



By Kalundi Serumaga



As I have said before, unless you are quite the expert, if the bicycle you are riding comes to a sudden halt, you are likely to fall with it. Riding a bicycle is an act of deceiving the laws of physics.

The Western economic bicycle has been forced to a stop by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exposed its inability to stand by itself. Against this backdrop, the United States is currently caught up in quite a bit of domestic turmoil. Hundreds of cities and towns, including the capital, are beset with often turbulent protests against yet another set of murders of an African American by American police officers and white vigilantes.

The particular spark was the nearly nine-minute-long police suffocation of George Floyd on a street in Minneapolis. Floyd was arrested on suspicion of a minor offence. Each gruesome minute of his death was captured on a traumatised bystander's cellphone. The protests are of a size of that has probably not been seen since the peak of the 1960s' urban unrest, also against racism.

Matters quickly moved beyond US President Donald Trump's intellectual capacity to manage responsibly. Part of his handicap is that he is temperamentally and ideologically firmly on the side of the very same white supremacist nationalism for which the racist culture of American policing is an essential tool.

Let us be clear: this was a deliberate act of murder. The policeman cannot possibly claim that some kind of accident occurred. He had no less than four items of ongoing information to tell him that something bad was going to happen. The first, of course, was that it is not a normal thing for a human knee to be on a human neck, and so this was a risky holding tactic that would require brief

application, if at all. The second was that George Floyd was repeatedly protesting about his fatal discomfort. The third was that, at some point, George Floyd STOPPED protesting. This meant that either he was no longer physically able to, or had become comfortable. But since the policeman had not removed his knee from Floyd's neck, or even shifted in position (and knew that he had not), then he would have no reason to assume that his prisoner was now comfortable in the same position he had been protesting about just moments before. The last item of information was of the small gathering of onlookers also loudly informing the policeman that his prisoner was in distress. None of this stopped him. He fully intended to kill George Floyd, and fully expected that there would suffer no consequences for this.

It also is a fully visual affirmation of just how callous and inhuman American policing is in regard to, first and foremost, Africa Americans, but by implication, any resident of that country - even white ones who may find themselves targeted one day.

Which is why the presence of large numbers of white Americans, often young, often female, in the marches and demonstrations is significant, since it is White America that has benefitted the most from the American project that stands on the blood-soaked land stolen through an anti-Native genocide, so as to get rich off African American poverty by locking them in spaces where their labour, health, housing and credit can be converted into a profit margin. Is that legacy now being rejected?

By opposing police brutality, the youth are opposing a long and effective American tradition of psychological and physical violence, ideologically backed by racist justifications that began with brutal tortures during enslavement, and then evolved into an apartheid, and continue as police terrorism today.

Much as the United States of America is an autonomous empire, it remained organised like many a sub-Saharan African neocolony since acquiring independence in 1776. The white colonial settlers revolted against their British colonial masters, and took over the colony for themselves. But the basic exploitative economic structure was kept intact. The settlers' quarrel with the British Empire had not been over dismantling the exploitation, but for the settlers to also be able to expand and begin seriously profiting from it themselves. The idea was "Independence" for the white settlers, and nobody else. The means of keeping this perversion of politics in place ever since has produced new levels of violence, dishonesty, trickery and fascism as to create a vast population of people who are basically collectively spiritually and possibly mentally unwell, but well-armed.

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In a sense, White America was culturally short-changed. The conquest and settlement of what is now North and South America was a wholly European idea. The tools of that process - the genocide of Native Americans and then the enslavement of Africans that have left the legacy of what has killed George Floyd and very many millions before him - were all forged in Europe.

Today, however, many try to present the matter as an American problem. It is not; it is a problem of white culture globally. As European colonies, the Americas were the place where Europe's elites outsourced their exploitation. In doing so, they also outsourced the necessary brutalities, and the human beings needed to enforce them. The white European settlers were basically the front line of a

system that required that they become monsters, which they most willing did. This is the cultural inheritance they have failed to dispose of.

The problem now is that white oppression is no longer delivering sufficient benefits. Even the younger white Americans are now seeing the American Dream for the sham it now is. Prosperity seems very remote for people stuck in a “gig economy”, with none of the small assurances of steady employment, health insurance, affordable housing, and affordable credit that were available to their grandparents’ and parents’ generations. And available, it must be emphasised, at the expense of African Americans, who were assured of none of these things, by and large, and yet whose labour was feeding the economy.

Now, thanks to the COVID pandemic, that economy, which had never really recovered from the financial disaster of 2008, is faced with the challenge of maintaining the illusion of forward motion.

This is a problem for the American state and its economic masters. If the present uprising creates a fundamental shift in the thinking of at least younger Americans, then racism will no longer be viable as an economically profitable ideology. The need for exploitation will remain, however, for that is how the American economy works.

So, if the money-makers cannot afford or accept to make smaller profits, then more Americans, irrespective of race, will begin to live a life with more than just a taste of the kind of poverty that currently is largely the experience disproportionately visited upon African American communities, as the poverty would then eventually be spread more evenly among the rest of the population.

That could be the basis of a new cycle of discontent. What people have not yet worked out, is the extent to which this will be a new normal. As Ferguson City’s 2014 disturbances over an earlier police shooting showed, this could still be a forerunner.

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America needs a cure for what amounts to a psychosis affecting a significant part of white American culture, brought on by centuries of being steeped in the blood and gore of innocent people. The collective failure of White America to seek some kind of atonement has left a psychological imbalance. There is now something a part of many a white American settler’s psychological make-up that cannot function rationally when in sight of black, red or brown people. When Martin Luther King described them as “our sick white brothers”, he was describing them, not insulting them.

As an Ethiopian friend of mine, a long-term resident of the United States, put it to me, “It’s like when police are dealing with a black person something in their brain switches off and suddenly this person is no longer human in their eyes.”

In many African cultures, a person returning from any death-like experience, be it war, or exile, or prison is not expected to immediately return to the bosom of his family, or even set foot in his own house. It is accepted that what he might have suffered has a detrimental impact on the soul and psyche. He must first be rebalanced through a process of cleansing, which varies in form and method from culture to culture.

Western society seeks an approximation of this through the various post-traumatic stress disorder

(PTSD) treatments for war veterans and victims of violent crime. However, these tend to be material, not spiritual, and are not culturally embedded, and so attract stigma. Further, they are often only invoked after a person has begun to display signs of mental damage.

War, murder and oppression damage even those who profit from them. But being widespread, the behaviour is taken as “normal” and therefore not seriously interrogated by the perpetrators. But as the world has seen in these recent killings, this is the behaviour of psychopaths. It is simply the collective normalisation of mental illness.

The settlers have two sets of options in dealing with this mess, one rooted in their political tradition of cheating history, and the other potentially based on new thinking.

In the first option, they could try and get the bulk of white opinion back in line by first breaking up the growing racial unity between the demonstrators.

But this may not work, because, unlike in the post-60s period, there is no shiny prosperous economy to dangle in front of non-Black Americans as an alternative to revolution. And despite a new intensity of police attacks on white protesters in Minneapolis and other cities, in an effort to make protest less attractive, this has only further opened their eyes to what African Americans have long seen alone.

Increasing numbers of white youth are basically disillusioned, fed up with the system and the ways it has failed them already. White privilege does not pay the thousands in education loans they are lumbered with, and neither do low-wage jobs. If anything, they may now carry this new understanding forward to their own homes, communities, places of work and educational institutions, and challenge the built-in racism there.

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This second set of options would be based on serious reform. However, new laws and regulations can only achieve so much. African Americans have been revolting against their condition from the moment they were brought to what is now the United States. What all the changes the revolts has brought have also shown that as long as the intent to exploit, and therefore oppress, remains, then reforms can always be undermined.

So what is really needed first is for White America to cleanse itself of the mental silt deposited by the flow of centuries of profit-making blood, tears and pain. We have a belief that it is unwise to allow a young dog to become familiar with the taste of raw meat, blood and bone, as it will grow to want to kill chickens and even pets.

Judging by their conduct while in uniform, for many white people, especially the men, this is now beyond political policy. Like the badly-raised dogs, the scent of black blood abnormally agitates their senses and this defect gets passed on down the generations. There is clearly a need to literally undergo rituals of atonement, in which they exorcise the centuries of innocent blood still haunting their ancestral lines.

But to do that, they will first have to acknowledge their collective illness.

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