

race, racism, territory and institutions

by Zukiswa Wanner

Today is January 19, 2021, when I start writing this text and in most of the United

States of America, it is still Martin Luther King Day. Today is also the day that six years ago in Kenya, where I am writing this from, children at a primary school were teargassed by the police. Reason? These young citizens were protesting the land-grabbing of their school playground to build a parking lot for a Big Man's hotel. Both children and the Big Man are citizens of the country. But, tasked to choose between right and wrong, the police institution chose wrong and rich over right and poor.

During the #BlackLivesMatter following the death of George Floyd, a friend made a post on Facebook, 'When did you realise Black Lives Matter?' I interpreted it to mean 'when did you realise you were considered lesser than?'

Two years old.

This was the first thought that occurred to me. I had to call my mother in Australia to check that I was not imagining this. That I had not imagined it. She told me I was not. I was with my mother. A political activist from the then Rhodesia who had been exiled in Zambia, met and fell in love with a South African political activist and conceived and gave birth to me.

Two years old.

My mother had decided she would try to smuggle me into the then Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, so my grandparents could see me for the first time. My mother is the first child

in a family of eight so this was a meaningful trip. She did not succeed though. She was caught crossing illegally and got arrested. And here is my trauma. I remember crying as this white Rhodesian policeman kept prodding her chest and asking her questions. And she, trying to keep me quiet while also answering the interrogation.

We were bailed out by my grandfather with some assistance from my mother's political activist comrades who were within the country. But until I was ten, I was terrified of white people and also thought everyone spoke English. Harshly. Like the policeman who interrogated my mother.

Twelve years old.

I am finally over my childish belief and at a school where we have some white people. Among my friends is Charlie. Charlie is my age but a grade behind me. She stays in my street. We have a lot of fun together. We share stories about the boys we have crushes on. We walk to school together. We walk home together. Charlie and I go into my mother's bedroom and play with her make-up and jewellery. But here is the thing. I have never been inside Charlie's house. When I get to her house, I stand at the gate and ask for her. She comes out and we go to my house. One day as I get to her gate, I arrive at the same time as her brother Pierre. 'Please tell Charlie I am here?' I request. And he does. 'Charlie, your kaffir friend is here.' In Southern Africa, the word kaffir is equivalent to nigger. I hear Charlie's mother say 'Pierre, go and apologise. She may have heard you, you were so loud.' Charlie runs to the gate before Pierre comes. 'Pierre is coming to say sorry. Please just tell him it's okay.' I ask her what Pierre is apologising for. She doesn't say. I leave. Twelve year old me realises that Charlie is not my friend.

Nineteen years old.

Los Angeles. My flight from London arrived late so I have missed my flight to Hawaii as I go to college. I have to sleep over in the City of Angels. I realise soon enough that these angels do not look like me. I check in to my lodging. Their restaurant is closed. I ask reception where I may be able to get food. There is a pizza place across the street. I cross the street. I

realise, when I get into the pizza place that I do not have enough money (I am going through my vegetarian phase then). I decide to leave and get more money. As I leave this pizza place, someone yells to me 'hey.' I start walking faster.

This is my first day in America. Am I about to be robbed? 'Hey,' the person yells again. I walk faster. Next thing a man is grabbing me. A policeman. I am relieved. OK. At least it's a policeman. My relief is short-lived. He asks me whether I have any drugs on me. I say no. He searches my pockets and finds only my passport and the insufficient money I have. 'Go. I don't want to see you here again,' he says. 'But officer,' I say thinking I am being rational, 'you will see me again. I haven't eaten and after I get more money I will return.' He looks at me like I am the maddest person he has ever met. 'Oh? So you are being a smartass?' he handcuffs me, against his partner's objection, he puts me in a squad car. When I get to the police station, I am strip-searched. I am asked to open my butt-cheeks. I am nineteen. I have always been law-abiding. I have never suffered this much humiliation in my life.

I will be 45 this year.

If I had to write every humiliation I have been subjected to on different continents including my own because of the colour of my skin.

If I had to mention my random selection at airports despite the fact that I had to go through rigorous visa processes.

If.

I would write many books.

I am honoured to be guest-editing this issue of *Peripheries 6* with the theme **Race,**

Racism, Territory and Institutions. If what you have read about my experiences above makes you sad, then you do not live on planet earth or you choose to be blind to much of what goes on to black people worldwide. Hopefully, this issue may do something to open up your eyes and have you not only questioning why institutional racism results in the deaths of Joao Pedro Matos Pinto at the hands of police in Brazil, or Augustina Arebu killed by the notorious SARS unit in Nigeria or Collins Khosa killed by soldiers in his yard in South Africa, but actively working against it.

I also hope that this issue will have the non-blacks among the readership see the intersectionality between ethnicity, racism, poverty and territory. Echoing some of the experiences of those of us who worked on this issue, Colombian Maryuri Mora Grisales recounts her work on *Sur 28*. This is just one of the many pieces to look forward to in this issue. Pay attention and reflect when Eduardo Jose Barbosa throws down the gauntlet to Brazil's left to be better lefties and less neoliberal in *Hey Progressives and Anti-Racists, How About Broadening the Debate?* Hold your breath knowing what you know about the treatment of black bodies as young Nelio is ordered off a bus for looking suspicious in *The German Shepherd* by Utanaan Reis. If you didn't know, have your eyes opened to the struggles of the Kurds by Zozan Sima and understand the intersectionality of fighting racism as shown in Mariam Bhargouti's essay on Palestine.

Merdi Mukore's essay shows us parallels racism in France and ethnocentrism in his Democratic Republic of Congo while Howard Meh-Buh Maximus' short story set in Cameroon where two young men from the same region end up with different fortunes. We see too how there are institutions and nations that push the narrative of 'better black' (usually an expatriate from another country) as shown by Michelle Mashuro in her essay on Australia. How too there are institutions that are black-run under black governments that will have zero respect for their black citizens (pick any African or Caribbean country you

want and tales of police brutality against citizens or government-corporate corruption at the expense of citizens abound).

In my native South Africa, non-black animal rights activists make much noise about the darker members of society slaughtering for spiritual reasons. Read the parallels of this and the racism in such protests in the excellent [interview by Silvia Souza with respected Brazilian lawyer Hédio Silva Júnior.](#)

Your heart will break on seeing the [photographic essays of Vila Autodromo](#) favela resisting removals in 2016 for the Olympic Games as well as well as the [Brumadinho tragedy](#) in 2019. Memory frozen in images. But this issue also has beauty aplenty. Last year an [Exhibition Origins#3, Pangeia Festival](#), was held virtually and artists we may never had access to like Caua Bertoldo, Ione Maria, Isabella Alves and Cassimano were in the exhibition. You get to see them in this issue of Peripheries again with an essay from the curator telling you more about it. [Luana Galoni](#) defiantly reminds us how blackness is othered:

To my dark love

My dark friend

My dark author

My dark painter

My dark father

I wanted to make you just father

Just painter

Just author

Just friend

Just love

And I thought, bravo. May we live to see a time where we can all just be. Until then though, for the black people who are and always have been my primary audience, I hope this issue will show you the pluriversality of our experience but equally, where to be allies when we are the ones in condition of power and to take decisions. May we get to a time when we do not have to constantly shrink ourselves in order to appear non-threatening. May we live to see a world where, to paraphrase Dr. King, we, our children and our children's children are not judged by the colour of our skin but the content of our character. But if that doesn't happen, may we know that we have a world of black siblings and we are part of that world of black siblings who will amplify each other's voices when there is injustice.

When the indefatigable executive editor of *Peripheries*, Daniel Martins, a man I did not know a year ago but who has become a sounding board and a brother, asked me to guest edit this issue, I said yes because I like him. Now, I am honored to have guest edited it because it opened my eyes even more to the similarities of many of our experiences. And my eyes were able to be opened wider, and I hope yours will be too, because of a brilliant team of translators who translated texts in French, Portuguese, Spanish and English so that people who speak only one of those languages could understand everything else. Ana Rivas, Déborah Spatz, Edmund Ruge, Gabriela de Sousa, Jackson Schimidiek, Jemima Alves, João Aleixo, Karla Rodrigues, Karolina Mendes, Laura Faria, Lemuel Robinson, María Ortiz, Mariana Costa, Rane Souza, Stephanie Reist and Tainá Almeida. If there is any monotony in the words, Juliana Barbosa's illustrations and collages brilliantly break them. Image editing counted with the essential help of Felipe Moulin, while Paloma Calado carefully carried out the programming of interview, essays, stories, poetry, photography and art into *Peripheries'* four translated versions.

Obrigada, Gracias, Merci, Thank you to all of you team for your excellent work.

And to you, reader, may you read, see and reflect. When you are done with this issue, may

you be a changed human being determined to change the world you live in in whatever small way, for the better. Much like the people who have contributed to this issue.

A luta continua.

In Solidarity,
Zukiswa Wanner



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