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Global Resonances of the Black Lives Matter Movement

Claire C. Robison

THE 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in response to the murder of George Floyd—and relatedly, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor—ignited a powerful wave of protests across large cities and small towns throughout the US. This brought to a confluence widespread outrage over another instance of violence against a Black man by state forces and the underlying, structural racism that enables these acts to occur with chilling frequency. In one sense, this is a uniquely American conversation, grounded in the country's history of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and myriad racial inequalities in access to housing, quality of healthcare, and education among other markers of economic and social attainment. However, many Americans looked on in amazement as an image of George Floyd was painted on the wall separating Israel from the occupied West Bank in Bethlehem, and as Syrian artists Aziz Asmar and Anis Hamdoun painted Floyd's likeness on a lone remaining pillar of a building destroyed by aerial bombing

in Idlib, along with the messages of “No to Racism” and “I Can't Breathe.” Statements highlighting “Black Lives Matter” and Floyd's last words appeared on placards from Madrid to Pretoria to Rio de Janeiro. In each of these contexts, the specificity of George Floyd's unjust death and its legibility within the particular structure of systemic racism within the US was mapped onto a protest of local structures of oppression.

Racism, casteism, and local religious chauvinisms all stem from different historical circumstances and have forged distinct unequal relationships. However, as highlighted in the “Statement on Racism, Casteism, and Religious Chauvinism” issued by the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies, people around the world are making connections between these different structures of oppression. This speaks of widespread frustration and exhaustion with forms of state violence that are perpetuated in everyday life. Also, compellingly, the sparks lit

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by protests against Floyd's murder convey a shared inspiration to harness the power of outrage against US police violence toward Black Americans to myriad local attempts to overturn historic and contemporary systems of oppression. This has stretched from calls in the UK for a reckoning with Britain's colonial past and role in Transatlantic slavery. That culminated, in one instance, with the toppling a statue of Edward Colston, which was thrown into the Bristol Harbor to the sound of joyous cheering from the interracial crowd lining its banks. In another focused act of dissent in Antwerp, Belgium, led by Belgians of Congolese descent, Belgium's colonial atrocities under Leopold II were scorned. A statue of him was daubed symbolically with red paint and later removed from its pedestal. Aboriginal protestors joined the crowd in Sydney, Australia, highlighting their historic marginalization from the country's

development. At the same time, signs against police brutality were photographed at protests in Tunis and Istanbul, while protests in Balkan and Eastern European countries highlighted the experiences of Roma and refugees. And prominent voices in Indian media linked the systemic racism and police violence in the US to local acts of violence suffered by Muslim, Dalit, and SC/ST individuals—all in the hope that the BLM protests will also provide an opening to address local structures of oppression. These powerful connections being made in international protests are echoed in this letter. I deeply hope that such transnational resonances will lead to greater justice and respect for those who see themselves reflected in the image of George Floyd and the brutality that he experienced at the hands of someone who was supposed to represent the protection of his own government.