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Examining the way necropolitical online discourse has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic

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2021
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EXAMINING THE WAY NECROPOLITICAL ONLINE DISCOURSE HAS CHANGED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by

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Submitted in fulfilment with the requirements of the

MASTER OF ARTS

in the department of

CRITICAL DIVERSITY STUDIES

at the

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

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Date of submission: 30 April 2021

ABSTRACT

The year 2020 saw aspects of traditional human reality subsumed by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) or Covid-19 pandemic. As the coronavirus spread across the world, nations made decisions as to how they would deal with the unknown in order to ensure societal, economic and political survival. The varying levels of severity of these decisions brought to light various necropolitical actualities. The politics of who was allowed to live and thus who was allowed to die was at the forefront of every newspaper, talk show, family dinner discussion and social media interaction. What was seen as a unifying global experience, quickly became one of exacerbated inequality where race, age, gender and socio-economic status determined expendability. Amid this, George Floyd was killed in the United States, and the #blacklivesmatter movement erupted into a wave of global protests.

This study explores social media discourse construction during the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent anti-racism protests, in order to examine if rhetoric around race-related inequality changed during this particular period in modern history. Using Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics as a theoretical framework, the study did both a thematic analysis and a discourse analysis based on the work of Laclau and Mouffe on @nowhitesaviors, an anti-racism and activist Instagram account based in Kampala, Uganda.

The study found that while global human psychology was primed for a collective moment of engagement and protest due to conditions created by the Covid-19 pandemic, discourse created around revolution did not manage to achieve hegemony. This is in part due to a lack of discursive community inclusion, and in part because the examined social media conversations were imagined discourses occurring in online echo chambers.

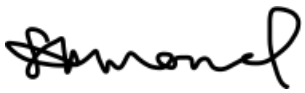
Keywords: Achille Mbembe, necropolitics, social media, Covid-19, Instagram, @nowhitesaviors, activism, #blacklivesmatter

DECLARATION

I, Sarah-Jane Caitlin Richmond, declare that this Research Report is my own, unaided work.

It is being submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Humanities in the School of Critical Diversity Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination at this or any other university.



Sarah-Jane Caitlin Richmond

24th of September 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Melissa Steyn. It was an honour to be taught and supervised by Professor Steyn, one of the leading voices in the field of Critical Diversity Studies. In her lectures, in one-on-one meetings, and in her emails, Professor Steyn offered me unfettered access to her brilliant mind and generous spirit, and I am an infinitely better academic, student, and human for it. She also put up with my last-minute emails, and avoidant personality and I am incredibly grateful.

To everyone who had to live with me while I wrote this dissertation: The Bud House Richmonds (Steve, Robyn, Jemma & Cara) and Caitlin & Michael Wellbeloved, I am sorry. Thank you for all the tea.

To all the friends and family who listened to me explain about the politics of death over coffee and at birthday parties: Shakti, Doug, Thomas, Guy, Vanessa, Michael, Zuraida, and Roy.

I am dedicating this paper to my niece and nephew (Riley & James Richmond) and my goddaughter (Eva Wood) - by the time you are old enough to read this (you really don't have to), I might have to explain what Instagram was.

Lastly, I have a fascination with the protection of life, and its reverse – the injury of death – in part because of all the people I have lost. To my two sets of parents: my mom and dad who died when I was in my early teens, and my grandparents who had passed away by my early 20s. Grief is just one side of the coin. Empathy is the other. I live my life in the constant study of equality not only because of all I have lost, but also because of all I still have.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last year, the world has been held hostage by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) or COVID-19 pandemic. The spread of the disease has seen human movement halted, non-essential companies and businesses shuttered, hospitals overrun, fear and uncertainty turned into fake news and conspiracy theories, and a global echoing cry for a revolutionary reform as to how we live our lives. We live, claim some, in unprecedented times. This may be true; it certainly is rare for such a cataclysmic event to affect every corner of the globe – we are far more accustomed to watching fires burn in Australia, or Ebola ravage the Congo from the relative safety of our own living rooms than having disasters move off the television and into our own streets. While pandemics themselves are certainly not unprecedented, the globalised world we live in has rendered even the most remote corners of the globe infectious. From powerfully developed industrialised nations to small indigenous groups of people living secluded lives, this new virus swiftly and nimbly permeated every populated piece of earth. As stated in The New Yorker on March 30, 2020, "this plague has proved an equal opportunity evil, striking theocratic states like Iran and authoritarian ones like China, and more open ones like our own and those in Europe." (Gopnik, 2020). For once, it seemed, not even the rich and powerful were safe.

For some, this was evidence enough to allege at the beginning of the pandemic that COVID-19 would prove to be the great equaliser; that it did not see race, gender, or socioeconomic status. That from royalty and heads of state, to a worker in rural India, the disease would affect all people equally, fairly, uniformly. This is nothing new, analysis of the rhetoric around the Spanish flu saw that 'the literature published up to the end of the twentieth century perpetuated this 'socially neutral' view claiming that the influenza virus infected and killed all classes equally because the disease was so highly transmissible." (Mamelund, 2017, p.6).

As deeper examination into the victims of the Spanish Flu shows,

> a person's overall risk was increased by such socioeconomic factors as poor nutrition, overcrowding, living conditions (such as poor heating) conducive to secondary infection with bacterial pneumonia, pre-existing infection with other diseases and low access to health care – or inadequate understanding of health information because of low literacy (Mamelund, 2017, p.6).

A similar attempt to paint the current COVID-19 pandemic as that 'socially neutral' equaliser demonstrates that the same oppressive privilege blindness is still firmly in place. Rhetoric around the Anthropocene and post-humanism often follows a similar line of thought – disasters render humans equal. It is within this problematic discourse of pandemic anthropocenic 'non-discrimination' and the polarising events around race, gender and class that have occurred and are still occurring during these ongoing tension-filled months of the pandemic, that there has been a marked rise in rhetoric produced around Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics and Judith Butler's theory of the grievability of lives. The way this discussion has played out on social media due to pandemic restrictions and social distancing has meant that necropolitical discourse has expanded to include the ungrievability of ideas and actions made online. An opinion, verbalised thought or aspect of performative online behaviour that does not fall in line with the acceptable moral view of the time can now render the holder of the view or the maker of the action as cancelled, or no longer deemed worthy to freely participate in online discussion. Communication through various types of media now builds a form of social currency that determines a kind of status and worth, or lack thereof.

With the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, human activity that was once perceived as being almost globally limitless, became physically constrained. Relationships between humans, both those pertaining to business as well as the personal, have been impacted by lockdowns and measures of social distancing. Online chatrooms have replaced boardrooms, living room zoom pubs have stood in for a night out, and social media platforms have become one of the main playing fields for activism and discourse around social justice. While this move towards life online is not a new facet of human nature, nor one created by COVID-19, it has seemingly been exacerbated by the pandemic.

When humans are forbidden to meet in person, when laws are put in place to prevent physical interaction, it does not seem to result in a deceleration in communication, but rather an accelerated change of course. In March 2021, Rani Molla published an article on the explanatory journalism site Vox titled *Posting less, posting more, and tired of it all: How the pandemic has changed social media* showing that average monthly visits in 2020 increased by 36% on Twitter, 43% on Instagram and 576% on TikTok compared to 2019. It also states that,

> the new normal, where many more of our daily interactions are mediated by screens, has made us change the way we behave on those platforms, with the messiness and realities of pandemic life crowding out some of social media's posturing and perfection (Molla, 2021).

This indicates that as the pandemic progressed, social media became less of a manufactured glossy display of the fake ideal and began mirroring real life more accurately. It may even have moved past mere mirroring and into the manufacturing of real life as, according to the same article, "all of this, of course, was happening amid historic events that also unfolded, at least in part, online. Black Lives Matter organized record turnout to protests against police violence, using social media sites and messaging platforms" (Molla, 2021).

This intersection of a) Anthropocene ethics, b) pandemic necropolitics that determines the inequality of grievability, and c) the changing power wielded by social media rhetoric, is a fascinating meeting place on which to base research. It is exciting in its novelty and in its relevance yet daunting in its fluidity. Media, especially social media platforms, are the battlegrounds for modern conflict with the expendability of certain groups of people and certain ideas as the casualties. What is left to discover is how much of a role anthropocenic disasters – such as COVID-19 – play in exacerbating such wars of polarity.

1.1. The research problem

During the last year, the focus of a large portion of social media discourse has become centered around the discussion and rebuttal of opposing opinions, mainly around race. The online cancel culture movement has begun wielding more power and influence during the pandemic – either coincidentally, or as a result of an amalgamation of the high-wattage pandemic tension and the lockdown-enhanced exodus of human connection to online outlets. Achille Mbembe (2019), in his book *Necropolitics* states that, "aided by the power and ubiquity of the digital phenomenon, no impenetrable separation exists between the screen and life. Life now transpires on the screen, and the screen is now the plastic and simulated form of living that, in addition, can be grasped by a code" (Mbembe, p.14). Mbembe's words, as the theorist behind the ideology, indicate that this conjunction of life and screen is also visible in how necropolitics is currently playing out. Mbembe's original definition (2003) of the theory states that it is the sovereignty that "resides, to a large degree, in the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (Mbembe, p.11). By applying this to a world currently in lockdown and living predominately on-screen and through interactions with and on various forms of media, necropolitical social media discourse is visible by examining which ideas, which opinions and which online actions are allowed to 'live' and 'die' – those deemed morally acceptable, and those doomed to cancellation.

Media has often been an indicator of the social and political condition within which it occurs. Karin Whal-Jorgensen (2019), in an essay about the formation of an emotional community around anger and resistance in the media as a response to Donald Trump, shows that,

> we can see a change in the media regime as intricately linked to, and making possible, a transformation of the emotional regime. If emotional regimes coalesce through the public expression of emotives, the media play a key role in facilitating their emergence and their change. The shifting media regime heralds a broader change in public discourse and in the terms of public life spurred on in part through the affordances of the hybrid media system, including the rise of social media (Whal-Jorgensen, p.51).

While this example is linked to the effects of the Trump presidency, the description Whal-Jorgensen gives of the way media facilitates an emotional reaction to the broader socio-political discourse, indicates the power media holds over the way emotions are stimulated, validated and altered. This research report aims to examine what the increasingly screen-driven discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis can reveal about the changing necropolitical and emotional ideologies surrounding race, equality and humanism. The beginning of the pandemic and the equalising rhetoric that followed may have been a catalyst for the rise in polarisation and online activism including new forms of ideological cancel culture and anti-racist protests. COVID-19 has been a battleground of the Anthropocene and the resulting emotional attachments that have played out online have pushed the needle on real-world structural change. Achille Mbembe (2003) states “the forces of passion these wars released have increased tenfold human’s faculty to divide themselves” (Mbembe, p.5). Was COVID-19, once heralded as the great equaliser, perhaps not even simply the great exacerbator, but in fact the great polariser? By examining the changes in social media discourse during this time, this dissertation hopes to analyse changes in the current emotional regime in order to assess their impact on issues of diversity, race and social justice.

1.2. Research questions

The study aims to examine what the social media discourse of the COVID-19 crisis can reveal about the emotional necropolitical ideologies surrounding race, equality and humanism

within the Anthropocene. Was there a distinctive type of discourse produced during this period of time? If so, what can it reveal about changes in the emotional regime? Sub-questions include:

1. Did the fact that the pandemic forced most discussion and protest online change the rhetoric? What was the impact of this on the discourse?
2. Did the backlash against the initial political discourse of the great equaliser of COVID-19 have any impact on subsequent online activism, such as the Black Lives Matter movement?
3. What can applying the theory of necropolitics to online discourse demonstrate about ideas of grievable and ungrievable speech and ideas, especially with regards to cancel culture, hegemony and the politics of offence?
4. What can the online discourse during this time demonstrate about the link between virtual activism and real-world change?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Necropolitics

Life: who is awarded the honour of having one considered valuable enough to protect, and thus valuable enough to grieve? Judith Butler (2006), in *Precarious Life*, states "the question that preoccupies me in the light of recent global violence is, who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what makes for a grievable life?" (Butler, p.20). These questions run parallel to Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics and have various interpretations and potential responses when examined through different political, economic, biological, ethical, or sociological lenses. In terms of Steyn's Critical Diversity Literacy framework (2015), the application of (1) *An understanding of the role of power in constructing differences that make a difference,* can show how the maintenance of oppressive social structures and hierarchies, "is achieved through the polarization of human variation into mutually exclusive, binary opposites such as man/woman; white/black, heterosexual/ homosexual" (Steyn, p.381). This polarisation reveals itself through necropolitical manifestations of othering that can be witnessed in naturalised rhetoric such as public, political or media facilitated discourses, or aspects of law and law enforcement that render various bodies more expendable than others, including border creation and control.

Mbembe (2003) expands on his definition of necropolitics as a sovereign display of state control over life and death by questioning "under what practical conditions is the right to kill, to allow to live, or to expose to death exercised?" (Mbembe, p.12). Mbembe first coined the phrase in the wake of apartheid in South Africa, the Rwandan genocide and the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia, in an attempt to explain why violence was still so common in post-colonial Africa, despite years of independence. His argument centered on the creation of a new kind of state regime – one that took its biopolitical and colonial foundations to the extreme through the creation of "death worlds". The normative view of a functioning state is one that seeks to maintain the lives of both citizens and non-citizens through the creation of "life worlds". In the necropolitical view of postcolonial states, not only is life not protected, political acts displaying power over death are flaunted. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has expanded upon this definition of necropolitics to include the creation of a "death world" that is reactive rather than proactive. Christopher J. Lee (2020) states in *The necropolitics of COVID-19* that,

> if COVID-19 has evinced a necropolitical approach to the lives of citizens and non-citizens that has remained latent until now, it is because this power over death contrasts with Mbembe's original emphasis on the spectacle of war machines and suicide bombing, among other features… The necropolitics of COVID-19 consequently uncovers both the strengths and limits of Mbembe's original intervention, as important as it was and still is… Being charged with capacity to dictate over life and death in a de facto way, as seen now during a time of epidemiological crisis, is not the same as pursuing it proactively as first described by Mbembe (Lee, 2020).

The current pandemic has expanded upon the original concept of necropolitics in part due to the atypical mass state failures of the global north. Early COVID-19 media coverage utilised stereotypical and traditional narratives to predict that African countries would suffer most once the disease reached the continent. When this was not the case, when some developed nations in the global north unexpectedly buckled under the weight of the pandemic, the resulting backlash came from people not used to being the in the position of being regarded as ungrievable. Liberal democracies such as the United States and Britain have seen limitations placed on aspects of their state power, which has contributed to a crisis of sovereignty. This is where one of the new latent "death worlds" can be seen because "though it is too early to be conclusive about either the immediate or long-term political effects of COVID-19, the geography of response that has surfaced underscores how states are attempting to recoup sovereign power over matters of public health" (Lee, 2020).

Current necropolitical COVID-19 debate in early 2021 centres around vaccinations and border control. In his pre-pandemic book *Necropolitics*, Mbembe (2019) speaks about borders by saying,

> in fact, everything leads back to borders – these dead spaces of non-connection which deny the very idea of a shared humanity, of a planet, the only one we have, that we share together, and to which we are linked by the ephemerality of our common condition. But perhaps, to be completely exact, we should speak not of borders but instead of 'borderization', if not the process by which world powers permanently transform certain spaces into impassable places for certain classes of populations? (Mbembe, p.99).

These words are particularly striking when applied to the early days of the COVID-19 panic when the rhetoric was one of a shared crisis. It is difficult to believe in a "shared humanity… linked together by the ephemerality of our common condition" when the politics of the pandemic have resulted in biopolitical borders designed to reinforce the binary of illegal / legal, or vaccinated / unvaccinated. For Roberto Esposito, "borders and immigration controls are examples of the immunisation paradigm of the modern state and its biopolitical existence. The term 'immunity' refers to the resistance of an organism to the harmful effects of pathogens. In political-juridical language, immunity denotes an attempt to protect the social body from the danger of communal interaction through the use of what it opposes" (2011, p.7). This rhetoric of pandemic equality, of a shared humanity existing in conjunction with such blatant othering, has resulted in a new category of necropolitics, one that can be referred to as resulting from "slow violence" and resulting in "slow death".

In Mbembe's original iteration (2003), death was dramatic and obvious – that of war zones and concentration camps. In pandemic necropolitics, death comes about as a result of

> the everyday death-worlds created by health inequality and the conditions that foster ill-health and premature deaths across the globe. It is through a chronic state of acceptance that necropolitical conditions are allowed to continue existing and thus creating zones wherein people are exposed to conditions not conducive to living but 'slow death' (Sandset, 2021, p.3).

Sandset elaborates on this idea of acceptance by discussing the common rhetoric around age, ethnicity, lifestyle choices and pre-existing health conditions as reasons for COVID deaths, and how this creates a pandemic "death world" where conditions for dying are naturalised. He states that during COVID,

> conditions of slow death and necropolitical outcomes are themselves not only the outcomes of a form of 'state of exception' but rather through what we can call a 'state of acceptance'… the necropolitics of global health inequality is driven *not* by a perpetual *state of emergency,* but by a state of *chronic acceptance* that some have poorer health than others (Sandset, p.2).

What this indicates is that crises such as COVID are intertwined with necropolitical aspects of slow death, and that slow violence does not only predate the pandemic, but also

contributes to “disproportionate distribution of vulnerabilities towards the risk of infection, death, and economic impoverishment” (Sandset, p.2).

Awareness of the inequalities laid bare by the necropolitics of the coronavirus has potentially altered the way humans relate to each other and acceptance of the naturalised sovereign world order. Due to this heightened awareness of disparities, activism also underwent a change. In Africa, approximately 100 days after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, social and political protests on the African continent increased. Research published by Accord – a civil society organisation working throughout the African continent to find solutions to challenges posed by conflict - stated that “these protests reflect pre-existing frustrations with social and political conditions that have now been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 restrictions, especially in the spheres of health, education, politics and service delivery” (Accord, 2020). In Europe too, countries including Germany, Croatia and Sweden saw a rise in protests against confinement and other anti-COVID policies that resulted in negative economic repercussions.

In a similar vein, the death of George Floyd was a catalyst for protest, bringing people worldwide onto the streets mid-pandemic. In the second necropolitics and race themed episode of the *COVID Conversations* podcast produced by Marquette University, Dr. Jeffrey Coleman (2020) states,

> the fact that you have COVID, and that’s compounded by this anti-racist movement as a result of the killing of George Floyd creates a perfect storm for racialized communities around the world to come together and fight against racism whether it’s in labor or healthcare or education or what have you, we’re starting to see a real coalescence around these notions such that these rights, these things that people should have access to really should be accessible to all people (Coleman,2020).

The Black Lives Matter movement, while not something that has arisen out of the pandemic itself, has morphed from its original iteration into something more powerful. When asked in an interview with The New Yorker about the effect the pandemic had on the movement, Black Lives Matter community organiser Opal Tometi stated: “There is something about the economic conditions in addition to the lethal force we are seeing every day that makes this moment feel different, where people are making different kinds of demands” (Chotiner, 2020).

Instead of accepting the slow death world of the COVID-19 pandemic, the change in rhetoric around inequalities has had an influence on global resistance, including on the current iteration of the Black Lives Matter movement. Ungrievable lives are political pawns. The oppressive structures that rely on such expendable pawns as fuel wish to remain hidden behind hazy instances of slow death, and slow violence. Thus, as Laurie and Shaw (2018) state, "we must challenge those autopsies that return 'natural' causes of deaths. Social murder hangs across the truncated lives of capitalism. And we are complicit" (Laurie & Shaw, p.16). Expendability relies on hegemony and challenging hegemonic practices through acts of resistance brings to light the intersectional necropolitical contexts that protect the players responsible for these acts of 'social murder'. The theory of necropolitics is the lens through which this paper serves to examine and challenge such hegemony.

2.2. Anthropocene Ethics

Research of the current crisis and the relations of power present within it cannot be done without examination of the relevance of various historical contexts surrounding race and the Anthropocene. Anthropocene is a term used to describe the current geological epoch, one where human activity has had a dominant and destructive effect on the climate. Issues that arise out of the Anthropocene, such as climate change, natural disasters and global pandemics, are often presented as equalisers where inequality and inequity are willfully ignored in favour of a discourse that focuses on a shared human experience. Not only does this discourse protect existing oppressive power structures, but it also ensures that any solutions proposed to such problems will not take inequality into account. Thus, in order to analyse discourse changes that occurred online during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important to understand how the pandemic fits into the notion of the Anthropocene, and also how exactly inequality is entrenched through existing Anthropocenic discourses.

In August 2020, medical researchers Cristina O'Callaghan-Gordo and Joseph Anto published a paper titled *COVID-19: The disease of the Anthropocene* in which they state that "…COVID-19 is a paradigmatic example of an Anthropocene disease. It follows a complex sequence involving disruption of the natural, social, economic and governance systems" (2020). The powerful links between planetary and human health systems have been demonstrated very clearly in the current zoonotic pandemic. Thus, solutions to the current crisis, as well as any proposals for what a post COVID world should look like, must include tackling issues of

inequality present both in regard to human life, but also in terms of ecological sustainability. O'Callaghan-Gordo and Anto go on to say that,

> these solutions must be aligned with the reduction of internal and north-south inequalities, and at the same time be respectful of world diversity. If the pandemic subsides without causing an even greater global disruption, and we can all regain the precarious stability we were all living in, the real challenge will continue to transform our civilization into a just and sustainable society (O'Callaghan-Gordo & Anto, 2020).

In her essay *Blackness and the Pitfalls of Anthropocene Ethics,* Axelle Karera's (2019) main argument centres around ethics and the way that responses to the current epoch and the potentially resulting apocalypse are notable for their "generalized – perhaps even calculated – unwillingness to account for past and current imperial injustices" (Karera, p.33). She challenges the idea that the Anthropocene's effect is so great that there is no space for any debate about human survival that does not extend to "the status of blackness both in the Anthropocene and its concomitant apocalyptic consciousness" (Karera, p.33). This 'status of blackness' can be extended to include other oppressed groups. In the era of debate around the potential apocalypse, she argues, we cannot allow the "generalized planetary anxiety" (Karera, p.38) to dominate to such an extent that we allow issues of oppression to be ignored or labelled as unimportant. When she states, "the Anthropocene erasure of race rather anticipates a post-apocalyptic "recalibration" of anti-black racist practices" (Karera, p.34) she is issuing a stark warning that using current end-of-the-world rhetoric as an excuse to push aside and ignore historical and current oppression does not mean that "post-Anthropocene times would *de facto* be non-racist" (Karera, p.34), but rather that it would most likely result in a repetition of old power structures and oppression. Karera's warning can be applied to Covid-19 discourse, particularly rhetoric that depicted the pandemic as an equaliser.

Along the same lines, differences in anti-COVID-19 policies implemented by different nation states indicate the presence of additional inequalities in current anthropocenic humanist ethics. Different levels of vulnerabilities and inequalities have been exacerbated by various lockdown policies. Worldwide, we have seen that "…lockdowns increase among others the economic, gender, digital or educational divide. Accordingly, domestic violence – particularly against women massively increased. The out of school rate dramatically rose to levels not seen

since the 1980s. In essence the virus is ruthlessly exposing the gaps between the haves and the have nots, both within and between countries" (Lakitsch, 2021).

It is also only by viewing nature and humans as separate, bordered entities, that lockdowns can be viewed as valid solutions to a zoonotic pandemic. This, claim some, is problematically colonial as,

> the lockdown policies are based on the modernist conception of political space. It presupposes the European idea of sovereign human thinking as most prominently exemplified by the Cartesian distinction between res cogitans and res extensa. On this foundation, human rationality penetrates the world, divides it into a natural and a human realm, grasps its entities, and makes them understandable and controllable. Thereby, political reasoning is able to provide a safe haven for mankind by constructing an artificial home, separated from nature's arbitrary dynamics and contingencies. Nature for Hobbes is inscrutable to mankind as god's creation, whereas the human world is human-made and thus comprehensible and controllable. (Chakrabarty 2009, p. 201) (Lakitsch, 2021).

The debate between Covid-19 policy responses that rely on dueling ethical logics – either a) a withdrawal as seen in a lockdown where people avoid the virus, or b) adaptation as seen in contexts where people attempt to adjust to the virus– has resulted in a polarised set of ideals that neglect the current ethical metamorphosis produced by the crisis. This lies in accordance with what was predicted by Karera (2019) – that anthropocenic disasters allow us to ignore inequalities by focusing on immediate dangers that fantasise a shared human experience. However, it is becoming clear that, "such a view is misleading, what we experience is neither an expression of solidary global governance nor of totalitarian biopolitics willing to suppress populations in the name of neoliberalism. Instead, what we are witnessing is the first concrete manifestation of Anthropocene ethics at a large scale" (Pospisil, 2020).

The significance of this is demonstrated in Stanford University research that shows how polarisation in the United States decreased at the beginning of the pandemic, in part due to the equalising nature of early rhetoric, but increased again after the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in May 2020. In October 2020, the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research stated,

> "We're all in this together." That was an early mantra as COVID-19 spread. But then what happened? Despite signs of a culture war and differences in social distancing behaviors between Republicans and Democrats during the pandemic, new research indicates COVID-19 did not drive the nation's partisan wedge deeper. Instead, negative sentiment between Republicans and Democrats decreased significantly after the onset of the pandemic, according to research by Stanford economist Matthew Gentzkow and his colleagues. Political polarization then picked back up, nearly to pre-COVID levels following the death of George Floyd in May (Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, 2020).

The working paper published by Stanford shows that overwhelmingly, early pandemic days saw people from differing cultural and political factions join together to embrace anti-Covid-19 behavioural changes. This follows in line with predicted anthropocenic discourse – that the disaster or the apocalypse will put all humans in the same survival boat, regardless of previous inequalities. However, it is interesting to note how quickly this reversed mid-pandemic, once old racial tensions were reignited. According to early Wellesley College research published in The Washington Post in an article by Maneesh Arora (2020) titled *How the coronavirus pandemic helped the Floyd protests become the biggest in U.S. history*, reasons for this include the fact,

> that accumulated racial disadvantages in almost every aspect of society have made the protests explode... media attention may also help fuel the protests, which have garnered more coverage than any other protests in the previous 50 years… (and) the pandemic may also be increasing protest attendance because people have had more free time" (Arora, 2020).

This shows clearly the existing link between a) anthropocenic ethics, b) social media, and c) the specific experiences of the COVID pandemic, as well as the effect this combination has had on social justice and protests in the real world. When the Anthropocene is used as an equalising balm intended to smooth over past injustices and existing inequalities, it plays directly into the hands of necropolitical discourse.

2.3. Intersectionality, the Economies of Death and Posthumanism

In the first episode of the webinar *Under the Blacklight: the Intersectional Vulnerabilities that COVID Lays Bare* the person responsible for first coining the term *intersectionality* in 1989, professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, states in her opening comments, "we are all equal in this Orwellian nightmare, but some are more equal than others" (2020). Those who claim that the anthropocenic COVID-19 playing field is level can only do so because they have avoided being active players in most other major crises and their sudden inclusion prompts the belief that equality is present. However, closer examination shows there are various powers actively maintaining and exacerbating inequality and intersectional oppression to, quite literally, decide who lives and who dies in the pandemic. Since Crenshaw first published her theory over 30 years ago, the concept of intersectionality has taken on a life of its own, often deviating from her original definition. In the field of qualitative research, it is widely accepted that "intersectionality examines how distinctive social power relations mutually construct each other, not just that social hierarchies exist" (Collins, 1998).

Intersectionality is based upon historical contexts. Thus, the historical aspects of humanism, the grievable life, unwillingness to address past injustices, necropolitics, the hunger of capitalism resulting in the expendability of certain groups of people, have all contributed to the tension of the Covid-19 era. Crenshaw (2020) went on in her webinar introduction to state that the pandemic has "laid bare the profoundly hierarchal, racist and patriarchal organization of society. Intersectional discourse acknowledges that both common threats that we all face along with maldistribution of survival resources is part of this crisis" (Crenshaw, 2020). One example of this is how our lockdowned quarantined society has come to rely so heavily on critical frontline providers such as doctors, nurses, grocery store workers, garbage collectors, hospital cleaners, but how even within these critical positions, there is a hierarchy of value. People physically stand at their windows and applaud these workers, but value must also be shown through structural and economic support. The way these services and workers are valued reflect inequalities. The myth of the great equaliser is exposed in our appraisement of critical frontline providers; all of whom are essential, yet differences in monetary and social valuation suggests some of them are also expendable. These layers rely on intersectionality in order to be fully examined.

To expand further on one area of intersectionality that is particularly prevalent in the Covid-19 pandemic: the pervasive ideology of necropolitics as seen through the lens of economies of death show how certain groups of people are utilised until rendered expendable.

According to Patricia. J. Lopez and Kathryn. A. Gillespie (2015) in the introduction to their co-edited book of essays titled *Economies of Death : Economic Logics of Killable Life and Grievable Death*, by examining "the economic logic involved in determining whose lives and deaths come to matter and why (we can focus on the) killability and grievability of certain humans, animals and environments (by advancing) an intersectional theory of economies of death" (Lopez & Gillespie, p.3). The unwillingness of some governments and businesses to acknowledge the vulnerability and importance of human life not only in the current Covid-19 emergency, but also with regards to other consequences of the Anthropocene (climate change deniers, indifferent or violent reactions towards refugees and migrants), shows that there are lives considered expendable in favour of capitalistic gains. Lopez and Gillespie (2015) go on to say, "a key feature of late-modern capitalism is its tendency to economically order certain human and nonhuman lives and environments, while appropriating and commodifying certain bodies and spaces in the process" (Lopez & Gillespie, p.3). This appropriation or commodification relies on devaluation based on various socially constructed labels that form a hierarchy based on "race, gender, sexuality, species, intelligence and cognition, etc" (Lopez & Gillespie, p.2) and this in turn, determines expendability. Discourses surrounding deaths during the current crisis work to trivialise both the historical contexts and the maintenance of oppression by various forces, with the claim that since this is an equal opportunity virus, the lives lost are collateral damage, or even a form of necessary eugenics.

Historically, this echoes the rhetoric of the HIV/AIDs pandemic. Dr. Lisa Bowleg, an HIV/AIDs policy analyst and prevention researcher with 32 years of experience in the field, reflects on her reaction to the phrase 'we are all in this together' in a 2020 paper titled *We're Not All in This Together: On COVID-19, Intersectionality and Structural Inequality* by saying,

> although seemingly innocuous and often well intentioned, the phrase reflects an intersectional color and class blinding that functions to obscure the structural inequities that befall Black and other marginalized groups, who bear the harshest and most disproportionate brunt of anything negative or calamitous: HIV/AIDS, hypertension, poverty, diabetes, climate change disasters, unemployment, mass incarceration, and now, COVID-19 (Bowleg, 2020).

This demonstrates that the Covid-19 necropolitical acceptance centred around the idea that some groups are simply more prone to conditions of slow violence that end in premature death, is nothing new. It is built upon layers of intersectional histories that have turned into a

naturalised hegemony that will maintain power until we "acknowledge 'we're all in this together' for what it is: another hollow platitude of solidarity designed to placate the privileged and temporarily uncomfortable and inconvenienced" (Bowleg, 2020). The privileged, in this case, being those bodies who personify the archetypal human form.

In her essay *Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism*, Rosa Braidotti (2017) explores the argument that feminism is not a humanism by unpacking the intersectional historical contexts that gave rise to humanism in the first place. Humanism as a theory, Braidotti explains, is based "along the lines of a notion of equality that assumes an unproblematic belonging to the same category of humanity" (Braidotti, p.21). This sense of a shared humankind serves to centre a particular kind of human as the status quo as,

> this allegedly universal ideal is brought back to his historically contingent roots and exposed as very much a male of the species: it is a *he*. Class, race and gender never being too far apart from each other … the dominant subject is implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit, and a full citizen of a recognized polity (Braidotti, p.23).

The historical roots of humanism and a shared human experience contributes to the construction of the myth of a great equaliser – it is only when this dominant subject is affected (regardless of the extent to which he is affected) that an experience takes on a dominant importance. When an experience affects the outliers – members of the non-dominant race, gender or socio-economic class – it is not awarded the same significance. This results in the necropolitical idea of acceptance: those who exist as outliers of the humanism status quo are expendable. In the historical context of the 'human' of humanism, "Otherness is defined as its negative opposite… redefined as 'other than', difference is inscribed on a hierarchical scale that spells inferiority and means "to be worth less than". Such epistemic violence acquires ruthless connotations for real-life people who happen to coincide with categories of negative difference: women, native, and earthly Others" (Braidotti, p.23).

What we see in the current crisis is a form of necropolitics that gives states the ability to choose who lives and who dies, and as Braidotti pointed out in pre-Covid-19 times, 'class, race, gender and age have moved center stage in the global economy and its necropolitical governmentality' (Braidotti, p.40). She goes on to say that,

> class, race, gender and sexual orientations, age and able-bodiedness are more than ever significant markers of human 'normality'. They are key factors in framing the notion of and policing access to something we may call "humanity". And yet, considering the global reach of the problems we are facing in the Anthropocene today, it is nonetheless the case that "we" are in *this* together. Such awareness must not, however, obscure or flatten out the power differentials that sustain the collective subject ("we") and its endeavor (*this*). There may well be multiple and potentially contradictory projects at stake in the recomposition of "humanity" right now' (Braidotti, p.40).

One of the contradictory constructions of humanity during the Covid-19 crisis is formed upon the conflicting balancing act of trying to normalise both a) the myth of the equaliser and b) the definition of what is considered a grievable life. It is not possible to claim equality while still actively maintaining a society founded on capitalistic necropolitical ideologies that maintain and replicate oppression. These historical contexts show that notions of inequality and oppression have been replicated within current discourses. This research aims to examine Covid-19 era social media discourse for examples, evidence and effects of such replications. This requires an understanding of the links that exist between media and the politics of offence.

2.4. Aspects of Offence

In an introduction to the collection of essays titled *Media and the Politics of Offence*, Anne Graefer (2019) explores the importance of researching issues of offence by saying that,

> while offence is often seen as a spontaneous, authentic reaction that we feel reflectively when encountering something 'offensive', it is precisely this spontaneity, seemingly without consciousness or will, that requires critical analysis, not least because of its pervasive and largely unquestioned influence on the conduct and quality of our lives (Graefer, p.4).

How does something become offensive? When does an idea or an action move out of the arena of innocuous acceptance and become a transgression? Research of "the media and offence is a tricky task because offence is relative" (Graefer, p.1) and what is considered

offensive changes alongside shifting moral and ethical boundaries. Changes in "notions of what is acceptable and appropriate are culturally constructed and therefore contingent, changing over time and place…thus, our understanding of what makes something offensive has been, and continues to be, complex and fluid" (Graefer, p.8). Changes in what is considered offensive mirror changes in society, and thus examination of the politics of offence allows examination of broader society and issues of justice.

Offence is often assumed to be something innate, an uncontrollable reaction based on a collection of authentic emotional responses, but Graefer theorises that offence is "not one distinct emotive state, but rather as a messy affective fabric that encompasses a varied collection of sensations, relations and experiences which shape people's attitudes, opinions, beliefs and perspectives and therefore our social, economic and legal realities" (Graefer, p.4). This builds upon Sara Ahmed's (2014) theories of affective economies, in particular the cultural politics of emotion that show themselves through her a) *organisations of hate*, b) *affective politics of fear,* c) *performativity of disgust* and d) *shame before others* that present emotions as hegemonic economic structures that use feelings as capital through which to grow their portfolio. She states, "rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work in concrete ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, between the individual and the collective" (Ahmed, 2004, p.119). Assumed visceral emotional reactions of love, hate, fear, disgust, shame, and pride are all founded upon historical constructions of otherness. It can thus be argued that necropolitical aspects of accepted otherness hide within emotions that have been normalised as psychological reactions, as emotional reactions often rely on polarisation centered on worthiness and unworthiness.

This is especially prevalent when examining changes in current online racialised discourses because as Karin Whal-Jorgensen (2019) states in her essay titled *Creating an Emotional Community: The Negotiation of Anger and Resistance to Donald Trump,*

> we can see a change in the media regime as intricately linked to, and making possible, a transformation of the emotional regime. If emotional regimes coalesce through the public expression of emotives, the media play a key role in facilitating their emergence and their change. The shifting media regime heralds a broader change in public discourse and in the terms of public life spurred on in part through the affordances of the hybrid media system, including the rise of social media (Whal-Jorgensen, p.51).

Whal-Jorgensen's work shows the link between online and social media discourse designed to facilitate and amplify real-world emotion, and changes in public discourse. Both Ahmed and Whal-Jorgensen depict emotion as a powerful tool, one that hides within bodies as a normalised reaction or feeling, yet when mobilised or weaponised through channels such as social media, can play a role in concrete real-world change. When examining the emotion of Covid-19 discourse, there are many that take centre stage: anger, frustration, disappointment, fear. However, offence as theorised by Graefer is the one emotion that has resulted in the most mobilised form of offline action during the pandemic.

Current Covid-19 racial discourses are distinctly necropolitical with regards to offence. For example, the debate around aspects of discourse control such as cancel culture, or virtue signalling, centre themselves on the perceived death of freedom of speech –perhaps it is no longer simply bodies that are rendered ungrievable and expendable, but thoughts too. Can the online cancelation of a person be a result of emotional necropolitics entering a new posthumanistic online arena? Or is this rise in anger an indication that offence will no longer be tolerated, and the slow violence of necropolitics no longer accepted? Graefer goes on to question "what makes something offensive, to whom and in what context? Why is offence felt so differently? How can we understand the circulation of offence as an intrinsic part of wider structures of power? And what are some of the critical implications if offence is avoided at all costs?" (p.4). The offensive image of a police officer kneeling on George Floyd's neck created a global psychological reaction. In her article *How the pandemic changed social media and George Floyd's death created a collective conscience,* Professor Pam Ramsden (2020) states that "the coronavirus and how we have been consuming social media has a lot to do with the psychology of why so many have and continue to be mobilised" (Ramsden, 2020). She explains how the pandemic created a collective existential crisis that resulted in a people rallying around Floyd's death – "as more join the ongoing protests they are reaching for something that psychologists call mortality salience – a need to experience a sense of clarity about worldviews, values and purpose in society" (Ramsden, 2020).

Covid-19 offers a unique perspective on the mediated links between necropolitics, offence, acceptance, and resistance. What is most interesting is how quickly the rhetoric changed from one of a shared and equalising experience to one of anger and protest. Tal Morse (2019), in his analysis of *Gruesome images in the contemporary Israeli mediated public sphere* talks about how,

> death imagery, and gruesome images in particular, are a political matter. The aesthetics of death, whether it is visible, and the conditions of his presentation, make a statement about power dynamics and hierarchies in life. More specifically, the sense of offensiveness contemporarily associated with gruesome death images that ignites and informs political debates and power struggles between rival parties (Morse, p.248).

This paper will thus attempt to combine the theory of necropolitics, Covid-19 rhetoric and the politics of mediated offence to examine how the death imagery of George Floyd and the resulting Black Lives Matter movement on social media altered the acceptance of the slow violence of the pandemic.

3. METHODOLOGY

Working within this specific cross-section of the theory of necropolitics, Covid-19 Anthropocene rhetoric and the politics of mediated offence, this research aims to employ a combination of both thematic and discourse analysis as methodological frameworks.

Both thematic and discourse analysis focus on the written word, which Mbembe (2003) emphasises the importance of by expanding on Fanon's idea of language,

> to oppressed individuals who sought to rid themselves of race's burden, Fanon thus proposed a long course of therapy. This therapy began in and through language and perception, via the knowledge of the fundamental reality according to which becoming a human being in the world means accepting one's being exposed to the other (Mbembe, p.7).

Mbembe, as previously stated, believes that a link exists between real life and what happens on digital screens. His use of Fanon's idea of language and perception being necessary for personal emancipation coupled with his ideas on digital life representing reality, indicates that to Mbembe, what is said and perceived through online mediums, can affect real-world change, if even only for the self. Tabitha Fisher (2020), while examining *The smooth life: Instagram as a platform of control*, comments further on this offline-online world building: "the digital interface has been a lens through which we see the world, though increasingly it has *become* the world as we shift closer towards a posthuman reimagining of the self" (Fisher, 2020).

The research will utilise netnography – a term coined by Robert Kozinets as a form of traditional ethnography where qualitative, interpretive research is performed on data collected from the internet or social media (Kozinets, 2015). This netnographical case study will examine necropolitical Covid-19 discourse produced between February and July 2020 on one Instagram account (@nowhitesaviors) and, through the combined thematic and discourse analysis framework, analyse any changes in rhetoric that occurred during that period.

The combination of these two aspects – written language and discourse portrayed via digital mediums – offers an opportunity to analyse current social issues through a contemporary and technological netnographic discursive lens. Carly Lamphere (2020), in her article *A Tool for Change: Technology and Activism in the Year 2020* examines the particularities of social justice in the COVID era by stating that

> in the midst of a global pandemic, massive protests and mobilization occurred in the wake of the death of George Floyd… throughout the chaos, a powerful movement emerged … one different feature makes the historic time much different from movements of the past: digital technology. At the heart of activism in 2020 is technology. From social media and beyond, technology plays a huge role in disseminating verbal and visual information for social justice causes. (Lamphere, p.33).

Technology and digital platforms are representative of real human life and experience, and, as shown previously, changes in rhetoric and information shared on such platforms are worthy of examination due to the social changes they represent. By first applying thematic analysis to such discourse and then utilising Laclau and Mouffe's hegemonic discourse analysis to analyse the thematic findings further, this research hopes to provide new knowledge on one aspect of current global political and emotional racial attachment.

This section will briefly illustrate and explain how the data source was chosen and associated ethics, the techniques used to gather data from the source and associated ethics, and how the gathered data was analysed through the frameworks of thematic and discourse analysis. The following section will examine in detail the analysis and the findings of the research.

3.1. Data sources

In an age of technological innovation that provides copious amounts of data to analyse, it is difficult to choose one particular source from the available options. Instagram has been identified as the platform currently offering the most interactive mode of communication for online assembly, particularly during the lockdown period. In *How social justice slideshows took over Instagram,* Terry Nguyen (2020) states,

> online activism, coupled with in-person organizing, reached a zenith in June, as daily Black Lives Matter protests erupted across the country. Instagram, once an apolitical din, reflected that change. It no longer felt appropriate — even for celebrities and influencers, who tend to exist unfazed by current events — to skip over politics and resume regular programming. The escapist days of

> uninterrupted brunch photos and filtered selfies have been replaced by protest photos and black squares (Nguyen, 2020).

It is where people, predominantly the youth, meet to share ideas, circulate information and engage in debate. The interface offers space for visual, textual and emotional exchanges that differ from other platforms. It is not the only space to engage in forms of online and hashtag activism – Twitter was once the leading online forum for discussion and revolt. However, not only does extensive research on Twitter activism already exist and thus the study of Instagram in this context may add something new to the canon, but Instagram is also currently challenging Twitter's status as the online base for revolution and engagement. The 2020 Reuters Digital News Report showed that the number of people using Instagram as a news source doubled from 2018 and,

> younger users in particular are much more likely to turn to Instagram for news. In the US specifically, 12% of adults overall used Instagram for coronavirus-related news in April, but more than double (26%) of those aged 18-24 used it for that purpose" (Nielsen, Fletcher, Newman, Brennan & Howard, 2020).

For the purposes of this research, Instagram is also the most appropriate data source as it is a free to access app and provides insight into naturally created racial discourse. After interviewing leaders of various racial justice campaigns, Shannon Ho and Phil McCausland (2020) state in their article *How Instagram became a destination for the protest movement* that,

> activists said Instagram provides an important dynamic : a young audience that is receptive to social justice issues on a flexible medium" and that "Instagram has become a crucial tool to organise and educate people around police reform and anti-racism … some use it to educate viewers on policy and candidates, while others broadcast protesting experiences and strategise about where the movement goes next – sometimes literally, as they provide live updates on protests and marches (Ho & McCausland, 2020).

The extensive options offered by the platform are not limited to education and information sharing, but in 2020 evolved to also include real-time content creation, discussion and community engagement and mobilisation.

The rise in the number of Instagram users, and specifically the numbers of those who engage in social justice on the app, is not coincidental. In June 2020, Twitter had 166 million users active on a daily basis, while the Instagram story feature alone averaged over 500 million daily users, prompting the designers of the app to create updates that made content engagement and the sharing of information easier (Stewart & Ghaffary, 2020). Stewart and Ghaffary go on to state that, "there are multiple explanations for this shift. A feature Instagram introduced in May 2018 that lets you share other accounts' posts to your story makes it easy for people to participate" (2020). With this increase in participation and sharing occurring alongside the rise in online activism, the platform began to create events such as the Share the Mic Campaign where,

> on June 10, 54 Black women took over the Instagram accounts of 54 white women for the day as part of Share the Mic Campaign, a campaign aimed at amplifying Black women's voices. Political analyst Zerlina Maxwell took over Hillary Clinton's account, Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors took over Ellen DeGeneres's... The Black participants had a total of 6.5 million followers on their personal accounts, while the white women had 285 million. The campaign vastly expanded their reach. (Stewart & Ghaffary, 2020).

It is difficult to determine whether the rise in social justice content on Instagram encouraged more organisations and activists to move to the platform, or whether an organic increase in social justice accounts caused the app to add incentives and pulls. However, when interviewed about the choice of platforms, a representative for the Justice for George NYC Instagram account told *Vox Recode* that "this movement was about so many more people than that [Twitter]. It's about reaching a wider audience," she said. "As we continue into the 2020 election, we have to go where people are, and Instagram is it" (Stewart & Ghaffary, 2020).

As more people utilised Instagram to engage on issues around race, equality and rights, the platform took steps to encourage and promote this movement,

> Instagram has embraced and elevated these types of conversations, placing an Act for Racial Justice notification at the top of millions of people's Instagram

> feeds in early June, which linked to a resource guide with links to posts from Black creators and Black-led organizations about racial justice. CEO Adam Mosseri on June 15 committed to reviewing Instagram's algorithmic bias to determine if Black voices are heard equally enough on the platform (Stewart & Ghaffary, 2020).

The steps taken by the platform towards embracing and encouraging these specific ideals has resulted in clear polarisation, and a backlash towards the perceived liberal tendencies of Instagram. Ben Gilbert's (2020) article *Liberal political messages dominate on Instagram – a stark contrast to Facebook, where conservative political messaging rules* uses data from Facebook's own metric gathering service CrowdTangle to show "climate change, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the anti-Trump "Resist" movement as some of Instagram's most popular content" and that "by comparison, on Facebook, the Trump campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" received more than double the interactions it did on Instagram" (Gilbert, 2020). This polarisation reflects the polarity in the age groups each platform attracts and "age disparity helps to explain at least part of the difference between political ideology popularity on the two social media platforms: Liberal ideals tend to skew younger, while conservative ideals tend to skew older" (Gilbert, 2020). Instagram is also more focused on individual opinions as shown in *The liberal election is happening on Instagram* by Nathan Rothschild and Sara Fischer (2020) that quotes an interview with Adam Mosseri, the head of Instagram, as saying "Facebook leans more into hard news… social movements definitely exist on Instagram … the platform lends itself more naturally to individual voices rather than news organisations" (Rothschild & Fischer, 2020).

With Facebook's own CrowdTangle data showing these differences and tendencies towards polarisation, and with the fact that Instagram was purchased by Facebook for $1 billion in 2012 making it all part of the same company, it is incongruous that "Facebook execs, including CEO Mark Zuckerberg, have long contested that its social media platforms have partisan bias" (Gilbert, 2020). When choosing to engage with Instagram as an information source, the political and ideological leaning of the platform is important to note as it predetermines the political, emotional and moral context of the data.

3.2. Data collection technique and ethics

In January 2021, there were over a billion (1.074 billion) monthly active users worldwide on Instagram, some of whom post through more than one account (Tankovska, 2021). This represents a 73.5 million increase from the same data collection point in 2020: a number experts had predicted for 2024, but due in part to the coronavirus, was reached 3 years early (Mohsin, 2021). Out of all possible users and accounts, data collection for this project required the following : a) the account is public and free for all to access and engage with, b) the account has an open and unrestricted comment section, c) the account is run predominantly in English, d) at least 80% of the content on the account focuses on race and social justice, e) the account has a wide reach in terms of both the number of followers and in terms of content production, f) the account is not only centered on fundraising, but also on education and discussion, g) the posts frequently utilise hashtags or tag other accounts and h) the account does not only engage users through the Instagram Story function, but regularly posts on their Instagram feed. While Stories account for a large portion of engagement on the app, they are mostly visual, designed to disappear after 24 hours, have no public comment section and thus offer limited longitudinal data for a discourse analysis.

As this research presents a netnographical case study, one account was chosen for analysis. It was selected from a list of 27 recommended Instagram accounts published in 2020 by the New York University Law Department's Center on Race, Inequality and the Law. Some of the accounts highlighted by NYU Law are very specific, such as @blackownedbklyn, a curation of Black Brooklyn's people, places and products, and @yourrightscamp, the account for a Colin Kaepernick funded campaign with the goal of raising self-empowerment by working with law enforcement. While accounts such as these provide opportunities for compelling research, for the purposes of this project, the selected account needed to be more generalised. Thus, after careful consideration of all the recommended accounts on the NYU Law list and following the aforementioned list of criteria and considerations, the official Black Lives Matter account @blklivesmatter, and the account for the Ugandan based community organisation @nowhitesaviors were chosen for consideration. After a brief data capture of both accounts that involved looking at the number of posts, follower growth, content of posts, and intersectionality of the discourse provided, it was found that @blklivesmatter, while central to racial narrative construction during the time period, was predictably US centric. Thus, the Ugandan based @nowhitesaviors was chosen as the point of data collection. The account

provides a unique cross-section of how racial discourse can be affected by international events and interpreted through social media with an African lens.

The account has accumulated a large following during the pandemic. A 2020 Google news search of No White Saviors shows prolific media coverage in the last year, including articles published by and about the organisation on outlets such as The Mail and Guardian, NPR, The New Yorker, BBC, Forbes and ABC news. The Instagram account is highlighted on lists of recommended anti-racist accounts by educational institutions such as New York University Law, and by media organisations such as The Independent, and Variety, Glamour and Marie Claire magazines. This establishes it as part of the debate, and within the global context.

Data was gathered from the @nowhitesaviors account between January and March 2021 and focused on the first 100 timeline posts made between February 2020 and July 2020. Reasons for this timeframe include: a) the coronavirus pandemic started to make international headlines towards the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, b) lockdowns had been implemented in most countries by early to mid 2020 and c) the death of George Floyd occurred on the 25th of May 2020 spurring subsequent online and offline racial protests. These events all create the necropolitical conditions upon which this project bases its theoretical approach. While this timeframe is limited (and is perhaps a limitation), it gives room through which to analyse the discourse in light of these three specific events of the period. Another limitation was placed on the number of posts analysed: due to space constraints of the project, the first 100 posts from the 1st of February 2020 onwards were included in the data capture. This was enough to provide a limited, but rich amount of event and time specific cross-sectional data.

Data collected for analysis includes that of the created content of specific timeline posts, hashtags and captions that accompany the posts, individual comments left by readers and / or account moderators under each post, as well as any other written communication that occurs between readers, or between readers and moderators, in the comment section. Data was captured by the researcher and was not collected utilising data capturing software.

This netnographic research examines online behaviour, yet fundamentally still deals with human beings. Thus, ethical considerations were adapted to fit the research technique utilising David Berry's approach from his article *Internet research: privacy, ethics and alienation – an open source approach.* Berry encourages netnographic researchers to focus on, "... how such research can best be managed within an ethical framework which would allow the researcher to carry out academic research but avoid causing harm and distress to its subjects" (Berry, 2004). Since the internet can be said to be an open-source forum within the public

sphere, it falls to the researcher to decide where the ethical lines lie. For the purposes of this research, Berry's guidelines were employed,

> The so-called Golden Rule (Christina Allen, 1996; Herring, 1996:44, Thomas 1996a, 1996b) namely 1) Never deceive subjects, 2) Never knowingly put subjects at risk, and 3) Maximize public and private good while minimizing harm (Thomas, 1996b:53) must be observed. Despite the importance of these rules, I would like to avoid the debate over issues of the "human subject" which has been a source of intense discussion and disagreement … instead I argue for an *Open-Source Ethics,* namely a non-alienating duty of care during the research … (Berry, 2004).

As well as Berry's ethics of care and intent, a technique of non-disturbance was utilised where no contact was made with anyone associated with the Instagram account in order to discuss or elicit information.

3.3. Data analysis and interpretation techniques

This research project uses a multiperspectival approach and a combination of 1) Thematic Analysis – used as a first step, to facilitate and rank the themes of the posts over the chosen time period, and 2) Discourse Analysis to analyse and interpret the data in depth.

3.3.1. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is utilised in order to analyse "the connections between the explicit statements and the implicit meanings in people's discourse" (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Since thematic analysis is used to discern and define frequent patterns within data, it offers a way for changes in implicit meaning in discourse to be analysed. Changes in themes that arise in discourse around race offer a way to examine the broader changes in rhetoric that move the needle on social action. It is thus used as a lens through which to view general concepts and the changes thereof, which can then be analysed further using techniques such as those offered in discourse analysis.

A data extraction sheet was created to facilitate the data collection from the account @nowhitesaviors and the selected posts and comments. The sheet had 7 items: (1) Date of upload, (2) Content type (video, text, infographic, educational), (3) Hashtags or tags, (4)

Number of likes, (5) Number of comments, (6) Themes of content and (7) Examples or quotes of the theme. The contents of the posts and comments were extracted, and thematic analysis was continued until data saturation was reached. The extraction sheet containing the data collected from the 100 posts is included in this report as Appendix A.

Thematic analysis, while an interpretive technique on its own, is not sufficient for the scope of this project, which aims to examine hegemonic necropolitical COVID discourse. Thus, discourse analysis was utilised in the second step of the analytical process.

3.3.2. Discourse Analysis

After thematic analysis of posts and comments on @nowhitesaviors, discourse analysis was used to analyse the findings. This method was chosen because Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is "concerned with general, overarching patterns and aim at a more abstract mapping of the discourses that circulate in society at a particular moment in time or within a specific social domain" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.20).

This focus on a broad analysis of the patterns in naturally occurring discourses during a specific time period means that the analyst is not required to come to immediate conclusions about the validity of the statements. Critical analysis can be implemented at a later stage once the pure discourse analysis has been undertaken, but for Laclau and Mouffe, the first stage of the analysis needs to be undertaken with the understanding that reality can never be reached. Because "the analyst has to work with what has actually been said or written, exploring patterns in and across the statements and identifying the social consequences of different discursive representations of reality" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.21), this, in theory, offers up the potential to conduct a more neutral or impartial form of discourse analysis.

Laclau and Mouffe's work is purposefully abstract, and they steer clear of offering a direct analysis of empirical material, giving researchers the freedom to apply the method according to their specific projects. Thus, for the purpose of this report, the guidelines offered by Jorgensen and Phillips are utilised:

a) Examination of nodal points (that organise discourses), master signifiers (that organise identity) and myths (that organize social spaces) in selected discourses,
b) Searching for chains of equivalence,
c) Concepts regarding group formation, identity and representation and
d) Concepts for conflict analysis such as hegemony (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.49).

These guidelines offer a way of examining naturally occurring discourses around race over a certain period of time in order to see if changes ~~that~~ have occurred, and if so, what these changes indicate. The focus of Laclau and Mouffe also provides a lens through which to frame the necropolitical, racial discourse during COVID as a hegemonic practice. Hegemonic discourses are those discourses that have become dominant, or in extreme cases are considered the only possible truth. Discourse analysis challenges hegemonic rhetoric by exposing the ways in which these so-called *natural* discourses have been formed. Laclau and Mouffe build upon Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony that explains how leaders can maintain control through ideology, not only economic or political force and coercion. In this way, the values and morals of those in power become accepted by society as common sense and legitimise the actions of leaders in a cyclical fashion of ideological reinforcement. One facet of Laclau and Mouffe's argument is to show how this is done through discourse that plays a role in social change. Thus, the discourse analysis utilised in this report focuses on aspects of hegemonic discourse creation.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1.Thematic analysis

4.1.1. Brief contextual overview of the Instagram account @nowhitesaviors

The account is run out of Kampala, Uganda by two black Ugandan women and one white American woman. It is registered on Instagram as a community organisation with the tagline "if you're not uncomfortable, you're not listening" as well as the header "education, advocacy, action". There are currently (as of the 20th of April 2021) 659 posts and 875,000 followers on the account, with the page itself following 5,616 accounts.

The first post made on the account on the 5th of June 2018 was a text post of a quote by Teju Cole that states "the white savior industrial complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege" which received 405 likes and 1 comment. This set the tone for the main focal point of the account: examining and critiquing the perceived "savior" tendencies of white people who come from western countries into African nations in order to do work they see as helpful and moral. Justice, colonialistion, education and the decolonisation thereof, ethical tourism, ethical storytelling, economics, emotions, and issues such as illegal adoption are all common themes throughout posts made on the account during their first two years.

4.1.2. Overview of data analysed

Out of 100 posts made between February and July 2020 that were reviewed: a) all 100 were mixed medium and contained both textual and visual aspects, b) 68 contained hashtags or tagged other accounts, c) 27 were slideshow posts (each post contained more than one page that was presented in a carousel form for the reader to swipe through), d) 10 had components of humour including the use of memes and parodies, e) 8 highlighted direct quotes from other activists, and f) 7 contained video content.

From the analysis of the 100 posts, 67 preliminary codes were extracted. The codes were then classified into 29 subthemes. The subthemes were then classified into 4 themes:

Theme 1: Ethical Border Crossing

Consisting of subthemes: travel, storytelling, entering black spaces, physical, emotional or visual abuse of black bodies, power dynamics, white savior complex, and hypocrisy.

Theme 2: Anthropocene and the Myth of Equality
Consisting of subthemes: COVID 19, virtue signalling, medical racism, ungrievability, and internalised racism.

Theme 3: Identity
Consisting of subthemes: narrative formation, language, cultural appropriation, shame, privilege, miseducation / education.

Theme 4: Community Engagement
Consisting of subthemes: justice, solidarity, activism, performative allyship, revolutionary theatre, protest, offence.

4.2. Ethical Border Crossing

As examined in the literature review, border creation and maintenance is one of Achille Mbembe's founding principles of necropolitical control. The Covid-19 pandemic both highlighted old border debates and created new areas of discussion around lockdowns, citizen control, freedom of movement, vaccine passports, and sovereignty. Mbembe (2019) states,

> …borders. Everything begins with them, and all paths lead back to them. They are no longer merely a line of demarcation separating distinct sovereign entities. Increasingly they are the name used to describe the organised violence that underpins both contemporary capitalism and our world order in general (Mbembe, p.99).

Borders are no longer simply creases on maps that furrow the left side of a landmass into one country and the right into another. They exist in all kinds of physical, technological, and emotional forms, and the crossing of all borders requires ethical consideration. In the analysis of @nowhitesaviors, the traversing of borders was identified as a) the traditional crossing of a physical border that involves traveling into a new country or landmass and / or b) an act of crossing a more personal racial boundary that consists of occupying a black or non-white physical, emotional or visual space. It is what is consequently done in these spaces, once

the border has been crossed, that can be analysed as abuse, a show of power dynamics, or of hypocrisy.

A recurring topic in the analysis of early posts made on the account that discuss border crossing was the aspect of ethical storytelling. The February 6th post dealt with the idea of ethical tourism:

"nobody understands Black suffering more than black people. You get to pop in, *experience* our tragedy & leave for furlough…".

The February 7th post added focus on the storytelling that arises from such physical border crossings:

"… a reoccurring theme in our work has been the liberties that white folks take in the name of raising awareness about black suffering. There are ways to share stories & advocate ethically. We need to see you upholding the same standards for ALL PEOPLE".

Border crossing when it entails travel and storytelling should, these posts argue, be contingent on the abandonment of bias and stereotyping or else it becomes voluntourism. This concept is explained further when on February 26th, a post about poverty tourism was created that read:

"people are not zoo exhibits… the white gaze is still at work exploiting and dehumanizing whenever it can sink its teeth in, especially when there is a profit to be made".

This post received over 21,000 likes and was one of the most popular posts made on the account that far. The anger at the stereotype that accompanies the idea of a border crossing from 'the west' into 'Africa' as being a crossing from a place of privilege to one of helplessness, is highlighted in a Covid-19 related post made on March 25th regarding news about the Peace Corps scrambling to remove their volunteers from Africa:

"it's troubling to rely so heavily on foreigners in any aid or development program… @PeaceCorps as an entity could never have the same level of commitment to our communities that we do. They can always leave & go back home. Even if home is LESS SAFE right now #Covid19".

In this case, @nowhitesaviors alludes that early Covid-19 rhetoric that presumed Africa would be hardest hit by a disease that had not yet arrived at its shores, made it preferable for people to return to America, a place that was already proven to be suffering during the pandemic. The hypocrisy of the white savior complex that was foundational in the creation of the @nowhitesaviors account became even more highlighted through Covid rhetoric. While at the same time, a discourse of unity was circulating,

> the global pandemic has resulted in a wave of advertising and marketing approaches that are based on commodified concepts of human connection, care and community in a time of crisis. At the core … is the notion that 'we're all in this together' (Sobande, 2020).

However, in reality, necropolitical border discourse based on traditional ideologies of separation and individualization were at play.

As the pandemic continued, issues of emotional border ethics and ethical storytelling converged. In a post made on the 21st of April 2020, @nowhitesaviors highlighted a photograph taken by @joshwideawake and distributed by the @cityofcapetown official Instagram account. The image showed a homeless man in Cape Town walking down a deserted street with a billboard asking people to "Stay Home if You Can" visible in the distant background. The man was wearing pants that did not fit him and his buttocks were exposed. @nowhitesaviors posted:

"…we need to pay close attention to the varied ethical standards when it comes to photojournalism and storytelling. When it comes to showing the suffering of white people, rarely do we see images of such poverty / suffering porn. Josh, and so many like him, find a way to photograph & document white people in a dignified way".

In this context, an emotional border was crossed. @nowhitesaviors argues that images of suffering people of colour are considered acceptable by the media because of stereotypes and associations. In a so-called borderless and equalising pandemic, a necropolitical border lies in the ethical differences and demarcations that exist in depictions of pain. This theme was predicted in a March 17th post where @nowhitesaviors produced a slideshow of text and images highlighting the differences in media portrayal of black and white suffering by utilising a National Geographic feature on Ebola. They said:

"I want you to imagine this being written about Italy & #Covid19. Are they sending out humanitarian photographers to capture white suffering? No. Why? Because even in death, white people are treated w/far more dignity & humanity than we are while ALIVE".

This post gained 30,743 likes, the first time the 30,000 mark was reached during the data capture.

On May 26th, after the death of George Floyd and in the midst of the Black Lives Matter protests, @nowhitesaviors created a post telling the story of a white American woman living in the United States with her adopted Ugandan sons who tweeted about American police brutality by saying, "I don't usually post stuff like this". @nowhitesaviors commented:

"…something feels deeply disingenuous about white folks who travel to the other side of the world to help out Black people when they can't even stand up & hold accountable the countless examples of state sanctioned violence against Black people in their own countries".

This post links the hypocrisy of the white savior complex to imaginary borders of race and suffering that have been placed upon geographical landmasses, and garnered over 62, 706 likes. The sharp increase in followers, likes and comments seen on the account during this exact period indicates that the specific socio-political climate – a combination of Covid-19 and inequality - resulted in an increase of community engagement around necropolitical border discourse on social media.

4.3. Anthropocene and the Myth of Equality

The very first Covid-19 centric post on @nowhitesaviors was made on the 12th of March 2020 and was a reposting of a news headline highlighting surprise at the perceived lack of Covid deaths on the African continent at the time:

"…the responses that the world has been having toward the lack of #covid19 cases on the African continent… The overall sentiment seems to be shock & surprise. This isn't solely from a scientific, logistical or medical perspective, more so it seems to be coming from a place of expectation that Black bodies are supposed to suffer first and suffer most".

As shown previously, Covid-19 rhetoric is linked to ideological necropolitical border creation that demarcates bodies into worthy vs unworthy, or desirable vs undesirable, based (in part) on stereotypes around existing geographical borders. This then connects the imagined racialised border creation to Anthropocene ethics and to the economies of death. It is important here to re-examine a point raised in the literature review that showed,

> by examining "the economic logic involved in determining whose lives and deaths come to matter and why (we can focus on the) killability and grievability of certain humans, animals and environments (by advancing) an intersectional theory of economies of death" (Lopez & Gillespie, 2015).

This is clearly reiterated in the above post by @nowhitesaviors. Internalised racism manifests here through Anthropocene discourse – humans are all equal in the apocalypse, but only as equal as they are supposed to be.

In the Covid-19 related post made on March 25th that centred on the Peace Corps removing their volunteers from their posts when the pandemic hit America, @nowhitesaviors questions:

"how necessary is an organisation if it can close up shop & evacuate every single volunteer as soon as sh*t hits the fan?"

This post highlights an interesting question in terms of disaster relief organisations and ungrievable lives. When does a life that is deemed grievable according to the manifesto of relief work, become an ungrievable one? When does someone deemed worthy of protection become one that is abandoned? The debate here can be linked back to stereotypical border creation: many people left on the assumed basis that America would handle the pandemic more efficiently than African nations. As subsequent events proved this assumption somewhat incorrect, perhaps future research will show a shift in the way stereotypes around grievability have shifted due to the "shock and surprise" of Covid-19 death statistics.

This aspect of the theme is continued in a post made on the 7th of May, a slideshow of news screenshots highlighting incorrect predictions of Covid deaths in Africa. It says:

"propaganda is one of the most significant ways white supremacy is perpetuated. @caleb_okereke & @unpopularvote co-wrote some counter-propaganda which questions the obsession w/ Africa suffering under #covid19 & how African countries are SETTING AN EXAMPLE on how to fight the spread of the virus".

Here, the notion of anthropocenic equality is challenged, albeit with a slightly different focus. In the traditional sense of the theory, all people will be equal under the apocalypse regardless of past inequalities. What Covid-19 has shown is that not only are most pre-existing inequalities exacerbated, but that in some cases, previous inequalities prepared nations for disease or disaster, thus aiding their efforts to contain the 2020 / 2021 pandemic. This represents a swift change in global narrative and perception. Being previously classified as an ungrievable life and / or having prior experience existing in death worlds, became an advantage for some groups.

Ungrievability became highlighted once again in discourse surrounding vaccine testing. In a post made on April 3rd, @nowhitesaviors examines news reports of French scientists engaging in a discussion on why the Covid-19 trial vaccines should be tested on African bodies. The Instagram post goes on to say:

"just imagine during Ebola if we got on the news and started talking about how we were going to ~*test out~* vaccines on Europeans".

Some of the healthcare challenges faced in the Anthropocene lie within the actual emergence of the new diseases and pandemics that result from a broken relationship between humans and the natural world. The call for an ecological health conscience needs to be heeded on a large scale. However, the testing of trial vaccines on specific bodies – those deemed less grievable, and also those who live in places that will most likely be last to receive the approved vaccinations – represents a different kind of anthropocenic injustice. There is very little freely available data concerning Covid-19 vaccine trials, but according to the US based National Institutes of Health, "as of 19 January 2021, out of 4,483 COVID-19 studies worldwide searching for drugs or vaccines, only 233 or 5% for COVID-19 were carried out in African countries, including 158 studies in Egypt, 31 in South Africa, 11 studies in Tunisia and seven in Nigeria" (Sawahel, 2021). This indicates that perhaps the prediction that there would be an abusive use of African bodies to test vaccines was inaccurate. The original suggestion by the French doctors to utilise Africa as a testing site still stands, contributing to the discourse. The

vaccine itself is a topic of Anthropocene Ethics that must be addressed – the so-called vaccine apartheid currently occurring where wealth and development determines vaccination levels, the ungrievable line of reasoning could ask – were vaccines not tested on African bodies because they were not deemed worthwhile?

Another theme around Anthropocene Ethics that arises when Covid-19, #blaclivesmatter and the theory of ungrievable lives are combined is represented in a post made by @nowhitesaviors on July 2nd. The owners of the account organised a Black Lives Matter protest in Kampala and were subsequently arrested over a claimed lack of social distancing:

> "while the Ugandan police claimed that they detained us for going against #Covid19 restrictions, this clearly wasn't the case, as we've seen a number of influencers here in Kampala holding larger gatherings without anyone wearing masks or social distancing. Standing up for & fighting to protect Black lives is more offensive in this global system dominated by anti-Black racism than the murder of #BreonnaTaylor or the countless babies who died while #ReneeBach experimented on them".

This claims that the new laws put into place to protect people from an equalising anthropocenic pandemic were then used for racially motivated discrimination. This harkens back to Karera's warning that "the current epoch and the potentially resulting apocalypse are notable for their "generalized – perhaps even calculated – unwillingness to account for past and current imperial injustices" (2019, p.33).

4.4. Identity

Identity as a theme in this analysis is perhaps best described as intersectional. The intersectional aspects of narrative formation are seen in subthemes such as language, education, culture and the appropriation thereof, and the privilege and / or shame that is present in the humanist and posthumanist construction of the individual, or of the nation. When constructing a story, narrative formation (and the ensuing upkeep of the narrative) is where the power dynamics lie. This is where humanism as a theory finds its power, or rather its ability to hide its power – in the creation of what it is to be human and the subsequential normalisation of this ideal. The Rosa Braidotti (2017) quote used in the literature review criticises humanism on the basis that it promotes a universal image of humankind, one that is a white male.

@nowhitesaviors is an account that is built upon identifying, critiquing and dismantling problematic narratives, particularly those that centre white experience as the standard. In a post on the 10th of March the account announces its first podcast episode about the idea that:

"development was interrupted by around 300 years of enslavement, of colonialism, of neo-colonialism. Many things were not allowed to move. There were many people who had a lot of ideas that were killed in those wars. People tend to paint a picture that Africans were non-resisting, docile people who were just there... No, they put up resistance but because the stories are not told...."

In an age of increased global storytelling, the problem of ethics is raised (as examined in the first theme), but also the problem of whose narrative, whose ideas, whose framing of the story is the loudest. As shown, historical narrative formation around Africa has had a direct impact on Covid-19 news coverage, disaster relief policies, morbidity predictions and vaccination rhetoric. In a post made on the 12th of March, this idea is elaborated upon:

"there is no possibility in the mind of the average white / western person that Africa is capable of existing without suffering. The fact that Africa could in fact be a refuge and a safe place in a time like this contradicts or tugs at the very foundation of what white supremacy has taught the world to believe about the Continent".

The use of the phrase "average white / western person" speaks to the fact that this white view is average, normalised, a base line of sorts. To go against it is to shock, or surprise.

Narrative formation also comes in the form of labelling. Whoever decides on a name or label for a person, a place, or a disease, holds the power to create a prevailing image and all the accompanying stereotypes (both good and bad). Kim Yi Dionna and Fulya Felicity Turkmen (2020) state in their article *The politics of pandemic othering: putting COVID-19 in global and historical context* that "…naming pandemics after foreign countries or foreign nationals promotes irrational fear and stigmatization of those "others" while simultaneously leading to a false sense of security as the virus is perceived to threaten "others" in a distant, foreign land" (Dionna & Turkmen, 2020).

On the 18th of March, @nowhitesaviors comments on the naming of the Coronavirus. They mention Ebola, named after a river, and Zika, named for a forest in Uganda. Both of these

disease names have had a prevailing negative effect on the places that gave them their monikers:

"this stretches far beyond the naming of a virus / infectious disease after the country, town or river of where it is believed to have originated. One of the by-products of #coronavirus / #covid19 we've seen people most upset by, and rightfully so, is the racism that has come with the virus being associated with China & Chinese / Asian people experiencing racism globally as a result of it".

The naming of the South African variant of Covid-19 is still impacting current travel and trade levels in the country, even though the variant is not contained to South Africa. Identity formation is closely linked to naming, yet naming is not always done with care or knowledge and can affect the entire narrative of an entity. It becomes difficult for even those whose identity is formed through careless or malicious intent to divorce the resulting bias from their own identity, resulting in internalised oppression.

It is also classic power maintenance as Kim Yi Dionna and Fulya Felicity Turkmen explain further, "during epidemics, societies can construct these targets as coping mechanisms against the fear of the unknown, loss of control, and related social, political, and economic consequences" (Dionna & Turkmen, 2020). The emotional affect of fear and blame helps to construct a narrative centered around othering that, in this particular example, results in the creation of a geographical border control designed around an imagined quarantine, and the acceptance of this by the citizens and politicians of the nation.

Another aspect of internalised identity disconnect is shown on the 28th of March when @nowhitesaviors posted a video of a former Peace Corps volunteer who had returned to the United States from Liberia. She shot an instructional tutorial for her former students on how to wash their hands and keep themselves safe from Covid-19. The caption to the post states:

"…it's very bold that she made this video for Liberians who have far fewer cases not only than her country but far fewer cases than the state of California where she resides.... The underlying message here is that a white woman is required to educate African people on how to stay safe during a pandemic...".

The reaction from some Liberians was to praise her for her way of communicating in Liberian English, while others condemned her for infantilisation of Liberians. (This evokes one

of Laclau and Mouffe's fundamental questions around hegemonic discourse that will be discussed in Section 5.2: who has the right to tell someone to be offended?). @nowhitesaviors uploaded a post the next day in which they state:

"one of the biggest lies we tend to believe in this work is that those in the oppressor class are the only ones actively working to sustain a system of oppression. In actuality, we understand that the oppressor class must recruit from the oppressed, granting personal favour, access and some level of protection as the reward. This exchange, of course, is highly conditional".

The rhetoric around the Covid-19 has shown the ways in which nations have internalised the narrative formation around their own identity. Many African nations implemented extreme lockdowns as the disease headed towards the continent, sure that predications about mortality and capability would be realised. On the other hand, many developed nations believed the narrative that they would be more competent and efficient in managing the pandemic. The dichotomy of shame / privilege seen in these examples of identity formation were brought to light, and in some cases flipped, by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The third aspect of identity and narrative formation that occurred during analysis of the time period happened after the killing of George Floyd. In a post made on May 8th. The ideas of narrative formation, internalised racism and miseducation are all connected when @nowhitesaviors state:

"here, in this version of anti-Blackness, you believe African people are helpless and incapable. In the USA, anti-Blackness has you believing that Black folk are dangerous and an inherent threat. Both narratives serve their own purpose to protect and perpetuate white supremacy at all costs. Black lives are not valued from small town USA to the village in Uganda".

On June 16th, the account elaborates further by commenting on reactions to Black Lives Matter protests held in Uganda:

"we were mortified to see mocking statements making rounds on social media about how we as Africans, or in particular Ugandans, should concentrate on fighting tribalism rather than chanting BLACK 🗣 LIVES 🗣 MATTER 🗣.

There is a chance that statements like this are coming from a place of ignorance and largely from the miseducation / colonized education African people are subjected to".

Pandemics further exacerbate pre-existing inequalities and show us that othering seen in pandemic politics are part of a continuous historical process. The myth of equality of the Anthropocene does serve to bring people together under an imagined shared global experience, but in the case of Covid-19, it then flipped the narrative on long held identities and illuminated ideologies created by years of miseducation. The Black Lives Matter banner under which people in different nations and holding different identities came together to protest racial injustice in 2020, was in part fuelled by the specific pandemic conditions which challenged these long-held narratives of who people are and what they should fight for.

4.5. Community Engagement

Some of the early Covid-19 rhetoric sought to bring people together. During the high-level lockdown periods when people could not leave their homes, online discourse facilitated a coming-together over fears about the unknown, sadness at not seeing loved ones, and bonding over shared Netflix experiences. For a social media account such as @nowhitesaviors that seeks to divide and conquer problematic narratives through online activism, community engagement was always a priority. On February 12th, before true pandemic politics set in, the account posted:

"there are so many ways in which white supremacy tries to divide & put black people at odds with one-another".

The account then asked for engagement in the comment section, limiting comments to black readers only. This decision to limit comments based on race raises an interesting debate: some may claim it denies freedom of speech to certain groups and thus marginalises them, while others state that it is simply giving space for specific marginalised voices to speak up. This type of post was indicative of the kind of community engagement encouraged on the account pre-Covid-19. By tracking the changes that occur in posts that specifically address community support, it is easy to see the effects the pandemic had on online mobilisation.

On the 14th of March, the account posted:

"you show up for us time and time again, we want to take this time to show up & hold space for you. We are in a unique position here in #Uganda with #covid19 — we are largely untouched by the virus at this time with no confirmed cases to date … We know this is a vulnerable thing, something outside of our normal posting, but we believe in caring for each other first and foremost. We REALLY need that as a global community right now".

This post addresses the flip in narrative: those in Uganda were offering support up to other nations, presumably including the United States and similar developed countries. It changes the usual tone of rhetoric produced on the account with no direct mention of race or racism, although it is somewhat implied in the term "global community" as this likely references activists and excludes white supremacists. The use of the terms "unique" and "outside of our normal" show that what was happening with regards to Covid-19 was having an impact on all aspects of usual communication. During March and April, the account continued with its usual mix of community engagement that included calls for fundraising, critique of news bias and white privilege. After the killing of George Floyd, the tone changes once again, as on the 29th of May, the post states:

"we want to acknowledge our Black sisters and brothers in the USA right now. We see you; we feel for you and we are with you (in spirit and in the fight for justice). We are here to mobilize & organize however we can from a distance".

They continue in a similar vein on June 4th:

"we can't stand by and watch all of this happen without showing up for our Black family in America fighting fearlessly and tirelessly. Make no mistake, the news today was a DIRECT RESULT of your protests. … For the next 24 hours we will be collecting funds to donate to two Black-lead Philly based organizations…".

Both of these posts registered over 33,000 likes and over 200 comments, some of the highest engagement on the account. By this stage, the number of people following the account had grown from 300,000 in February, to 500,000 on June 8th. There were also claims around this time, according to posts made on the account and statements made in the news, that Instagram had implemented algorithmic measures to curb engagement with @nowhitesaviors.

Janice Gassam Asare (2020) for Forbes magazine covered the story in a January 2021 article titled *Social media continues to amplify white supremacy and suppress anti-racism* by adding that "popular Instagram No White Saviors (NWS) found themselves in a similar situation when much of the content on their Instagram page was concealed or what is known as shadow banned. Shadow banning can be thought of as the suppression or invisibility of a post on social media" (Asare, 2021). The account responded to Instagram tactics by calling for more community engagement to offset the algorithm. The posts became more focused on global community engagement and this naturally included higher participation in Black Lives Matter content, including calls for revolt and reform. By June 11th, 56, 733 people liked a post that read:

"there have been more coloniser / imperialist statues taken down, beheaded or pushed into bodies of water in the last 2 weeks than there have been in the last century. The REVOLUTION is now. This is what happens when the masses stand together & refuse to concede to oppression".

News articles around this time link heightened community engagement and anti-racism protests to collective pandemic fear. In a June 24th blog post by the London School of Economics, Pam Ramsden (2020) states that people have moved on from early pandemic fear and dormancy to the idea that,

> …life does not have to be defined by a pandemic where social distancing, washing our hands and staying safe are our only options. We can join a collective with a cause against racism, social injustice and police brutality, whether that is through protest or other mechanisms of support. From fear in this current time, many people have found meaning (Ramsden, 2020).

The increase in engagement seen on @nowhitesaviors at this exact time supports this claim.

However, such community engagement that included people who were seen to be engaging in virtue signalling through hashtag activism in an attempt to be seen as morally righteous, resulted in backlash. A @nowhitesavior post on the 3rd of July expresses frustration with this by saying:

"there seems to be an urgent haste to exhibit like-mindedness with the ongoing BLM protests globally by white people/those in proximity to whiteness. It is beginning to feel like diversity

and inclusion without equity aka tokenism. Black people have been tokenized in the media, politics, workspaces …".

The next day, June 4th, 2020, was #BlackoutTuesday. The movement was originally proposed by two black women in the music industry, Jamila Thomas and Brianna Agyemang, who called for people to pause business for a day to take a stand against racism. It quickly became a symbol of performative activism with news reports claiming that "Instagram users are flooding the platform with black squares in support of black victims of police violence as part of a Blackout Tuesday protest. As of 11:45 a.m. ET, more than 14.6 million Instagram posts used the hashtag #BlackoutTuesday" (Whitten, 2020). The sheer number of posts using the #blacklivesmatter hashtag to post the black square led to claims of inadvertent silencing of activists who were using the same hashtag to spread information. This angered many anti-racism advocates due to the hollow performative aspect of the campaign. On July 9th, @nowhitesaviors claimed:

"perhaps one of the biggest dangers of revolutionary theater AND the white savior complex is their tendency to stifle the very progress they claim to be prioritizing. We care more about being seen doing the work, above actually doing the work … but we are NOT committed to actualizing it & changing the realities for those who are suffering most under systems of oppression".

The term "revolutionary theatre" links this kind of community engagement to the white savior complex. Instead of crossing geographical borders into black spaces and doing harm with uneducated intentions, here we see a traversing of digital space. This post argues that performative allyship with the goal of justice and solidarity, but without conscious deconstruction of internalised narratives (that requires a conscious self-decolonisation and re-education) is destructive, regardless of intention.

Covid-19 has changed the way communities call for engagement. The analysis of @nowhitesaviors has shown how quickly this change happened. In a period of a few months, social media became even more of a theatre for revolution, both in a positive sense – in an increase in involvement and accountability- and in counterproductive ways where the performance became more vital and more attractive than the working towards outcomes of real social change.

4.6. Discourse analysis

For Laclau and Mouffe (1985), social movements are only successful in creating social change when they bring people from diverse groups together and unify them in a new and common power struggle, referred to as an antagonism. As they state in their 1985 book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, "the Left should start elaborating a credible alternative to the neo-liberal order, instead of simply trying to manage it in a more humane way. This, of course, requires drawing new political frontiers…it requires the acceptance of the ineradicability of antagonism" (1985, p.5).

A new antagonism must be linked to an established discourse that shows that an unjust power relation already exists. When Mbembe states that "power, thus, is increasingly about identifying patterns or connections in data, in a context in which the opposition between information and knowledge, knowledge and data, data and image, thinking and seeing, appears to collapse" (2019, p.109), he is linking necropolitical aspects of power to Laclau and Mouffe's notion of creating hegemonic discourses through connection. When new discursive patterns are created between diverse groups that were previously antagonistic, new antagonisms are created to unify these groups and old oppositions collapse. This represents the creation of hegemonic power,

> in Gramsci's theory, hegemony is the term for the social consensus, which masks people's real interests. The hegemonic processes take place in the superstructure and are part of a political field… it also means that, through the creation of meaning in the superstructure, people can be mobilised to rebel against existing conditions (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002 p.31).

Thus, it is through this combination of hegemony, discourse, and rebellion that the theories of Laclau, Mouffe, Jorgensen and Phillips were used to further analyse the data collected from @nowhitesaviors.

Analysis followed Sara Walton and Bronwyn Boon`s (2014) suggested Laclau and Mouffe discourse analysis data construction guide:

Step 1: Constructing the data
Step 2: Compiling a chronological outline of events
Step 3: Identifying key antagonistic discourses
Step 4: Analyse the organisation of key discourses
Step 5: Examine the subjectivity
Step 6: Examining the process of hegemonic closure (Walton & Boon, p.360).

Since steps 1, 2 and 3 were accomplished in the thematic analysis, the discourse analysis starts with step 4. Analysis was done utilising the aforementioned analytical guidelines offered by Jorgensen and Phillips (2002):

a) Examination of nodal points, master signifiers, and myths in selected discourses *(step 4),*
b) Searching for chains of equivalence *(step 4),*
c) Concepts regarding group formation, identity and representation *(step 5)* and
d) Concepts for conflict analysis such as hegemony *(step 6)* (Jorgensen & Phillips, p.49)

While all four guidelines were utilised, a) examination of nodal points, master signifiers, and myths in selected discourses and b) searching for chains of equivalence were analysed together under Walton and Boon's Step 4: Analyse the organisation of key discourses.

4.6.1. Examination of nodal points master signifiers and myths in the selected discourse and searching for chains of equivalence

Jorgenson & Phillips (2002) expand upon and define these concepts further: "… nodal points organise discourses (for example 'liberal democracy'), master signifiers organise identity (for example, 'man') and myths organise a social space (for example, 'the West' or 'society'). All of these concepts refer to key signifiers in the social organisation of meaning" (2002, p.50). Sara Walton and Bronwyn Boon (2014), in a paper titled *Engaging with Laclau & Mouffe: informed discourse analysis: a proposed framework* state, "it could be said that the theoretical domain of Laclau & Mouffe's discourse theory is that of conflict and struggle over identity" (Walton & Boon, p.353) and thus the formational aspects of the theory -nodal points

and master signifiers - create labels around idea and identity formation. There are many ways through which to organise nodal points, master signifiers and social spaces. For the purposes of this project, Walton and Boon's template for nodal points and signifiers (Walton & Boon, p.355) was used to analyse data captured in the thematic analysis and thus constitutes Walton and Boon's 4th step: analyse organisation of key discourses.

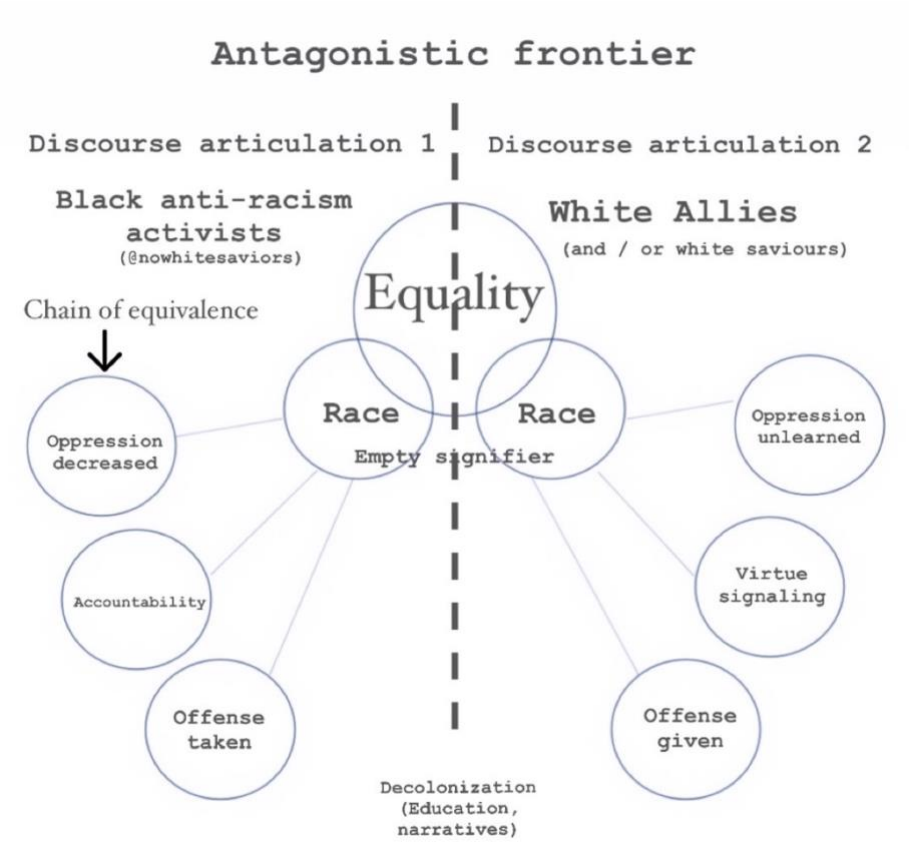


Fig. 1 Analysis of @nowhitesaviors discourse from February to July 2020

Since the analysed discourse comes from one source (Discourse Articulation 1: Black anti-racism activists, i.e., @nowhitesaviors), components of Discourse Articulation 2: White Allies is a constructed discourse created from posts where @nowhitesaviors engaged directly with the white ally (or white saviour) narrative. Interactions on social media can often occur one-way and can result in a bubble or an echo chamber. As conversations or dialogues online often happen with an imagined opponent constructed upon outside and individualised experiences (such as @nowitesaviors reacting to screenshots or news articles of offensive material), so too must the other discursive partners in the conversation be imagined by the reader (or the researcher).

In this particular constructed model, discourse occurs around the floating signifier antagonism of "equality"; floating signifier being defined as a word or term subject to dispute that creates the base for the antagonism. "Race" is identified as the empty signifier – "…one nodal point (or privileged signifier), suitably emptied of difference, is mobilised to represent the whole chain of equivalent signifiers" (Laclau, 1994). The chains of equivalence on either side represent "…the cluster of nodal points each set of agents draw on to support a particular identity of the floating signifier" (Walton & Boon, p.355). The chains of equivalence from Discourse Articulation 1 show that black anti-racism activists move from 1) offence taken (reaction to racist news, tweets, policies) to calls for 2) accountability that will hopefully result in a 3) decrease or elimination of oppression. Discourse Articulation 2 (how the black anti-racism activists interact with the white allies through their medium) show the chain of equivalence as moving from 1) being offensive (then learning) to 2) virtue signaling (passing on learned knowledge to other white allies) that will hopefully result in a 3) decrease or elimination of oppression. This shows how two groups representing previous antagonists can be united under a new goal –to decrease or eliminate oppression – and persuaded under a new hegemonic discourse to solve, or put aside, their old antagonisms in order to fight a new one. This is an important step in Laclau and Mouffe's analysis of discourse because, "…empirical material and information is read as a set of signifying practices through which a particular "reality" is discursively constituted" (Walton & Boon, p.356). The discourse on @nowhitesaviors only becomes one of engaging with white allies in posts made after the death of George Floyd.

Social media is perhaps the best example of a "particular reality being discursively constituted". While discourse analysis does not aim to analyse the authenticity or accuracy of the constructed reality, merely to represent it, it still remains that,

> the discourse analyst is often anchored in exactly the same discourses as he or she wants to analyse…Although discourse analysis is about distancing oneself from these discourses and 'showing them as they are', in this kind of theory there is no hope or escaping from the discourses and telling the pure truth, truth in itself being always a discursive construction (Jorgensen & Phillips, p.49).

Analysing social media discourse adds another layer to this since, as shown above, often one of the discourse articulations is itself a construct. It shows how a discourse we may be anchored in can be presented as a discussion but may in fact exist in an online echo chamber.

In addition, polarisation of social media platforms can be seen as representing forms of digital gated communities. If Laclau and Mouffe's *myth* represents the organisation of the social space, then it can be classified as the borderisation of the space. Jorgensen & Phillips define hegemonic discourse creation as being where "*antagonism* is open conflict between the different discourses in a particular order of discourse, and *hegemony* is the dissolution of the conflict through a displacement of the boundaries between the discourses" (Jorgensen & Phillips, p.56). The connection between shifting antagonisms and group constructions determines the shape and the border of the social space. But if these conversations and shifts are happening in online gated communities, can they really impact offline social change? The case of #blacklivesmatter proves that global offline mobilisation can stem from bordered online engagement. It remains to be seen if this will continue to be the case once collective pandemic fear is no longer a driving factor in community formation. If pre-pandemic borders are redrawn, will the myth of the #blacklivesmatter social remain?

4.6.2. Concepts regarding group formation, identity and representation

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) suggest that social change is not guaranteed, or deterministic. Thus, it is created either purposefully, or out of necessity. An important factor in determining if social change will occur or not, is the amount of support a movement has. With increasing diversification of groups, it has become more important for those invested in activist work to make active choices that facilitate the formation of connections through identity, representation and shared goals.

The nodal points and signifiers in the diagram Fig.1. in Section 5.2.1, represent an analysis of the discourse that occurred on the @nowhitesaviors Instagram account after the death of George Floyd. While it is very similar to analysis done on discourse prior to his death, the biggest difference is the change in voice represented in Discourse Articulation 2. Prior to George Floyd's death, @nowhitesaviors mainly engaged against the voice of the White Savior archetype, while after May 5th, 2020, it began to engage with the Ally archetype. This signifies the creation of a new group, where a former antagonist (white people) who may still be engaging in aspects of external antagonism (such as problematic behaviour, or hypocritical revolutionary theatre), has been included in the community in order to fight the new, larger antagonism. Mouffe states in her introduction to the book *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (1996) that,

> democratic action, in this perspective, does not require a theory of truth and notions like unconditionality and universal validity, but rather a variety of practices and pragmatic moves aimed at persuading people to broaden the range of their commitments to others, to build a more inclusive community (Critchley, Derrida, Laclau, Rorty & Mouffe, 1996, p.3).

This theorises that most successful social justice movements frame their discursive stories so that previously accepted or tolerated relationships of oppression become questioned in a way that galvanises a group to form in order to push for change, has been correct. In many ways Covid-19 did this – the pandemic fear, the myth of equality, the ideas of humanism and a shared interest in necropolitical decisions made by governments – all combined to trigger a flammable sense of global anger that became ignited under #blacklivesmatter, as evidenced in the thematic analysis of @nowhitesaviors.

This paper hypothesizes that another factor, the sudden removal of the "taken-for-granted" was an additional antagonizing factor. Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) state,

> antagonisms are dissolved through hegemony, whereby the one discourse conquers the terrain and appears as the objective reality; the objective being that which has become taken-for-granted, that which we forget is contingent … the taken-for-granted can be understood as emanating from a centre and spanning a certain radius out to the periphery on which it is not quite so taken for granted (2002, p.190).

What Covid-19 did, however, was not simply to show how those on the periphery did not have access to certain privileges, but also removed the taken-for-granted from the centre itself. With the flip of grievable lives becoming ungrievable, and with some developed nations suddenly finding themselves in necropolitical death worlds, the taken-for-granted became worth fighting for. When life was no longer guaranteed, all lives became worth fighting for, even those previously regarded as ungrievable. Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) state that,

> whenever a group is represented, a whole understanding of society follows with it as the group is constituted in contrast to other groups… group formation thus

> plays a part in the struggle over how the myth about society is to be filled with meaning (Jorgensen & Philips, p.47).

Once life in 2020 began to return to (somewhat) normal, or people began to adapt and adjust to new versions of normality, this spark of collectivism started to lose focus. A June 23rd post on the @nowhitesaviors account stated:

"have you been noticing that the *trend* of outrage against anti-Black violence is starting to fizzle out? Many who were posting, calling, donating, dedicating their social media content to bringing awareness to the violent, oppressive system of American policing... it is slowing down quite drastically. So, what can we do?"

This shows the importance of active discursive upkeep for a group formed under a new antagonism. If the discourse around it does not reach a degree of hegemony and become naturalised, it is easy for it to be unlearned and unnaturalised. There also needs to be a degree of collaboration within members of the new group; while this analysis did not raise any signifiers or nodal points that link to any form of active alienation or antagonism such as cancel culture, there was also very little discourse around concrete ideas for future involvement and no viable options for attainable work towards justice or equality. Laclau and Mouffe's 1985 work on hegemony suggest that groups need to provide aspects of viable alternatives to the status quo in order to succeed.

When this is applied to the thematic analysis of the @nowhitesaviors discourse, only 6.6% of posts show any kind of community building through future action. This is mainly done through posts that call for fundraising or suggest some kind of online and / or offline engagement, such as a protest or posts that emphasise solidarity. In terms of group solidarity, the analysis shows an increasing number of posts centered around inclusion of various iterations of "us" or "we", where the group addressed is limited to people of colour, mainly Black people in the United States, Uganda and an occasional reference to a greater non-white community. As an account that is based upon the amplification of Black voices and the critique of unethical storytelling from a non-Black perspective of the Black experience, this is completely justifiable and effective. On the other hand, as shown in Fig.1., @nowhitesaviors posits itself not only as an account through which to communicate with other people of colour, but as a place for education, discussion and advocacy. Thus, by not engaging with the imagined

white audience that represents Discourse articulation 2 on aspects of planning, engagement and co-identity group creation, engagement falls, and the hegemonic model cannot survive.

Discourse is vital in the creation of new groups that seek to promote social change. Not only must the new discourse attach itself to a preexisting and established discourse, but it must also be agile. As social realities change so must discourses within activist movements. As shown, @nowhitesaviors adapted to a certain extent, moving beyond the White Savior discourse to a more inclusive, while still critical, conversation with the imagined Ally. What did not change, was the language of inclusion. A post made on June 18th on the account shows that the account is aware of the fact that:

"a serious flaw of revolutionary movements in the past has been that primary focus was on dismantling a current system, as opposed to imagining and ultimately creating a new and just society".

It is not, however, discursively utilised by the very revolutionary movements who aim to dismantle the current system, such as @nowhitesaviors. To achieve hegemony or change, ideas need to be utilised, not simply understood.

In previous discourse analysis, Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) show how "*logic of equivalence* worked as all non-white people gradually were identified as black … *the logic of difference* tries to disperse the polar opposition in a larger number of more specific identities" (Jorgensen & Phillips, p.44). @nowhitesaviors displayed the *logic of equivalence* during the rise of the #blacklivesmatter and #georgefloyd movements, when all Black people – Ugandans, Americans – became identified as "we" and "us". While the number of white or non-black followers grew and more posts discussed actions of the Ally, there were no posts that included any form of inclusivity. This is not to say that non-black people should be awarded an *equivalence,* but that perhaps there needs to be a *logic of inclusion* added to activist hegemonic discourse in order to see full engagement.

4.6.3. Concepts for conflict analysis such as hegemony

As shown above, a hegemonic discourse is one that manages to naturalise a particular view by winning various discursive struggles. Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) explain further by saying,

> …discourse constructs the social world in meaning, and that, owing to the fundamental instability of language, meaning can never be permanently fixed. No discourse is a closed entity: it is, rather, constantly being transformed through contact with other discourses. So, a keyword of the theory is *discursive struggle*. Different discourses – each of them representing particular ways of talking about and understanding the social world – are engaged in a constant struggle with one another to achieve hegemony, that is, to fix the meanings of language in their own way. Hegemony then, can provisionally be understood as the dominance of one particular perspective (Jorgensen & Phillips, p.6).

Discourses are constantly fighting for dominance, with hegemony as the ultimate end goal for a discourse that seeks to generate social change. Most social movements base themselves on pre-established stories of subjugation and oppression and use these to frame their discourse around a push for change. In this way, discourse also holds the power to frame what constitutes an oppression. Oppression is not fixed: norms shift over time according to cultural and moral systems that determine where the line lies between a just / unjust or legitimate / illegitimate breach of power. The politics of offence thus raises a debate around hegemony: who is given the power to draw this line? If the centre of democracy is supposedly empty – that is, no one entity has the right to claim a privilege to truth construction – then those who have the power to determine what is offensive and what is inoffensive are able to form hegemonic borders and blocs around the construction of society.

In his book *Necropolitics*, Mbembe(2019) talks about offence with regards to war and other conflict by saying that: "…no offense has been committed whose seriousness can be objectively gauged" (Mbembe, p.26). This harkens back to Graefer's (2019) statement that examining "…offence is a tricky task because offence is relative" (Graefer, p.1). Discourse analysis is not utilised to examine relativity: the moral aspects of why something is offensive, or even how it becomes thus. If this were the case, aspects of counter-narrative would have to be examined, such as Barrow's (2005) theory that "the current climate of political and moral correctness has led to a complete failure to make the distinction between what someone finds offensive and what is inherently offensive" (Barrow, p.270). Rather, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis is used to identify specific points where antagonisms, identified for the purposes of this research as 'constructions of offence', have been utilised in an attempt to form a new hegemonic discourse under a shared offensive antagonism. It is thus imperative not to

"understand offence as apolitical or as outside cultural discourses and practices, but rather as one important (embodied) circuit through which power is felt, imagined, mediated, negotiated and contested" (Pedwell and Whitehead, 2012, p.176).

In the discourse analysis shown in Fig.1., the creation of offence stemmed from two distinct events: a) the murder of George Floyd and the use of his body as a political and emotional pawn, or *offence taken*, and b) the subsequent revolutionary theatre of the White Ally, or *offence given*. Morse, in his analysis of the use of images of violent death in order to create specific Israeli political discourse, states that "violent death is integral to our political life. It reflects the power dynamics between the powerful and the powerless, between the oppressive and the oppressed" (2019, p.233). The post made by @nowhitesaviors on the 29th of May 2020 makes direct reference to George Floyd's body used as an image of violent death:

"…pay attention to how much overt white supremacy & anti-Black violence white folks need to be presented w/ to start caring & speaking up. What finally humanised Black people for you? Was it having to stare a man in the eyes for 7 minutes as the life left his body?"

Here we see the creation of the nodal point labelled as a) *offense taken.* The discourse here is not focused on the death of a Black person, this is not a new antagonism. Rather, it creates the antagonism around the offensive idea that it took a direct image of a violent death broadcast around the world, on and through numerous platforms, during a necropolitical pandemic for the White Ally to join the discourse. Morse adds to this theory when he states that "death imagery, and gruesome images in particular, are a political matter. The aesthetics of death, … make a statement about power dynamics and hierarchies in life… the sense of offensiveness contemporarily associated with gruesome death images that ignites and informs political debates and power struggles between rival parties" (2019, p.248). It should not be necessary, @nowhitesaviors *offence taken* argues, for death to be explicitly shown in order for empathy and anger to be felt.

This resulted in the subsequent discourse of nodal point b) *offence given.* The attempt at creating a hegemonic discourse at this stage was centered on the antagonism of *offence given* by the actions of the White Ally in direct response to the death imagery represented by the body of George Floyd. Two posts showing *offence given* by performative allyship, one made on the 2nd of June:

"celebrities & companies alike are pulling some high key virtue signalling based off the fear of losing money or favour … Many celebrities, companies, brands, influencers.... they are "speaking up" and "using their voice". Because, finally, it's reached a point that saying nothing at all could actually mean a loss of $$$$. The tides are turning and a fight for justice is becoming the NORM".

The other post was made on the 26th of June:

"we see through your #BlackLivesMatter branding and "support" or "solidarity" with Black voices. Which Black voices exactly? Certainly no one that is seriously holding anti-Black racism & white supremacy accountable".

This shows a change in antagonism that alienates one part of the newly formed group, without offering alternative solutions. Karin Whal-Jorgensen (2019) makes the claim that "if the media are one of the key vehicles used for both establishing and perpetuating particularly emotional regimes, they also facilitate the sharing of particular legitimate ways of talking about our feelings and hence the conditions of possibility for shared action" (Whal-Jorgensen, p.50). Hegemony here is not achieved, in part because there is a lack of suggested or concrete shared action.

Other forms of discourse analysis may at this point analyse the *how* and *why* behind the creation of societal morals that underpin this discourse, such as frustration at the attempt to paste over decades of white inaction with a single black square and a hashtag. In Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) analysis however, the discourse analysed at this time simply indicates an attempt by @nowhitesaviors to create a new hegemonic discourse under a new antagonism that did not succeed. In the ideal chain of equivalence as shown in Fig.1., the imagined narrative would follow a) offence given to b) virtue signalling to c) oppression unlearned. In this instance, through the discourse, the White Ally would be held accountable for the ways in which their actions create offence, they would utitlise this knowledge to educate other White Allies and thus learned actions that perpetrate oppression would be unlearned. However, what discourse analysis of @nowhitesaviors shows is that the aspect of hegemonic group formation that regards inclusion and representation of all previously antagonistic groups under a new antagonism as a vital step, was not adequately maintained through subsequent discourse creation.

At the time this report was written, the account itself is still popular and active but mimics the drop in global unification over #blacklivesmatter with regards to community engagement that consists of diverse groups. Sara Ahmed's (2004) work on the affective policies of fear show us that "fear might be concerned with the preservation not simply of 'me', but also 'us', or 'what is', or 'life as we know it', or even 'life itself'" (Ahmed, p.64). It is hard to read this and fail to see how a collective pandemic fear based on aspects of uncertainly and mortality resulted in a collective worldwide protest over the death of George Floyd. Ahmed (2004) goes on to say that,

> fear may also work as an affective economy: It does not reside positively in a particular object or sign. It is this lack of residence that allows fear to slide across signs and between bodies. This sliding becomes stuck only temporarily, in the very attachment of a sign to a body, an attachment that is taken on by the body, encircling it with a fear that becomes its own (Ahmed, p.64).

A substantive hegemonic discourse cannot arise out of fear, which likely has to do with the impermanence of the emotion. Thus, in order for a hegemonic discourse to survive, it cannot focus only on the negative, it must inspire positive action. This is not present in discourse created by @nowhitesaviors. Itay Snir's (2016) research as represented in his article *Not just one common sense: Gramsci's common sense and Laclau and Mouffe's radical democracy*, corresponds with this assessment by saying, "while the heterogeneity of common sense is made possible by the presence of good-sensical elements, the retreat to homogeneity is made possible because the distinction between common and good sense is rigid, namely because it reflects a single social rupture" (Snir, p.276). Thus, this research suggests that in order to create a hegemonic discourse that does not retreat back to homogeneity, that each social rupture must be consistently sealed through discursive inclusion and a concrete imaginary of not only what an improved alternative society looks like, but a road map of how to get there.

5. CONCLUSION

If there is one word that can accurately describe the world in 2020, it is *death*: the death of people under a new pandemic, the death of people at the hands of other people: police or necropolitical death dealt through governmental pandemic policies, and the death of old versions of normality. And in the aftermath of all this death burst forward numerous new ways of being: the possibility of a renewed sense of political activism ignited by the inequalities laid bare by the pandemic, a new sense of empathy as identities and narratives were rewritten through shared lenses, a new sense of fragility at how delicate the balance truly is between people, and nature, and other people. A global event experienced simultaneously, but unequally, by people all over the world both altered and reinforced traditional boundaries and created new forms of borderisation.

This dissertation is based upon the hypothesis that the collective awakening to new imaginaries of death and mortality brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic created changes in emotional necropolitical discourses surrounding race, equality and humanism. By examining social media produced during a timeframe that included pre-pandemic fear, lockdown, the killing of George Floyd, and the global #blacklivesmatter protest movement, the research aimed to produce a very specific cross section of data that included aspects of necropolitics, emotional affects, culture, power, oppression, humanism, and Anthropocene ethics.

What emerged from the analysis were thought-provoking theories on geographical, emotional and physical borderisation that connect to necropolitical discourse, as well as shifts in narrative and identity construction that show how the construction of self / other is linked to ideas of grievability and ungrievability. The construction of death worlds and life worlds was also shown to be a fluid concept, while it was proven that removal of the taken-for-granted is a fast way to galvanise a group of people.

The myth of equality seen within discourse surrounding the Anthropocene was seen to be false, with inequalities becoming exacerbated under anthropocenic conditions. This exacerbation, along with the mental effects of the lockdowns and the losses of offline communities, resulted in online communities rising in importance. These communities and the activities they constructed became the new myth of the social. In the case of anti-racism, this psychological aspect combined with new ideas surrounding mortality and the meaning of life, to prompt an increase in online activism.

While analysis of discourse created during this time saw an increase in engagement with regards to such activism, research produced here shows that this collective anger and

commitment to global equality failed to become a hegemonic discourse for a few reasons: the lack of sustained inclusive engagement under a collective antagonist, the fleeting nature of the affective economy of fear, the rigidity of old borders and traditional narratives, and the ever-changing nature of offence.

This research also demonstrated the importance of social media and online discourse with regards to both the creation and maintenance of polarisation, and potential impacts on real-world social change. Currently, debates are happening on issues such as freedom of speech, the power of big tech, and the control over personal data. Technology is at the heart of many current societal disputes, and thus research that adds to the cannon is of vital importance.

This research report had many limitations and thus offers much in the way of suggested future research. Due to time and space constraints, only one discourse was analysed. This left no space for comparison or contrast. Also, data available from entities such as CrowdTangle – the Facebook owned data collection site that would allow for gathering of more specific types of data, such as geographical location of accounts and commenters, and the ability to search for exact hashtags and communication strands between specific users - is only available for accredited journalists, PhD students, postdocs, and faculty. This meant that there was a limit on accessible data obtained for this research.

One limitation that the researcher attempted to mitigate was that of positionality. As a student of critical diversity studies whose personal beliefs and discourses fundamentally draw from those that prioritise diversity, give voice to oppressed groups and demand accountability, it was clear that the discourses analysed here were those that share certain moralities with the researcher. Thus, by using Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis, there was very little room for personal opinion or concurrence to creep in (… as hard as it was).

Thus, future research projects that stem from this research report can include: a comparative study between social media accounts that represent different necropolitical groups, and a longitudinal study conducted over a few years that tracks in-depth changes of the #blacklivesmatter movement pre-covid, during the pandemic, and in (hopefully) post-covid times. It would also be interesting to analyse if and how the White Ally becomes less performative and more substantial as an anti-racist activist. @nowhitesaviors, while failing to produce a hegemonic discourse, did achieve a high level of education and advocacy. It would thus be interesting to analyse the educational impact social media has over the next few years. For what this research paper has shown is that while realties such as death continue along existing lines and through developed tropes, technology adds another dimension to the human existence.

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8. APPENDIX A: Data capture and thematic analysis of @nowhitesaviors

No White Saviours

Data Capture : thematic analysis

Date of post	Content Type	Hashtags / tags	Number of likes	Number of comments	Themes	Quotes
2 February	Text, visual background, highlighting need for accountability from photographers depicting African bodies	@tomsaater, ugandan photographer	6,077	46	Ethical storytelling (justice, photography, narrative, identity)	"we have a huge responsibility as photographers on the African continent in flipping the narrative through the kinds of images we share about our own people"
3 February	Text, meme, visual background (slideshow), behind the scenes, engaging with readers	@olivia.rises, @unpopularvote, @lubegawendy, owners of account	7,780	169	Activists (introduction, budget, explanation, personalisation of activism)	"spoke with a guy who imagined our office was full of approximately "50 angry back people" because of how "on fire" our platform is. Many would be shocked we are a small team of only 4!! & you don't even see half the work we do offline."
5 February	Text, visual background, call for financial contributions		3,963	44	Activists (budget, fundraising)	"We need to hire PIs for the most concerning cases that get referred to us"
6 February	Text, meme, visual background (slideshow), highlighting accountability		10,850	121	White privilege (accountability, entering black spaces, ethical travel)	"nobody understands Black suffering more than black people. You get to pop in, *experience* our tragedy & leave for furlough…"
7 February	Text, visual background, educational	@hammond_robin, @amyhehre (white photographers called out for their work)	12, 360	132	Ethical storytelling (justice, photography, narrative, identity, compassion, accountability, entering black spaces)	"… reoccurring theme in our work has been the liberties that white folks take in the name of raising awareness about black suffering…" "there are ways to share stories & advocate ethically. We need to see you upholding the same standards for ALL PEOPLE"
10 February	Text, visual background, educational	#reneebach	4,046	40	The colonised mind, miseducation (post-colonial education systems,	"It is no wonder that whiteness remains unquestioned by non-white people who still have a deeply colonised mindset"
12 February	Video (excerpt of speech)	#walterrodney	26,661 views, 1,568 likes	65 (owners of account stated "wanting to hear from BLACK FOLK ONLY in the comments - have you struggled with identity?")	White supremacy, miseducation, language (identity)	"there are so many ways in which white supremacy tries to divide & put black people at odds with one-another"
13 February	Text, visual background, humour	#happyvalentinesday	18,593	135	White privilege (justice, law enforcement)	"Roses are read, Personal boundaries are healthy, "Justice" systems protect the white & the wealthy"
17 February	Text, meme, visual background (slideshow), highlighting African identity		16,750	317	Colonisation, Identity (white south africans, diaspora, migration)	"Have "white africans" ever been oppressed for their africanness anywhere in the world?" "What makes someone African? … for one to be African they must ne indigenous to the land, sons of the soil. This is why for us, the descendants of stolen African people in the diaspora today are more African than the descendants of white colonisers ever could be"
20 February	Text, visual background, announcement of podcast	@roscoejones	19,887	68	Community engagement	"One of the strongest things about this movement is the COMMUNITY and how y'all show up"
23 February	Text, meme, humour		156,802 views, 22, 991 likes	219	Community engagement	"when we get approached by a white person I'm public and they all "are you guys the ones who run No White Saviors? & to our surprise they tell us they follow our work and love what we do" "… but we want this to become far more common for Ugandan and African nationals to be familiar with our work"

25 February	Text, meme, visual background (slideshow), highlighting white privilege	#uganda	27,694	222	White privilege (accountability, entering black spaces, ethical travel, voluntourism)	"There is a romanticizing of poor people in over exploited countries and communities that we need us to pay close attention to. People will come and visit, comment on how happy, "carefree" and content some of our poorest citizens appear to be. Do not mistake self-preservation and resilience with satisfaction or security."
25 February	Text, visual slideshow highlighting the account		3,668	48	Community engagememt, Activists (explanation, personalisation of activism)	"This week we hit 300K. This has happened in UNDER TWO YEARS … this level of forced accountability is part of the power in a movement like this, we aren't giving people an option to treat Black communities with a lower standard any longer".
26 February	Text, visual background, educational highlighting poverty tourism	#sarahbaartman	21,344	201	White privilege (accountability, entering black spaces, ethical travel, voluntourism)	"people are not zoo exhibits" "The white gaze is still at work exploiting and dehumanizing whenever it can sink its teeth in, especially when there is a profit to be made."
29 February	Text, visual background, educational, highlighting colonisation of education		17,772	310	The colonised mind, miseducation (post-colonial education systems, entering black spaces)	"Could they allow a women's studies program to be taught exclusively by men? What sort of education would that look like? Where would the men have obtained their knowledge on women's studies in the first place?"
1 March	Text, visual background, educational, highlighting medical apartheid	#reneebach	13,083	179	Medical apartheid (experimentation, ungrievability)	"black bodies are not your test subjects" "We see that you haven't learned from the #ReneeBach case but be assured we are watching & ready to hold anyone accountable who chooses to experiment on Black bodies"
7 March	Text, screenshots, visual (slideshow), highlighting disagreement between reader and account holders		18,122	616	White privilege (accountability, entering black spaces)	"Us: whiteness can be exhausting, sometimes Black folk and other non-white people need a break. White woman: that's so silly, nobody should need a break from any other race, my husband is brown!"
8 March	Text, Audre Lorde quote, visual background	#audrelorde #internationalwomensday	19,267	50	Intersectionality, women	"I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own" Audre Lorde
10 March	Text, visual background, announcement of podcast	#Uganda , #Kampala #PanAfricanism #panafrican	14,403	22	pan-Africanism (identity, borders, resistance)	"development was interrupted by around 300 years of enslavement, of colonialism, of neo-colonialism. Many things were not allowed to move. There were many people who had a lot of ideas that were killed in those wars. People tend to paint a picture that Africans were non-resisting, docile people who were just there... No, they put up resistance but because the stories are not told...." - Dr. Kanakulya Dickson

12 March	Repost of news headline and tweet about COVID 19 highlighting surprise at lack of black suffering	#covid19 @caleb_okereke	13,780	352	Covid 19, myth of equality (black suffering, ungrievability, racial bias)	"he responses that the world has been having toward the lack of #covid19 cases on the African continent. The overall sentiment seems to be shock & surprise. This isn't solely from a scientific, logistical or medical perspective, more so it seems to be coming from a place of expectation that Black bodies are supposed to suffer first and suffer most. . There is no possibility in the mind of the average white / western person that Africa is capable of existing without suffering. The fact that Africa could in fact be a refuge and a safe place in a time like this contradicts or tugs at the very foundation of what white supremacy has taught the world to believe about the Continent." "the inherent belief that in a pandemic, black bodies must hurt too, and first"
13 March	Text, visual background, call for financial contributions, COVID-19		1,777	9	Covid 19, community engagement	We know that many are scared right now and being impacted by this at various levels. We know we aren't even close to being the most adversely affected, but this has hit our projected funding goals pretty hard. We had important in-person meetings, consultations and speaking engagements that have all been cancelled or postponed.
14 March	Text, visual background, community engagement around COVID 19 and mental health	#uganda, #covid19	5,746	302	Covid 19, community engagement	"You show up for us time and time again, we want to take this time to show up & hold space for you. We are in a unique position here in #Uganda with #covid19 — we are largely untouched by the virus at this time with no confirmed cases to date" "We know this is a vulnerable thing, something outside of our normal posting, but we believe in caring for each other first and foremost. We REALLY need that as a global community right now."
17 March	Text, screenshot, visual, highlighting comment from reader		12, 388	220	Community engagement, mixed families	"We need to see more white parents who are raising Black / POC children showing up in this way. While the education should begin BEFORE a child is brought into the picture, we are here for THIS. We don't know who needs to hear this, but it's not too late to start showing up & to commit to do better by your children. Part of the healing needs to be you LISTENING & HEARING your children out for the ways you've hurt them / caused harm."
17 March	Text, visual background (slideshow), highlighting differences in media portrayal of black and white suffering, national geographic portrayal of Ebola	#covid19	30,743	394	Covid 19, black suffering, ethical storytelling (press bias, disease coverage, privacy, compassion, narrative formation)	"I want you to imagine this being written about Italy & #Covid19. Are they sending out humanitarian photographers to capture white suffering? No. Why? Because evening death, white people are treated w/ far more dignity & humanity than we are while ALIVE.

18 March	Text, screenshot, visual background, highlighting racism in disease naming	#coronavirus "covid19	12,448	395	Covid 19, ethical storytelling (press bias, disease coverage, racism, narrative formation)	This stretches far beyond the naming of a virus / infectious disease after the country, town or river of where it is believed to have originated. One of the byproducts of #coronavirus / #covid19 we've seen people most upset by, and rightfully so, is the racism that has come with the virus being associated with China & Chinese / Asian people experiencing racism globally as a result of it. What we didn't communicate as effectively when we initially made this post, is that the naming of such diseases has carried anti-Black racism that largely went unchallenged. Who remembers the way African people were treated during Ebola? How many cared then
21 March	Text, news screenshot, visual background, highlighting silencing of black voices		11,664	94	White privilege, press bias (active removal of black representation, racism, climate change, scientists)	"There are so many ways in which African voices are erased from the most pressing conversations of our time. In the discourse on climate crisis and corresponding climate action, African voices have continuously been ignored"
22 March	Text, visual background, highlighting ungrievable lives	#mikkikendall	7,473	59	Ungrieveable lives (oppression, representation, intersectionality)	In any system of oppression, the most vulnerable will always suffer most & be heard the least" "So many of us claiming to be inclusive in these spaces are often still alienating or leaving out some of the most important voices we need to be listening to. So while you might be hearing from BIPOC voices, you are likely hearing from those who are "educated", would be considered "well spoken" (in the coloniser's language), those who are financially secure enough to access the internet & social media."

23 March	Text, visual background, announcement of podcast	#PanAfricanism	935	4	pan-Africanism (justice)	
25 March	Text, visual background (slideshow), highlighting volunteer programs and COVID policies	#covid19 @peacecorps	14,926	385	COVID19, volunteerism, inequality (bias, borders)	"how necessary is an organisation if it can close up shop & evacuate every single volunteer as soon as sh*t hits the fan?" "it's troubling to rely so heavily on foreigners in any aid or development program… @PeaceCorps as an entity could never have the same level of commitment to our communities that we do. They can always leave & go back home. Even if home is LESS SAFE right now #Covid19"
16 March	Text, visual background, highlighting whiteness		14, 714	479	White privilege, racism	"So many problems could be avoided if white people just stayed in their lane…"
27 March	Text, screenshots of article, visual background (slideshow), highlighting volunteer programs and COVID policies	#mordecaiogada	4,837	95	Colonialism (clinate change, conservation, scientist, narrative creation)	"The wildlife conservation narrative in Kenya, as well as much of Africa, is thoroughly intertwined with colonialism, virulent racism, deliberate exclusion of the natives, veiled bribery, unsurpassed deceit, a conservation cult subscribed to by huge numbers of people in the West, and severe exploitation of the same wilderness conservationists have constantly claimed they are out to preserve".
28 March	Video (reposting two cases of white people instructing people of colour how to wash their hands)	#covid19 @peacecorps	6,073	624	Internalised racism (infantilisation, bias)	"…it's very bold that she made this video for Liberians who have far fewer cases not only than her country but far fewer cases than the state of California where she resides. This video needs to be made to address her own people. The underlying message here is that a white woman is required to educate African people on how to stay safe during a pandemic. She could have easily just posted a video of Liberian leaders addressing their own people, but nope....
29 March	Text, visual background, highlighting oppression	#stevebiko	6,520	52	opression, internalised oppression	"the greatest weapon in the hand of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" "One of the biggest lies we tend to believe in this work is that those in the oppressor class are the only ones actively working to sustain a system of oppression. In actuality, we understand that the oppressor class must recruit from the oppressed, granting personal favor, access and some level of protection as the reward. This exchange, of course, is highly conditional"
1 April	Text, visual background, highlighting cultural appropriation	@shannondrewthis	41,425	633	Cultural appropriation (shame, bias, racism)	"What is the difference between appreciation and appropriation? To us, appreciation values, honors and respects another culture; while appropriation exploits, steals and tries to gain from a marginalised culture that is not your own.

1 April	Text, visual background, highlighting exploitation of black bodies, children	@juliosacristan	3,484	277	Ethical storytelling (justice, photography, narrative, identity)	"We are not saying nudity is wrong, we know it's even more normal / embraced in certain cultures; but that's not the problem here. The problem? Foreign photographers coming in so as to fetishize and capitalize of the naked bodies of both adults and children. These children didn't sign up to open themselves up to such violations just so these white men can get a nice paycheck from @natgeo "We won't stop fighting this, we will no longer accept that the nudity of Black and Brown kids is normalised online where as if it were a white child it would be removed immediately. And THAT is what we need to talk about @instagram —- you'd have time if it was a white teenager with her entire bare breast showing .
2 April	Text, visual background, call for financial contributions	#covid19	1,751	17	Covid 19, poverty (vulnerable groups, government assistance)	"So many people are out of work right now and we are already hearing about how much this has already put more stress on already vulnerable populations. There are virtually no safety nets here. Federal and state funding for services such as unemployment, food stamps, Medicaid/ Medicare, WIC, Section 8 housing, etc does not exist.
3 April	Text, visual background (slideshow), news screenshot highlighting vaccines, testing and race	#covid19	13, 982	327	Covid19, medical racism (ungrievable bodies, vaccine apartheid)	Just imagine during Ebola if we got on the news and started talking about how we were going to ~*test out~* vaccines on Europeans".
3 April	Text, visual background (slideshow), news screenshot highlighting white privilege resulting in black deaths	#reneebach #uganda #blackbodiesarenotyourtest subjects	4,991	73	medical racism (ungrievable bodies, vaccine apartheid)	"YOU ALL HELPED MAKE THIS HAPPEN. Thank you for the pressure and accountability!!! . For years, the board of directors knew that Renee was engaging in direct medical practice which was far beyond her qualifications (she didn't have any). They made excuses and justified her behavior which only escalated over time. She started small, checking vitals, dosing medication, starting cannulas... and then it escalated into pelvic punctures, shots of lidocaine in the bottom of the feet, blood transfusions without cross matching the blood, cutting flesh off a child's infected arm.... the list goes on and for years, her family and friends made excuses and supported Bach's dangerous, life threatening behavior. .

4 April	Text, visual background (slideshow), news screenshot highlighting adoption and COVID 19		9,667	541	White privilege, supremacy (bias)	"There have been far too many stories of children taken for adoption from Uganda who have biological families that were lied to in the process. The children's home where Lyndsey and Jacob are attempting to adopt this child from has already been flagged by the U.S. embassy for being part of fraudulent adoptions. THAT is why this Alabama woman is "trapped" here. Not just because the U.S. embassy is being difficult. The embassy is well aware of how much corruption exists in the international adoption process here. They know more and more people are watching. They have a responsibility to end the trafficking of children under the guise of adoption.
5 April	Text, video, meme, humour : white saviours		95,006 views, 5,732 likes	112	Community engagement, accountability	We also appreciate your vigilance and commitment to accountability for those causing harm to Black and / or POC communities around the world. Just make sure that in an effort to hold others accountable, that you're not neglecting your own internal process and need for accountability.
7 April	Text, visual background, highlighting positionality and social context		15,294	220	Community engagement, power dynamics, positionality (intersectionality)	"We don't know who needs to hear this but… not every single photo you see of a white person w/African people = white saviourism. Consider the power dynamics involved & the context of the photo before you send it or tag us
7 April	Text, visual background, announcement of podcast	@caleb_okereke	1,822	12	Narrative creation, media	"After seeing a need for full and accurate representation of minority voices in Africa, Okereke founded and is the Managing Editor at Minority Africa. We brought Caleb on for an important conversation about representation in the media and the power in controlling the narrative." .

9 April	Text, visual background (slideshow), screenshots highlighting conversation between the account owners and The New Yorker magazine	#reneebach, @newyorkermag @arielvlevy	7,975	235	Medical apartheid, ungrievable bodies, White privilege (media, narrative creation)	"What this woman has done has caused harm to so many people and it is clear as day what she was doing. It is terribly disappointing that #TheNewYorker would allow the publication of such hot garbage. This woman wasn't just defending Renee Bach, she was defending herself and the unquestionable morality and innocence of whiteness. White supremacy does not leave space for accountability, we need to remember that."
10 April	Text, Malcolm X quote, visual background	@newyorkermag @arielvlevy	21,017	89	Medical apartheid, ungrievable bodies, White privilege (media, bias, narrative creation)	"if you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing - Malcolm X" "We've seen this week what @newyorkermag journalist @arielvlevy chose to do with her privilege, power and access. It was wielded and weaponised rather than used to seek justice for victims of anti-Black violence"
12 April	Text, visual background, highlighting white supremacy		14,171	269	White privilege, supremacy (bias)	"How many times have we watched white lies believed over Black experiences? How many times have we seen Black victims of white violence framed, discredited & vilanised (sic)?"
13 April	Text, visual background (slideshow), news screenshot highlighting predicted African COVID 19 deaths	@melindafrenchgates, @thisisbillgates #covid19	24,856	709	Covid 19, Ungrieveable lives (oppression, representation, medical racism)	"Remember when #BillGates warned of "10 million deaths in Africa" due to #Covid19 ??? To date, we have had only 54 confirmed cases here in #Uganda & ZERO deaths. Continent wide, approx 13,814 cases have been recorded & a total of 747 deaths…."
14 April	Text, humour, visual background, highlighting social media anger		24, 818	542	White anger	"white women announcing that they are unfollowing you on social media is the digital equivalent to Karen asking to speak to the manager"

14 April	Text, video, highlighting anti-blackness in China and other Asian Communities		70,604 views, 3,871 likes	310	Covid 19, xenophobia, bias (labels, stereotypes, disease bias, fear)	"because of the Covid-19 pandemic, whose origins can be traced to Wuhan, China, there has been an increase in hate crimes targeted towards individuals of Asian origin. If anything, the Covid-19 pandemic has proven how there is less regard for Black people. It has exposed structural racism that has lingered for centuries. Look at the U.S. and disparity with how many African- Americans are dying from the virus because they cannot access health care or because they don't have the luxury of working from home. While the WHO and the US government is calling upon individuals to wear face masks so as to prevent the spread of the virus, the police are running down black people wearing face masks targeting them as criminals. . Different countries have registered high cases of Covid-19 with African countries having some of the lowest rates of infections yet, look at the racism and xenophobia towards individuals of African origin in China
18 April	Text, Amiri Baraka quote, visual background		9,792	64	Oppression, identity	"the torture of being the unseen object, and the constantly observed subject"
21 April	Text, screenshot, visual background, highlighting ethical storytelling and dignity	@cityofcapetown, @joshwideawake	14, 922	641	Ethical storytelling (justice, photography, narrative, identity, compassion, accountability,)	"…we need to pay close attention to the varied ethical standards when it comes to photo journalism and storytelling. When it comes to showing the suffering of white people, rarely do we see images of such poverty / suffering porn. Josh, and so many like him, find a way to photograph & document white people in a dignified way"
26 April	Text, screenshot, visual background, highlighting relationships between people with different views		9,993	157	Community engagement, accountability	"we often get DMs from people who can't figure out how to get their significant other to care about these conversations or this work"
26 April	Image sharing (slideshow), highlighting illegal adoption of children of colour	#srilanka	10,989	185	Adoption, silencing	"My adoptive parents always welcomed my critical and questioning voice. Discussing heavy personal topics was a natural part of our journey as a family. I was always allowed to be myself and be curious about my heritage. My adoptive father helped me write my first letter to be reunited when I was seven years old."

28 April	Image sharing (slideshow), highlighting illegal adoption of children of colour	#rwanda	15,312	406	Adoption, silencing, eurocentrism	Little did she know that they were talking about adoption. I don't think the word adoption, as it is known in the west, even exists in our language. Also keep in mind that the year was 1991 and Rwanda was becoming more and more unstable at that time".”
30 April	Text, visual background, highlighting case fought by lawyers hired by @nowhitesaviors to reunite a Ugandan mother with her son adopted in the US		3,750	72	Adoption, silencing, eurocentrism	We have been sharing the stories of adult adoptees who were adopted through unethical and/or fraudulent means. We don't believe there is a price we can put on fighting for a mother and child to reconnect with each other. Nearly every time we speak about this case with her, she is in tears. She didn't know she was declared dead so they could adopt her son to the U.S., she was promised that they would continue communication with her.”
1 May	Text, visual background, highlighting white saviour complex in `developed` nations		12,172	287	White Savior Complex, whataboutism (intersectionality, positionality)	“While the way it manifests might look different depending on the context, the same racism & white supremacy that convinces young white suburban teachers & social workers that they know the best way to “help underprivileged children” outside their own communities is the same racism and white supremacy that convinces recent college graduates that they can come here and open their own NGOs.”
3 May	Text, parody video, humour, visual background, highlighting social media anger		128,700 views, 16,806 likes	363	White Savior Complex	“I don't know why they're running away from me, I'm bringing them food”.
3 May	Text, visual background (slideshow), photographs, behind the scenes, engaging with readers		8,604	143	Activists (introduction, budget, explanation, personalisation of activism)	There is a core group of 3 of us who you will see on lives, hear from on the podcast & speaking engagements and learn from when we curate content for you. We have an accountant and lawyer on the team who work more behind the scenes. We also have a number of others who we consider extended family of NWS and Kusimama - people who mentor, strategize and collaborate with us.”
5 May	Text, visual background, news screenshot highlighting adoption and COVID 19	@watotochurch	5,895	137	Covid19, adoption, white supremacy	“The Ugandan government has launched an investigation into the activities of a megachurch in Kampala after seven members of its internationally renowned children's choir were diagnosed with Covid-19 following an overseas tour.”

7 May	Text, visual background (slideshow) news screenshot highlighting prediction Africa would be hardest hit by Covid19	#covid19, #uganda	12,128	200	Covid 19, Ungrieveable lives (oppression, representation, medical racism)	"Propaganda is one of the most significant ways white supremacy is perpetuated. @caleb_okereke & @unpopularvote co-wrote some counter-propaganda which questions the obsession w/ Africa suffering under #covid19 & how African countries are SETTING AN EXAMPLE on how to fight the spread of the virus."
8 May	Text, visual background, music added, highlighting lockdown protests vs black anger	#AhmaudArbery	90, 257 views, 10,739 likes	133	Covid 19, Ungrieveable lives (oppression, anti-blackness, protest, hypocrisy)	"to think that some of ya'll have the audacity to comment on Black people being angry? We see you out here protesting in the streets because you can't go to Cracker Barrel or the shooting range, we're just demanding you stop killing and brutalising Black bodies" "What kind of Black people are you interested in "helping" exactly? You won't touch the overt, state sanctioned anti-Black violence in your own country but you will take 10 day mission trips to Uganda? All of that time trying to solve exotic problems in the "developing world". Here, in this version of anti-Blackness, you believe African people are helpless and incapable. In the USA, anti-Blackness has you believing that Black folk are dangerous and an inherent threat. Both narratives serve their own purpose to protect and perpetuate white supremacy at all costs. Black lives are not valued from small town USA to the village in Uganda.

12 May	Text, visual background (slideshow) screenshot highlighting perceived lack of ethical tourism	@patopopular	27, 683	1,012	Ethical storytelling (bias, narrative, identity)	"In the DM conversation with Lauren, you can see that he acknowledges that people "like her" could hold issue with the video but that he does not actually care.If you search his YouTube channel you'll find almost all his videos about Africa have negative words in the tittle: Worst, Strange, Dangerous, Miserable, "I almost died", Weird, Strangest, Scammed. Whiteness really is so dramatic. If this is all you are capable of, please stay home."
13 May	Text, screenshot of youtube channel of blogger mentioned in previous post highlighting use of blackface	@patopopular	11,661	1,487	Ethical storytelling (bias, narrative, identity, racism)	"Today in colonisers be colonising, we have a follow up to the last post... @ patopopular (it is written like this because he blocked us. This seems to be a new feature on IG where you can't tag someone who blocks you in a caption or comment? So please feel free to tag him in our comments"
15 May	Text, screenshot of company endorsing blogger mentioned in previous post	@patopopular @asusczsk	6,383	392	Accountability, (bias, narrative, identity, racism)	"We need more from @asus than this weak excuse for an apology. We need confirmation that they have dropped @ patopopular from sponsorship. We need to see you take a clear stance on this, assuring us you do not align yourself with such blatant anti-Blackness."
19 May	Text, visual background, encouraging discussion on working on internalised oppression		16,080	306	Internalised oppression, accountability (allyship)	"For this post, we invite our white followers to prioritize LISTENING (we're not saying you can't comment, but comments shouldn't be about your experiences and should be reflective / supportive of the BIPOC commenting). We welcome our Black, Indigenous and POC followers to share ways in which you've had white people respond poorly to accountability"
20 May	Text, video, interview with Paul Mooney	#paulmooney, #breonnataylor #reneebach #blacklivesmatter	154,494 views, 8,825 likes	Comments disabled for post	White supremacy, ungrievable lives (violence, police brutality)	"The complexion for the protection for the collection" - #PaulMooney
22 May	Text, Toni Cade Bambara quote, visual background	#tonicadebambara, #ninasimone, "miriammakeba, #angeladavis	8,445	108	Protest, art (emancipation)	"The role of the artist is to make the revolution irresistible" Toni Cade Bambara

25 May	Text, visual background, encouraging discussion on working on internalised oppression	#blessed	39,045	263	White Savior Complex	"Maybe you're #blessed or maybe your reaping the benefits of centuries of white dominance and exploitation" "Perhaps one of the most insidious things about the white savior complex is the illusion that there is any real sacrifice involved or that there is actually a commitment to justice. The white savior complex allows the person in a position of privilege to maintain power and control while helping in the way they deem fit for the subjugated individual."
26 May	Text, visual background, highlighting white woman in the US with adopted Ugandan sons tweeting about police brutality saying "I don't usually post stuff like this"	#AhmaudArbery, #TamirRice, #FreddieGray, #TrayvonMartin, #GeorgeFloyd	62, 706	375	White Saviour Complex (hypocrisy, racism, police violence, adoption)	"something feels deeply disingenuous about white folks who travel to the other side of the world to help out Black people when they can't even stand up & hold accountable the countless examples of state sanctioned violence against Black people in their own countries"
28 May	Text, screenshot video of youtube channel of couple who gave up adopted son from China when his autism became too hard for them to deal with		60,446	3,321	Adoption (white privilege, victimhood)	"A white savior always finds a way to center themselves and make it about them. When things don't go as expected, it becomes all too clear that it was never about the non-white person or people. We can not imagine if this was their biological child born with Autism, that they'd just give up on him and "rehome" him like this. The white savior complex has this sense of ownership of non-white people's problems but only up until a certain point"
29 May	Text, visual background, highlighting the US reaction to the killing of George Floyd	#georgeloyd #icantbreathe #ericgarner	32,791	215	White supremacy, ungrievable lives (violence, police brutality)	"Pay attention to how much overt white supremacy & anti-Black violence white folks need to be presented w/ to start caring & speaking up. What finally humanised Black people for you? Was it having to stare a man in the eyes for 7 minutes as the life left his body?" "We want to acknowledge our Black sisters and brothers in the USA right now. We see you, we feel for you and we are with you (in spirit and in the fight for justice). We are here to mobilize & organize however we can from a distance."
31 May	Text, visual background, highlighting white supremacy and black solidarity	#NoJusticeNoPeace #WeHaveNothingToLoseButOurChains #GeorgeFloyd #BlackLivesMatter #blackliberation	40,419	123	White supremacy, ungrievable lives , collective activism (violence, police brutality)	"They've had the chance to resolve this peacefully for HUNDREDS OF YEARS. White supremacy is violence & will protect itself at all costs. It's time declare a WAR ON WHITE SUPREMACY. This requires BLACK UNITY & white solidarity" "Black America, you are our sisters and brothers and we will ALWAYS stand with you. Please know that"

2 June	Text, screenshot, video of Pepsi ad, highlighting companies and celebrities virtue signalling in order to make money	@kimkardashian @kyliejenner @khloekardashian @kendalljenner #georgefloyd	205,912 views, 22,857 likes	216	White supremacy, ungrievable lives , virtue signalling	"celebrities & companies alike are pulling some high key virtue signalling based off the fear of losing money or favour" "Many celebrities, companies, brands, influencers.... they are "speaking up" and "using their voice". Because, finally, it's reached a point that saying nothing at all could actually mean a loss of $$$$. The tides are turning and a fight for justice is becoming the NORM.."
4 June	Text, visual background, asking "so when are we putting sanctions in the United States? This is the accountability measure we use when a country refuses to end its human rights abuses, is it not?"	#Nowhitesaviors #BlackLivesMatter #BlackLiberation #AbolishPrisons #georgefloyd	33, 725	225	White supremacy, ungrievable lives , collective activism (violence, police brutality)	"We can't stand by and watch all of this happen without showing up for our Black family in America fighting fearlessly and tirelessly. Make no mistake, the news today was a DIRECT RESULT of your protests. The charges against that sick, killer cop Derek Chauvin have been increased to second-degree murder." "For the next 24 hours we will be collecting funds to donate to two Black-lead Philly based organizations @phillybailout and @_terrancelewis_iaminnocent (we will share his non-profit's website in our stories).
5 June	Text, visual background (slideshow) titled "8 Ways to Put Your Solidarity Into Action for Black Liberation : We cant afford to just theorise revolution, we need to actualize it together"	#blacklivesmatter #nowhitesaviors #blackliberation	45,078	219	White supremacy, ungrievable lives , collective activism (violence, police brutality)	"We continue to stand in solidarity with our Black family in the United States. We see you leading the revolution & galvanizing the people. The African family on the Continent and in the Diaspora has to be more unified than ever for this to work on a domestic & international level. White supremacy has worked very strategically to divide and pin Black folks against each other for hundreds of years. From the drawing of colonial borders, to the diversion of "what about Black on Black crime", to the disconnect we can see between Africans on the Continent and those in the diaspora. All of us have been subjected to deeply anti-Black propaganda & we need to counter that ALWAYS."
6 June	Text, visual background (slideshow), screenshot of news article highlighting problematic usage of the term "unheard voices"	@minorityafrica, @caleb_okereke	10,191	51	Passivity, narrative construction (western-centric, ethical storytelling)	"Perhaps the most problematic thing about White people like Jonny Geller categorizing African and Black Voices in stories, media, and even Academia as "unheard" is that it attempts to exonerate the West and White folks like Geller of the role they play in "unhearing." . Its even more problematic because it suggests that a voice is only being "heard" when it is being listened to by the West"

7 June	Text, visual background, highlighting attempted narrative control by "people who benefit from anti-blackness"	@nfl, @kaepernick7, #blacklivesmatter, #georgefloyd	37,388	244	White supremacy, ungrievable lives , virtue signalling	"We don't want to see any more photos or videos of police taking a knee, marching w/ protestors or condemning what happened to #GeorgeFloyd unless we see some hard evidence that this isn't only symbolic. Get up off your knee & acknowledge the violence you've been complicit in. . Get up off your knee & demand that Qualified Immunity be abolished immediately"
8 June	Text, visual background, fundraising		9,137	167	Community engagement,solidarity	"We need to raise $100,000 to make this dream a reality! If you've stuck around long enough, you will know that we have always raised big money for others. We've fundraised for legal fees on multiple cases, the launching of a safe shelter for survivors of sex trafficking, solidarity for Black-lead Philly based non-profits doing important work as well as investing in our Ugandan-lead community projects. . We want to break down where this $100,000 will be going: . Complete start up costs to open a libratory library and cafe that will serve multiple purposes."
11 June	Text, visual background, highlighting collective anger and protest	#georgefloyd	56,733	229	Community engagement, power dynamics (activism, narrative creation)	"There have been more coloniser / imperialist statues taken down, beheaded or pushed into bodies of wanter in the last 2 weeks than there have been in the last century. The REVOLUTION is now. This is what happens when the masses stand together & refuse to concede to oppression"
14 June	Text, visual background, screenshots of news headlines highlighting racism and white supremacy in social work	#defundthepolice, @huffpost #DecolonizeSocialWork #Nowhitesaviors #blacklivesmatter	34,337	373	White supremacy, racism	"' …100% for the defunding of police but social work is deeply rooted in anti-Black racism as well. It's also deeply rooted in violence against Indigenous & Latinx communities as well."
14 June	Text, Ida. B. Wells quote, visual background	#blacklivesmatter	17,468	65	White supremacy, economics	"The appeal to the white man's pocket has ever been more effectual than all the appeals ever made to his conscience" Ida. B. Wells
15 June	Text, visual background, highlighting education systems with regards to how slavery and colonialism is taught in the classroom	#blacklivesmatter	40,354	116	Decolonisation of education, white supremacy	"We know education & religion to be two serious enforcers of racism & white supremacy around the world. Schools at all levels as well as religious institutions are places that people go to in order to make sense of the world around them. So long as whiteness is still centered & lies or half truths are being taught, we will not see true liberation."

16 June	Text, Malcolm X quote, visual background	#blacklivesmatter	9,822	23	Decolonisation of education, white supremacy (solidarity, community engagement, activism)	"In the awake of the protests against state sanctioned police brutality, most especially against Black people in the USA after George Floyd was murdered by police, a lot has tangibly changed. Different individuals from different cities all over the world have held protests in solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter movement. We were mortified to see mocking statements making rounds on social media about how we as Africans, or in particular Ugandans, should concentrate on fighting tribalism rather than chanting BLACK LIVES MATTER . There is a chance that statements like this are coming from a place of ignorance and largely from the miseducation / colonized education African people are subjected to."
17 June	Text, visual background, highlighting justice and liberation	#blackliberation #nowhitesaviors #blacklivesmatter	12,218	26	Decolonisation of education, white supremacy (solidarity, community engagement, activism)	"We need to love justice & be more committed to justice than anything else in our lives. It can't be a side hobby or afterthought. It can not be optical or for likes. It requires us to make it core to our lives in every way possible."
17 June	Text, video from The Washington Post highlighting citizen patrols as confidence in police falls		143,524 views, 9,444 likes	159	Community engagement, power dynamics (activism, narrative creation)	"what you see is the community protecting the community"
18 June	Text, @djuan____ quote, visual background		15,336	114	Community engagement, power dynamics (activism, narrative creation)	"a serious flaw of revolutionary movements in the past has been that primary focus was on dismantling a current system, as opposed to imagining and ultimately creating a new and just society"
19 June	Text, visual background, announcement of podcast		2,866	6	Narrative creation, media	"We believe it has a lot of relevant information to help you become more media literate & aware of how media has been used throughout history to maintain systems of oppression."
19 June	Text, visual background, Happy Juneteenth post	#happyjuneteenth	19,923	30	Community engagement, power dynamics (activism)	"Today is a day to honor the ancestors & pay homage to all they have done in the fight toward freedom and liberation. It's a day of remembrance. At the same time, it's a day to acknowledge that freedom and liberation have not yet been actualized for Black people"

21 June	Text, meme humour, highlighting rhetoric from white churches	#nowhitesaviors #BlackLiberation #blackpower	43,332	435	White supremacy, ungrievable lives , virtue signalling (hypocrisy)	"The church, especially the white Christian church, has been complicit in so much violence against Black & Brown communities in the USA and around the world. Remember that 80% of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump"
23 June	Text, visual background, highlighting lack of arrests	#breonnaTaylor, #ReneeBach, #Uganda	28, 742	153	White supremacy, ungrievable lives , collective activism (violence against black bodies)	"YOUR MONDAY REMINDER THAT WE ARE ONLY GETTING STARTED & while there have been some wins these last few weeks, there's still so much accountability that has NOT happened for perpetrators of anti-Black violence. BLACK LIVES ARE IRREPLACEABLE"
23 June	Text, visual background, highlighting decrease in "revolutionary energy"		23,595	95	Community engagement (activism)	"Have you been noticing that the *trend* of outrage against anti-Black violence is starting to fizzle out? Many who were posting, calling, donating, dedicating their social media content to bringing awareness to the violent, oppressive system of American policing... it is slowing down quite drastically. So what can we do?"
26 June	Text, visual background, screenshot (slideshow), highlighting social media censorship	@instagram, @nws_backup_account, @facebook, #blacklivesmatter	36,192	857	suppression, bias, community engagement	"If you've been with us for a while, then you're aware @instagram has threatened to delete our account (which is why we had to create @nws_backup_account) on more than one occasion. We've had multiple posts taken down," "We see through your #BlackLivesMatter branding and "support" or "solidarity" with Black voices. Which Black voices exactly? Certainly no one that is seriously holding anti-Black racism & white supremacy accountable."
29 June	Text, visual background, screenshot highlighting Renee Bach		48,984	742	Accountability, medial racism, white privilege	"What does it mean to be a white woman and claim *good intentions* after causing unquestionable violence on Black bodies? . It means you're not only FREE, but that you can get engaged before ever being arrested or paying a single dollar or shilling in reparations to the 100+ Ugandan families who believed you were a doctor, believed you were running a medical facility, who trusted you in their most vulnerable moment…."
2 July	Text, visual background, screenshot (slideshow), highlighting arrests of account owners at the first Ugandan Black Lives Matter protest	@mailandguardian, #blacklivesmatter, #covid19, #breonnataylor, #reneebach	11,019	153	Accountability, medial racism, white privilege, ungrievable lives	"While the Ugandan police claimed that they detained us for going against #Covid19 restrictions, this clearly wasn't the case, as we've seen a number of influencers here in Kampala holding larger gatherings without anyone wearing masks or social distancing. . Standing up for & fighting to protect Black lives is more offensive in this global system dominated by anti-Black racism than the murder of #BreonnaTaylor or the countless babies who died while #ReneeBach experimented on them."

3 July	Text, visual background, screenshots of news reports (slideshow), highlighting performative allyship	#decoloniseyourmind	24,135	104	Accountability, performative allyship	"There seems to be an urgent haste to exhibit like-mindedness with the ongoing BLM protests globally by white people/ those in proximity to whiteness. It is beginning to feel like diversity and inclusion without equity aka tokenism. Black people have been tokenized in the media, politics, work spaces & in the process are faced w/ a heightened compulsion to perform"
5 July	Text, visual background, screenshot highlighting Fredrick Douglas and July 4th	#BreonnaTaylor	30,469	93	Colonisation (oppression, justice)	Wear a mask & AREST THE COPS WHO KILLED #BreonnaTaylor"
5 July	Text, visual background, djuan____ quote	@djuan____	20,252	78	Community engagement, power dynamics (activism, decolonisation of education)	"Having the right university degrees, institutional accolades or gaining a certain number of followers can't be the measure of our fitness to lead the revolution. How fearlessly committed are we when it comes to staring violent systems of oppression in the face? How are we improving the lives of the most marginalized? How are we ACTUALIZING JUSTICE?"
7 July	Text, visual background, photographs (slideshow), highlighting black activists who were exiled and/ or assassinated	#nowhitesaviors #blackliberation #Blacklivesmatter #liberation	24,303	111	Community engagement, power dynamics (activism, decolonisation of education)	"Anti-Black racism & white terrorism has been legalized within our global institutions and systems for centuries. So when we talk about holding acts of anti-Black violence accountable, it requires us to imagine & create a world where this will actually be the norm rather than the rare exception. For too long, those who have held white violence accountable have been criminalized, framed & even murdered for the threat that they have posed to these systems."
7 July	Text, meme humour, for-for-profit adoptions	@hashtagfostercare @_heytra @fosteryouthempowered @uwerakathy @priyangikasamanthie —	15,411	195	Adoption, white saviour complex, eurocentrism	"In many cultures, there is no word for adoption. If you are from a non-English speaking, non-white country, we would like to know if there is a word that would directly translate to adoption? The concept of severing family / blood ties is very foreign in many parts of the world."
9 July	Text, visual background, (slideshow), highlighting revolutionary theatre	@djuan____	5,980	56	Revolutionary theatre, performance allyship (community engagement)	"Perhaps one of the biggest dangers of revolutionary theater AND the white savior complex is their tendency to stifle the very progress they claim to be prioritizing. If we care more about being seen doing the work, above actually doing the work; if we care more about naming the problem & holding big conferences to discuss it, rather than actually combatting it... we are into the optics of justice & revolution, but we are NOT committed to actualizing it & changing the realities for those who are suffering most under systems of oppression."