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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/16368>

DOI: 10.4000/ejas.16368

ISSN: 1991-9336

Publisher

European Association for American Studies

Electronic reference

Liam Kennedy, ““This is Not America”: States of Emergency in Europe”, *European journal of American studies* [Online], 15-4 | 2020, Online since 17 December 2020, connection on 09 July 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/16368> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.16368>

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"This is Not America": States of Emergency in Europe

Liam Kennedy

- 1 Transatlantic relations, a symbolic linchpin of the Western-led global order, are in a parlous state, reflecting both internal crises in the US and in many European nations and a loss of faith in broader visions of supranational alliances. The relations have recently come to seem further imperiled, perhaps terminally so, with multiple tensions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and the protests in solidarity with those protesting the death of George Floyd in the US. Neither emergency has triggered a reinvestment in multilateral actions, rather they have rigidified ideologies of political elites, revealed the unpreparedness of Western states for crisis management, and exposed the hollowness of grand narratives and geopolitical fantasies—not least those of “the West” and “transatlanticism.” To the degree that these emergencies have been thought together they have been all too casually conflated in the European imagination, not least as moral judgments about the leadership of President Donald Trump. Over the last four years, Europeans have moved from shock at Trump’s election to confusion about what this means for the Atlantic alliance to increasing repudiation of American leadership and are now beginning to imagine a world order that the US is not at the centre of. Yet, there is great uncertainty about the interregnum of the present, as the new order is not yet formed, and the pandemic and race emergencies not only intensify European rejection of the US, they reveal the frailty of the “European project” and anxiety about the future of Europe.
- 2 Underlying this shift in European perceptions of the US is a deep but barely coherent disinvestment in the fantasy of “America” as a liberal and redemptive power.¹ This has been a sustaining fantasy for European political and popular cultures since the end of WW2. It is a fantasy that links affect to political life, fetishizes the transatlantic relationship, and functions to contain the traumatic specters of violence and exclusion that underpin the making of European identity (Kroes, Kennedy 145-50). Hannah Arendt observed in a 1954 essay that “[e]ver since this part of European mankind ceased to be a colony, framed its Constitution and declared itself an independent

Republic, America has been both the dream and the nightmare of Europe" (Arendt). At the time, Arendt was concerned that this imagining fed an emergent anti-Americanism in Europe, repudiating the US as an embodiment of the latest stage of modernity that prefigured Europe's development. And so, she argued, Europe "tries to escape the consequences of her own history under the pretext of separating from America" (Arendt). While the conditions of this imagining have shifted, Arendt's insight—that via repudiation of the US Europe disavows what it does not want to acknowledge in its own formations—has remained a core feature of the fantasy. Fascination and contempt are bound together in this fantasy, it is dependent on what is known but cannot be acknowledged: a fear of and desire for American power. It provides Europeans with the balm of calling out America hypocrisy in the misuse of its powers, often measured in the distance between its soft power rhetoric and hard power actions. A moralizing language of critique and repudiation is commonplace in European commentaries on Trump's perceived failings in dealing with domestic and international emergencies. The moralizing rarely reflects so stringently on European shortcomings though, and is echoed in the common rejoinder of those who insist on European exceptionalism: "This is not America."²

- 3 The health and race emergencies of 2020 may prove to be yet another cycle in this dramaturgy, but there are indicators of a deeper unraveling of the fantasy. The distinct yet complexly related emergencies signify a conjunctural moment in which geopolitical and biopolitical challenges to both the European project and transatlantic relations have converged around recognition of the fragilities of social administration and political governance and the vulnerability of marginal peoples, due both to the disproportionate toll of the coronavirus on these lives and to the protests claiming that their lives matter.

1. Westlessness

- 4 The naturalization of the West as a normative model of global order has been under strain for some time as the once hegemonic power of liberal market economies lose their allure. It has been severely tested by the shifting power dynamics caused by major geopolitical and technological changes, and the emergence of illiberal nationalism and concomitant backlash against globalization. These shifts have exacerbated tensions in transatlantic unity, which have steadily mounted since the endings of the Cold War, signaling a divergence that is structural and not simply a response to the style of particular political leaders. With the US turning away from international commitments and American foreign policy pivoting to the Pacific the reluctance of Europeans to accept the changing geopolitical realities is telling. That relations have reached a nadir has become a commonplace observation among European commentators: "European diplomats privately admit transatlantic relations are at their lowest point since the end of the Cold War, including during the 2003 Iraq War. Previous US-EU disagreements have been over policies. Today, the very concept and value of transatlantic unity is questioned" (Whineray).
- 5 This questioning of transatlantic relations is not new but there is reluctance among policy elites in Europe to explore it too closely or fully acknowledge the underlying paradigm change of which successive disruptions in transatlantic relations are symptoms. In this vacuum they try to ignore the epistemic pressure on frames and

practices of knowledge production in relation to transatlanticism. For those, sometimes termed "Atlanticists," who have long invested in the relationship between the US and Western European powers as a privileged axis of global order and stability, it is hard to let go of this illusion today. They continue to speak of "shared values" tying Europe and the US but are rarely clear what these are. The anxiety about the relationship is most keenly felt in Europe where transatlanticism is institutionalized in a plethora of thinktanks, university programs, fellowships and publications. The American journalist Madeleine Schwartz, on a fellowship visit to Germany in the summer of 2018, was dumbfounded to find that "transatlanticism is everywhere in Berlin. Everyone I met in my new life as a journalist abroad seemed to be an emissary of the Atlantic project," and surmised that "[t]he relationship thrives in the many networks rallying for its existence in the face of possible decline" (Schwartz). Schwartz comments on the both the vacuity and usefulness of Atlanticism as a policy concept:

In the language of thinktanks and funds, 'Atlantic' designates not a real set of values so much as an empty form that can be filled with whatever meaning its organisers want: liberal democracy, the diplomatic partnership between the US and Europe, or the simple continuation of structures set up after the second world war and not redefined since.... Whatever happens in the most recent crisis, there will still be Atlanticism, a nebulous set of ideals harking back to the end of the second world war. Its vagueness is too useful: political opportunism dignified with the weight of history. (Schwartz)

- 6 The elite discourse of "transatlanticism" continues to appear in news media and policy speak in Europe though has almost disappeared in the US (Garton Ash). It is an example of the investment in fantasy that elides the reality of Europe's asymmetric dependence on the US.
- 7 The fault lines were visible at the Munich Security Conference in February 2020, an annual gathering of international policymakers and a barometer of transatlantic relations. The last few conferences have been tense affairs, reflecting growing schisms on a range of issues. At the 2020 conference the tensions spilled over into heated discourse, with European speakers expressing the growing sense that Europe needs to "go its own way," while American speakers scolded Europeans about their failure to understand the security threats posed by China. The hosts chose "Westlessness" as the conference theme, defining it as "a widespread feeling of uneasiness and restlessness in the face of increasing uncertainty about the enduring purpose of the West" (Munich Security Report 2020). This seemed to signal an introspective focus but was also intended to challenge assumptions about the purpose of the West and by implication of transatlantic relations, and force acknowledgement of an emerging world order in which the West is less dominant. Leading European speakers were blunt about the new realities and overtly critical of the Trump administration's "America First" approach to foreign affairs. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, in his speech opening the conference, remarked the US administration "rejects the very concept of the international community," while the EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell called for the EU to "develop an appetite for power" ("EU Must Develop Appetite for Power"). That appetite remained reigned in however, with Germany and France unable to reach an accord on how it should be enacted. French President Emmanuel Macron was bullish in his speech, warning that on security issues Europe "cannot always go through the United States, no, we have to think in a European way," promoting a strategic dialogue on defence that would include a European nuclear deterrent (Knight). With Germany

remaining sceptical though and hindered by a deracinated leadership the forging of a grand bargain remained moot.

- 8 The US had a strong presence at the conference, led by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and US Defense Secretary Mark Esper and over 40 congressmen and women from both parties, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. They were somewhat taken aback by the theme of the conference and the tone of some of the European speakers. Pompeo, pushing back against Steinmeier's speech, asserted "I'm happy to report that the death of the transatlantic alliance is grossly overexaggerated. The West is winning, and we're winning together." He also repeated in order to rebut some of Steinmeier's comments about the Trump administration's unilateralism, saying "I'm here to tell you the facts.... Those statements do not reflect reality.... Let's be straight up: The U.S. is out there fighting for sovereignty and our friends" (Birnbaum, Hudson and Morris). The predominant message from the Americans to the Europeans was to get into line on security issues and especially on the threat posed by Huawei, with many expressing anger or incomprehension at Europe's decision to give the Chinese company access to 5G networks. Esper stated that "Huawei and 5G is a textbook example of China's strategy to destabilize and to dominate" (Wintour). Pelosi concurred, warning that working with Huawei was like "choosing autocracy over democracy on the information highway" (Knutson). Yet, in response to a question after his speech, Esper acknowledged that the US did not have an obvious alternative. And so, the Europeans and Americans talked past each other, unable or unwilling to find common ground and barely able to raise the fig leaf of "common values" to signify their bond as pillars of the West.
- 9 The Munich conference signaled an effort by some members of the European policy elite to finally address some of the elephants in the transatlantic room but the rhetoric lacked conviction in the face of uneasy member states hobbled by national interests and distrust. As Jeremy Shapiro has observed of the Munich gathering, "for all the destabilizing developments in Europe's neighborhood, the member states clearly prefer the old bargain that has served them so well. For the most part, they will cling to it until its demise becomes clearer than truth" (Shapiro). Beyond the policy elites however many Europeans are tiring of the old bargain, and the presidency of Trump has clearly increased their disenchantment with the US. They watched the US pull out of the Paris climate accords and withdraw from multilateral commitments globally. They listened to Trump call NATO "obsolete" and to his many aggressive statements about Europe. In early February 2020, a week before the Munich conference, the American president told a gathering of US governors: "Europe has been treating us very badly. European Union. It was really formed so they could treat us badly" ("Remarks by President Trump"). The European discontent with and disdain for Trump became a significant undercurrent of frustration that would find dramatic expression in responses to the health and race emergencies of 2020.

2. Covid-19

- 10 "Coronavirus: Pandemic Plunges Transatlantic Relationship Into Coma," read the headline in *Le Figaro* in April 2020, and it was echoed in several European countries beyond France (Lasserre). European media reported a widespread sense of disillusion at Trump's mismanagement of the coronavirus outbreak domestically and

internationally, expressing a sense of disbelief at how quickly the US became the epicentre of the pandemic, and pointing up an acceleration of American decline. Writing in the *Irish Times* in April, Fintan O'Toole was forthright in his view that "Donald Trump has destroyed the country he has promised to make great again":

it is hard not to feel sorry for Americans. Most of them did not vote for Donald Trump in 2016. Yet they are locked down with a malignant narcissist who, instead of protecting his people from Covid-19, has amplified its lethality. The country Trump promised to make great again has never in its history seemed so pitiful... the idea of the US as the world's leading nation—an idea that has shaped the past century—has all but evaporated... who is now looking to the US as the exemplar of anything other than what not to do? How many people in Düsseldorf or Dublin are wishing they lived in Detroit or Dallas? (O'Toole)

- 11 This unsparing judgment by one of Europe's leading journalists would likely not have been made even five years ago but was now resonant of op eds across Europe. The growing consensus was that there was no expectation or even the vaguest hope that the US would demonstrate moral leadership or promote liberal values in response to the pandemic emergency. As European commentators regularly detailed Trump's failed leadership during the pandemic crisis and speculated on the future of American leadership, American media began to pay attention. In April, the *New York Times* reported on the European disquiet, citing several European intellectuals. Dominique Moisi, a political scientist at the Institut Montaigne in Paris, opined: "Europe's social democratic systems are not only more human, they leave us better prepared and fit to deal with a crisis like this than the more brutal capitalistic system in the United States." Timothy Garton Ash, a professor of European history at Oxford University in the UK, remarked on the inevitability of American decline: "You accumulate problems, and because you're such a strong player, you can carry these dysfunctions for a long time...Until something happens and you can't anymore" (Bennhold).
- 12 Such comments are indicative of the moralizing discourse among European elites in commenting on US failings. This is not to say they are out of tune with public sentiment for the widespread antipathy towards Trump in Europe only intensified as the pandemic emergency took hold. In March, Europeans observed the Trump administration impose a 30-day ban on travel from Europe to the US, without consultation with European leaders, and read media reports on how Trump offered \$1 billion to a German pharmaceutical company to secure monopoly rights to a potential Covid-19 vaccine. While the much-reported story was denied by the Trump administration, many in Europe were prepared to believe it. There was also notice of the US' conspicuous absence from a virtual global summit of world leaders in early May that pledged billions of dollars to develop vaccines to fight the coronavirus and professed international solidarity in the face of the pandemic emergency. The US was content to send supportive messaging yet refused to give an explanation for the absence. The mounting public antipathy towards Trump and his administration was evidenced by polls and surveys in European states. A survey by the Körber Stiftung foundation in Germany in mid-May found that "73 percent stated that their opinion about the United States had deteriorated due to the current health crisis" ("Coronavirus Turns Germans More Critical").
- 13 While such views were widely shared in Europe they elided discomforting realities and growing apprehensions about the handling of the pandemic emergency in European countries and by the EU leadership. In Italy in particular there was deep resentment at

what many Italians perceived to be the lackluster response of the EU in providing efficient help at an early stage of the pandemic. More broadly, old fault lines between Northern and Southern Europe emerged in the rancorous and stalled discussions about calls for collective debt issuance to deal with the post-pandemic recovery. The EU struggled to keep internal borders open and keep alive the principles of the single market and free movement. The governor of the Veneto region in Italy that "Schengen no longer exists.... It will be remembered only in the history books" (Dettmer). Meanwhile, Poland and Hungary slid further towards autocracy, using "a state of emergency" to advance/extend the state's powers. In Hungary the government evoked Covid-19 to allow the Prime Minister to rule by decree, arguing that "Today, we confront not a military power but are in a war-like state to defend our people against a pandemic the likes of which we have not seen in a century" (McLaughlin). The demonstrable lack of solidarity across Europe in managing the pandemic unnerved proponents of political and economic union in the continent. In a rare public comment on the EU in late March, former president of the European Commission Jacques Delors warned that lack of solidarity posed "a mortal danger to the European Union" (Rankin). Reflecting on the crisis in Italy, the former European Council president Donald Tusk remarked that "the loss of reputation is huge.... We must save Italy, Spain and the whole of Europe and not be afraid of extraordinary measures. This is a state of emergency" (Bailey). Leaders of the Munich Security Conference published an op ed that signalled their alarm: "The task at hand is to save lives. But the task is also to save the Union: Decision-makers must ensure that the EU emerges from the crisis strong enough to deal with the challenges within and to hold its own in a world of great power competition" (Ischinger and Ruge).

- 14 The European loss of confidence in American leadership proved coincident with a consuming crisis in the European project. That crisis is at once geopolitical and biopolitical, which is to say it involves a sense of threat both externally and internally to the ideas and institutions of union. The supranational weaknesses of the EU were already becoming apparent before the Covid-19 pandemic. Writing in 2016, Thierry Chopin and Jaen-Francois Jamet surveyed the challenges to the *Pax Europaea* and noted it was not a guarantee for social peace nor for domestic security across Europe.

European integration seems therefore to be directly threatened: as a space without internal borders, it raises fears of contagion of the crises from the periphery (geographic and economic) to the heart of the Union, without being adequately equipped to rise to ensure a collective, Community wide response. (Chopin and Jamet)

- 15 Geopolitically, the pandemic emergency intensifies multiple threats and challenges to the Union—the migration crisis, terrorism, Brexit, anti-European populism, and the rise of China—and amplifies the growing realization that it can no longer count solely on the US for its security nor on an imaginary West as the bastion of liberalism. The pandemic has quickened the emergence of a new world order, which is likely to be a new era of great power competition. There is evidence that European publics are nervously comprehending this. A major survey in June 2020 by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) found that deep public disillusionment with the EU was leavened by a desire for greater collaboration and cohesive action among European states. The authors of the resulting report note that those seeking more cohesion in EU action do not do so based on any idealized vision of European unity: "For them, Europe is no longer mainly a project motivated by ideas and values, it is a community of fate

that must cling together to take back control over its future." The authors conclude: "The driving force for more EU cooperation appears to be the way the coronavirus crisis dramatically altered how fearfully the world beyond Europe is seen" (Krastev and Leonard). This suggests a turn to *realpolitik*, a pragmatic response based not on trust and solidarity—the founding principles of the EU—but fear and a heightened concern for security.

- 16 The pandemic is also a biopolitical crisis that challenges the European project in that it presages re-evaluations of the value(s) of political and social life and how this is administered. The many references to a "state of emergency," perhaps most eagerly enunciated by more authoritarian regimes such as Hungary but also articulated by the EU, has sparked concerns about expansion of disciplinary state and inter-state powers. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben identifies the pandemic emergency with "the state of exception, to which governments have habituated us for some time" and observes that "It is not surprising that for the virus one speaks of war. The emergency measures obligate us in fact to live in conditions of curfew" (Agamben, "Clarifications"). He argues that "an entire society has acquiesced to feeling itself plague-stricken, to isolating itself at home, and to suspending its normal conditions of life, its relationships of work, friendship, love, and even its religious and political convictions" (Agamben, "Reflections on the Plague"). Agamben's reading of the pandemic threat as a continuation of regimes' exercise of biopolitical power causing widespread sacrifice of social relationships has been widely echoed by European intellectuals. However, it has also been widely challenged by commentators who point to evidence of solidarity and collective care provoked by the virus. This more optimistic interpretation of the impact of the emergency looks at emergent forms of "civic responsibility and mutual aid, a 'biopolitics from below' of informed consent to unprecedented measures for the protection of the public health" (Pearce). The debate, rarefied and nascent though it may be, indicates the mobile stakes in this conjunctural moment of emergencies, with recognition of fragile co-dependencies both accentuating fears about and invoking empathy towards others. The pandemic has underlined inequalities, proving the lie that the virus does not discriminate, but also rendered inequalities more visible and occasioned fresh discussions about the undervalued underclass of "emergency" workers (Butler). The conflicting responses indicate a suspension of "normal" social relations and widespread uncertainty about what will constitute a "new normal." It remains to be seen how the pandemic will play out politically—whether it will give rise to new forms of population management, surveillance and digital tracking, or to a new politics of care—but it constitutes a significant breach in the social contract (including the racial contract) in Europe, reorienting relationships between states and their subjects.

3. Race and Protest

- 17 Throughout June 2020, there were protests in cities across Europe in response to the protests in the US sparked by the death of George Floyd. Expressions of solidarity were the most common feature of the protests but they also invariably connected with and expressed local matters of racial division and injustice. As they mutated transnationally, the protests triggered activism and debates on police violence, racial profiling, the detention of asylum seekers, and the removal of monuments. The range

and intersectionality of issues reflect the multiple ways in which race is at the heart of so many socio-political issues in Europe—and yet, race and racism are rarely addressed so directly in many European countries, where denial is the norm. The protests have both opened up new conversations and also provoked pushback that deflects or relegates issues of racism within European societies, often by describing them as “American.”

- 18 Racial dynamics in Europe are of course different to those in the US, reflecting different histories and geographies of racial order, different legacies in the present, and different conceptions of racial difference and racial justice—there are few countries in Europe where racial discrimination is treated as a significant social justice issue. That official data on “race” as a social identifier is uncommon in Europe, and strongly opposed in many countries, is an indicator of the sensitivities around public or state recognition of racism. In Europe racism is often framed as cultural or religious difference, thereby displacing the primacy of race and yet perpetuating “color-blind racism” (Roig 614-15). As the French intellectual Étienne Balibar wryly remarks, the “idea of a ‘racism without race’ is not as revolutionary as one might imagine” (Balibar 23). Historical context is important to understanding the different ways in which the US and European countries have dealt with legacies of racism and colonialism. The British writer Gary Younge points out:

One of the differences between America and Europe is that when it comes to anti-black racism, Europe’s most egregious acts took place abroad. Our civil rights movement took place abroad, our segregation, our slavery.... But the fact of that distance, that arm’s length, means that it hasn’t been internalized in the same way. And so there is this challenge to really teach the history in order to understand the present. (“Gary Younge on Europe and the US”)

- 19 This is an important insight, for the distance Younge refers to continues to feed into the disavowals of racism in Europe. This distance is both temporal and spatial: racism is what happened in the past in European colonies or what happens in the present in the US—Europe remains racially innocent. Psychological and ideological screens are erected to sustain this sense of distance, including selective amnesia about colonial and imperial histories of European countries. The morphing of protests in Europe into attacks on monuments and statues indicate a dramatic recognition of this amnesia, making a battleground of the symbolic landscape of historical memory.
- 20 This relative European distance from slavery and civil rights activism is crucial to understanding the different ways in which discourses of race and racism (including anti-racism) are expressed and performed in Europe, and their relation to American discourses. It can both enable and disarm efforts to advance understanding and activism around racism in Europe. Younge points out that a key element of the European disavowal of racism is a displacement via (mis)identification with African Americans:

From the vantage point of a continent that both resents and covets American power and is in no position to do anything about it, African Americans represent to many Europeans a redemptive force.... They see in black Americans a way of embracing America—because you’re embracing that bit of America that is least co-opted, least bought into the kind of power structure, least representative of the power... what they’re trying to do is finding a way to embrace the America with which they have a deeply ambivalent and complicated relationship.... And here stands this group, which signifies both that America is not all that it claims to be, but that America could be so much more. (Younge)

- 21 Younge captures the imaginary force and ambivalence of white European enthrallment to an idea of America, fetishizing African Americans as redemptive figures. "George Floyd isn't just a murder, he's a metaphor," Younge observes, "He's a metaphor for a lack of democracy" ("Gary Younge on Europe and the US"). This can be a powerful symbolic rallying point for Europeans but also a displacement of more local registers and instances of the precarity of black life in Europe. The fixation on racial injustices in the US can be frustrating and challenging for black activists in Europe. Donnay Musombo, an activist organizing a Black Lives Matter protest in Belgium, noted that members of the Congolese community there "came to the conclusion that an African American is considered more than an African. An African American is valued more than an African.... It took George Floyd to have Europe listening to us" (Birnbaum). At the same time, such attention can present opportunities to leverage a fresh recognition of racism. A major challenge and opportunity has opened for activists in Europe as they seek to mobilise public affects in defense of racial justice.
- 22 The European protests, in their performance, indicate the signifying cultural power of the US and more particularly the symbolic resonance of American civil rights matters across the world. The European events have been very American in styling and messaging, an example of the growing symbiosis of social media and transnational protest movements to propel civic activism. A driving force is Black Lives Matter, the American social movement that has become a globalized phenomenon with influential circuits in youth and popular cultures as well as protest movements around the world. The European protests replay iconic text and imagery via social media and placards, banners and chants—"Black Lives Matter," "I Can't Breathe," "No Justice, No Peace" and "Silence is Betrayal." Body language is also symbolic—a bent knee, a clenched fist, shorthand references to American protest iconography. The British journalist Ben Judah has suggested the European protests signify a "new transatlanticism": "Ironically, just as the old ideological West, of the G-7, transatlantic intellectuals and NATO-focused think tanks is breaking down a new kind of transatlantic experience, born out of a common virtual Instagram and TikTok world, is coming alive" (Tharoor). This is a suggestive observation, recognizing the disruptions in transatlantic relations and the uneasy interregnum that now exists, and the new circuits of communication and activism that link Europe and the US. Yet, there is much in this new form of transatlantic protest that is familiar from earlier forms. It is striking how much of the signage at demonstrations in different countries is in English, clearly intended as a messaging to the US. A common sign reads "The World is Watching." In this there are echoes of "anti-American" demonstrations in many cities during the Vietnam War and again following the American invasion of Iraq. The protests act out the ambivalence Younge refers to in European responses to American power, such that it is disavowed via deep affiliations with American culture.
- 23 European elites, feeling the pressure of the protests, have struggled to articulate responses that would recognize and act on their import. Rather, they have fallen back on soft statements about "the erosion of America's moral authority" while not acknowledging significant issues of racial division or violence in Europe (Hernandez and Mueller). For those still promoting "transatlanticism" it is an opportunity to remind America of its moral mission. Wolfgang Ischinger, a former German ambassador to Washington and the chairman of the Munich Security Conference, stated:

People all over the world understand that their own fights for human rights, for equality and fairness, will become so much more difficult to win if we are going to lose America as the place where 'I have a dream' is a real and universal political program.... Let's hope the demonstrations all over the world will help remind Washington that U.S. soft power is a unique asset, setting America apart from other great powers—from China, Russia, and even from Europe. It would be tragic if the Trump Administration turned a huge opportunity for the U.S. into a moral abdication. (Wright)

- 24 A similar statement was made by Sir Peter Westmacott, the former British Ambassador to the United States, who remarked that many observers outside the US "are saddened by the damage which President Trump and his Republican supporters are doing to the values we share, to freedom of expression, to the rule of law.... And even—if he means what he says—to democracy itself" (Wright). Such statements are exemplary of how policy and political elites in Europe read the issue of protests in the US, distancing them through the moralizing lens of geopolitical judgment that sees no domestic issues of relevance in Europe.
- 25 This moral discourse is also explicitly used to disavow the presence of racism in Europe as a structural or institutional presence—deflecting it as an "American scourge" (Rios). Many politicians who express solidarity with the protestors and advance criticism of the Trump administration remain wary of addressing European-based issues of racism. In June 2020, EU Commissioner Margaritis Schinas stated that the police brutality and protests in the US were "not likely... to happen in Europe at this scale.... I do not think that we have issues now in Europe that blatantly pertain to police brutality or issues of race transcending into our systems" (Banks). Schinas, whose post includes responsibility for "Promoting Our European Way of Life," also observed that "There is no doubt that Europe as a whole has been doing better than the United States in issues of race, also because we have better systems for social inclusion, protection, universal health care" (Barigazzi). Such clear statements of moral superiority have been called out for their complacency and hypocrisy, with many pointing to the lack of diversity in EU institutions, which are staffed predominantly by white people, while only 29 Members of the European Parliament, 3% of the total, are people of color. The commonplace EU response to criticism of this lack of diversity is that EU recruitment policies are "color blind"—a claim that has been challenged for several years via the #BrusselsSoWhite Twitter campaign (Islam). The claim of color-blindness is not simply glib hypocrisy, for it is a widely stated view across Europe in relation to debates about racism, reflecting a hegemonic culture of denial that is also evidenced in public reluctance to engage with the legacies of colonial history.
- 26 Part of the challenge for anti-racism activists in Europe is to disarticulate the grammar of race, to disrupt both the deep structures and accepted discourses that normalize everyday relations of racial power (Bonilla-Silva 181-86). As activists seek to leverage the fixation on the US to force fresh recognition of racism in local contexts they draw attention to culturally embedded grammars of racial power. In France, demonstrators have expressed anger at racial injustice and police brutality, particularly toward minorities from France's former colonies in Africa. A key reference point in the large protests has been the death of Adama Traore, a French black man who died in police custody in Paris in 2016. The protests have greatly disturbed national complacencies and silences around race in a country that has a deeply-rooted sense of itself as a color-blind republic and refuses to recognize race or ethnicity as formal arbiters of social

identity or difference. French law continues to prohibit the official collection of data on race, ethnicity or religion and there have been moves in the French parliament to erase the word "race" from the constitution. In lieu of public discussions about race in France there has been widespread resentment and repudiation of identity politics as a foreign concept, more particularly an American import, that threatens to undermine the social contract and universal ideals. President Emmanuel Macron articulated this perspective in his public responses to the protests, saying France would not fall into "communitarianism," associated with American-style identity politics, and claiming that the fight against racism was being misappropriated by "separatists," a coded reference to the alien nature of such protesting in France (Girette). He reiterated the common refrain of French leaders, that individual racism was to be denounced but structural racism did not exist. Meanwhile, France's Interior Minister Christophe Castaner denied that there was institutional racism in French policing: "I refuse to say that the institution is racist, but yes, there are racist police officers" and stressed that "France is not the United States" ("France Set for New Antiracism Protests").

- 27 The fresh perception of racial discord in France has sparked discussions about the validity of what are widely viewed as Anglo-American concepts, such as "identity politics," "white privilege" and "affirmative action." In early June 2020, the novelist Virginie Despentes published an open letter "to my white friends who do not see the problem" in which she asked for acknowledgement that "white privilege" existed in France (Despentes). It drew a heated response, attracting criticism from both right and left, charging Despentes with supporting an alien and divisive "communitarianism" that will produce "a new racism" (Badinter). In *Le Monde*, Corine Narassiguin of the Socialist Party argued that "To import into France the expression 'white privilege' is to want to tackle the history of the United States on the history of France, without respecting either. It is to fabricate historical nonsense" (Narassiguin). The sociologist Eric Fassin, writing in *Liberation*, counters by asking

what if we were living, in France as elsewhere, the end of the racial exception?... It is therefore not a matter of importing problems from abroad: in reality, American news is only a catalyst. This transatlantic mirror sends us back our image today. In short, the end of the racial exception means that the racialization of society is recognized as a truly democratic issue... has the time come to assume that universalism does not suffer from exceptions? Is the Republic a national singularity, or must it be part of a common democratic logic? This is the whole issue of democracy, racial or sexual: the thing, not the word. (Fassin)

- 28 Fassin's comments present the mirroring effect of the US protests as a deconstructive force that disturbs the French grammar of race, parsing the ideological distance between the language and the practice of democracy.
- 29 In Germany, the racial issues exposed by the protests are also propelling uneasy discussions in mass and social media while referencing domestic issues and giving fresh impetus to a halting public recognition of racism. As in France, Germany eschews the collection of data on race and there is a general public silence around domestic matters of racism, though shaped by a different historical legacy in which the Holocaust looms large. In recent years, immigration—and in particular, the 2015 entry of nearly a million refugees into Germany—has intensified political commentary and protest in the country, including growing unease about the violent activities of far right, white supremacist groups. In 2018, 250,000 demonstrated in the "Unteilbar" (Indivisible) march in Berlin against racism. In early June 2020, tens of thousands marched in "silent

demonstrations" across Germany to express solidarity with US protests following the murder of George Floyd. As in France, there is unease about the usage of Anglo-American language around race and protesting. As the term "Antifa" became widely used in American media and reported abroad, it caused particular consternation in Germany where it is shorthand for "antifaschistisch" (or anti-fascist) and has troubling historical connotations for many. The hashtag #IchBinAntifa ("I am antifa") has been embraced by left wing groups and provoked backlash (Staudenmaier). These and other national European environments of protest signal the varied ways in which racism and anti-racism are configured by both local and global discourses. A key drive in protests in both Europe and the US has been to illuminate the biopolitics of racial discrimination, to ask: why do some lives and bodies matter? That question—impelled and inscribed in Black Lives Matters—has both universal and particular connotations. It emphasizes racialized definition of who counts as "human," while also entailing other identifiers of inclusion and exclusion, including: who counts as European? This is to say that race and racism in Europe must be understood in terms of immigration—that is, in terms of the influx of previously colonized peoples and the anxieties (and violence) this has induced. That the protests invariably took up questions of empire and coloniality acknowledges how a history of racial violence and exclusion has shaped the biopolitics of the present, including the ongoing vulnerability of black populations. The symbolic grafting of Black Lives Matter onto protests against European states' treatment of refugees and asylum seekers underlines that the migrant crisis is a racial crisis. To understand racism, following American scholar-activist Ruth Gilmore's definition, as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death," is to comprehend how it diminishes the life chances of marginalised people (Gilmore 28). Beyond its import as a transnational civil rights movement, Black Lives Matter has become a floating signifier of Europe's racial unconscious, helping to illuminate that which is disavowed (Younge).

4. Conclusion

- 30 Taken together, the health emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the race emergency caused by the protests against racist policing form a conjunctural crisis that challenges the present coherence and future legitimacy of the European Union and transatlantic relations. The challenge is especially acute due to the combined focus of both emergencies on the governance of populations. Fears of demographic change—more particularly, large influxes of non-white peoples—have excited white racial anxieties in the Global North, provoking nationalist surges, and producing dystopian visions of the future (Smith and Vasudevan 212). The perceived threat is at once geopolitical and biopolitical, a crisis of futurity that is relative to growing white precarity, hence the pitch of unease at the prospect of a "post-American" world.³ In Europe this unease is not caused by the presidency of Trump, though it has been dramatically exacerbated by it; rather, it is presaged by Europe's long overdue reckoning with what Hannah Arendt termed "the consequences of her own history" and a consequent diminishment of the fantasy of America as a liberal and redemptive power.

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NOTES

1. I refer to fantasy here as playing a constitutive role in the formations and narratives of states and nations (Rose 1-16; Pease 198-203).

2. The phrase "This is not America" has been widely used by commentators in Europe pushing back at what they perceive (or seek to frame) as US-centric ideas in debates on race in particular. The construction has obvious ambiguity, registering a gap between American ideals and realities while the meaning slips between provocation and lament. In the US, it is commonly used by liberal commentators to decry the Trump administration's corruption of American values. That ambiguity has been pointedly referenced in the Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar's "A Logo for America," a series of electronic billboards, one of which combines the words "This is Not America" transposed on an outline map of the US. It was originally displayed in Times Square in 1987, referencing the Reagan administration and more particularly its interventions in Central America at that time. Displayed in Times Square again in 2014, it was interpreted as a commentary on the Obama administration's treatment of migrants. In 2016, it was displayed in Piccadilly Square in London, and interpreted as a symbolic rejoinder to then presidential candidate Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" logo (Simon).

3. The "post-American world," a term first popularised by Fareen Zakaria, refers not to an emergent order of American defeat or irrelevance, rather it is one of relative American (and Western) decline and the "rise of the rest," most notably of China (Zakaria). On the looming future of a "Post-America Europe," see Thomas Wright, "A Post-America Europe and the Future of U.S. Strategy" (Wright).

ABSTRACTS

The COVID-19 pandemic and the protests in solidarity with those protesting the death of George Floyd in the US constitute a conjunctural crisis in Europe, exposing the hollowness of grand narratives and geopolitical fantasies—not least those of "the West" and "transatlanticism." In the interregnum of the present, as a new world order takes form, the pandemic and race emergencies not only intensify European rejection of the US, they reveal the frailty of the "European project" and anxiety about the future of Europe. This article examines ways in which these emergencies signal an uncomfortable European disinvestment from the fantasy of America as a liberal and redemptive power.

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Keywords: transatlantic, coronavirus, race, protests, emergency

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