City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Banerjee, B. (2023). War in Peace: Race, Organized Violence and the Unbearable Whiteness of Being. Organization Studies, 44(2), pp. 327-330. doi: 10.1177/01708406221131935

This is the published version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/29137/

Link to published version: https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406221131935

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to City Research Online policy.

City Research Online: http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/ publications@citystgeorges.ac.uk

Check for updates

War in Peace: Race, Organized Violence and the Unbearable Whiteness of Being

Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee*

Earlier this year, I was one of several speakers on a panel titled 'Modernity Unhinged: Organized Violence in its Contexts' where the war in Ukraine was described as "the latest, terrible example of modernity becoming unhinged, derailed, and appropriated towards violent end." The assumption here is that modernity has become unhinged because of the war in Ukraine, or at least the war was the latest example of an unhinged modernity. I challenge this assumption and argue that modernity has always been unhinged since its creation. Modernity is deeply embedded in the idea of empire and colonialism, whose mission involved political subjugation of those it sought to empower and civilize. While European historical narratives celebrate the Enlightenment and modernity as a liberating and progressive force, histories of black people, people of color, and Indigenous peoples that have borne the brunt of modernity have different stories to tell: of genocides, colonial domination, environmental destruction, disease, and cultural devastation (Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021).

Commenting on the international response to the war in Ukraine in a recent Agora piece, Pawlak (2022) pointed to "ignorance in the organization of aid." While remarking on the "almost complete unanimity about providing aid" to Ukrainian refugees and "the touching mobilization to aid Ukrainians" he rightly asks why the same welcome is not offered to other refugees; for example, those fleeing war in the Middle East. Pawlak points to "Islamophobic fears" and "deeply internalized racism (because) people fleeing Ukraine are white Europeans," but then chose to focus "on the interplay of knowledge and ignorance" to explain the organization of humanitarian aid to Ukrainian refugees. Leaving aside the question of why most European and North American organizational scholars choose to ignore the question of race, I want to enter this conversation with race and racism firmly at the center of my argument. Why? Because by refusing to engage with race the "interplay of knowledge and ignorance" can only create a sanctioned ignorance that normalizes racism.

Apparently, modernity has become unhinged because white people are killing other white people in Europe, without any recognition that white people killing and dispossessing black and brown people has always been constitutive of modernity through its colonial practices. Like many of us I received several petitions to sign condemning the war in Ukraine. Why are European and U.S. institutions and governments asking me to condemn this particular war when those very same institutions are responsible for scores of wars and massacres of black and brown civilian populations? Where were these condemnations and petitions against wars waged on non-European peoples?

Particularly galling was a statement by a group of vice chancellors and rectors of European universities, a group with the self-congratulatory name "Eutopia," which claimed: "we defend peace and European values incompatible with the imposition of power by violence." Really? Which planet are these people living on? Imposition of power by violence is not just compatible with European values but is very much a European speciality, where by European I mean not just a geographical location but a discursive space, a set of positionalities embedded in a network of economic and power relations that produce material and discursive effects. How does one explain this breathtakingly arrogant statement? Racism? White supremacy? Historical amnesia? Elsewhere I have written about how colonial systems of knowledge production operate from a position of

*Professor of management and Associate Dean of Research & Enterprise at Bayes Business School, City, University of London; bobby.banerjee@city.ac.uk; twitter: @messiah_naughty

epistemic blindness that makes invisible alternate ways of knowing and being (Banerjee, 2021). When particular ways of knowing become hegemonic, epistemic blindness inevitably leads to forms of *epistemic erasure* that negate or subjugate other realities.

This same blindness and erasure was on display when Condoleezza Rice, the former US Secretary of State, in responding to a question if the invasion of Ukraine was a war crime replied with a straight face that any invasion of any sovereign state was a war crime. Of course, she will never admit that the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq are also war crimes. When is a war crime not a war crime? When it is committed by a western superpower? The narrative about the war and violence in Ukraine is another form of violence because of the erasures, silences and denials it entails. If Putin is a war criminal then so are George W. Bush, Tony Blair, Barack Obama, and dozens of political leaders in so-called western liberal democracies. But they are able to commit these crimes with impunity (with an occasional Nobel Peace Prize thrown in for their efforts). Why stop at freezing the assets of Putin and his oligarchs? Who is going to freeze assets of people like Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, or Elon Musk when the United States and its allies indiscriminately bomb or invade countries?

Racism is another form of violence that is apparent in the Ukraine conflict. Black and brown refugees have faced racism and discrimination at Ukraine's borders, forcibly prevented from boarding trains and buses, with white Ukrainians given priority. African, Asian, and Middle Eastern nationals were denied food, water, and accommodation and left to wait outdoors in freezing winter conditions, unlike white Ukrainians. Needless to say, the majority of mainstream western media chose to ignore these incidents, which is an example of how systemic institutionalised racism and imperialism operates, particularly in the framing of Ukrainian refugees in comparison to refugees from Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan, or Africa. So when a CBS television anchor describes the war in Ukraine as "[t]his isn't Iraq or Afghanistan [. . .] this is Kiev, a relatively civilised, relatively European city," Ukrainian refugees are positioned as more "civilised" and somehow "superior" to refugees from the Middle East, Africa, or Asia. Whiteness is more explicitly articulated by Ukraine's former deputy general prosecutor David Sakvarelidze, who in an interview with the BBC stated: "It's very emotional for me because I see European people with blonde hair and blue eyes being killed every day with Putin's missiles and his helicopters and his rockets." Consequently, Ukrainian lives are worth saving, while the lives of millions of other refugees are disposable because they are people who are not "well-dressed," "middle-class," or don't "look like us" (white).

Leaving aside Ukraine for the moment how is violence organized and deployed in the political economy? In the remainder of this essay I describe the practice of everyday violence, not just by the state which is the only "legitimate" purveyor of violence, but also through the outsourcing of violence to private organizations to protect corporate assets. I will briefly touch upon two cases to illustrate what I mean – first, the everyday violence of occupation in Palestine; and second, the violence of extraction in the mining industry where thousands of people are killed every year and communities dispossessed for mineral extraction.

Palestinians have endured and continue to endure different forms of violence: direct, structural, instrumental, and epistemic violence are part of their daily lives. Some practices of everyday violence that I have personally witnessed during my travels in the West Bank in 2015:

- Spraying Palestinian homes with sewage water (called 'skunk water' – your clothes smell of shit and piss for weeks even after repeated washing);
- Building and expanding illegal settlements;
- Confiscating land using a variety of legal maneuvers (including applying laws dating back to the Ottoman Empire);
- Cutting off access to water and electricity;

- Demolishing Palestinian homes;
- Destroying citrus and olive trees planted by Palestinian farmers. This is a particularly diabolical practice: olive trees take 3 to 4 years to mature. Palestinian farmers spend years planting and tending to the trees which are then destroyed just before the harvest by Israeli soldiers.
- Using multiple checkpoints to restrict movement of Palestinians. I met a 19-year-old student in Ramallah whose permit to visit Tel Aviv-Yafo was denied for the third time. When asked the reason for her visit she said: "To be able to look at the sea. I have never seen the sea in my life." Her permit was denied.
- Arbitrary detention of trucks carrying fresh farm produce at checkpoints. The produce is destined for sale to Palestinian towns and villages in the West Bank. Trucks are detained until the produce rots after which they are allowed to cross the checkpoint.

The list is endless. All this of course is in addition to more direct forms of violence including "targeted" and "extrajudicial killings," assassinations, arbitrary detentions of Palestinians, and allegations of torture by Israeli police and army. And business plays a key role in dispossession and occupation: some of this violence is subcontracted to private firms and obviously much of the equipment is manufactured by companies who are the target of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

In the case of the extractive industries, there are currently nearly 1,500 violent conflicts between the extractives industries and communities. It is no coincidence that most of these conflicts are happening in countries that are former colonies. It is also no coincidence that the mining companies involved in the conflict are headquartered or financed from the former colonizing countries. All these postcolonial countries are also "democracies" which begs the question in what way is democracy serving these communities who are being dispossessed and killed? The state is a key player in these conflicts—many mining projects are joint venture projects involving states and multinational corporations.

The resistance movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) by the Standing Rock Sioux tribal nation is an example of how violence is organized in contemporary liberal democracies. Tribal leaders claimed that the pipeline project would disturb sacred sites, violate past treaties and Indigenous sovereignty as well as pose grave dangers to the tribe's water supply. For the first time in more than 150 years all 7 bands of the Sioux nation came together to protect their land and water. The last time this had happened was when Abraham Lincoln was president, and ironically the protests then were also about dispossession of tribal communities.

The protests that took place in 2016 were violently quelled by militarized police with armored vehicles, rubber bullets, mace, water cannons, attack dogs, tear gas, concussion grenades, armed drones, and helicopters. It is difficult not to see the racialized nature of state violence in quelling tribal protests—these tactics are rarely, if at all used to suppress protests by white U.S. citizens. The project itself was founded on racialized violence: an earlier proposal to route the pipeline through Bismarck, a town whose population is 92% white, was rejected because of risks to the town's water supply. Violence against the protestors was deployed through a collusion between market and state actors: the owners of the pipeline, Energy Transfer Partners, hired the private security firm TigerSwan to conduct surveillance of activists and to provide daily "intelligence updates" to federal and state law enforcement agencies (Banerjee, 2022). When the state and big business collude to become legitimate providers of violence in a democracy then that democracy must be questioned.

These forms of market/state violence can be described as necrocapitalism—modes of accumulation that involve dispossession, death, torture, suicide, slavery, destruction of livelihoods and the

general organization and management of violence (Banerjee, 2008). Some examples of necrocapitalist practices include: the privatized military industry; regimes of property rights that convert collective forms of property rights to private property; forceful expulsion of peasant populations in the name of development or environmental conservation; environmental racism; and intellectual property rights on life forms.

So how has organizational research addressed these social and environmental injustices? How many papers published in our allegedly top-ranked journals describe violence, racism or dispossession? A miniscule number, would be my guess. Perhaps our field does not have the vocabulary, imagination, or courage to engage with "grand challenges" that make us uncomfortable. Maybe it is time to throw out the baby with the bathwater and search for alternate research frameworks.

References

Banerjee, Bobby (2008). Necrocapitalism. *Organization Studies*, *29*, 1541–1563.

Banerjee, Bobby (2021). Decolonizing management theory: A critical perspective. *Journal of Management Studies*, *59*, 1074–1087.

Banerjee, Bobby (2022). Decolonizing deliberative democracy: Perspectives from below. *Journal of Business Ethics*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04971-5

Banerjee, Bobby, & Arjaliès, Diane-Laure (2021). Celebrating the end of Enlightenment: Organization theory in the age of the Anthropocene and Gaia (and why neither is the solution to our ecological crisis). *Organization Theory*, *2*. https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877211036714

Pawlak, Mikołaj (2022). Humanitarian aid in times of war: Organization and ignorance. *Organization Studies*, *43*, 993–996.

Breaking the Spell of the Necromancer

Leonid Sokolovskyy*

Into Darkness

My first encounter with war happened in May 2014, when pro-Russian secessionists came to power in my home city, Donetsk, and my mother was taken hostage in her office by the separatists. My family left everything behind and flew as refugees to the nearby city of Kharkiv, which seemed safe for the time being. For eight years, the tumour of war in Donbas was slowly growing, claiming the lives of 14,000 people in the process. In the early morning of 24 February 2022, the tumour ruptured and the war burst into the rest of the country, razing cities and leaving piles of corpses behind. On the day of the invasion, all of us listened, tensely, to the address of Vladimir Putin, who decided that he was now a historical actor, creating his own reality. The rest of us would be left to fit ourselves within this new world, attempting to survive, resist and make sense of it.

As a PhD student, the unfolding trauma of war triggered a deep psychological search within me to transform my identity as a future academic. While some of my closest relatives are facing Russian artillery in Donbas, how can I be useful? Why am I doing what I am doing? What can I give to this world? Ukrainians are now calling for advanced weaponry and military aid. I'm not a weaponsmith but, perhaps, what is also needed today are theoretical tools (the word 'guns' might

*PhD student in accounting at the Alliance Manchester Business School, University of Manchester; leonid.sokolovskyy@manchester.ac.uk; linkedin: https://www.linkedin.com/in/sokolovskyy