Introduction - Black Lives Matter : a transnational movement ?

Audrey Célestine, Nicolas Martin-Breteau and Charlotte Recoquillon

Translator: Nicholas Mann

Electronic version
URL: https://journals.openedition.org/slaveries/6664
DOI: 10.4000/slaveries.6664
ISSN: 2540-6647

This article is a translation of:

Publisher
CIRESC

Electronic reference

This text was automatically generated on 21 May 2022.
Since 2013, Black Lives Matter has emerged as a widespread social movement in the United States, with the prime objective of condemning and abolishing not just police violence against black people, but, more generally, systemic racism in the USA. As the hashtag #Black Lives Matter was going viral on social media, a huge political consensus was gathering, with unprecedented international visibility (Célestine & Martin-Breteau 2020; Recoquillon 2020; Taylor 2016).

The expression ‘Black Lives Matter’ has several dimensions. It is first a rallying cry, deployed particularly in street demonstrations and on social media, which voices an antiracial political ideal aiming to assert the value of black lives, to express solidarity with people of African descent, and to condemn the racism to which they are subjected. ‘Black Lives Matter’ also denotes a specific political organization created in 2013 (https://blacklivesmatter.com), which supports and initiates projects for racial justice, with the help of its branches in the US and overseas and of kindred organizations. Finally, the expression embraces the whole range of organizations which lent their support to movements of protest against racism in the 2010s, some fifty of which, all based in the US, have since 2015 been grouped together in the Movement for Black (https://m4bl.org/): ‘Black Lives Matter’ thus unites a complex of realities with both a North American and an international dimension.

Under the presidency of Donald Trump (2017-2021), however, in an environment undoubtedly hostile to anti-racist movements, protests linked to Black Lives Matter acquired a new momentum as a consequence of the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020. In the US and in numerous other countries across the world, demonstrations of support for Black Lives Matter brought together hundreds of thousands of people – numbers all the more impressive since this was in the context of a global pandemic (Kennedy-MacFoy & Zarkov 2020; Silverstein 2021). Thus in spite of the diversity of realities covered by the expression, Black Lives...
Matter can initially be perceived as a platform for shared political demands, reaching out beyond national frontiers. A first analysis reveals several elements which characterize Black Lives Matter as a transnational movement: the spread of slogans originating in the US, and linked to BLM, to numerous other countries when there have been simultaneous demonstrations; the transnational aspirations of the movement manifested by the support of causes, and meetings with activists, beyond national borders; the transnational circulation of performative repertoire of action, such as taking the knee or adopting slogans ('I can't breathe'; 'Black Lives Matter'); the enlistment of non-governmental actors combating racism at the international level.

Yet such a characterization of Black Lives Matter prompts us to reconsider the classic definitions of transnational movements. First formulated to analyse both the counter-summits and the alter-globalist movements of the 1990s and 2000s (Della Porta & Tarrow 2005), these definitions prove of little use when it comes to analysing the Black Lives Matter movement. They are based on a number of elements, including the nature of collective demands and protests beyond the national borders, the strength of the more or less formal connections between activists which shape the development of the movement, the consistency of the transnational social space in which it evolves, and the collective identity of the persons who claim to be close to the movement whatever their national affiliation (Sapiro et al. 2018; Siméant 2015). But such definitions are less well-adapted to the more fluid types of transnationalization which have emerged in recent years.

This observation can open the way to an understanding of the implications of the transnationalization (Siméant 2010) of Black Lives Matter for pre-existing local movements, notably as a consequence of the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. It is with this in mind that the papers gathered here aim to analyse the forms, the degrees and the implications of whatever the Black Lives Matter movement has sent out into transnational circulation from the US to the rest of the world, and back again. From this point of view, we can detect and analyse modes of circulation and connection, of identification and appropriation, of reinterpretation and even of detachment from political, media and scientific resources and expertise, and can come to terms with a transnational dimension which may be more or less confirmed.

The long history of a movement with transnational aspirations

The transnational aspirations of Black Lives Matter date back before the summer of 2020. By 2014 the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, set up the previous year by Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi² and Patrisse Cullors - the three founders of the movement (Célestine & Martin-Bretteau 2016) - had explicitly adopted the aim of internationalizing the US movement by means of a network which, despite the tensions which have recently divided it, today numbers some twenty locally-run branches, some of which are located outside the US, for instance in Canada or the United Kingdom (Black Lives Matter 2020; Ford 2020; King 2020; Morrison 2021).

In 2015, activists in the US had for example established political and practical links with Palestinian protest movements through the hashtag #Palestine2Ferguson (Masri 2015), and had contributed to the condemnation of the situation of people of Haitian origin in the Dominican Republic, who were threatened with expulsion (Baptiste 2015; Burton...
2020). In 2020, Black Lives Matter publicized campaigns in favour of Ugandan LGBTQIA+ refugees in Kenya (Coalition of African Lesbians 2021), and showed its support for young Nigerians campaigning against police violence (Ojedokun et al. 2021). The concern of Black Lives Matter for the international dimension of the issues related to anti-Black racism was equally directed at the world-wide impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and global warming on communities of colour. More generally speaking, the scale of political action is an important question for those active in the Black Lives Matter movement, but one that is perceived in a variety of ways, as emerges clearly from the review in this issue of Alicia Garza’s *The Purpose of Power* (2020) by Nicolas Martin-Breteau.

These transnational aspirations need to be reinserted into the long history of collective action against racism, in order to negate the commonly accepted idea that in Black Lives Matter we have the unprecedented story of a simple hashtag that became a global movement (Asmelash 2020; Castillo 2020; Garza 2020). In the US, if a number of organizations grew up after the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012 (Dream Defenders, Millions Hoodies Movement for Justice, ...) or following the Ferguson riots in 2014, most organizations with anti-racist aims (Black Youth Project, Color of Change, Black Alliance for Just Immigration, Organization for Black Struggle, ...) existed before Black Lives Matter came into being. They were, moreover, the successors of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, adopting and developing the programmes for action of organizations that had preceded them, such as the famous Ten Point Program of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense published in 1966. In fact in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, actions by black anti-racist organizations such as the Black Panther Party were already explicitly situated in the context of transnational networks of activists, since they envisaged the situation of Afro-American people in the US as one aspect of a worldwide problem (Angelo 2009; Bloom & Martin 2013; Horne 2020; Jeffries 2020; Joseph 2020). Transnational aspirations are furthermore a significant characteristic of political activism in the African diaspora, and have been so at least since the movements for abolition and Pan-Africanism in the 19th century (Blain 2018; Boukari-Yabara 2014; Roy 2021; Sinha 2016).

Since 2013, when support has been mobilized across the world for the struggles of people of African descent, it has built upon earlier histories. In the United Kingdom, Brazil and Australia, for instance, Black Lives Matter is not a foreign import or a derivative of the US movement. An examination of the respective national dynamics in fact reveals that what we are witnessing is less an Americanization of anti-racism on a global level than an invigoration of anti-racist movements at a local level. This invigoration is not isolated, but springs from more or less long histories of the struggle against racism. The huge demonstrations in the summer of 2020 in France, following the murder of George Floyd, were part of the long durée of the history of anti-racism, stretching from the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) to the second abolition of slavery in 1848, to the Négritude movement of the 1920s and 1930s, to the struggles for decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s, and to the movements since the 1980s for racial justice and against police violence, launched by the children of immigrants (Ndiaye 2008; Pattieu 2009; Hajjat 2013). Black Lives Matter therefore manifests the transnational movement of political and militant currents: on the one hand, through the re-use in demonstrations of visual or semantic references of US origin, whether in English or in translation, and on the other, through the attention paid in the US to
events overseas, as witness for example the cover story of Time magazine devoted to Assa Traoré in December 2020.

The transnational dimension of the Black Lives Matter movement can be observed through the circulation of English slogans in France. This is illustrated by the examples of demonstrations against police violence, in Paris in 2020 and 2022.

Demonstration in Paris (France) on 13 June 2020.
In the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder in 2020, Opal Tometi, Nigerian by origin and former leader of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration, declared that the question of anti-Black racism was perceived and confronted by Black Lives Matter as a collection of issues at once global and local which were addressed by networks and campaigns operating at the transnational level (Joseph & Tometi 2020). The last ten years have seen the development of anti-racist and Afro-feminist collectives, especially prominent on social media, which have facilitated the circulation of historical, academic and political content contributing, even if its full impact has yet to be measured, to the transformation of the environment of the anti-racist cause (Larcher 2017; Picot 2017).
At all events, movements inspired by Black Lives Matter operate within the context of long-standing struggles and deliberations – a fact which should lead us to reconsider the notion that they are a radical innovation (Siméant 2010).

**The global impact of the murder of George Floyd**

George Floyd's murder by a white police officer in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020 has come to be a major event in the history of Black Lives Matter. As the images circulated in the media and the first demonstrations were organized in Minneapolis, calls to demonstrate were being put out abroad. The demonstrations of the summer of 2020, both in the US and in many other countries, had a huge following, not least because of the support of hundreds of thousands of white people. On 3 July 2020, the *New York Times* declared, not without reason, that Black Lives Matter was probably the largest social movement in the history of the US (*New York Times* 2020). Impressive demonstrations were also organized elsewhere in the world, including in countries with no particular anti-racist tradition such as Switzerland, South Korea and Japan (Silverstein 2021; Zaveri 2020).

Other events, like the riots in Ferguson, Missouri following the death on 9 August 2014 of Michael Brown, also killed by a white police officer, set off supporting demonstrations across the world. But it was George Floyd's murder that had an unprecedented impact on the transnational spread of the movement, carried by the unbearable images of his arrest, live-streamed on Facebook. The images of George Floyd's death were in fact shared and viewed millions of times on the internet. Filmed close up and without a break for almost 9 minutes by a young passer-by, Darnella Frazier, the video helps to explain the rapid publicizing in late May and early June 2020 of George Floyd's ordeal, the global expansion of the demands of Black Lives Matter, and the rare but exemplary justice of the police officer's condemnation in a court of law in 2021.

Once again, social media figure as a decisive factor in the transnationalization of the issues promoted by Black Lives Matter. One can compare their role in this respect to that played by television in the civil rights movement (Recoquillon 2021). Now as then, the circulation of images of racist violence on mass-media channels goes a long way towards explaining the global response to Black demonstrations in the US. Since the beating-up of Rodney King by a number of police officers in 1991, amateur videos have been key in spotlighting the reality of police violence, given greater visibility by those social media which first adopted what is now known as ‘hashtag activism’ (Ray *et al.* 2017a; Ray *et al.* 2017b; Cox 2017; Ince *et al.* 2017; Schneider 2017). The same was true in Ferguson in 2014, when demonstrators documented police repression towards them by live-streaming videos on Periscope or Twitter. Broadcasting images in this way was a key strategy of the movement, serving as a check on the narrative of events by the media, and a refutation of the allegations of criminal behaviour on the part of the demonstrators by the forces of order. Studies have shown that tweets posted from abroad about BLM were in general more favourably inclined towards the movement than those originating in the US, and even more so when posted on individual accounts rather than by institutional media, all of which raises the question of the growing influence of social media on the framing of these questions by journalists (Kilgo *et al.* 2018; Harlow 2019).
It is worth asking why this video in particular had such a global impact. While a comprehensive explanation may elude us, it is important to embark on an outline analysis of its semantic and phenomenological value. The video was filmed by a Black teenage girl of 17, who instinctively pulled out her phone and live-streamed the video. These minimal biographical details reference an important dimension of the socialization of young people in the US and elsewhere: filming and keeping track, especially through images, of problematic interaction with the forces of order. The video of George Floyd's death belongs in this respect to a type of video which is unfortunately easy to recognize (slightly blurred and unsteady images, clearly taken on a phone), and which has become increasingly widespread in recent years. Just as in other videos of police violence, what we have here are ‘somatic images’ which ‘bear the imprint of the bodily movements and emotions of the person filming’ (Jost 2006: 71).

In the particular case of George Floyd, however, and unlike other videos of police violence, the usual conflict of interpretations of what is being played out in the scene appears to be nullified by the unambiguous nature of the images. The characteristics of the person who produced and live-streamed the video, its dynamic and audio properties, and its value as evidence – Darnella Frazier was awarded a Pulitzer Prize because her video was central to the police enquiry around the death of George Floyd – are all factors which give a particular status to these images (Le Monde 2021). Far from being confined to the Facebook and Twitter accounts of people interested in issues around police violence or anti-racism, the images were taken up by television channels the world over. Thus the video quickly achieved the status of essential evidence, given that it appears to offer an unequivocal narrative of the causes of George Floyd's death.

If semio-pragmatics offers us some analytical approaches to this video, there is as yet no sociological perspective upon it. A study similar to that undertaken by the sociologist Gérôme Truc of the bombings in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 would enable us to analyse, among other things, the way in which ordinary individuals in different countries reacted to the spread of this document, and to understand the motives which drove some of them to take part in demonstrations of solidarity with Black Lives Matter, whether in the streets or on social media. Cultural and political output concerning traumatic events in fact constitutes ‘stances which contribute to the framing of an event and to shaping the way in which society reacts to it’ (Truc 2016: 86).

Galvanizing mobilization at an international level

Since the video of the murder of George Floyd is not the first of its kind, its diffusion alone probably does not account for the extent of the demonstrations in the summer of 2020. Its particular resonance can probably be explained in terms of the extended effort to mobilize activists, to raise media awareness of anti-Black racism, and to educate the public about it. This preparatory groundwork was particularly in evidence in Minneapolis, where the existence of a web of activism, organized around the fight against police violence, especially since the murder by a police officer of Philando Castile, the Black driver of a car at a traffic stop, on 6 July 2016, made for rapid mobilization in response. One might also hypothesize that the circulation of definitions of racism as a systemic or structural phenomenon at the global level has had profound political effects, which have been accentuated by the question of migration in Europe.
(De Genova 2018) and the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has particularly affected Afro-Americans and other populations across the world who are racially discriminated against, for reasons both of comorbidity and of unequal access to healthcare systems (Marshburn et al. 2021; Brun & Simon 2020); it has furthermore led to the stigmatizing of people of Asian descent because the virus made its first appearance in China (Ho 2020).

On the global level, mass movements have not been simple reactions to the legitimate emotions stirred up by the media breaking news of yet another case of police violence against a Black person in the US. They have emerged in an international context in which there is a general consensus condemning racism, which both facilitated and legitimized national and local movements to counter it. This observation should not, however, lead one to overestimate the ideological homogeneity and the meaning attributed to such demonstrations in different countries. Black Live Matter galvanized older local anti-racist movements, characterized by their own configurations of meanings and practices, while the demonstrators adopted the emblematic slogans of the US movement as a new language through which to express their own demands: ‘Black Lives Matter’, ‘Hands Up’, ‘Don’t Shoot’, ‘No Justice, No Peace’, ‘Stop Killing Us’, ‘I Can’t Breathe’.

The association of police violence with systemic racism, which characterizes the framing of these questions in the US, does not necessarily correspond to the way in which these issues are envisaged, discussed and put into action in the countries where demonstrations in support of Black Lives Matter have taken place. To understand how the movement became transnational, it is essential to grasp the complex processes leading to different ways of envisaging racism across the world, and the role that they play in the treatment of racially oppressed minorities in each separate society and over a long period of time. As Michel Dobry shows, ‘it is for heterogeneous “reasons”, “motives” or “interests”, or rather under the influence of causal series or “determinisms” largely independent of each other that, in distinct social settings, groups or individuals are encouraged to adopt movements launched by others, to give them other meanings, and thus, by “getting involved”, other historical trajectories’ (Dobry 2009: 31). In this case, the various movements of summer 2020 can be seen as one stage in socio-historical trajectories of longue durée, more or less independent of each other, addressing differing modes of envisaging racism and anti-racist mobilization, by a variety of actors who endow the slogan ‘Black Lives Matter’ with different ideas and political objectives.

Depending on the country, the slogan and the Black Lives Matter movement have been appropriated in a variety of ways, ranging from a simple expression of solidarity with Afro-American people, as was the case in Switzerland and South Korea, to a convergence of catch-phrases and demands for social reform, as was the case in France, Belgium and New Zealand. The slogan ‘Black Lives Matter’ can be appropriated for purposes which are not uniformly radical; it does not explicitly attribute guilt, nor spell out any explicit demands. As a result, it can be used to voice a wide variety of criticisms – of the police, but not only of the police –, which explains its recurrence in the demonstrations organized by SOS Racisme and by the La Vérité pour Adama Committee.

The aim of this collection of papers is thus to gain a more granular understanding of the strength of demonstrations, the levels of commitment and, more generally, the surrounding structures conditioning the anti-racism cause in different countries:
France, Brazil, and at the heart of the transnational zone that is the Confederation of African Football. In her article, the sociologist Jean Beaman sets out to analyse the role of transnational solidarity between women who have experienced racial discrimination in demonstrations against police violence in France. For her part, Emmanuelle Bruneel analyses the reception and varieties of the appropriation of the Black Lives Matter movement by the French media, which fluctuate between open hostility and well-intentioned elucidation. There are two articles devoted to Brazil, a country marked equally by the major reverberations there of the death of George Floyd, and by a long-standing tradition of interaction between anti-racist demonstrations and the fight against police violence. Luar Maria Escobar examines the transnational circulation and appropriation of ‘repertoire of symbolic actions’ by studying gestures, such as taking the knee, in the Brazilian demonstrations of the summer of 2020. The research of Mille Fernandes, Luzi Borges and Maria Rita Santos is directed to Afro-Brazilian activism in the town of Bahia, where resort was had to cyber-activism in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In his article, Yvan Issekin focuses on the ‘effort to normalize the neutrality of sport’ made by the African Football Confederation, as an explanation for the relative absence of echoes of the Black Lives Matter movement in Africa, at a time when outside the continent there were increasing signs of solidarity on the part of African players, who were frequently the object of racist slurs in the stadium.

Differing appropriation according to local contexts

23 Although it is beyond the scope of this introduction and collection of papers, it is essential to analyse the ‘militant processes’ (Siméant 2010) in the sociological and historical contexts in which they are deployed, if we are to account for the global diversity of Black Lives Matter. In particular, close attention must be paid to the reasons why the political demands, the vocabulary of activism, and the modes of action of the US movement have been reappropriated in very different ways by pre-existing social movements, political parties, trade unions and professional organizations, student unions, media coverage, scientific research and so on. The specific challenges faced by movements outside the US may lead them to prioritize structures, strategies and representative voices – often women – different from, or on the contrary similar to, those of the American movement, whose global influence offers a window of opportunity for the reformulation of local demands.

24 In this respect the French case, for which we have academic studies and ethnographical data, provides an interesting illustration (Hajjat 2013; Pregnolato 2017; Jobard 2002; Moreau de Bellaing 2015; Codaccioni 2018). Following the death of George Floyd, a number of demonstrations were organized in France in early June 2020. The first official call to demonstrate in Paris was issued by SOS Racisme and supported by the left-wing parties and unions: the Greens, La France Insoumise, and the Socialist Party. The rally was planned for 6 June 2020 in the Place de la République. But a few days before, on 2 June, the La Vérité pour Adama Committee issued another call to demonstrate on social media. Despite a ban on the meeting by the police, 20,000 demonstrators, many of them very young and the victims of racial discrimination, unfurled their banners in front of the Tribunal de Paris (High Court) and chanted slogans explicitly referencing the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement, but in the specific context of the conflicting medical opinions in the case of the death of Adama Traoré in
2016 at the Persan police headquarters in the Val d'Oise. The 6 June rally in the Place de la République brought together people of an older generation than the crowd attracted by the La Vérité pour Adama Committee, the leaders of which indicated that they did not wish to take part since they did not consider themselves as represented by SOS Racisme. A new call to march ‘against police violence and against racism’ in Paris on 13 June 2020 was put out by the La Vérité pour Adama Committee. This too was banned by the police the day before it was due to take place, and there was a simple mass gathering of between 15 and 20 thousand people in the Place de la République instead. As a result, the two events of 2 and 13 June between them constitute the largest demonstrations against racism in the recent history of France.

The sociologist Abdelli Hajjat (2021) reminds us that ‘since the March for Equality and Against Racism of 1983 with its 100,000 participants, activists militating against racism and police violence had never managed to gather as many demonstrators in the streets of Paris’ as they did with the demonstrations and mass gatherings organized by the La Vérité pour Adama Committee in June 2020. Following the example of earlier movements against racism on French soil, he points out the ‘improbable’ alliances between very different actors, which gave birth to these movements, and the importance of militant and political efforts, especially in the judicial arena. The sequence of events initiated by the first tweets in France breaking the news of George Floyd’s death, and culminating in the 13 June 2020 demonstration, makes it possible to observe on the one hand the tensions within the anti-racist cause in France (Laplanche - Servigne 2014), where older organizations such as SOS Racisme came into conflict with more recent one such as the Adama Committee (Picot 2016), and on the other, the dynamics of the diffusion and appropriation of the Black Lives Matter movement in the French context.

There are different dynamics in other national areas. There is for instance a long-standing interaction between the US movement and that in Canada – where there are branches of the Black Lives Matter foundation – due to geographical proximity and a shared language. Very similar issues arise concerning the Black populations of Canada, though there is a more specific emphasis on the resemblance between their situation and that of the Amerindian ‘First Nations’ (Maynard 2017; Diverlus et al. 2020). Movements in Australia, another country founded on the systemic undertaking of white colonization and the elimination of Aboriginal people, likewise organize their demands around Aboriginal populations (Geia 2020 ; Maddison 2019 ; Stansfield 2021), as is the case in certain Central American countries with Amerindian populations such as Honduras (Anton Mahfoud et al. 2020). In Belgium, as in Italy, the demonstrations following the death of George Floyd galvanized local protests prompted by the colonial past and the specific forms taken by racism in the two countries (Ducourtieux & Stroobants 2020). The issues raised in the US by Black Live Matter thus find an echo in the circumstances of many countries, including African ones where a majority of both the population and the forces of order are Black. The transnational dimension of movements in favour of Black populations, and more generally of people suffering racial discrimination, is thus firmly rooted in a multiplicity of sociological and historical factors which lead to forms of ‘hybridization’ (Sahin et al. 2021) of the US demands, which in turn generate forms of transnational solidarity (Moon 2021 ; Niang 2020 ; Pregnolato 2017 ; Smith 2017).

From this point of view Black Lives Matter represents an upheaval of the usual collective perceptions of slavery, colonialism, imperialism and racism, with major
consequences for political strategies for combatting racism. Global issues are now being confronted at a local level: questions like the collection and use of statistics taking account of people's racial origin (France, Canada, Germany, etc.); the presence of statues and monuments dedicated to figures prominent in colonial and racial Western imperialism in public spaces, condemned in campaigns such as #RhodesMustFall and Faidherbe doit tomber (Nyamnjoh 2016; Chantiluke et al. eds 2018; Ndiaye & Sylla 2020); the question of reparations for slavery and colonialization (Bessone & Gordien 2021; Bessone & Cottias 2021); the introduction of the history of peoples suffering from racism into museum collections and school curricula through such initiatives as The Black Lives Matter Syllabus, The Black Curriculum and The Caribbean Syllabus; or finally the renewal of topics around these questions as the subject of scientific research. All these elements make the case for localized approaches which can take account of the existence, or absence, of transnational networks supporting the actions of Black Lives Matter outside the US.

One of the issues for future research programmes on the possible transnational dimensions of Black Lives Matter, and more widely on militant practice against racism, will be to reach out beyond the circulation of political slogans and scientific definitions of racism and anti-racism. It is a fact that identifying channels of circulation, or even appropriations in this regard, may not tell us very much about their tangible effects on militant practice and the various arenas in which local movements operate. These are significant questions which refer in turn to others: the question of language for example, of translation and intellectual points of reference – systemic racism, Black feminism, the intersectional approach – which do not circulate much beyond the world of activists with university degrees. Similarly, unlike in the US where activist organizations have salaried 'permanent' staff, the absence of professionalization among activists in most other countries may act as a constraint on efforts to rally militant resources over time. An approach of this kind would make it possible to understand better in real time the effect of the spread of repertoire of actions and performances, whose meaning changes according to the context in which they occur. It would also make it possible to gain a deeper understanding of any currents of political identification around Black Lives Matter. Given what we know of the Black Lives Matter movement, we can already amend the definition of transnational collective action given by Della Porta and Tarrow as 'coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions' (Della Porta & Tarrow 2005:2-3). Despite the absence of an easily identifiable transnational coalition or a genuine transnational collective identity (Tarrow 2005,7:161-179), there are signs of overlapping influences, connections between activists and the circulation of content. The slogan 'Black Lives Matter', since it does not immediately generate an interpretive framework in terms of injustices, can be appropriated in fluid and more or less radical ways. It is further important to note that studying forms of opposition to Black Lives Matter at a global level might help to refine our understanding of its transnational character. On the basis of the revival since the 2000s of the extreme right in the US, we can see the dynamic effect of the transnational circulation of reactionary right-wing ideas and practices, which has fed a series of moral panics and local backlashes, particularly targeting intersectional ‘theory’, Critical Race Theory, ‘wokeism’ etc. The very same type of opposition faces the feminist movement and #MeToo, equally at a transnational level.
If it is not possible to speak of a transnational movement, may we perhaps speak of the transnational anti-racist ‘tone’ of Black Lives Matter, which has created a framework of reference and action sufficiently fluid to be spread outside the US (Siméant 2010; Sénac 2021)? Or even of a transnational anti-racist ‘generation’? Black Lives Matter has in fact contributed to the political education of a whole generation, reaching beyond national borders. It has imposed new themes on media output, on political programmes, on scientific research etc., and has in this way transformed our vision of the world. When the protests were taking place in the summer of 2020, Opal Tometi described them as follows: ‘We are finally achieving a mass consciousness. We’re seeing a widespread awareness and commitment to anti-racism that we have long needed’ (Joseph & Tometi 2020). Activists use the expression the ‘Great Awokening’ to signify this dawning awareness that the world can be changed, harking back to the Protestant ‘Great Awakening’ in the 18th century which inspired the movement for the abolition of slavery. From this point of view, ‘Black Lives Matter’ is the rallying cry for a whole political generation, just as ‘Black Power!’ was for the generation of young activists coming into adulthood in the 1960s.

**Conclusion**

Since it is not in the hands of a transnational organization, or of a group of such organizations, Black Lives Matter does not appear to constitute a unified and homogeneous movement at a global level. Local dynamics, whether in the US or abroad, give a sense of an ensemble of interconnected and plural initiatives. It seems rather that it is a conservative narrative that seeks to disqualify Black Lives Matter by presenting it as an ideology and a movement all the more dangerous because unified and homogeneous.

An analysis of the transnationalization of Black Lives Matter truly sensitive to the local and national dimensions of the movement, its modes of circulation, the ways in which it is appropriated and embedded, enables one to counter such impositions and to reveal the reality of the struggle against racism in the 21st century. From this point of view this introduction can only sketch out a reply to a related, and much broader question: what does it mean to study Black Lives Matter, and more generally Black lives, not from the perspective of the US, but from outside (Fouquet 2014)?

---

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


GEIA Lynore et al., 2020. « A unified call to action from Australian nursing and midwifery leaders: ensuring that Black lives matter », Contemporary Nurse, n°56/4, p. 297-308.


HAJJAT Abdellali, 2013. La Marche pour l’égalité et contre le racisme, Paris, Amsterdam.


NYAMNJOH Francis B., 2016. #RhodeMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa, Bamenda, Cameroon Langaa Research et Publishing CIG.


SHAHIN Saif, NAKAHARA Junki et SANCHEZ Mariana, 2021. « Black Lives Matter goes global: Connective action meets cultural hybridity in Brazil, India, and Japan », *New Media & Society*.


SMITH Christen A., 2017. « Battling Anti-Black Genocide in Brazil: For over a decade, antiracist movements in Brazil have sought justice for the killing of Black Brazilians by state forces », NACLA Report on the Americas, n°49/1, p. 41-47.


RECOQUILLON Charlotte, 2021. « Le rôle des médias dans les violences policières », Stop Killing Us, épisode 5 (2 parties). Disponible sur : www.youtube.com/watch?v=xALMjQldjzI&list=PLzB0oX59kJNhNxN8T40VztGGY0eYrhU&index=6&ab_channel=Valyumedia et www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMwJSmzyOZY&list=PLzB0oX59kJNhNxN8T40VztGGY0eYrhU&index=7&ab_channel=Valyumedia


NOTES

1. M4BL no longer publishes the list of its members and partners on its website. In January 2017, it still listed 28 organizations forming a ‘United front for black lives’, together with 226 ‘endorsing organizations’. It is possible that the decline in transparency of communications from M4BL reflects a certain disarray or tension at the heart of the organization.

2. Since 2021, Ayo Tometi.

3. On the question of videos and their diffusion, it should be noted that activists and journalists alike are uncertain as to whether violent and traumatizing images should be published. In the case of the 13-year-old boy Adam Toledo gunned down by the police in Chicago, there were a number of pleas from journalists, lawmakers and activists not
to share the video. Alerts and Trigger Warnings (TW) have become much more frequent on social media when such images are posted. For further details, see Jost 2016.


5. We thank Johanna Siméant for her observations which enabled us to develop this idea.

AUTHORS

AUDREY CÉLESTINE
Maitresse de conférence, université de Lille, département d'études anglophones, Centre d'études et de recherches administratives, politiques et sociales (CERAPS)

NICOLAS MARTIN-BRETEAU
Maître de conférences, université de Lille, département d'études anglophones, Centre d'Études en Civilisations Langues et Lettres Étrangères (CECILLE)

CHARLOTTE RECOQUILLON
Chercheuse associée à l’Institut français de géopolitique, journaliste et actuellement (2022) enseignante à Sciences Po