

Anti-racist perceptions about the 2023 anti-democratic acts in Brazil

Percepções antirracistas sobre os atos antidemocráticos de 2023 no Brasil

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Abstract: This essay analyzes the racially related issues around the terrorists who vandalized the buildings of the powers of the Brazilian State on January 8, 2023, in the country's capital, Brasilia, the class and race relations in the performance of the means of repression of the State, and still encourage the hypothesis that people from the countryside, middle-aged, white and from the middle class had and still have different treatment by security agencies when compared to citizens from the Minorized Majority. Finally, it complicates the analysis by pointing to the racial pasteurization of terrorists by the press associated with financial capital. For this brief and interpretative essay on the Brazilian reality at the time, we used three authors and their tools for exploring contemporary reality: Muniz Sodré, Brazil, Byung-Chul Han, South Korea; and Achille Mbembe, Senegal. Thus, the analysis of the episode was developed from the perspective that it is inserted in a territory of governance and geopolitics dominated by US interests, that there is a Brazilian national construction based on what Muniz Sodré classifies as "fascism of color," and that society is uncivilized by possible mediations of the corporate media associated with neoliberal interests and turbo-capitalism; that, according to Achille Mbembe, this whole process of advancing communication technologies and neoliberal domination promotes the hyper-humanization of some and the dehumanization and brutalization of others (all non-whites). Also, consistent with Byung - Chul Han's perspective, the psychopolitics associated with neoliberal social mediation technologies are new power techniques applied in that episode by the financiers of terrorist acts.

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Resumo: Este ensaio analisa a racialidade relacionada aos terroristas que depredaram os prédios dos poderes do Estado brasileiro em 08 de janeiro de 2023, na capital do país, Brasília, a relação de classe e raça na atuação dos meios de repressão do Estado, e ainda fomenta a hipótese de que pessoas interioranas, de meia idade, brancas e da classe média tiveram e têm tratamento distinto, por parte dos órgãos de segurança, quando comparadas com cidadãos oriundos da Maioria Minorizada. Por fim, complexifica a análise apontando a pasteurização racial dos terroristas por parte dos órgãos de imprensa associados ao capital financeiro. Para este breve e interpretativo opúsculo sobre a realidade brasileira no período, nos valem de três autores e suas ferramentas exploratórias da realidade contemporânea: Muniz Sodré, Brasil, Byung-Chul Han, Coreia do Sul, e Achille Mbembe, Senegal. Assim, desenvolveu-se a análise do episódio à partir da perspectiva de que está-se inserido em território de governança e geopolítica dominada pelos interesses dos EUA; de que existe uma construção nacional brasileira baseada no que Muniz Sodré classifica como “fascismo da cor”, e de que a sociedade é incivilizada por possíveis mediações da mídia corporativa associada aos interesses neoliberais e do turbocapitalismo; de que, conforme Achille Mbembe, todo este processo de avanço das tecnologias da comunicação e dominação neoliberal promove a hiper humanização de uns e a desumanização e brutalização de outros (todos não brancos); e ainda que, coadunando com a perspectiva de Byung -Chul Han, a psicopolítica associada às tecnologias neoliberais de mediação social são novas técnicas de poder aplicadas naquele episódio pelos financiadores dos atos terroristas.

Palavras-chave:

Brutalismo, Maioria Minorizada, Psicopolítica, Imaginário, Mediação

Resumen: Este ensayo analiza las cuestiones raciales en torno a los terroristas que vandalizaron los edificios de los poderes del Estado brasileño el 8 de enero de 2023, en la capital del país, Brasilia, las relaciones de clase y raza en el desempeño de los medios de represión del Estado , y aún alientan la hipótesis de que las personas del campo, de mediana edad, brancas y de clase media tuvieron y tienen un trato diferente por parte de los organismos de seguridad en comparación con los ciudadanos de la Mayoría Minorizada. Finalmente, complica el análisis al señalar la pasteurización racial de los terroristas por parte

de la prensa asociada al capital financiero. Para este breve ensayo interpretativo sobre la realidad brasileña de la época, utilizamos tres autores y sus herramientas para explorar la realidad contemporánea: Muniz Sodré, Brasil, Byung-Chul Han, Corea del Sur; y Achille Mbembe, Senegal. Así, el análisis del episodio se desarrolló desde la perspectiva de que se inserta en un territorio de gobernanza y geopolítica dominado por intereses estadounidenses, que hay una construcción nacional brasileña a partir de lo que Muniz Sodré clasifica como “fascismo de color”, y que la sociedad es incivilizada por posibles mediaciones de los medios corporativos asociados a los intereses neoliberales y al turbocapitalismo; que, según Achille Mbembe, todo este proceso de avance de las tecnologías de la comunicación y la dominación neoliberal promueve la hiperhumanización de unos y la deshumanización y brutalización de otros (todos no blancos). Asimismo, en consonancia con la perspectiva de Byung-Chul Han, las psicopolíticas asociadas a las tecnologías neoliberales de mediación social son nuevas técnicas de poder aplicadas en ese episodio por los financiadores de los actos terroristas.

Palabras clave:

Brutalismo, Minoría Mayoría, Psicopolítica, Imaginario, Mediación

1. Introduction

For a better idea of how we perceive the terrorist acts of January 8, 2023, in Brazil, our analysis of what the press initially reported and the profile of the prisoners disclosed by the State Secretariat of Prison Administration of the Federal District, SEAP-DF, we consider important to start by portraying the events and protesters' profiles, as disclosed by the local and national press, and later the profile of the prisoners according to data from SEAP-DF.

According to news published that January in large circulation newspapers such as "Correio Brasiliense," "O Globo," and Folha de São Paulo, together with television stations such as "Globo News," the January 8, 2023 acts were marked by invasions and vandalism in public buildings, such as the National Congress and the Supreme Court, in addition to attacks on journalists and police. Several arrests were made related to the events of the day. Still, according to the narrative of the cited media, there was not a single profile of the prisoners. Still, the reports would indicate that many of them would be young, primarily men, linked to far-right groups and supporters of the former president defeated at the polls, Jair Messias Bolsonaro. Some would have a history of involvement in radical groups and violent actions.

There were also reports that many prisoners were not regular protesters, having been encouraged to participate in the acts through political groups organized on social networks.

This context briefly summarizes what we found in the press at the time. None of the accounts portrayed a racialized contextualization of those arrested for attacking democracy. Racialization is customary in the Brazilian press when reporting the profile of possible law offenders from the Brazilian peripheries and favelas, which we classify as the "Fields of the Minority Majority - Black Territories" (Santos, 2020).

It is important to emphasize that the investigations are ongoing; the available information can still be updated and deepened. As I write this essay, we² leave the Supreme Court, STF, to begin the trial of the detained terrorists.

In the context of the data³ released by SEAP-DF, it is observed that of the 1,193 names of detainees for terrorist acts, ten people do not present a date of birth. Thus, of the remaining 1,183, 494 are women, and 699 are men. One person is under 18, and the oldest is 86 years old. The average minimum age is 18.5 years, and the maximum is 74.8 years. 68.1% are between 40 and 60 years old, and 36.8% are between 45 and 55. Thus, one concludes that most detained people are middle-aged, not young. Finally, the average age of women is 46.3 years, and men's is 44.6 years.

In this way, we observe that the people detained in the terrorist acts are middle-aged people with a significant gender balance and possibly impacted by the speeches, actions, and false information disseminated on social networks during Jair Bolsonaro's government. The report with the data of the detainees does not have a racial profile. This type of report would be the only coincidence between the corporate media narrative and the data the Department of Prison Administration of the Federal District reported. Information is casuistically devoid of racial filament when this is a significant incidence of the Brazilian media. Non-whites are single-out. This undesirable "other" is disseminated and dehumanized with extreme speed. Lourenço Cardoso (2020) has a socio-historical analysis of this process in Brazil.

As pointed out in the "Relatório Conjunto de Monitoramento de Direitos Humanos"⁴, a document to publicize the monitoring data of the people arrested on January 8, 2023, produced by the Defensoria Pública da União (2023), "não haviam pessoas algemadas, todas as pessoas tinham acesso aos aparelhos celulares, dialogavam entre si e dispunham de equipes de pessoal e ambulância para atendimentos médicos" (p. 6). The report also does not inform the racial profile of the detainees and confirms no arrests of LGBTQIA+ people.

² <https://noticias.uol.com.br/ultimas-noticias/agencia-brasil/2023/04/18/stf-initiat-trial-of-denunciations-contrainvolved-em-atos-golpistas.htm> Visualized on 18/04/2023

³ <https://seape.df.gov.br/prisoos-dos-atentados-bsb/> Visualized on 15/04/2023

⁴ See the full report at: <https://static.poder360.com.br/2023/01/ReportingJaneiro.pdf> Acesso on 15/04/2023.

This treatment should be praised for the high degree of humanity and respect in dealing with the people who promoted terrorism in the federal capital. But should it not be the right of all citizens to enjoy their rights regardless of class, gender, and race? Thus we bring this essay question-problem: Why the difference in treatment and attention of those in the custody of the State, arrested in-flagrante when attacking the democratic regime? Why is there such a distinction of treatment between detainees whose profile we have already mentioned and the mass of people incarcerated historically? Why the silence of the corporate media about this uncollected data?

Perhaps, what we coined as whiteness (Santos, 2021) explains this abject relationship. It is still possible to dwell on the writings of Achille Mbembe to understand this differentiation of treatment and its relationship with the coloniality of black bodies, blackness, and permissiveness given to white people.

2. Brutalism and Necropolitics - The Construction of the "Other"

Mbembe argues that blackness is a political and historical experience related to colonialism, slavery, and the struggle for emancipation and equality. It is possible to inform that this political imaginary associated with blackness makes us see communication codes and signs of whiteness that are not written but practiced by the media in association with local rulers.

Mbembe (2017) uses the term "the non-white other" to refer to those subjugated and colonized by the Western white system, especially those of African descent. He further argues that blackness is a political identity built in opposition to Western white rule and that the "non-white other" is one that, although outside of white rule, is also affected by it.

For the Senegalese theorist and thinker, the category "the non-white other" is crucial because it highlights the centrality of race in the construction of identity and politics. He argues that race is a socially constructed category used to justify exploitation, domination, and violence against those considered inferior. He seeks to challenge these racial hierarchies through the blackness and promote a more just and egalitarian view of society. It is in this perspective of understanding the relations between blackness and whiteness that we understand how Achille Mbembe articulates the concepts of "Necropolitics" (2017) and "brutalism" (2021).

Necropolitics would be a form of power that focuses on controlling death and life. It refers to political practices that aim not only to kill but also to control and manage people's lives and deaths, especially those considered "disposable" or "surplus" by the logic of global

capitalism. Necropolitics is a concept that Mbembe uses to analyze colonialism, racism, and war, as well as how power manifests itself in our contemporary societies.

Brutalism, in turn, is an architectural aesthetic that emerged in the postwar period, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, characterized by simple geometric shapes, apparent concrete, and exposed structures. In his work, Mbembe uses the term "brutalism" to refer to an aesthetic of brutality broader than architecture. He argues that the brutalist aesthetic is a visual expression of necropolitics, which manifests in all aspects of social life, from architecture to politics. It also points out brutalist aesthetics and necropolitics are inseparable since both share the same logic of control and power over life and death. It thus suggests that brutalism is a visual expression of violence at the heart of necropolitics and that analyzing these forms of power and aesthetics can help us better understand contemporary societies and fight injustice and oppression.

Now, wouldn't this path be the best analytical path to understand the approaches on the fateful January 8, 2023, by the media and the government, since the racial pasteurization of the detainees at the event? However, it is also possible to project perceptions about the terrorist act from the perspective of what Muniz Sodré (2021) wedges as an "incivil society" guided by technological devices that promote a mediatized ethos within a nation where "color fascism" (Sodré, 2023) is a dominant part of the national historical formation, creating the "bios-media" (Sodré, 2002) racist.⁵

3. Incivil Society and Media Bios

Sodré uses the term "incivil society" to describe a type of society marked by characteristics, such as:

1. **Social and economic inequality:** Incivil society is marked by significant social and economic inequality, with a small ruling elite controlling most resources and opportunities. At the same time, most of the population lives in precarious conditions.
2. **Social fragmentation:** Social fragmentation characterizes incivil society, with groups and communities that do not communicate or relate to each other, weakening social ties and solidarity.
3. **Violence and insecurity:** Violence and insecurity mark the incivil society, with high crime rates and violence, leading to a climate of fear and mistrust among people.

⁵ The concept of media Bios developed by Muniz Sodré offers the possibility of analysis and understanding of media influence in contemporary society.

4. Absence of values and ethics: Incivil society is characterized by the absence of values and ethics, with a culture that values individualism, competition, and the pursuit of profit at all costs, to the detriment of the common good and the collective interest.
5. Authoritarian and corrupt politics: Incivil society is marked by an authoritarian and corrupt policy, with political and economic elites who use power to maintain their privileges and interests to the detriment of democracy and social justice.

In short, for Sodré, an incivil society is marked by profound inequalities, social fragmentation, violence, lack of values and ethics, and authoritarian and corrupt policies.

Take into account that this is a picture of Brazil in recent years. It is a depiction associated with the interests of the financial market and corporate⁶ media, the national political elite that orchestrated the coup against President Dilma Rousseff. It connects with the retraction of civil rights initiated in the coup government of Michel Temer, which culminated in the election of Jair Messias Bolsonaro in 2018, whose non-re-election in 2022, and the attacks and false news during his tenure were flammable fuel of the terrorist acts that took place in January 2023.

Nevertheless, Sodré (2002) also discusses the importance of communication for constructing individual and collective identities. In "Anthropology of the Mirror," he argues that communication is fundamental to the constitution of culture because it is through it that individuals relate to each other and the world, creating meanings and meanings.

From this point of view, we could consider that the "non-communicated," such as the racial profile of the detainees, and the communicated, such as the conditions of treatment given to prisoners for terrorist acts, communicate and signify the differences in class and race of the people involved, even more, inform the border bodies allowed (white) and border bodies not allowed global citizenship, black.⁷

⁶ The impeachment process of Dilma Rousseff began on December 2, 2015, when former President of the Chamber of Deputies Eduardo Cunha continued the request of jurists Hélio Bicudo, Miguel Reale Júnior and Janaína Paschoal. With a duration of 273 days, the case ended on August 31, 2016, resulting in the revocation of the mandate, but without the loss of Dilma's political rights. For more information, visit: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2016/12/28/impeachment-de-dilma-rousseff-marca-ano-2016-no-congresso-e-no-brasil> Visualized on 17/04/2023

⁷ Research by the National Council of Justice reveals that about 63.7% of the Brazilian prison population is made up of blacks. See more at: <https://www.cnj.jus.br/o-incarceration-cor-cor-diz-specialist/#:text=%E2%80%9CCerca%20de%2063%2C7%25,Brazilian%20%C3%A9%20made%20up%20.> Last viewed on 11/04/2023

4. Cross-border bodies

From the spectrum drawn here, perhaps we can associate the difference in visibility between the conditions of people arrested in terrorist acts and the Brazilian prison population, predominantly black, to what Achille Mbembe (2021) characterizes as "cross-border bodies" (p. 75). This prison population is associated with the undesirable "other," those whose bodies would be disposable.

Thus, Mbembe discusses the idea of "cross-border bodies" in his writings, which refer to bodies beyond the geographical and political boundaries established by nation-states. To those whose signs of subordination and inhumanity travel in historical time from the colonization of the Americas, the process of slavery and colonial domination.

Cross-border bodies are those expelled, kidnapped, or left their places of origin, searching for new opportunities or refuge. These bodies include migrants, refugees, exiles, and those in transit or living in precarious situations outside their homelands, people who are not white.

Mbembe further argues that, in many cases, nation-states fail to deal adequately with these cross-border bodies, leading to violence, discrimination, and exploitation. Thus, the mediation of countries has been the result of what Sodr  (2002) classifies as media Bios and Mbembe (2021) of technolatriy, which would generate bodies allowed and positively identifiable and others not allowed and invisible, invisible because erased and enforceable in the hands of state agents.⁸

From this perspective, it is possible to insert in this analytical comparison the perspective of the Korean thinker Byung-Chul Han, when he informs us that these mediations that generate governance and humanity for some and inhumanity for others are part of a new model of neoliberal domination and power, which he classifies as "psychopolitical," this psychopolitical orchestration where media platforms are essential, generate the elimination of the other, the disappearance of the not equal, the increased bubble of equals, and so the permission of negativity and violence on the unequal invisibilized.

⁸ Research of 2022 of the Brazilian Forum of Public Security points out that in the last decade 408,615 black people had deaths due to lethal violence in the country. In the same period the reduction in the lethal death of white people was 26.5%, while the lethal death of black people increased by 7.5%. For more, visit: <https://forumseguranca.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/infograficoviolenca-desigualdade-racial-2022.pdf> Visualized on 18/04/2023

5. Psychopolitical orchestrations in the disappearance of the "Other"

In his work "Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Power Techniques," Han (2018a) discusses how contemporary politics uses psychological techniques to control people subtly and invisibly. He argues that psychopolitics is a form of power that seeks to control individuals through their subjectivity, that is, through their emotions, thoughts, and desires. Han also points out that while traditional politics uses coercion and violence to control people, psychopolitics seeks to manipulate the emotions and desires of individuals through communication platforms so that they control and adjust to the demands of society.

According to the author, psychopolitics is a consequence of neoliberalism, which puts the individual responsible for his success and happiness. He argues that neoliberalism has created a society where individuals are forced to constantly compete and adapt to market demands, leading to exhaustion and despair.

For Han, the solution to psychopolitics is to create a new form of politics based on care and solidarity. He advocates the need for a policy that values human life rather than focusing on success and productivity, which considers individuals' vulnerability and fragility. In addition, it points out the importance of a critical education that enables reflection and resistance to manipulative discourses of psychopolitics.

In a racialized Western society, the question remains: how to define this access to critical education and widespread humanization of all human beings regardless of class, race, or gender? And, still dialoguing with Sodr  (2023), which informs that Brazilian society is formed from the "color fascism," whose communication industry has great significance for this racial fascism to the Brazilian one, how not to compare the right given to white people who comment on crimes concerning black people?

6. Inconclusive perceptions

Perhaps, to begin what we would call the essay's conclusion, although, in an abstract and inconclusive way, we could continue with Byung-Chul Han, who has written a lot about the relationship between society, perception, and communication in contemporary times. In his works, he points out that technology and digital culture have profoundly changed how we relate to the world and others. For Han, contemporary society is marked by excessive visibility. Social networks and digital media expose and communicate everything in real-time. He argues that this has led to a "fusion" of subject and object, where individual perception dissolves into collective communication.

In addition, Han (2022, 2018b) points out that digital communication has led to a "trivialization" of language, where words and images are devoid of depth and meaning, being used by far-right rulers, Radical militants, and Pleo cybercrime world to rally people and actions as a kind of "Swarm," another term of Han to categorize contemporary reality and that we could associate with the terrorist actions of January 8. He argues that this has led to a "linguistic depression" in which words can no longer express genuine emotions and feelings.

For Han (2022), it is necessary to rescue a more authentic and meaningful form of communication that considers the individual's singularity and subjectivity. He advocates the need for critical reflection on technology and its influence on communication and perception to create a more humane and supportive form of society.

Otherwise, also from the global SOUTH, Muniz Sodré (2002) indicates that we are living in a period of "turbocapitalism," where the characteristics and impacts of the current stage of capitalism, which is characterized by an acceleration and intensification of economic processes, social and cultural, would be a form of capitalism developed from the 1980s, driven by globalization, new communication technologies and neoliberalism. This form of capitalism is characterized by the speed and intensity of financial transactions, unbridled speculation, the concentration of wealth and power in a few hands, and the transformation of everything into a commodity—the commodification of life and the ossification of black bodies, coadunate Achille Mbembe (2021).

Sodré also points out that turbocapitalism generates a growing social and economic inequality since the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. Furthermore, he argues that this form of capitalism is responsible for frequent economic crises and a global environmental crisis, as it promotes the intensive use of natural resources and the large-scale production of often unnecessary consumer goods.

In short, Muniz Sodré sees turbocapitalism as an unsustainable economic and social system that profoundly affects people's lives and the planet. He proposes a critical reflection on this model and suggests seeking alternatives that promote social justice, equality, and sustainability.

See that so far, from its different locus of enunciation, perceptions of the world, and theoretical tools, we have three contemporary thinkers coming from the global south, helping us to reflect on the period in which we are living the dominance of machines, the acceleration of virtual life, the implantation of the "media Bios" and the capitulation of the different facing a dictatorship of the "equals." Finally, it is possible to affirm that what unites these three thinkers, who provided us with a brief tool for developing this essay, is their critique of

neoliberalism. In this sense, Achille Mbembe's perception of this system of domination illustrates what the Brazilian and Korean say in their writings.

Mbembe, with his essays mediated by criticism of neoliberalism, stands out in pointing out the neoliberal system's emphasis on individualism and profit maximization, which he sees as an ideology that favors capitalism over democracy and human rights. It also argues that neoliberalism has increased inequality globally, weakened labor rights, and contributed to the precariousness of work. Are these not the policies of the precariousness of conquered rights and social lobotomy that we have seen since the 2016 coup suffered by President Dilma Rousseff and accentuated by the Bolsonaro administration?

Mbembe also criticizes how neoliberalism influenced government policies worldwide, resulting in cuts in social spending and dismantling the welfare state. He believes that neoliberalism promotes a culture of consumerism and individualism, which causes a severe threat to solidarity and social cooperation, and we agree with it.

Now, the sociological reduction, adduced here the proposal of the Brazilian sociologist Alberto Guerreiro Ramos (1996), provided by Achille Mbembe on the influences of the neoliberal system for domination, illustrative and consistent with the others cited present criticism of neoliberalism and its media-financial system.

Thus we understand the terrorist acts of 2023 in Brazil, the racial pasteurization of its propagators, and the silencing of the media as of historical interest in the context of the Brazilian social reality.

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