academy and beyond (Jong *et al*. 2019*)*. What kind of a city, culture and society can be envisaged, which aspects must be transformed and dismantled – and what kind of justice can be aspired to beyond the bandwagon of decolonising curriculum initiatives?

#WhyIsMyCurriculumWhite?

To conclude, the question of the 'public' and the kind of city and society we want to see is far from being rhetorical. It goes hand in hand with the kind of 'culture' we aspire to: one based on oppression and exploitation, or one based on an ethics of care, moral economy and welfare policy? While recently notions of 'care' have been mobilised by states and policy-makers in the deepening of neoliberal objectives of dismantling the welfare state, there is also a resurgence of an ethics of care among racially marginalised communities that revives its more revolutionary roots, as a source of survival and of constructing political communities (Emejulu and Bassel 2018). The Combahee River Collective (1977) once claimed that 'if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression'. Focusing on these intersectionalities offers a productive starting point for both reflection and action for the re-imagining of radical and sustainable urban futures in which all Black lives can flourish. As the inspirational singer Sam Cook powerfully put it in 1964: 'A Change is gonna come', it has to…

#SayHerName   #BlackLivesMatter   #BlackTransLivesMatter

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