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On deaf ears: anti-black police terror, multiracial protest and white loyalty to the state

Jaime Amparo Alves^{a,b} and João Costa Vargas^{a,b}

^aDepartment of Sociology and Anthropology, College of Staten Island/City University of New York, New York, NY 10314, USA; ^bDepartment of Black Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78702, USA

ABSTRACT

In this essay, we explore the racialised dimensions of policing practices in Brazil. To do so, we look not at the police, their administrative organisation, and practices, but rather we examine the modes of sociality reflected in and produced by police violence. Drawing from a statistics-based analysis of the social and political outcomes produced by the state in its preparation of mega-sports events – evictions, incarceration, and police violence, for example – we identify a nexus between, on the one hand, racialised violence against black bodies and, on the other hand, white loyalty to the state, despite, or precisely because of, a specific type of violence perpetrated by the state on white bodies. Our primary contention is that we cannot understand white victimisation by the police – and the outrage it produces – without taking into consideration two foundational, dialectical aspects of the regime of rights: complicity and disavowal. White vulnerability to this specific form of state violence – a form of violence that is contingent and produces collective horror – reflects not only the disavowal of black suffering, but also the strengthening of the white public sphere.

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Racial catharsis

On 20 June 2013, violence erupted in Brazilian major cities as the police force tried to control thousands of demonstrators angry with bus fare hikes and frustrated at the Brazilian political system. Violent police response to peaceful protests turned cities like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro into battle zones.¹ Protesters responded by burning buses, storming state facilities, and damaging private buildings, especially banks, TV stations, and high-end stores. Images of white middle class students beaten and arrested generated

CONTACT Jaime Amparo Alves  Jaime.alves@csi.cuny.edu;
João Costa Vargas costavargas@austin.utexas.edu

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a public catharsis leading human rights organisations, public intellectuals, and even conservative news media to denounce what they called a 'disproportional and unjustified' use of military force and defend the rights of civil society members to protest.² Activist lawyers organised a legal committee to pressure the police commander to sign a deal to only use non-lethal weapons during the protests and to ensure that arrested individuals would not be tortured.³ On 21 June 2013, in a prime-time evening televised address, President Dilma Rousseff condemned the violence, defended the rights of civil society members to voice their demands, and promised to meet the protest leaders. 'I am listening to the voices of the street,' she reassured the nation.

Mass protests in Brazil's main cities are not new. In 1984, in the waning days of the military dictatorship, large-scale demonstrations demanded direct elections for president, and in 1992, a national mobilisation pressed to impeach president Fernando Collor de Mello. So what was different about the June 2013 protests? While a bus fare increase in São Paulo and government overspending in the preparation of the 2014 World Cup were primary motivations, the movement only became a mass, multi-sited and repeated event after news media captured violent police interventions. Indeed, it was following the 13 June 2013 protest in São Paulo, when *Folha de S.Paulo* news reporters were struck by police rubber bullets, that major newspapers and television channels began to openly support the protests. In the following weeks, street manifestations brought together more than one million people in Fortaleza, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Curitiba, and Porto Alegre, among others. Commentators and surveys confirmed what the protest photographic images suggested: white and middle-class young college graduates, not in the labour market and connected via social media, were the majority of those protesting (Saad-Filho and Morais 2014, 235; Pelli 2013, 33; Jensen 2014).

In this essay, we explore the racialised dimensions of such protest drawing attention to broader policing practices in Brazil. To do so, we look not at the police, their administrative organisation, and practices, but rather, we examine modes of sociality reflected in and (re)produced by police violence. The following questions structure our analysis: What was the nature and process by which political solidarity among the protestors (and the larger public) was established? How was the grammar of rights mobilised, and what accompanying shared symbolism granted civil entitlement to enact the protests? How were notions of public space and whiteness (re)configured under police violence? And finally, how did ordinary anti-black terror enable whites to come together in their critique of exceptional violence (thus making possible the regime of rights)?

In order to answer these questions, we briefly introduce the theoretical problem of how to conceptualise and interpret police violence in societies like Brazil, in particular, and the black diaspora in the Americas, in general.

We acknowledge the sociological record but argue this record is insufficient to account for the 'racial episteme' (Fanon 1967) that informs policing practices in these geographies. Second, we draw on statistics on evictions, incarceration, homicide, and police violence to reveal a structure of anti-black racial disposability and racial privilege in Brazil. And finally, we look at the protests against the 2014 World Cup, as well as state repression of demonstrators, to analyse the nexus between, on the one hand, ordinary violence against black bodies and, on the other hand, white investment in the racial state, despite, or precisely because of, a specific type of violence perpetrated by the police on white bodies. Our primary contention is that we cannot understand white victimisation by the police – and the outrage it produces – without taking into consideration two foundational, dialectical aspects of the regime of rights: complicity and disavowal. White vulnerability to this specific form of state violence, while providing an opportunity, via protest, to reaffirm the white public sphere, disavows black suffering. Ultimately, we argue, white vulnerability to state violence strengthens white identification with and belonging in the avowedly multiracial polis. During the demonstrations, a public catharsis emerged out of the spectacular display of police violence against white bodies. The outrage generated by the police beating of whites in Brazilian streets was a suggestive moment when white entitlement (to outrage and public demonstration) and black exclusion were dialectically produced in name of a peculiar democracy.

Racialised regime of law

Between 2009 and 2013, Brazilian police killed 11,197 individuals, an average of 6 persons killed per day.⁴ Although the available data is unreliable insofar as the racial identification of the victims is concerned, scholars have demonstrated a consistent pattern of victimisation of Black, young, favela resident individuals (Mitchell and Wood 1999; French 2013). A comprehensive body of literature has argued that police violence is part of a broader challenge for the consolidation of democracy in Latin America; police violence, corruption, and widespread human rights violations all are indication of 'low intensity democracies'. This approach usually relies on Guillermo O'Donnell's framework according to which the continent is divided into 'brown', 'green', and 'blue' areas depending on the presence of the state and its ability to provide territorial and political cohesion. In his framework, countries like Brazil and Peru (and, in a less intensity, Argentina) exemplify the 'brown' zone due to the predominance of traditional/clientelist relations, lack of accountability in the judicial system, and the poor performance of the state in providing equal protection to their citizens. In the brown areas, 'democracies are based on a schizophrenic state (...). It is a state in which its components of democratic legality and, hence, of publicness and

citizenship, fade away at the frontiers of various regions and class, gender and ethnic relations'. In contrast, in the 'green' and 'blue' areas, respectively, the rule of law is consolidated, and all citizens, regardless of class and ethnic belonging, equally participate in decision-making processes (O'Donnell 1993, 1361–62).

Taking up O'Donnell's approach, scholars contend that as the region, and Brazil in particular, has moved from the dictatorship regime to democracy, there remained an 'authoritarian tradition' that has in police corruption its main expression and the urban poor as its main target (see, e.g., Chevigny 1990; Pinheiro 1991; Holston and Caldeira 1999; Huggins 2000). While it may indeed be true that the 'new' police that emerged from the exception regimes that plagued Latin America remain heirs of a tradition that treats political dissent and common criminals as enemies of public order, state violence against blacks is a hardly new phenomenon, as the rule of law has never been applied to protect black bodies, regardless the nature of the regime.⁵

However, the literature in dialogue with O'Donnell's work has a point: police violence against the poor is an enduring and widespread phenomenon throughout the Americas, and it indicates the state's unfulfilled promise to grant citizenship rights for all its citizens. Continued police brutality against the most vulnerable citizens also suggests the state's complicity in the perpetuation of violence as a form of social management. Still, to craft this problem in mechanic and (class) economic terms misses a fundamental aspect of its manifestation: the enduring racialised regime of law in which blacks are deemed as enemies of public order in the hemisphere (Goldstein 2003; De La Torre 2005; Moncada 2010). The refusal to take race seriously reveals the underlying belief that, contrary to the United States and South Africa, where racial violence is easily identified as a component of these formations of state, in Latin America, the problem is mainly thought in terms of class privilege and the state's failure to grant universal citizenship rights. Such citizenship-focused framework, blind and tone deaf to racial dynamics, continues to inform critiques of (state) violence in so-called Latin America (see e.g., Brinks 2007; Bergman 2006; UNPD 2013). What if the very constitution of citizenship requires its opposite, the non-citizen? If the rule of law is in fact a racialised regime of punishment, then how do we analyse police victimisation across the spectrums of race and class? And finally, how does the rule of law (and thus legitimate state violence) normalise racial terror in urban Brazil?

Legitimate violence

One strategic site to explore these questions is the current battle over the 'right to the city' in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. As it happened in Rio's favelas in the 1960s (Zaluar and Alvito 1999), the more recent favela

burnings have become routine in major Brazilian metropolitan regions. Military occupation, mass evictions, and the levelling of the remaining houses follow the fires. In 2012, the city of São Paulo alone accounted for 38 fires of favelas in strategically located areas.⁶ Social activists and scholars have denounced the burnings as part of a politics of 'sanitation' of Brazilian major cities as the country gets ready to host the 2014 World cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. Residing in zones of high real estate and strategic value, vulnerable populations have been forcibly removed to give space to private business and major infrastructure projects such as demolition or construction of roads, sports facilities, convention centres, parks, et cetera.)

Since the beginning of the preparation for the 2014 FIFA's World Cup event, at least 170,000 people have been evicted from favelas across the country.⁷ Given that favelas are predominantly black spaces, the racial calculus and outcomes of such strategies are quite apparent. Pressured to conform to tight schedules and powerful competing interests (transnational corporations, state actors, and private investors), Brazilian cities have become a 'new frontier' of black disposability and white privilege, what can be better apprehended through David Harvey's forceful formulation of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey 2009). This dynamic of accumulation by dispossession has been noticed in other contexts as well: the post-Katrina reconstruction in the United States, the 2010 South Africa World Cup, and the series of catastrophes in Haiti. Black suffering, removal, and death, while already a product of global capitalism, generate further opportunities for profit-driven restructuring and accumulation through the humanitarian aid business complex, corporate control of strategic resources, principally land, and new fronts of business initiatives and political influence (Samara 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2011; Mullings, Werner., and Peake 2010; Vargas 2013; Jensen 2014).

A related dimension of this transnational process of white accumulation by black dispossession is the killing of black bodies by targeted assassinations in Brazilian favelas. The likelihood that a black young person be killed in Brazil is 3.7 times greater than that of a white person, illustrating that black lives do not matter in this country of alleged racial democracy. Systematic black death shows the extent to which a black future is compromised in Brazil. As in the United States, Brazil's missing black men impacts the black women/black men ratio, and thus further transforms a social world already defined by uncertainty and vulnerability.⁸ While deaths by the police are part of the state's *modus operandi* (Cano 1997; Human Rights Watch 2009), current policing strategies have become more militarised and enjoy unprecedented public support. Police corporations now contract United States security experts,⁹ increasingly utilise cutting-edge military technology, such as Israeli drones, and frequently deploy the Brazilian Army to reclaim, occupy, and police disputed geographies (Vargas 2013; Larkins

2013). In Rio de Janeiro, the 'pacification' of favelas produced astonishing indices of brutality, disappearances, and death. Between 2000 and 2011, at least 10,000 people were killed by Rio's police force,¹⁰ the majority of whom in military invasions of the city's favelas. In São Paulo, where the Military Police is responsible for 1/5 of all violent deaths in the state, the police killed 358 civilians only in only the first semester of 2015.¹¹ While in the United States, the police lethality rate is 0.6 per 100,000 people, in São Paulo state, this rate is 5.5 per 100,000.¹²

Scholars and social activists have pointed out another sinister tendency: the steady increase in disappearances. Between 2007 and 2013, more than 40,000 people have been reported missing in the state of Rio de Janeiro.¹³ As the city reinforces its image as a safe place for tourists, the state has taken control of areas historically neglected by the state itself. In the process, many impoverished urban dwellers, unable to keep up with rising prices, or simply removed to new settlements, have been pushed out to the city's outskirts. Beltrame, the Secretary of Public Security of Rio de Janeiro safety, justified, 'the state arrived, this is a state territory and we will not leave.'¹⁴ The cycle is completed with the astonishing rates of incarceration Brazil has produced in the last two decades. Brazil has as many as 1.5 million people under the auspices of the criminal justice system (supervision, parole, probation, or behind bars), and these numbers are already outdated.¹⁵ The state of São Paulo, alone, accounts for 35% of the Brazilian prison population. Although blacks are 34.6% of the state population, they are 53.4% of those incarcerated; the disproportional incarceration of black women and black men has led activists to name São Paulo as the Brazilian Texas (Alves 2014a).

These facts not only reveal the astounding scale of mass incarceration in Brazil; they also help us to better grasp the often obfuscated relation between black subjugation and white protection by the law. If we consider policing and carceral practices as a mode of social organising (Martinot and Sexton 2003, 171; Rodriguez 2007), then the social landscape produced by the synthesis of targeted killings, spatial segregation, and incarceration acquires a magnitude that far exceeds statistical narratives. These practices enable the removal of the undesirable others from the polis, thus generating conditions for the reproduction of class privilege (insofar as neighbourhoods close to zones considered formerly dangerous become part of the real-estate speculative market and thus gain value), capitalist exploitation ('cleaned up' and occupied areas become more conducive to formal business), and tourism (enhanced by a renewed sense of public security.) Police justification for the killings of nine persons in a recent military operation in one of Rio's favela is telling: 'the Police are the best social pesticide.'¹⁶ Yet a less visible, but nevertheless related, aspect that must be investigated is how specifically in the face of widespread police violence, whites benefit

from black subjugation and death. The social logic that animates incarceration and confinement, while suggesting disregard for black life, also energises white privilege.

To illustrate our point, we bring together facts seldom analysed as part of the same system of privilege and dispossession. During the 2013 June–July protests, while (a) mass demonstrations against police violence took the streets of São Paulo and Rio, (b) the Military Police killed dozens of individuals in favelas.¹⁷ Predictably, the police justified the killings by arguing the victims were imminent threats and did not obey their commands to surrender. The difference between the two events was not only that ‘non-lethal weapons’ were used against white middle class protesters. As telling, the political territories where each event took place – the legal city, where public demonstrations happen, and the peripheral city, where black bodies are consistently brutalised, disappeared, and killed – are themselves part of a dialectical process of granting and denying rights, granting and denying political agency, granting and denying life. In other words, it is the normalised state violence, often lethal, against and amongst people of favelas – the readily accessible cognitive linkage between violence, geography, abjection, death, and blackness – that renders the police beatings of white protesters in the legal city an aberration, a scandal.

There is a shared and tacit understanding that, whereas places of social exclusion are spaces of violence, places of privilege are spaces of rights and politics. In this system of spatial-political signification, there emerges a definition of who is the legitimate political subject. S/he is not of the periphery; s/he is not Black; s/he is not subjected to indiscriminate state violence. In spaces of legitimate political action (the polis), if and when state violence occurs, it is contingent on a perceived transgression, explainable, and therefore punishable and reversible. Under these conditions, state violence is deployed because, as political subjects who make conflictive claims against the state, and at some point in time are depicted as non-legitimate political subjects by the state, media, and citizenry, they become a threat and therefore justifiable objects of violence. But still, *contingency* is an understood part of the political game and a privilege held by political subjects deemed legitimate: it establishes rules of common understanding. Prior to gaining sympathy from news media and the broader public, protestors were harassed and brutalised by the police without generating surprise. Police harassment and brutality became unacceptable when they reached levels not compatible with the assumed norms of contingency (that is, state force was disproportionate to the nature, level, and form of opposition the protestors enacted), which in turn required a fundamental recognition: that of the familiar, intimate even, political subject. When young, white, some of them female reporters of media corporations were found gravely injured by police rubber bullets, their victimisation became the basis from

which a critique against police force was launched. Adjusted rules of contingency and participation in public–political events thus emerged and arguably played a considerable role in catapulting the protests’ acceptability and the adoption of their demands in others parts of the country.

It is precisely the absence of rules of contingency in zones of exclusion that defines such zones as non-political, as places where state violence is gratuitous (as opposed to contingent), where indeterminacy equates with social death (Wilderson 2010), where no calibration is needed. Police violence, as it is applied under different principles depending on the geographic zones and associated bodies, reveals the conditions and rules according to which the polis and its citizens are defined and can be performed (Martinot and Sexton 2003; Vargas and Alves 2010). In the next section, we turn our focus to the ways in which this symbiotic relation between law and whiteness is made visible in the discourse of a common victimisation by the police. The 2013 June–July protests reveal an enduring economy of violence in which the white citizenry is ontologically dependent on black disposability.

White pain

‘Is not the difficulty of empathy [for black suffering] related to both the devaluation and the valuation of black life?’ (Hartman 1997, 21). The police beatings of white protestors in the June 2013 demonstrations provide an opportunity to explore Hartman’s question. In the aftermath of the beatings, human rights organisations and social movements pushed for an agreement with state authorities to sign a police practices protocol. In doing so, the protestors and their representatives recognised the legitimacy of the state to guarantee law and order. At the same time, they engaged in a legal battle to hold police officers accountable for their acts of violence against demonstrators. Forged by socially shared empathy with brutalised white bodies, the emerging political solidarity brought together a range of social movements, lawyers, alternative media, and religious groups in an unprecedented way.

Inspired by the image of the Folha de S. Paulo, a young white woman journalist hit in the eye by a non-lethal rubber bullet, the photographer Yuri Sardenberg produced an exhibition (see Figure 1) named ‘it’s hurting all of us.’ Featuring several Brazilian celebrities photographed with fictive yet realistic-looking injured eyes, Sardenberg and his installation joined the chorus of protest against police abuse.

The exhibition, he said, aimed at inviting as many citizens as possible to stand united against all forms of violence because ‘united we are stronger than divided.’¹⁸ And indeed the white beaten bodies created a catharsis that brought hundreds of thousands of Brazilians to the streets.¹⁹ What to make



Figure 1. Online campaign featured Brazilian celebrities with fake injured eyes, after the clash between police and demonstrators in June 2013. Photo: Yuri Sardenberg/Muda Brasil.

of the photographer's call for, and people's response to, a universal community galvanised around 'our' Brazilian-ness? When we take seriously (a) formulations about the black subject's constitutive exclusion from the spheres of rights and politics, and (b) the nature and process of the Brazilian racialised regime of citizenship, what meanings attain the horizontal community whose symbolic scaffolding relied on the recognition of white victimisation?

To restate, galvanised by the beatings of white bodies, the mass protests revealed a prescient moment in which the default white public sphere and its attending regime of rights came into sharper focus. There was not a deliberate promotion of whiteness in the protests – it was not needed.²⁰ Yet whiteness critically informed how the protests, especially (but not exclusively) following the acts of police brutality, were imagined and performed. Using the lexicon of human rights and justice to formulate claims against state violence, protestors demanded recalibration from the state so that the rule of law, and with it the legitimate and rights-endowed public-political subject, could be reestablished in common understanding.

However, as the protestors intensified their narrative strategies to unveil police brutality as an aberration in public-political spaces, they also performed a feat of concealment. By stressing violence against white bodies as the paradigmatic infringement, they silenced, thus naturalised (and cancelled) the historically persistent and normative racialised policing practices

(Holloway 1993; Flauzina 2008; Silva and Carneiro 2009; French 2013) that have informed, indeed constituted, the same regime of rights they now wanted recalibrated. Black bodies and blackened communities have not only been the main target of police abuse; they have been the negative reference against which is attained the very constitution of the white public sphere. As a practice fundamentally implicated in the reproduction of the normative white social order (Martinot and Sexton 2003), police violence against blacks is acceptable, mundane, if not encouraged; white pain, on the other hand, producing immediate recognition and empathy, is a valuable – indispensable – political resource, one that effectively enables civil society to come into being as a constituted mass of people that is entitled to inhabit, and is protected by, public–political spaces. That is to say, white pain is legible inasmuch as it is not black pain. Inasmuch as the black subject is a ‘non-being’ (Fanon 1967), in the political lexicon of white civil society black suffering is an oxymoron; black lives do not matter.

Under the rubric of democratic participation, the protests perform a racial/spatial order where white public space is (re)constituted through and by black abjection, subjugation, and death. It is revealing that despite the numerous recent reports on violent deaths of blacks in Brazil, – between 2002 and 2012, 272,000 black individuals were murdered (e.g. Waiselfisz 2012) – there is no registry of mass mobilisation, beyond already mobilised and aware collectives, protesting this persistent and surely increasing black body count.

To be sure, organised black movements have consistently fielded public acts denouncing the devastation of black life in Brazil. From public outcries against discrimination in the job market, to residential segregation and police violence, to the ongoing campaign for affirmative action policies in public universities, to religious practices like Candomblé, black movements have insisted on providing counternarratives against Brazilian racial order (see Moura 1983; Andrews 1992; Ribeiro 1995; Bledsoe 2015). For instance, on 22 November 2012, during Black Conscience week, led by UNEAFRO, Mães de Maio and Fórum Hip-Hop, thousands marched along the Avenida Paulista under the banner ‘Yes on Quotas, No on Genocide!’ (‘Cotas Sim, Genocídio Não!’). The campaign against the genocide of black youth, together with other similar organised movements, resulted in Dilma Rousseff’s federal administration embracing the ‘Juventude Viva’ program, much of which based on the recognition of long-term and persisting patterns of widespread homicide of black youths.

Yet, public support for campaigns against anti-black genocide initiatives remain timid, hardly reaching beyond already mobilised black people and their allies. Furthermore, with all of the federal government’s apparent good political will toward these demands, extremely high rates of black violent death not only remain, but intensify. In the words of renowned sociologist

Julio Weisselfiz (2012, 14), 'Of great concern is not only the high victimisation rate for blacks found in 2010. Even more worrisome is how the problem is intensifying over time. Current levels of black victimisation are already intolerable, and if nothing is done immediately and drastically, black victimisation in the country can reach levels that humanity finds unacceptable.'

That 'humanity' has not yet found black victimisation unacceptable reveals foundational categories informing the constitution and performance of supposedly democratic, public-political spaces. Humanity's incapacity and/or refusal to recognise black suffering as structural and ongoing is quite indicative of its anti-black animus: it suggests that life is valuable when it is not black. Relatedly, the 2013 protests revealed an immediate recognition of and low tolerance for white suffering. Black suffering is not only illegible but also politically irrelevant.

The problem of political irrelevance is of course made more complex when we consider that, disrupting the association between whiteness and the political occupation of public spaces, blacks have indeed participated, *qua* blacks, in manifestations occupying well-known urban spaces. UNEAfró's initiatives, mentioned above, drew from previous momentous events. For example, the Brazilian Black Movement (MNU, Movimento Negro Unificado) organised the 1995 *Marcha Zumbi dos Palmares*, and the 2005 *Marcha Zumbi + 10*. Each event gathered thousands of Afro-Brazilians and their allies in Brasília to affirm their position, as the subtitle of the second march stated, 'against racism, for equality, and life.'²¹ Armed with widespread experiential knowledge, and data from respected research centres, the protestors demanded an end to the homicide of black youth, *a trend that was increasing while the country's homicide rates for whites were falling*. State apparatuses have played a central role in these rates of homicide, either by directly perpetrating them, or by omission. In 2011, for instance, in the state of São Paulo, blacks experience violent deaths at a rate that 70% higher than for whites (Weisselfiz 2012).

In spite of their organisational success, and critical interventions in the realms of public-political narratives, black Brazilian movements fall well short of effectively and consistently mobilising blacks and non-blacks nationally – as, for example, the 2013 general protests did. The 'civil loneliness' (Atila 2009, 261) Afro-Brazilians face in their demands for their right to exist illustrates not only antithetical dimension of the (white) public sphere, but also and more pointedly, the limits of conceptualising and enacting black public spheres. This critique rings particularly true when we consider the scholarly silence on the troubled relation between blackness and the public sphere in so-called Latin America and Brazil for that matter. While scholars have long identified a tradition of popular mobilisation organised around discourses of political, social, and human rights, there are no works

exploring – even if hypothetically – the ways in which the very constitution of ‘civil society’ and its subjects (who mobilise as women, migrants, workers, residents of peripheries, and so on) reveals both anti-black dispositions and the negation of racism. The implicit but powerful assumption is that so-called Latin America is not the United States or South Africa, where anti-black formations of state and society are deemed relevant. It is not surprising that although ‘ethnic protest’ have increasingly been object of academic inquiry (e.g., Yashar 2005; Van Cott 2005), black (anti)politics continues to be marginal in the current debate. Most of the contemporary work on urban life politics in the region still focuses on a faceless, multiracial and/or colour blind subject, the incisive critiques against state violence and human rights violations notwithstanding.²² The problem, it seems to us, is not just a matter of a more pluralist civil society, or a matter of ‘democratising democracy’ (Brysk 2000; Souza Santos 1999), but rather to unveil the anti-black nature of political life itself.

The problem of the limits of civil society vis-à-vis marginal voices is hardly new. Scholars have criticised Habermas’s articulation of public sphere for not considering the plurality of political strategies and discourses marginalised groups have developed to decolonise public spheres (e.g., Chatterjee 2004; Fraser 1990; Squires 2002; Guidry 2003). Yet, alternative black public spheres tend to resonate in troubling ways with Habermas’s ideal type because in order to participate in the (counter)public sphere, in varying degrees blacks surrender to civil society’s norms of justice, rights, and respectability.

In spite of strategic gains blacks have achieved in challenging and even re-colonising public spheres with relatively autonomous black concepts, adherence to the language of rights and citizenship introduces a basic contradiction. If, to be legible, black suffering needs to be articulated with the moral and legal apparatus of citizenship, then even the ‘counter’ practices work according to a register that requires and produces blackness through respectability and loyalty to penal state (for a critique, Cohen 2004; Pinho 2004; Dawson 2003; Gregory 1995). That is to say, under white gaze, black existence is only possible through its own negation. Under the imperative of legibility, black counter publics often emphasise the constitution and performance of an oppositional yet law-abiding black subject, herself mirrored in the normative white subject of rights.

Our analysis thus proposes that the overwhelming symbolic purchase of white victimisation, and indeed the collective scandal it is able to engender, is the other side of black movements’ failure to open alternative spaces outside the normative/domesticated construct of the ‘political’. As long as the dominant collective gaze is sensitive only to white suffering, it will continue to require that black suffering be not white suffering, in this way establishing that black suffering be not suffering, and thus not culturally legible and relevant.

That (a) the black body offers no ontological resistance to the white gaze (Fanon 1967) is certainly related to (b) the black body's incapacity to generate legible suffering, unless it is white suffering merely channelled through, and thus not specific to, the black body. The conditions under which white empathy for the black subject occur disavow black suffering, rendering it a mere transposition of white suffering (Hartman 1997). These propositions suggest that, rather than constituting a cultural truth rooted in time and space coordinates, white life-black abjection constitute an axis of a trans temporal symbolic universe that continually actualises itself in distinct, but related, realms of sociality and politics. Imagine, if you can, a place in the black diaspora where white life is not the standard from which are defined protocols and expectations of belonging, performance, and longevity. The scandal of white suffering, so effective in mobilising claims to readjust the state machine's deployment of violence, is thus a mere instantiation of a gendered racial logic that, as a commentator of the black diaspora remarked (Gilroy 1993), is characterised by its quality of being a 'changing same.'

We never slept

During the 2013 June wave of mass demonstrations, a young black man carried a banner that read 'The bullets that target black bodies are not rubber bullets' (see Figure 2). Another banner stated, 'We never slept,' in response to 'Brazil woke up,' commonly donned by middle-class protestors in front of soccer stadiums. As we suggested above, these signs refer to the



Figure 2. Black demonstrator carries banner in Salvador/Bahia's protest, in June 2013. He asks: "Why the rubber bullets that hit the white skin move more than the real bullets that kill the black population every day?" Photo: Raquel Luciana de Souza/Steve Biko Institute.

less visible, but no less constitutive aspects of a socially shared and generative symbology that, while dependent on black abjection, naturalises the relationship between whiteness, belonging, and life. The signs invite us to consider white faithful adherence to the penal state even when, at times, whites are victims of state violence. In this last section, we want to explore this racial loyalty by calling attention to the structure and type of violence immanent to the reproduction of white civic life. Specifically, we ask, what kind of violence is essential, and required, to the production of the white subject of rights?

While many whites disengage themselves from the state, its apparatus and principles, by articulating a critique of it as a brutal, violent, death-producing machine – indeed, many human rights NGOs led by whites do have a critical approach to state bureaucracies²³ – they fail to recognise that the very constitution of subjects of rights requires the precise definition and ubiquitous presence of their opposite: the non-subject, abject, outlawed, criminalised, non-white, typically black bodies. Seldom visible, the black non-subject is nevertheless essential to the architectures of meaning, sociality, and legal entitlements.

Being loyal to the state is rendered suggestively visible in the moments of horror caused by white victimisation by the state. Emerging out of those moments, the reactions can be paraphrased in the following ways: how can you beat your own citizens? We're not bandits, we are the civil society! We live in a state of rights and so we have the right to protest! The police are here to serve us, we pay your salary and you beat us? Expressed in open letters, news reports and public outcries as the June protests unfolded,²⁴ these interjections reveal the recognition of the state as a legitimate, familiar entity from which one can ask for restitution/re-payment for his/her loyalty.

To be sure, this loyalty cannot be thought of outside the racial boundaries that constitute Brazilian society. As scholars Raimundo Faoro (1977) and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1995) contended, the Brazilian regime of citizenship emerged as an intimate comradeship where retributions and rewards were granted based on favour, lineages, and kinship. At the same time, they argued it would be a mistake to characterise Brazilian political power as a feudal, caste or class system. Rather, what defined it was a 'bureaucratic stratum' (*estamento burocrático*) in which social relations – and citizenship rights – would be vertically organised/granted through the loyalty to the state (Faoro 1977, 47). The 'bureaucratic stratum' thus conflates the state and particular forms of elite solidarity Raymundo Faoro named 'patrimonialism' (Faoro 1977, 46; see also Holanda 1995). Indeed, when the institutional order changed from Monarchy to Republic (in 1889), the patrimonial state became even more obviously foundational to the reproduction of white privilege. The Republic was a concerted effort to maintain white privilege and prevent blacks from political participation in

an economically uncertain post-abolition scenario. The Republic was an elite solution to maintain the same racial order under a new political regime (e.g., Carvalho 1999; Azevedo 1987). How, then, can black suffering be redressed in a society (and state) organised around patrimonial-traditional relations founded on white loyalty?

The ongoing spectacle of dead bodies, often found severed, transfigured (therefore never found), is collateral damage of the (sub-/non-) urban warfare (Alves 2014b). Like in other parts of the black Diaspora, – notably the U.S. – mass incarceration, as a mundane manifestation of white loyalty/racial state sovereignty, is mostly an invisible social phenomenon. The non-black and white body may experience violence, but it will be contingent violence; it is inscribed within the Weberian framework of state violence as legitimate/instrumental to guarantee peace and order. When state violence is employed on white bodies according to practices deemed outside the tolerable boundaries of contingency, the white victim and her loyal peers will demand and often succeed in producing legal calibrations of state practices. The social contract between the white citizens and the state is then reiterated in name of the regime of rights that engenders both police violence and citizens' entitlements to civil life.

To conceptualise and experience contingent violence, there needs to be at least a tacit understanding of what constitutes non-contingent violence. Black bodies, because they are the primary objects of technologies of death, experience forms of violence that are not a function of violation (although violations committed by black subjects will often result in greater state violence than when committed by non-blacks). Frank Wilderson (2003, 5) puts it this way: '... violence against Black people is ontological and gratuitous as opposed to ideological and contingent.' Terror, as related to but qualitatively different than violence, is precisely this ontological and gratuitous form of violence. For blacks, violence is transfigured, expanded, and experienced as terror. Protestors could and indeed experienced state violence that was contingent on the perception of the threat they posed. Black people, on the other hand, experience state violence-as-terror as a fact of life (and social and physical death), and thus as independent of their avowed position vis-à-vis the multiplicity of established forms of power, and public-political events and spaces (Vargas 2013).

If political life – life in the polis – requires the subjugation of the black, the politicisation of black suffering within the grammar of rights and citizenship is illegible and is therefore fated to fail. Indeed, black suffering is an oxymoron, an oxymoron that makes the polis, white by default, possible. Black suffering as politics thus fails because white suffering as politics is the all-encompassing norm, timeless, almost always effective. White suffering as politics is almost always effective precisely because black suffering as politics is always already illegible, irrelevant, impossible.

Troubling questions remain. For example, what are the symbolic and political implications of one's invitation into and willing participation in a political community dependent on white victimisation? What kind of political practices are required to make black lives matter? In the current anti-black racial order, the legal political community, where valuable life is lived and imagined, requires that *black life be lived through death* (Sexton 2011). And because black life and death are not legible, they do not count as either life or death.

Conclusion

We argued that police brutality is a producer, medium, and expression of social relations in the racial polis. Drawing from current political events in Brazil, we unveiled social norms, expectations, and outcomes produced through police violence and police terror. The production of a democratic public sphere is dependent on and intensified by two related axes. First, the normalcy, gratuitousness, invisibility, and ultimate political irrelevance of black suffering and experience of terror. And second, the exceptional, horror-producing violence inflicted on the white body. More research needs to be done on the fundamental yet often invisible centrality of anti-blackness in societies like Brazil in particular and Afro so-called Latin America in general. This may be a first step to broadening our understanding of the timeless antiblack dynamic of racial terror, which continues to structure civil society in formally democratic and multiracial polities. This paper invites reframing the canonical understanding of police violence as a symptom of democracy's dysfunctionality. Rather, we argue, policing in particular, and antiblack violence in general, are indicative of the socially shared cognitive, social, and institutional bases on which white civil life is founded. While police violence is widespread in Brazil and victimises blacks continuously and gratuitously, the temporary and contingent white vulnerability to this specific form of state violence during the June 2013 protests reflects not only the unfeasibility of black life, but also the strengthening and self-adjustment of white supremacy. The violence inflicted on whites in São Paulo's streets constitutes a telling moment in which black inhumanity and white pain are dialectically produced in the very reconstitution of the city.

Notes

1. See <http://g1.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2013/06/protestos-pelo-pais-tem-125-milhao-de-pessoas-um-morto-e-confrontos.html>
2. See for example statements by International Amnesty condemning the 'excessive use of force'. Available in <http://www.conectas.org/pt/noticia/protestos->

- em-sao-paulo. See also statement by Connectas, a Sao Paulo's based human rights organization available in <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/brazil-police-must-avoid-excessive-use-force-2013-06-14>
3. The group was formed in the wake of the June protests. See <http://advogado.sativistas.com/quem-somos>. Since then, the Advogados Ativistas [Activist Lawyers] have become a permanent group to assist protesters in Sao Paulo. See <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2013/09/1342227-advogados-oferecem-manual-a-black-blocs.shtml>
 4. See <http://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/no-rio-policia-matou-30-mais-em-2014-em-sao-paulo-28-15085530> Access in 10 March 2015
 5. For yet another critique of the O'Donnell's inspired democracy/citizenship approach, see also Goldstein (2003) and Arias (2006).
 6. See <http://noticias.uol.com.br/infograficos/2012/11/29/levantamento-do-uol-mapeia-os-incendios-em-favelas-de-sp-durante-2012.htm>
 7. Mega-Events and Human Rights Violations in Brazil. Articulacao Nacional dos Comites Populares da Copa. p.8. Available in <http://rioonwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/2012-World-Cup-Olympics-Dossier-English.pdf>
 8. See http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gary-barker-phd/brazils-undeclared-war-on_b_4647204.html
 9. The current New York City police Chief, William Bratton, is part of the security advising team and former New York City mayor Rudolf Giuliani heads for Rio's Olympic Games.
 10. See <http://observatoriodefavelas.org.br/noticias-analises/10-mil-mortes-em-10-anos/>
 11. See: <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2015/08/1669572-numero-de-mortos-em-confronto-com-policiais-e-o-maior-em-dez-anos-em-sp.shtml>
 12. See http://www.istoe.com.br/reportagens/232384_A+PM+MATADORA. In 2011, the Military Police accounted for 22.3% of the homicides in Sao Paulo.
 13. For statistics on missing people and police violence in Rio de Janeiro see <http://www.brasildefato.com.br/node/27590>
 14. See <http://exame.abril.com.br/brasil/noticias/pacificacao-no-rio-completa-5-anos-cercada-por-polemicas?page=2>
 15. See Departamento Penitenciário Nacional *Censo Penitenciário 2012* <http://www.mj.gov.br>
 16. See <http://www.jb.com.br/informe-jb/noticias/2012/12/20/a-pm-e-o-melhor-inseticida-social/>
 17. On June 23, least three favelas residents were killed in a protest in the zona sul. <http://www.agora.uol.com.br/saopaulo/2013/06/1299938-rotamata-tres-apos-protesto-em-favela.shtml>
 18. See <http://caras.uol.com.br/tv/mais-famosos-aparecem-com-olho-roxo-para-o-protesto-doi-em-todos-nos#.UvVGA9gQTop>
 19. As commentators noted, 'it was especially paradoxical to see middle-class people expressing indignation over public services they neither use, nor intend to use any time soon' (Saad-Filho and Morais 2014: 238).
 20. For a reading on the omnipresence/obfuscation of whiteness, see Toni Morrison (1992).
 21. See the march manifesto in 'Zumbi + 10,' <http://www.historianet.com.br/conteudo/default.aspx?codigo=771>, accessed on 24 January 2014.
 22. The literature is too extensive to be cited here. For a comprehensive analysis of the scholarship on urban life politics in Latin America, see (Rosenthal 2000).

23. For example, the public statements by white-dominated organizations 'Advogados Ativistas', 'Connectas' and Amnesty International. See <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/brazil-police-must-avoid-excessive-use-force-2013-06-14>
24. See for example the collective statement 'Grito da Liberdade' by Brazilian celebrities and human rights activists available here: <http://buzuzu.com.br/2013/10/28/artistas-apoiam-protestos-criticam-violencia-policial-e-convocam-para-manifestacao-no-rio/>

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