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The spectre of Haiti: structural antiblackness, the far-right backlash and the fear of a black majority in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This article situates the far-right backlash in Brazil within the larger Latin American context, including its colonial legacy, leftist governments' failure to deliver promises of inclusion, and the US–China geopolitical dispute over the region's strategic natural resources. By situating Bolsonaro's electoral victory within these dynamics, our analysis presents an alternative to two common perspectives. First, studies of the region's political moment and of Brazilian society in particular do not pay enough attention to institutional and everyday racism, and instead focus mostly on comparative analysis of governmental policies and social class dynamics. Second, critical perspectives that take into account racial inequalities are often not attuned to structural dynamics of gendered antiblackness, and instead present racism as a broad set of practices that negatively affect non-white people in related manners. Our context-specific analysis of the electoral reemergence of the far right in Brazil aims at contributing to an understanding of persistent dynamics of racial inequality within the region as part of a long, enduring and foundational odium of Black people.

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Introduction

During his first visit to the United States on March 18, 2019, Brazil's newly elected president Jair Bolsonaro signed an accord opening Brazilian military bases to US rockets, paid a visit to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and concluded his trip by affirming that 'for the first time in a while a pro-American Brazilian president arrives in DC'.¹ Bolsonaro's praise of the Trump administration is a payback for the US Department of State's concerted geopolitical effort to regain full control of a region increasingly under Russian influence and dependent on trade with China.² In that sense, the ascension of right-wing forces backed by the United States is certainly a reaction to the leftist progressive governments that controlled most of the continent in the last two decades. Despite their shortcomings – for example, economic dependency on primary commodities and neo-extractivism to feed China's economic growth; inability to tame chronic corruption; and a narrow and unsustainable politics of inclusion (mainly through the domestic expansion of debt-financed consumption) – those

leftist regimes brought about considerable programmatic changes, even if short lived. For instance, their assertive redistributive policies granting identity-based social and political rights to millions of Black and indigenous individuals represented a point of inflection vis-à-vis the voracious neoliberal fundamentalist policies of privatisation, the slashing of social expenditures and popular repression that had previously characterised the region.³ In the case of Brazil, Bolsonaro's coalition marks an indisputable political shift from the leftist orientation of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, hereafter PT) that governed Brazil for the last 14 years. The army captain's vociferous discourse against Blacks, women, non-Christians, LGBTQ+ people, and indigenous groups, among others, represents an apparently abrupt and reactionary about-face in the country's political landscape. Still, to label Bolsonaro as a 'fascist' or an anti-democratic 'Trump of the tropics' (as he names himself) is as predictable as it is lacking.

By situating Bolsonaro's electoral victory within the hemispheric political context, our analysis presents an alternative to two common perspectives. First, studies of the region's political moment, and of Brazilian society in particular, do not pay enough attention to forms of institutional and everyday racism, and instead focus mostly on comparative analysis of governmental policies and social class dynamics.⁴ Second, critical perspectives that take into account racial inequalities are often not attuned to structural dynamics of gendered antiblackness, and instead present racism as a broad set of (cultural) practices that negatively affect non-white people in related manners. Even when the colonial past is brought into the equation as a critique of current political formations, usually it is the indigenous experience that occupies the centre of analysis, which involuntarily reinforces a highly problematic evocation of 'Latin Americanness' (aka idealised indigeneity and mestizaje) in which Blacks have little or no place.⁵ While scholars have made incisive contributions to unveiling the limits and possibilities of identity-based policies (promoted by left-leaning governments) in redressing racism, much is needed to unveil the specificity of the forms of oppression Black people experience – specificity which, we claim, is central to Brazil's (and Latin America's) social formation.⁶ Our context-specific analysis of the electoral reemergence of the far right in Brazil aims at contributing to an understanding of persistent dynamics of racial inequality within the region as part of a long, enduring and foundational odium of Black people.

Foundational gendered antiblackness

By *antiblackness* we refer to a shared set of assumptions and their corresponding social attitudes and institutional practices that dehumanise Black individuals, thus rendering their lives less valuable and disposable. While many oppressed groups experience racism, gendered antiblackness is defined by a specific aversion (overt and implicit) of Blacks.⁷ Such aversion accompanies, defines and is impacted by corresponding social and institutional practices. Inflected by (and influencing) dynamics of gender and sexuality, antiblackness provides added explanations for economic and social exclusion, as well as social and physical death.⁸ Notwithstanding its formulaic denial, antiblackness is one of the country's sanctioned, albeit not always graspable, structuring algorithms. Antiblackness is not the only explanation for social exclusion, but it is a fundamental aspect of it.

A focus on gendered antiblackness (rather than the general category 'racism') adds to an emerging scholarship moving beyond class- and race-oriented analyses of Brazilian society.⁹

It also pays attention to the ways in which Black women are caught in gendered dynamics of urban security designed to protect White life and White property. Marielle Franco provided a forceful critique of these security policies within the context of Rio's 'pacification' programme put forth by the Brazilian state in 2008.¹⁰ Franco's work was prophetic in unveiling a gendered and raced logic of evisceration of places and people, as the favelas of Rio and black bodies (including hers) became further targeted by a geopolitics of security that includes the deployment of US and Israeli military technologies to patrol predominantly black communities. Franco's death is still under investigation, and this investigation has already revealed Bolsonaro's family ties with paramilitary groups that control most of Rio's favelas. Franco's targeted assassination 'as a Black woman within the lines of enmity'¹¹ drawn by the security state evinces a logic of social death that results from the feedback loop between global apartheid enforced by the military industrial complex, domestic policies of spatial control/annihilation of predominantly black communities deemed as a threat to the nation and transhistorical gendered antiblackness.¹²

Despite PT's ineffectiveness regarding the *structural persistence of antiblackness*, manifested for example in the spiking rates of homicides of Black people (including those committed by the police) at a time, during the PT's massively popular federal administration, *when the country's homicide rates were falling*,¹³ a significant symbolic fact of our time is that the PT became associated with pro-Black policies and therefore with Black people. The inescapable irony is that the PT administration benefited Whites the most. While PT's administration did much to improve the living conditions of the impoverished, redistributed income, implemented affirmative action policies (Marielle Franco herself was a beneficiary of PT's University for All Program or ProUni) and expanded the social safety net, as common wisdom and most analyses confirm, *the White middle and working classes were ultimately the main beneficiaries of its policies and economic growth.*¹⁴ It thus seems that there were no apparent material-pragmatic reasons for the White middle and working classes to reject the social-democratic policy approach. The anti-PT and related pro-Bolsonaro rage, we submit, was of a particular and powerful *symbolic* nature. A focus on gendered antiblackness helps us to understand this symbolic rage and its 2018 electoral consequences, the PT's campaign of strategic disengagement from race-based demands and identity politics more broadly notwithstanding.

The rage that fueled Bolsonaro's election and PT's rejection is only a time-specific manifestation of what, we argue, is a cornerstone of the Brazilian social formation: the fear of the Black majority. It is the specter of the Haitian Revolution that may explain the far-right backlash as much as it explains the long duration of antiblack rage in this multiracial country.

To present our argument, we structure the article as follows. First, we contextualise Bolsonaro's victory within an enduring antiblack racial order and its dynamics of sociality. As will become evident, the Brazilian right's ascension is the product of an underlying but powerful antiblack hatred articulated via a reactionary discourse on economic uncertainty and the need for authoritarian rule to fight corruption, crime and reassert traditional morals, *order and progress*. Within this economy of morality, perceived threats to Brazilian values and social structure became associated with blackness. It is telling that Bolsonaro carried the cities where Whites were the majority, and lost where Blacks were the majority.

Second, we show the ubiquity of forms of discrimination and oppression targeting Black people specifically in the period leading to Bolsonaro's electoral victory, and provide a heuristic explanation for antiblackness. As a concept attuned to the specificity of forms of

oppression that target Black people, antiblackness zeroes in on a collective understanding that not only dehumanises the Afrodescended discursively, but also produces graspable social results. We propose that antiblackness is a diffused phenomenon, and as such it illuminates social processes that relate to the ways in which formations of modern political subjectivity and social organisation depend on and reproduce Black abjection in Brazil and beyond.

Third, in dialogue with some recent race-based interventions on the resurgence of the far-right in Latin America and particularly in Brazil,¹⁵ we suggest that rather than episodic phenomena, the various expressions of hatred of Black people so openly displayed during Bolsonaro's campaign are at the very core of the country's (and we would say the continent's) foundation. Drawing from historiographic accounts describing the constant fear the White slave owner society harboured of Black people, we propose that the Brazilian right's electoral reemergence at the federal level manifested the collective dread of a Black nation resulting from Black revolt and empowerment. The specter of the Haitian Revolution, in other words, animated much of the symbolic and actual violence perpetrated against the Afrodescended. In the process, it provided a rationale, even if implicit, for the rejection of PT's political agenda.

We conclude with a reflection on the political options presented to the largest electoral group in Brazil, Black people. While Bolsonaro's bloc was openly hostile to Blacks, the PT proved unwilling and/or unable to effectively challenge *structural antiblackness*. The difficult choice between these two projects may explain some of the support Bolsonaro received from Black people, and ultimately why the army captain won the presidential election. More troubling, the social drama surrounding the latest presidential election reveals, once again, that the ideological constitution of Brazil as a multiracial nation is fundamentally incompatible with Black citizenship and Black humanity.

Beyond electoral politics

Broken down by race, gender, social class and region, the voting patterns of the 2018 election for Brazil's president show an evidently divided country. Jair Bolsonaro had his best electoral results among White, male, middle-class voters from the south and southeast Brazil. He had 75% of the vote in average or high-income municipalities, while among the poorest municipalities he obtained less than 25% of the vote. Overall, the PT candidate Fernando Haddad won in 83% of the poorest municipalities, while Bolsonaro was victorious in 87% of the richest municipalities.¹⁶

When focusing on race, evident correlations emerge. Jair Bolsonaro won in 85% of the cities in which Whites are the majority – most such cities being in the south of Brazil. The PT won in all municipalities in which Whites are less than 20% of the population – cities that are predominantly in the north and northeast of Brazil. Overall, 68% of White voters chose Bolsonaro, a rate more than two times higher than the 32% of White voters who preferred the Workers' Party candidate.¹⁷ Such sharply drawn racial-electoral lines had a strong geographical component. During the electoral campaign, Bolsonaro's bloc often referred to the southern and southeastern regions as Whiter and therefore cleaner, safer and modern, while the north and northeastern regions were represented as blacker and therefore dirtier, dangerous and backward. The people from the northeast, *nortistas*, were cast as 'stupid', dependent on government stipends and politically illiterate. They were portrayed as a burden to the nation and blamed for Brazil's political problems.

A statement by a Bolsonaro enthusiast read as follows: 'the SOB nordestinos come to São Paulo, vote in Haddad, and then go to Gugu [a TV show] asking [for money] to go back home because they are unemployed'.¹⁸ In a video that circulated widely on the Internet, Bolsonaro appears offering grass to nordestinos, suggesting they are animals, naive supporters of PT.

Fueled by conservative media narratives that PT's social programmes constituted a burden to the middle classes – which is perceived as a burden to White people – there emerged a deep-seated hatred against the most impoverished and the Black (who are themselves disproportionately impoverished). Such hatred relates to but exceeds economic reasons. Given the country's alleged racial-democratic ethos, the narratives of burden successfully avoided any explicit mention of race and blackness. Nevertheless, the coded message makes its case unequivocal: PT supports the impoverished; the impoverished are disproportionately Black; Blacks are morally inferior, undeserving of assistance since they don't even try to help themselves, and abuse the government;¹⁹ responsible White (and White-identified) taxpayers are ultimately the group most disadvantaged by the PT's policies and its corruption; and, finally, it's time to retake the country before the PT and their supporters ruin it.

To be sure, under the PT there were considerable gains for the most disadvantaged Brazilians. Brazil's social expenditure, particularly the Family Stipend programme, lifted a quarter of the total population, nearly 50.5 million people,²⁰ out of poverty or into the low-middle classes, expanded Black, Indigenous and impoverished people's access to higher education via unprecedented affirmative action policies in public and private universities, and engendered income distribution while promoting economic growth. Lula left power with an approval rate of 80%, the highest in Brazilian history. This approval was credited to PT's social policies and to the country's economic boom that marked his presidency. Under Lula da Silva (and until the beginning of Dilma Rousseff's second term), Brazil maintained a high budget surplus and, in a move that is as much a source of national pride as it is an index of fiscal success, paid off its International Monetary Fund (IMF) debt. By 2010, Brazil had registered steady economic growth – its gross domestic product increased by an astonishing 7.5% that year – poverty was reduced from 22% of the population (in 2003) to 7%, and unemployment fell to historical lows.²¹ Rendering moot Wall Street's anxiety and frustrating the radical sector of the left, Lula and the PT did not challenge the neoliberal paradigm. Instead, they promoted financial and fiscal stability, and governed through a social pact that alleviated poverty while maintaining the structural arrangements of political and economic power.²²

Still, contrary to what one might have gathered from everyday talk and media reports, Whites were not in any way disadvantaged during the PT administration. Indeed, *Whites were the greater beneficiaries of the PT's redistributive policies!* Research on the effects of fiscal policy and social expenditure shows that although Blacks were the main group that received at least one direct government transfer more often, the per-capita transfer for Whites living in households under government assistance was much higher than it was for other racial groups.²³ Moreover, despite substantial poverty reduction in the last 15 years, the Black/nonblack inequality divide remains today as it persisted during the PT's administration. Blacks (which in this case includes 'pardos', which can be translated as 'mixed race') with income below the equivalent of US\$1.25/month receive 60% less in government benefits than Whites do. Meanwhile, Whites with income below US\$50.00/month receive twice as much in government benefits as Blacks.²⁴

Part of the explanation is that, while Blacks rely mostly on social assistance through direct transfers such as family stipends (eg *Bolsa Família*), Whites benefit through government in-kind transfers such as pensions, public higher education, subsidised health care through tax returns, and social security benefits which are relatively more substantial allocated public resources. As Pereira points out,

The fact that poverty is not reduced further despite Brazil's high spending on direct transfers is also due to high leakages to the non-poor (in addition to the deleterious effect of indirect taxes): 73 percent of total direct transfer benefits go to the population that is above the US\$4.00 poverty line.²⁵

Why, then, were Whites so enraged? Why was PT defeated? If Whites benefited the most from the party's multiracial project of inclusion, then we can propose that the left's defeat (and the far right's magnetism) is not solely a repudiation of its social policies, a condemnation of its members' alleged practices of corruption (a narrative that masked the lawfare against Lula and his allies)²⁶ or the rise of crime, as some have suggested,²⁷ but also – and principally – an abhorrence of the Black (and other vulnerable groups, such as the landless, women, the Indigenous and LGBTQ people) with whom the PT became associated. Widespread complaints during the PT administrations that 'airports and car dealerships have become like bus stations', 'domestic workers are now too expensive due to labor rights', 'universities have lowered their quality due to the presence of affirmative action beneficiaries' and 'shopping malls are now used by the "people" as a meeting place' illustrate this point. During his campaign, Bolsonaro frequently stated he would never fly on an airplane operated by people who benefited from affirmative action.²⁸ These outspoken positions against Black citizenship are certainly statements about PT's political choices. But more fundamentally, they are about the constitutive Brazilian antiblackness. What on the surface sounds like the typical fascist litany about the virtues of dictatorship, the unchecked monopoly of violence by the state and the rejection of affirmative actions and 'identity politics', is, in fact, not unlike its US counterpart, the proverbial dog whistle that communicates, at a less audible but far more recognisable frequency, the foundational fear and hatred of Black people.

Antiblack rage

On 30 October 2018, two days after the presidential elections, *Folha de S.Paulo*, one of the country's main newspapers, reported on a White law student pledging to kill anyone in a red shirt (a reference to PT supporters), and more specifically, to kill 'all those Black people [essa negraida]'. Actualised in private discussions, public events, social media and news broadcasts, this was a widely shared sentiment during and after the election. Even though Bolsonaro explicitly supported these and other acts of violence – in his public appearances he mimicked a gun or a rifle with his arms and middle and index fingers – he also lamented the hate assassination of Mestre Moa do Katende, a practitioner of capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial art. 'I ask people not to do this', Bolsonaro stated. But he added, in a public rally, 'I have no control over millions and millions of people who support me'.²⁹

Indeed, Bolsonaro cannot be held solely responsible for the wave of violence he encouraged. Antiblack violence in Brazil is part of a historically rooted national ethos. As such, it is a widespread practice that finds support across lines of national region, social class and race.

From the everyday humiliation and frequent sexual assault Black women face in the kitchens of White middle-class families, to skinhead groups' killings of homeless Black kids in the streets of Brazilian major cities, to vigilantism/lynching by police-linked death squads, to political assassination of Black activists – there exists a systemic rage that seeks to erase blackness from the nation.

We understand antiblackness as structured, ubiquitous and transhistorical advantages for nonblacks and structured disadvantages for Black people. Such articulated disadvantages and advantages take place in the realms of ontology (how individuals constitute and define themselves as such), sociability (lived social experience) and access to resources.³⁰ A shared set of assumptions and their corresponding social attitudes and institutional practices, antiblackness reflects and produces a hierarchy of worth according to which humans are classified. Antiblackness not only conditions social acceptance,³¹ but also determines how well and how long racialised groups live. Whereas for nonblacks antiblackness guarantees the accumulation of transgenerational social advantages, including occupational status and wealth, for Blacks it assures the transgenerational accumulation of disadvantages, which in turn diminishes life expectancy.³² The concept of antiblackness allows us to grasp the connections between, on the one hand, socially shared assumptions about one's symbolic worth and, on the other, social outcomes in the areas of residence, employment, education, health and criminal justice, to name a few. The closer one is to blackness, the greater the transgenerational disadvantages.³³

These social patterns of articulated disadvantages and advantages are deeply related to collective processes that are not immediately perceptible – what Frantz Fanon, drawing from Jung, names the collective unconscious.³⁴ Notions of Black inferiority and inhumanity exist even when individuals do not openly advocate for, or are not aware of, antiblack stereotypes. Social psychologists Jennifer Eberhardt, Phillip Goff and their collaborators provide incisive examples of this antiblack specificity. Based on experiments designed to bypass one's conscious mind, among nonblacks as well as among Blacks, and regardless of one's explicit racial attitudes, they found consistent subliminal associations between Black faces and apes, apes and Black faces, Black skin and absence of suffering, and Black faces and danger. By avoiding the conscious mind, these experiments show the ways in which the research subjects – US college students and police officers – harbour antiblack sentiments even when they assert multiracial tolerance or claim ignorance of racial stereotypes.³⁵ Eberhardt et al. note how criminalisation, and death sentencing in particular, are strongly correlated to Black traits in the accused: the darker a person looks, the greater the likelihood of harsh punishment.³⁶ As far as we know, such experiments have not been conducted with Brazilian subjects. We have no reason to believe the results would be any different. Available data on extrajudicial execution of young people by Brazilian police, the majority of them are Black, disproportionately impoverished, or transsexual individuals, suggest that implicit antiblackness, which would compel and justify such acts of state violence, is a diasporic phenomenon.³⁷

Antiblackness as a social logic – a structuring fact – can be gleaned from Fanon's scheme of related yet nonsymmetrical racialised positionalities. Such racialised positionalities are necessarily related to each other because the default, deemed universal and superior White propertied and Christian cis, heteronormative male subject defines himself in contrast to all other subject positions. All other subject positions, unavoidably in structural and symbolic disadvantage vis-à-vis the one deemed indisputably superior, are also simultaneously defined in contrast to each other. Yet – and this is a critical intervention that a focus on

antiblackness generates – the field of *structured subject positionalities*³⁸ operates in such a way that the Black person is always and already the non-reference: they provide the fixed point against which all other positionalities attain social freight, yet their presence is negated, erased, ignored. Fanon emphasises the singular structural positionality of the Black: they have ‘no ontological resistance in the eyes of the White man’³⁹ In an antiblack world, the Black subject is part of an asymmetric field of structured positionalities insofar as their unique physical presence is a threat yet their symbolic absence unimaginable.⁴⁰

Actualisations of this asymmetric field of structured positionalities are well exemplified in important studies showing that even when sharing the same social conditions, and subjected to similar forms of state violence (eg spatial segregation, police brutality, incarceration), nonblacks hold strong antagonistic attitudes towards Blacks.⁴¹ Research in the predominantly Black neighbourhoods of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro shows that nonblack, and particularly White, vulnerability to state violence is a by-product of their proximity to Black people. Impoverished nonblacks, including Whites, are indeed subject to extreme forms of violence, but this violence is *contingent* (on their social condition and place of residence), rather than *structural* (and thus independent of one’s station in life) as it is for Blacks.

Impoverished and disenfranchised nonblacks find in their investment in antiblackness a way to secure symbolic benefits in a world of uncertainty and violence.⁴² A final aspect of antiblackness we want to propose is its persistence through time and across national-political boundaries. Specific time periods legally codify and condemn blackness in particular ways. Yet social and institutional processes (as the growing body of studies on criminal justice and incarceration evinces) that consistently devalue, render threatening and extralegally kill Black people suggest a troubling historical continuity.⁴³ Brazil’s long duration of antiblackness is conveyed in Black activists’ critique of the country as a ‘graveyard’ – a metaphor for the genocidal scale of killings of black individuals by state forces – and in their critique of the periodisation of the military regime (1964–1985) as an exceptional moment in the trajectory of Brazilian democracy. Black activists forcefully pronounce such persistent, transhistorical antiblackness this way: ‘In the favela, dictatorship never ended’. Emphasising this *continuum* in Rio’s favelas, Marielle Franco calls attention to the increasing number of tortured, killed and ‘missing persons’ after the ‘pacifying’ programme. ‘Disappearing’ people – a common practice against leftist activists during the military regime – has remained an enduring practice in the favelas. These victims are, according to Franco, ‘the disappeared of democracy’⁴⁴ Franco points out that in Rio’s pacified favelas, ‘the past knocks at the door’⁴⁵ as a permanent state of exception enacted by the police. There is no ‘excess’ or ‘extralegal’ violence against the people of the favelas because military raids and assassinations are normative aspects of security policies that drive the Brazilian government’s promotion of urban peace in Rio’s racialised geographies. ‘It is not by chance that when arriving in the favelas [...] the police quickly hoist a [Brazilian] flag as a signal of territorial control. That is because these territories are seen ... as the enemy’s territory.’⁴⁶ Hamilton Borges, from the Black grassroots organisation React or You Die, conveys this critique in his description of Salvador – a predominantly Black urbanity with one of the highest rates of homicide in the country – as ‘the tomb city’. Commenting on the Cabula Massacre, when the military police killed 12 Black youths in February 2015, like Marielle Franco, Borges recuperates the figure of the ‘internal enemy’ (a term evoked by the military junta to justify counterinsurgent tactics against leftist groups in the 1970s) to denounce ‘state policies that are based on the logic of war, a logic of combating an internal enemy that has to be shot down’. This terrorist practice, permanently in

place in the ‘tomb city of Salvador’ as elsewhere in the country, produces Black genocide and renders irrelevant the distinction between democracy and dictatorship.⁴⁷

From yet another Afro diasporic context, political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal also provides a critique of this enduring antiblack regime by interrogating how the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments ‘were blatantly ignored in dozens of states where the torture and terrorism of bullwhips, lynch rope, and arson were practiced with greater consistency than were the lofty promises of the amended Constitution’. Although the US Constitution protected the rights of Black Americans to vote, he asks, ‘have Black votes ever mattered?’⁴⁸ More to the point, Abu-Jamal references Black Panther Party co-founder Huey Newton’s conceptualisation of the police in the US serving as an occupying army invading Black spaces with licence to kill extrajudicially, and asks ‘Have Black lives ever mattered?’⁴⁹

Regardless of the geographic context, it becomes evident that antiblackness explains much of the historical and contemporary forms of collective resistance against what is perceived as undeserving privileges to the Afrodescended – particularly social, economic and political privileges. ‘The trigger of White rage’, asserts Carol Anderson, ‘is, inevitably, black advancement. It is not the mere presence of black people that is the problem, but rather it is blackness with ambition, with drive, with purpose, with aspirations and with demands for full and equal citizenship. It is blackness that refuses to accept subjugation, to give up’⁵⁰ Foundational antiblackness may explain the repudiation of the PT by White and White-identified people who, despite their economic gains, felt aggrieved by the PT’s support of the historically excluded, particularly the Afrodescended. That is why Bolsonaro’s call for violence upon Black, trans, gay, female and poor people, may be, after all, a revealing statement on the always-in-place racial project of deblacking and unqueering Brazil.

As much as it is an important indicator of racial attitudes, electoral politics is a smoke screen for a country with a consistent history of antiblack terror, even during leftist/progressive governments. In fact, between 2006 and 2016, which includes the peak period of the PT’s antipoverty programmes, homicide rates of Blacks increased by 23% while homicides of White youth decreased 6.8%.⁵¹ As we write, Black victimisation is at least twice (40.2/100,000 persons) as high as it is among Whites (16.0/100,000).⁵² Also, within three years (from 2016 to 2018) the Brazilian police killed as many as 15,607 individuals, with Blacks accounting for at least 75% of victims.⁵³ Homicide by the police has achieved the terrible record of 14 victims per day. By way of comparison, in the United States, one Black person is killed every 28 hours either by an agent of the state or with the support of the state.⁵⁴ The leftist Brazilian government of the PT was not only unable to control police violence; it also deployed the national guard and the army to police Black communities in the country’s urban peripheries. The body count in highly celebrated joint police–military operations, particularly in Rio, in preparation for global sporting events (the 2013 Confederations Cup, the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games), which victimised young Black people in disproportionate numbers, were publicised as part of the PT’s worldwide appeal and administrative competence.

The specter of the Haitian Revolution

When enslaved people in the French colony of Santo Domingo killed their masters, burned their crops and seized their property, the political message to the colonial world was crystal clear: liberation would come only with the total

destruction of what they knew was the cause of their suffering; and if they destroyed much it was because they had suffered much. They knew that as long as these plantations stood their lot would be to labour on them until they dropped. The only thing to do was destroy them. From their masters they had known rape, torture, degradation, and, at the slightest provocation, death. They returned in kind.⁵⁵

From Brazil to the United States, the Haitian Revolution haunted the colonial world. Throughout the hemisphere, enslaved people's uprisings were met with new policies restricting the import of human cargo from the Caribbean, bringing about small reforms to delay emancipation laws, and creating more repressive protocols to protect White lives and property.⁵⁶

In the Brazilian context, medical doctor and novelist Joaquim Manuel de Macedo, in his 1869 *As Vítimas Algozes*, perhaps best captures this wave of antiblack fear. Macedo vividly described the unrelenting dread that defined White people's lives during the regime of slavery. Would Whites be poisoned? Would they be raped? Would they be attacked and killed in their sleep? Would Blacks, the indisputable numeric majority, take over the country and inflict on Whites the incessant brutality Whites applied on Blacks? The social system of slavery's logic was greatly determined by the fear of the Black and the ensuing preemptive violence that, it was agreed, needed to be exerted on the enslaved in order to avoid upheaval.⁵⁷ Macedo's moment is that of pre-abolition, but it explains the enduring collective fear of Brazil becoming a Black nation. As historian Sidney Chalhoub points out, the fear of Black rebellion

was solid as a rock, and was every now and then furthered by news of Haitians strolling in the streets of the court, urban rebellions in other places, or by rumors of an international conspiracy to subvert the slave societies. And there was the quotidian fear of the Blacks who could lace medication with poison or could stab someone⁵⁸

This widespread fear, and its corresponding interminable production of antiblack terror, became not only the basis for the despotic regime of law that replaced bondage,⁵⁹ but also an algorithm in the very constitution of the allegedly democratic Brazilian multiracial experiment.

Today's fear and hatred of the Black is expressive of the specter of the Haitian Revolution. Fear of Black people, and of what they are immediately associated with – poverty, crime, favelas, prisons, arrastões, rolezinhos and the PT – remains today in institutional and social memory, not as a static historical artifact, but as a shared agreement and thus constantly renewed and activated. Any cursory analysis of death by preventable causes, such as police use of lethal force, disease (eg cancer, cardiovascular ailments, AIDS/HIV), exposure to environmental toxins, and maternal and infant mortality, reveals Blacks are disproportionately and consistently affected.⁶⁰

From this perspective, Bolsonaro's victory is no scandal. Rather than a unique moment, the Brazilian presidential elections revealed the transhistorical symbolic and practical efficacy of the foundational antiblack hatred. Bolsonaro's political bloc represents an abhorrent modality of the collective hatred towards the most vulnerable, particularly the Black. But this hatred runs deeply in the country's social, ideological and institutional foundation, and is not exclusive, nor even particularly revealing, of the current moment. The emergence of the army captain to the highest executive office in the world's fourth-largest democracy is indicative of a structuring pattern of collective and ubiquitous antiblackness.

The critical question, then, is not so much about the (episodic) threat to democracy, but how democracy itself, as indeed the country's social DNA, is coded by antiblackness. Antiblackness, historically and contemporarily, is at the core of Brazilian social organisation – its logic, symbology and performance. To be sure, there are other logics and forms of hatred at play: against the impoverished, women, non-Christians, LGBTQ people and indigenous groups. Still, antiblackness is a critical feature of a social agreement that intersects with, energises and indeed shapes the appeal of Bolsonaro's multifaceted antidemocratic and excluding agenda. That is to say, Bolsonaro's election may be an unexpected and catastrophic political event, but his supporting bloc is fueled by a founding hatred of the Black and its twin, fear of a Black nation. Would not such specific hatred and fear constitute the very timeless essence of the Brazilian polis?

Conclusion: false choice

What was at stake during the electoral campaign when Blacks were invited to choose between two competing projects? PT's project, as was stressed during Fernando Haddad's bid for the presidency, is one of multiracial participatory and inclusive democracy. Bolsonaro's ultimately more appealing project is one that is explicitly authoritarian, sexist, segregationist, antiblack, anti-affirmative action, pro-military, hostile to all forms of progressive politics, and seeks to reestablish that which it claims the PT era annihilated: order and progress. Both projects were presented as the country's truest vocation. From a progressive perspective, Bolsonaro is often described as fascist and retrograde, a threat to the country's fragile democracy. From a conservative perspective, order and progress can only reemerge once unambiguous lines of authority, belonging and morality are redrawn. It is quite telling, however, that in spite of their contrasting political discourses, both campaigns asked that all forms of 'identity politics', including the demands by women, LGBTQ, indigenous and Black people, be put aside for the greater good. PT's leftist coalition replaced the traditional red colour associated with the party's visual identity with the yellow-and-green Brazilian flag and argued for the need to avoid antagonism and focus instead on the preservation of democracy. Bolsonaro's bloc emphasised the imperative of reconstructing the nation according to conservative values of the family, private property, the right to bear arms, Christian religion and the corruption-free management of the state apparatus. All of Bolsonaro's projects were packaged in an unsubtle emphasis on Whiteness as an index of order and progress.

What the 2018 presidential election evinces, however, is that the ideological constitution of Brazil as a multiracial nation is incompatible with Black citizenship and Black humanity. Although Bolsonaro's rhetoric is explicit in its authorisation of sexism, racism, violence and authoritarianism, the troubling fact is that state-sanctioned and systematic antiblack violence is foundational, not incidental. Indeed, it was prevalent during the so-called redemocratisation period, including the Lula and Dilma years. Then, as before, as now, and as will surely be the case during Bolsonaro's mandate, a striking persistence of early death by preventable causes, including but far exceeding homicidal violence, racial lynching and police terror in predominantly Black areas, reveals an irreconcilable relation between blackness and Brazilianess.

Even though it is certainly true that Blacks also voted for the paratrooper, the point we want to make is that the nation's foundational and transhistorical antiblack logic permeates all social and racial groups, including Blacks. The PT's utter inability and/or unwillingness to

address the longstanding patterns of state-sanctioned violence against Black people, *programmatic* anti-poverty social interventions notwithstanding, attests to the country's agreement about and support for everyday and *structural* Black exclusion and dehumanisation. Black life, says the agreement, is simply not valuable. And while we must recognise anti-blackness among Black people, perhaps some of the Afro-Brazilians who supported Bolsonaro recognised that PT's call for an inclusive and multiracial society was no different than the country's all-too-familiar genocidal ideology of racial cordiality, unperturbed by Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff's otherwise unprecedented and effective social programmes. In the end, both projects of nation, the progressive and the fascist, depend on – or at least are unwilling and/or unable to address – the nation's constitutive antiblackness. It is the specter of the Haitian Revolution that remains foundational.

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Notes

1. *South China Morning Post*, "Brazilian Leader Woos Donald Trump."
2. Seligman, "US Military Targets Growing."
3. See Ruckert, Macdonald, and Proulx, "Post-Neoliberalism in Latin America"; Beasley-Murray, Cameron, and Hershberg, "Latin America's Left Turns." For a discussion on the continuities between 'postneoliberalism', pink tide, and the current far-right backlash, see, respectively, Da Costa, "Decolonial in Practice"; Ravindran and Hale, "Rethinking the Left"; and Hale, Calla and Mullings, "Race Matters in Dangerous Times;" Freire, "Una nación para pocos."
4. See for instance Birdsall, Lustig and McLeod, "Declining Inequality in Latin America"; Saad-Filho, "Mass Protests Under 'Left Neoliberalism"'; Fortes, "Brazil's Neoconservative Offensive," 217–220; Ellner, "Latin America's New Left"; Hunter and Power, "Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash."
5. For a critique of the troubling place of Blacks in the scholarship on racism and racial relations in Latin America, see Hale, "Racial Eruptions"; Moreno and Saldivar, "We are not Racists"; and Arocha, "Etnia y guerra."

6. See for instance Novo and Shlossberg, "Introduction: Lasting and Resurgent Racism"; Ravindran, "What Undecidability Does"; Kröger and Llander, "Ethno-Territorial Rights." In the case of Brazil, research on racial inequalities usually employs a conceptualisation of racism that elides the country's history of antiblackness. See Cardoso, "O fim do arco íris"; Paixão, "Desenvolvimento Humano e as Desigualdades Étnicas no Brasil."
7. On the specificity of antiblack implicit sentiments and their corresponding institutional practices, see Eberhardt et al., "Seeing Black," and Goff et al., "Not Yet Human"; Vargas, *Denial of Antiblackness*.
8. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*; Waiselfisz, *Mapa da violência*.
9. e.g Pinho and Vargas, *Antinegritude*; Flauzina, "Corpo Negro Caido no Chao"; Vargas, "Gendered Antiblackness"; J. Alves, *Anti-Black City*; Rocha, "De-Matar"; R. Oliveira and Garcia, "Marielle, presente!"; Bledsoe, "Racial Antagonism;" Da Silva and Larkins. "The Bolsonaro Election."
10. Franco, "UPP: a redução da favela a três letras."
11. Bledsoe, "Racial Antagonism," 168.
12. Ibid.; R. Oliveira and Garcia, "Marielle, presente!"; Vargas, "Taking Back the Land"; Harrison, "Global Apartheid, Foreign Policy." On racial formations of security, see also J. James and Alves, "States of Security"; and Amar, *Security Archipelago*; Rocha, "De-Matar."
13. Waiselfisz, *Mapa da violência*; Vargas, "Black Disidentification."
14. Pereira, *Ethno-Racial Poverty*.
15. See Bledsoe, "Racial Antagonism"; Ravindran and Hale, "Rethinking the Left"; Hale, Calla and Mullings, "Race Matters in Dangerous Times." J. Alves and Vargas, "Antiblackness and the Brazilian Elections," most recently, see also Da Silva and Larkins. "The Bolsonaro Election, Antiblackness, and Changing Race Relations in Brazil," and Freire, "Una nación para pocos."
16. Scholars have identified these electoral dynamics in the previous three presidential elections, when the poor and the Black massively supported the Workers' Party. See Vargas, "Black Disidentification," 5.
17. El País, "Bolsonaro divide o Brasil."
18. Guimaraes, "De novo preconceito contra nordestinos."
19. Bolsonaro also attacked the quilombolas, stating that "they don't serve even to procreate." Cited in Bledsoe, "Racial Antagonism," 166.
20. Boadle, "Brazil's Rousseff Says."
21. NACLA, "Lula's Legacy in Brazil."
22. Kingstone and Ponce, "From Cardoso to Lula."
23. Pereira, *Ethno-Racial Poverty*, 9.
24. Ibid., 12.
25. Ibid., 12.
26. Fortes, "Lawfare Unmasked in Brazil."
27. Hunter and Power, "Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash."
28. Nugent, "Far-Right Presidential Candidate."
29. G1, "Bolsonaro comenta morte."
30. To arrive at this formulation, we initially draw from Lewis Gordon's theorisation of antiblack racism, which he defines as a form of *bad faith*: "The racist is a figure who hides from himself by taking false or evasive attitudes toward people of other races. The antiblack racist is a person who holds these attitudes toward black people." Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*, 94.
31. George Yancey's study in the US argues that while indisputably Latinxs and Asians face discrimination, and in certain contexts experience greater levels of prejudice than Blacks, the Black positionality is of a unique kind, irreducible to that of nonblack groups: "Because nonblack racial groups can avoid the label of being "black", they can eventually be given a "White" racial identity. 'It is the rejection of African Americans,' Yancey continues, 'rather than the acceptance of European Americans that shapes this hierarchical structure.' Yancey, *Who Is White*, 15, 72, 76, 71, 81.
32. On transgenerational racial patterns of occupational status and wealth, see Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*; Oliver and Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth*.

33. Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdade racial no Brasil*; Oliver and Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth*.
34. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.
35. Eberhardt et al., "Seeing Black."
36. Ibid.
37. Franco, "UPP: a redução da favela a três letras"; J. James and Alves, "States of Security"; Waiselfisz, *Mapa da violência*; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, "Atlas da Violencia 2018."
38. Vargas, *Denial of Antiblackness*.
39. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 110.
40. Vargas, *Denial of Antiblackness*.
41. See, for example, N. Oliveira's work on favelas in Rio de Janeiro and Niterói, "O caso do estado e as questões raciais."
42. Ibid.; Alves, *Anti-Black City*.
43. Flauzina, "Corpo Negro Caído No Chão"; Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, *Report on Black People*.
44. Franco, "UPP: a redução da favela a três letras," 106.
45. Ibid., 91.
46. Ibid., 41.
47. Borges, *Salvador: Cidade Túmulo*.
48. Historian George Lipsitz remarked on how the United States' possessive investment in Whiteness, particularly when confronted with what seems like undue advantages to the non-White, often responds with a combination of resistance, refusal and renegotiation. Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.
49. Abu-Jamal, *Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?*, 7–10.
50. White rage, Anderson argues, may not appear in the form of lynching mobs or other spectacular forms of violence, but it will actualise its antiblack disposition. Anderson, *White Rage*, 5;
51. Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, "Segurança Pública em Números."
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.; G1, "Número de pessoas mortas pela polícia no Brasil."
54. Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança, "Atlas da Violencia 2018"; Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, *Report on Black People*.
55. C. L. R. James, *Black Jacobins*, 88.
56. For an overview of the (ambiguous) effects of the Haitian Revolution on the other colonies, see Geggus, "Sounds and Echoes of Freedom."
57. Cedric Robinson shows that such fears were mostly unfounded since, even in victory, Blacks seldom inflicted on their former captors the same levels of brutality to which they were subjugated. See Robinson, *Black Marxism*.
58. Chalhoub, "Medo Branco de Almas Negras," 104 (our translation); see also De Azevedo, *Onda negra, medo branco*.
59. Duarte and Queiroz, "A Revolução Haitiana e o Atlântico Negro"; D. Alves, "Rés negras, juízes brancos."
60. Martins, "Mortalidade Materna"; De Castro Cerqueira and de Moura, "Vidas perdidas e racismo no Brasil"; Theodoro, Jaccoud, and Guerreiro Osório, "As políticas públicas e a desigualdade racial"; D. Alves, "Rés negras, juízes brancos."

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