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Raciontologies

RECONCEPTUALIZING RACIALIZED ENACTMENTS
AND THE REPRODUCTION OF WHITE SUPREMACY

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If race is only epiphenomenal, how does it continue to ground material reality?

—VISWESWARAN (1996, 73)

IN OCTOBER 2012, Vanessa Díaz was introduced to Chris Guerra by paparazzi photographer Galo Ramirez—one of the main collaborators involved in Díaz's fieldwork, which focused on race and gender in the production of celebrity media, specifically on the work of and relationships between the predominantly Latino paparazzi photographers and predominantly white women celebrity reporters who produce content for celebrity magazines.¹ Guerra was an aspiring paparazzo who had only recently begun working on a freelance basis for the same agency for which Ramirez worked. Ramirez was instructed to mentor Guerra, and Díaz photographed one of their training sessions as they waited near Heidi Klum's mansion in Pacific Palisades, an extremely wealthy neighborhood in Los Angeles. Guerra simultaneously practiced his photography using Díaz as a subject. Her photos of his training were shown during his memorial service.

Guerra was struck by multiple cars and killed on New Year's Day in 2013 as he reportedly followed a California Highway Patrol (CHP) officer's orders to return to his car after trying to photograph pop star Justin Bieber's Ferrari in Los Angeles. Guerra was twenty-nine years old. According to witness testimony and dashcam transcriptions,² the Ferrari was pulled over for speeding. When the passenger of the Ferrari told the officer that Guerra was videotaping the stop, the officer focused his attention on Guerra and let the car's occupants go,³ despite having stopped them for speeding and questioning them about the scent of marijuana in the car.⁴ Mainstream news outlets reported that when the officer ordered Guerra to return to his car, he did not look both ways before crossing and was therefore hit.⁵ In official statements, the officer and investigator declared that Guerra's death was his own

fault. The dashcam transcription tells a more complicated story. After releasing the individuals stopped in the Ferrari, the officer asked Guerra, “What the hell are you doing?” When Guerra explained that he was a photographer and a member of the press, the officer asked, “Do you have any credentials other than you just standing there?” As the officer’s tone became more aggressive, Guerra exclaimed, “OK, alright! Relax!” The officer then scolded Guerra, explaining that the paparazzi should not hassle people and demanded that he return to his car, which was parked across four lanes with no nearby crosswalk. Guerra’s last words were, “All right, brother.” Guerra was hit by one SUV and then by a second car as he attempted to return to his vehicle in accordance with the officer’s orders.⁶ The officer then stopped traffic, eventually calling for help. There was no attempt to revive Guerra, despite the CHP officer’s training in CPR. The dashcam later recorded the officer talking to his partner, “Dude I was just like, I just told him he couldn’t stand there. Fucking idiot, man.”

Despite Guerra’s position as the victim in this situation, the discourse surrounding his death—from the officer who was present at the scene, to celebrities, to the public—treated him as an ignorant nuisance, and his death as a relief. Reacting to the incident, pop star Miley Cyrus posted a series of tweets in which she called the paparazzi “fools,” also stating:

Hope this paparazzi/JB⁷ accident brings on some changes in ’13. Paparazzi are dangerous! . . . It is unfair for anyone to put this on to Justin’s conscious (sic) as well! This was bound to happen! Your mom teaches u when your (sic) a child not to play in the street! The chaos that comes with the paparazzi acting like fools makes it impossible for anyone to make safe choices.

Comments from viewers of online video reports of Guerra’s death echoed many of these sentiments, declaring such things as: “It’s sad when people die. Paparazzi, not so much”; “Paparazzi don’t count as human beings, so it’s ok to laugh when one gets flattened”; “Poor Justin. I feel so bad for him. Fuck you, paparazzi”; and “More paparazzi need to die. If I see one on the road, I will swerve to hit the mother fucker.”⁸

Instead of being seen as an integral part of Hollywood and broader media industries, paparazzi work is popularly derided and framed as disposable. Still, Guerra’s position as a photographer on whose labor the entertainment industry relies and yet ridicules, implicates him in fraught modes of surveillance and the reproduction of hierarchies linked to this monitoring of celebrity figures. Paparazzi photography tends to focus on white, mostly women celebrities; it renders predominantly white celebrities vulnerable and worthy of empathy and humanization, while systematically erasing people of color and dehumanizing the paparazzi of color who perpetuate this system (Díaz 2020). The gendered and racialized media patterns that led to Guerra’s death are intimately linked to the broader dynamics that problematically position particular victims of racial profiling and institutional racism as more grievous than others.⁹

Guerra’s story highlights the disparate treatment and (im)mobilities of particular laborers within the Hollywood-industrial complex (Díaz 2020), but such realities are not unique to these laborers or this industry; rather, they are representative of institutional structures that produce dramatically disparate and highly consequential experiences based

on the racialized ways various entities come to be perceived and positioned. We are interested in exploring not only the ways institutional contexts and processes such as mass media, the criminal justice system, racialized labor (trans)formations, and gentrification function as sites or vehicles for the reproduction of white supremacy, but more specifically how institutions become endowed with the capacity to act in their own right—that is, institutions as subjects, profilers, and even killers. This view of institutions as actors *in* rather than simply sites or vehicles *for* the reproduction of white supremacy represents what we call a *raciontological* perspective that attends to the central role that race plays in constituting modern subjects and objects, including forms of embodiment and broader material realities. *Raciontologies*—the fundamentally racialized grounding of various states of being, which sheds light on complex forms of institutional racism and white supremacy—powerfully shape how entities are endowed with the capacity to engage in particular acts while also conditioning perceptions, experiences, and material groundings of reality.

Our conceptualization of *raciontologies* seeks to contribute to the broader anthropology of white supremacy by offering frames for rethinking the nature of institutionalized racial violence and vulnerability. In this chapter, we engage with the killings of Guerra and other highly publicized police and public vigilante killings. Since the first version of this essay was published in 2019, we have seen countless additional examples of the perilous implications of *raciontological* realities. In the summer of 2020, incidents of anti-Black state violence sparked unprecedented public protests and rebellions across the United States and throughout the world. The uprisings erupted after the police murder of George Floyd, the civilian murder of Ahmaud Arbery, and the state-sanctioned police killing of Breonna Taylor. During this time of uprising, additional state-sanctioned racial violence included the police killings of Latinx youth such as Sean Monterrosa and Andrés Guardado in California as well as thirteen-year-old Adam Toledo in Chicago. Many mainstream institutions responded by superficially affirming racial diversity in ways that obscure institutional racism and frame antiracism as a matter of celebrating naturally occurring racial identities, rather than fundamentally transforming historical power structures and their ongoing realities. In contrast, to understand the central role of race in constituting modern states of being, our conceptualization of *raciontologies* combines anthropological analyses of institutional racism and ontologies beyond the human. By synthesizing insights from these literatures, it becomes possible to understand institutions as actors, on the one hand, and various ontologies' fundamental anchoring in race, on the other. That is, while institutional racism has emerged as a crucial framework for conceptualizing racism as an endemic structural phenomenon and not simply a problem at the level of interpersonal bigotry or discrimination, we emphasize the ways that institutions operate not only as sites for but also actors in the reproduction of white supremacy. Relatedly, while anthropological engagements with the ontological turn have attuned ethnographic attention to human and more-than-human actors, we point to the need to reconceptualize race as a key element in constituting modern ontologies.

We examine instances of institutional racism and racial profiling drawn from ethnographic research and broader accounts to demonstrate the potential benefits and limitations of various approaches to documenting and analyzing these phenomena; we also point to examples situated in a range of institutional and interactional settings to emphasize that racism is an endemic modern antagonism rather than a problem particular to any specific institution or individual. We illustrate part of what is at stake here by pointing to the particular instance of institutional racism tied to the death of Vanessa's research collaborator, Chris Guerra. And yet, we emphasize that it is not an unusual case. In fact, it represents the kinds of daily and deadly state-sanctioned institutional racism and white supremacy fundamental to the founding and continued reproduction of the United States as a settler-colonial project.

Rethinking Institutional Racism and the "Ontological Turn"

In 1955 (2001, 42), Caribbean philosopher Aimé Césaire declares, "My turn to state an equation: colonization = thingification." Insofar as the emergence of modern racism can be conceptualized as a justification for colonialism, we must also analyze the relationship between racialization and thingification. This relationship was illustrated during the 2013 trial of George Zimmerman for the killing of Trayvon Martin, a fifteen-year-old African American boy. During his closing arguments, Mark O'Mara, Zimmerman's defense attorney, disputed the prosecution's claim that Martin was an unarmed teenager. O'Mara carried a slab of concrete into the courtroom and displayed it before the jury. He suggested that Martin was in fact armed with the sidewalk, which he allegedly used to bludgeon Zimmerman during their altercation, thereby constituting Zimmerman's use of a firearm as a legitimate form of self-defense. Zimmerman went on to be acquitted. Seemingly objective things were fundamentally and consequentially transformed in the encounter between Zimmerman and Martin, as well as the legal recontextualization thereof. Zimmerman perceived the can of juice and pack of skittles Martin carried as potential weapons or drug paraphernalia, his hooded sweatshirt as thug wear, his slight stature as threatening; meanwhile, Zimmerman's attorney argued that Martin's very presence weaponized the sidewalk. Thus, *things*, including candy, soft drinks, sweatshirts, sidewalks, cell phones, and cameras are only constituted as such when they are inhabited and animated by—that is, indexically grounded in—normative whiteness.¹⁰ For those who perceive the world through what DuBois (1903) formulated as a racial veil that produces experiences of double consciousness, there is significant question as to whether they are experiencing the same *things* as those who are not.

Thinking back to Césaire's equation of colonization and thingification, it is crucial to reconsider the fundamental role of racial domination in constituting the modern order of *things*. In fact, we might examine the interplay between racial thingification and anthropological empiricism—how white supremacy constitutes things without being recognized as functioning in such ways. Following Kamala Visweswaran (1996, 73), we ask, "If race is only epiphenomenal, how does it continue to ground material reality?" This is not

simply an important consideration for societies rooted in histories of chattel slavery and Indigenous genocide, such as the United States, but rather across a modern world that has been profoundly shaped by the global imposition of colonial distinctions and hierarchies. In her analysis of these white supremacist configurations and contestations thereof, Christina Sharpe (2016, 21) notes that anti-Blackness is a “total climate,” which she formulates as “the Weather.”

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon (1967, 109) conceptualizes race as a fundamentally ontological problem.¹¹ He writes, “I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.” Fanon articulates a theory of race as ontological overdetermination. Building on Fanon’s thinking, racism must be understood not in terms of a conflict that can be resolved by redistributing rights and resources in prevailing political and economic orders, but rather as an ontological problem that is the foundation of modern governance and subjectivity. That is, modern governance is institutional racism.

In some ways, this reframing of institutional racism can be understood in relation to the move toward an anthropology of the posthuman and the study of ontological logics that differentiate human and more-than-human entities. However, in our analysis of institutionalized forms of racial profiling, we highlight the ironic avoidance of race, racism, and racialization in recent anthropological accounts of ontology that seek to examine and expand the range of entities understood to be endowed with the capacity to act. While the “ontological turn” has received a great deal of attention in anthropological literature over the last decade (De la Cadena 2015), and while studies in Indigenous contexts are often the reference point for alternative ontological realities, race has largely been absent from these analyses. In fact, one of the most central and compelling components of race is its capacity to transform particular subjects into objects—or, in the context of institutionalized modes of profiling, targets of surveillance, measurement, management, remediation, expulsion, and extermination. How might the “ontological turn” be reconceptualized through attention to the profound role of race in structuring modern ontologies?¹²

This attention to the racial dimensions of ontology is informed by Sylvia Wynter’s (1994) thinking on the institutional transformation of particular racialized persons into nonpersons. In the aftermath of the Rodney King beating, the acquittal of the officers involved, and the subsequent public rebellion, Wynter analyzed the use of the category “No Human Involved” within the City of Los Angeles’s criminal justice system to refer to alleged African American and Latinx gang members who were shot or killed by police. Wynter argued that the category “No Human Involved” was part of broader institutional logics that sanctioned police officers’ use of chokeholds that killed multiple young Black males. At the time, police chief Darryl Gates attributed these killings to Black males’ abnormal windpipes (Wynter 1994).

In 2014, New York City police officer Daniel Pantaleo used a similar chokehold to kill Eric Garner, an unarmed African American man who was selling loose cigarettes (Goodman and Wilson 2014). Video recordings of both the Rodney King beating that prompted

Wynter's inquiry and the killing of Eric Garner prompted widespread public outrage, yet none of the officers involved were convicted of criminal charges (in the case of Garner, no criminal charges were filed; in the King case, two of the officers were eventually found guilty of violating King's civil rights). The inability of these recordings to legally delegitimize police officers' actions reflects the need for a reconsideration of a racialized semiotics of visibility. As Charles Goodwin (1994, 606) notes in his analysis of the institutionalized "professional vision" through which the King recording was interpreted, "the ability to see a meaningful event is not a transparent, psychological process but instead a socially situated activity accomplished through the deployment of a range of historically constituted discursive practices." It is now customary for police officers to wear body cameras to document their actions, and yet videos of police officers assaulting and killing unarmed and compliant individuals continue to surface regularly; thus, Goodwin's insights help us to understand the limitations of these body cameras as a check on extrajudicial police violence.

These cases demonstrate how institutionalized ways of perceiving racialized persons can transform their ontologies. Rodney King was described as a "PCP-crazed giant," even though he never tested positive for consumption and was huddled in a ball on the ground throughout the beating. This is similar to officer Darren Wilson's description of Michael Brown, the unarmed African American teenager he shot and killed in Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014. In the grand jury hearing, Wilson referred to Brown as "it," characterized him as a "demon," and said that he "felt like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan," even though he and Brown were the same height (Bonilla and Rosa 2015). Twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was illegible as a child playing with a toy gun when Cleveland police shot and killed him within two seconds of encountering him. Institutionalized perceptions of racial difference can overdetermine what kind of a thing one is and legally authorize extreme, indeed existential, measures. The sections that follow demonstrate the implications of the co-constitution of race and ontology—raciontologies—across a range of interactional and institutional contexts.

Raciontologies and Institutionalized Disposability

Analyses of institutional racism and white supremacy must grapple with the ways various institutions—even those seemingly unrelated to one another—work in tandem to reproduce formations of power. The concept of raciontologies can provide insight into this interinstitutional coordination by drawing connections among systematic, racialized perceptions and attributions of deficiency and disposability across contexts. Díaz encountered these racialized perceptions and attributions in her fieldwork with celebrity photographers, centering on Hollywood as a major cultural and institutional force that wields larger systemic power. Over the last two decades, the demographics of the Los Angeles paparazzi photographers transitioned from a labor force of predominantly white men to one of predominantly men of color—mostly Latino. In the wake of this shift, figures across Hollywood industries characterized the new paparazzi as unprofessional and dangerous.¹³ This critique was often framed in explicitly racialized terms, focused on *whose* bodies were

producing this media content and how that devalued the work and potential professionalism inherent in the work itself (Díaz 2014). It quickly spread into public discourse, with news articles referring to paparazzi as “untrained,” “corner-cutting” “foreigners working on . . . questionable visas,”¹⁴ and online reader comments calling them “bottom feeders”¹⁵ and “illegals”¹⁶ who should “be deported.”¹⁷ The unique positions these photographers occupy, demographically and professionally, within the labor chain of celebrity media production, have made them convenient, if problematic, scapegoats for the current climate of celebrity obsession in the United States.

Raciontologies and Social Death

The story about photographer Chris Guerra’s death which opens this chapter illustrates how, from a raciontological perspective, we can understand the intertwined nature of various sociohistorical, individual, material, and institutional entities and processes. When institutional racism and white supremacy are enacted, it is often presupposed that these phenomena can only be produced by racist white individuals. This logic obviates institutional culpability and recenters interpersonal interaction and embodiment. In cases such as the killing of unarmed African American Florida teenager Trayvon Martin, the self-identified mixed-race Latino man who killed him—George Zimmerman—was labeled by outlets like the *New York Times* and CNN as “white Hispanic” to enhance the narrative of interpersonal racism.¹⁸ When Philando Castile, an African American man, was killed in Minnesota by a Latino police officer, Jeronimo Yanez, numerous articles presupposing a mutual exclusivity between Blackness and Latinidad pointed to Yanez as embodying anti-Blackness among Latinxs. Indeed, anti-Blackness is endemic in Latin America and the Caribbean, and their diasporas, as it is in the United States and throughout the modern world. However, narratives focused on interpersonal, as opposed to institutional, racism prevent us from understanding cases such as the three Black officers who were involved in the killing of Freddie Gray in Baltimore. More recently, five Black officers were charged in the 2023 police murder of Tyre Nichols. Similarly complex racial politics were at play in the death of Chris Guerra. We suggest that the *institutional* position of these officers (and those functioning as ad hoc police subsidiaries, as in the case of Zimmerman), regardless of their racial identities or interpersonal prejudices, allows them to enact white supremacy as agents of the state. Thus, simply diversifying an institution such as the criminal justice system does not eliminate racism or the broader raciontological realities through which it is enacted and reproduced.

The CHP officer who policed Guerra to death was Black. Guerra is the son of a Mexican father and an African American mother. In a conversation between Díaz and Chris’s mother, Vicky, during which they collectively mourned Chris’s death, she did not view his treatment as influenced by his racial positioning. Focusing instead on his economic positioning, she stated, “Nobody cares about this because Chris was poor.” Vicky Guerra’s emphasis on class rather than race in efforts to understand her son’s killing aligns with her valorization of Chris’s efforts toward upward socioeconomic mobility. While race was not something that Vicky Guerra, her husband, Juan Guerra, or their son could control, they

understood class as a variable, a particular circumstance that she declared Chris was trying to get himself out of. She said Chris was doing paparazzi work for the money, but “being a paparazzi wasn’t going to be a full-time forever job. Eventually he wanted to go back and do his own business. He had his own landscaping business before. He wanted to maybe open up a pizza place.” Vicky suggests that Chris was simply attempting to fulfill the American dream—trying to pull himself up by his paparazzi bootstraps to improve his life. In her theorization of social death and accompanying attempts to humanize those who are not seen as human, Lisa Cacho (2012) notes that tropes of the American Dream and the “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” narrative are commonly invoked in attempts to render racialized populations worthy of empathy. However, Cacho suggests that such efforts run up against racialized populations’ fundamental disposability. Vicky Guerra pondered a similar logic in a dialogue with Díaz in which she reconsidered how Chris’s racialization might have affected the way his labor was policed. She explained:

It never occurred to me how Chris looked. He usually didn’t wear a hoodie on shoots but it was January and cold. He had a baseball cap under the hood also. The more I pictured what he must have looked like, the more . . . it makes even more sense that this officer thought Chris was a Hispanic nobody from the “hood,” similar to Trayvon [Martin] who was perceived as trouble as he was just innocently walking home from the store. But I do think it was a power trip and rage also . . . [it] double hurts if that makes sense. Almost like he had no chance to survive even if the cop didn’t lose his temper because he thought Chris was just a lowly Mexican. And that was why he never helped him in any way and had so much hate for him even after he was hit.

Vicky Guerra sought to reconcile racialized perceptions of Chris’s position as a paparazzo with the notion that her son’s killing was the product of an exceptional instance of police power. Cacho’s analysis of this interplay between individual characteristics and institutional processes in her theorization of everyday life for people of color, specifically Black and/or Latinx identified people, echoes Vicky Guerra’s sentiment: “We learn that the ‘facts’ of people’s behaviors have little significance for determining whose deaths are tragic and whose deaths are deserved” (Cacho 2012, 150). Even if in interpersonal encounters it was possible for Guerra’s racial identity to be perceived in shifting ways, his racialized structural reality left him in a state of being that Cacho characterizes as “permanently criminalized,” “ineligible for personhood,” and, thus, experiencing social death (Cacho 2012, 6–7).

In previous cases, the race of agents of the state in relation to those who are killed under their watch or by them has been used to assert that racism was not a factor in the targeting of particular individuals. For example, the legal defense team of a Latino US Marine successfully argued that their client, who shot and killed a Latino teenager on the teen’s family property in Texas, “could not have possibly racially profiled” because the perpetrator and victim were both Latino and phenotypically similar (Márquez 2012, 498).¹⁹ As John Márquez argues in his theorization of a racial state of expendability, examples like these serve as reminders “of how expendability is not derived from the perceptions and/or

consent of white people and is also not reducible to corporeal signifiers of racial difference” (498).²⁰ Thus, regardless of their racial identities, agents of the state participate in the maintenance and reproduction of white supremacy. The death of Chris Guerra reflects the limitations of understanding race, racial profiling, and institutional racism exclusively in relation to the body; Guerra’s body could be racially identified in different ways, but in this particular encounter, he inhabited a racialized structural position that rendered him disposable.

The importance of not limiting one’s analysis of race to perceived bodily features is underscored by Barnor Hesse’s (2016, viii) “colonial constitution of race thesis,” which holds that “race is not in the eye of the beholder or on the body of the objectified,” but instead “an inherited western, modern-colonial practice of violence, assemblage, superordination, exploitation, and segregation . . . demarcating the colonial rule of Europe over non-Europe.” For Hesse, race must be understood as a historically situated, institutionalized process that creates the conditions of possibility for perceptions of bodies and the consequences thereof. These structuring, institutionalized preconditions for perception were reflected in the comments of paparazzi, who frequently told Díaz that when debating how to respond to someone chastising or harassing them, how to defend themselves, or how they might behave in a way that would appease others: “We’re already hated, so it doesn’t matter.” When conceptualized in relation to raciontologies, it becomes clear that overdetermined processes of mattering and nonmattering are not unique to paparazzi. Even when physical death is not the outcome of systematic surveillance and policing, the disposability of the racialized underscores their social death. These racialized incidents reflect the intimate interplay between social death as an existential phenomenon and disposability as realized interactionally and institutionally. This dynamic interplay is enacted through raciontologies that constitute statuses of being and regimes of value across institutional contexts.

Beyond Anthropological Empiricism in the Analysis of Institutional Racism

The ubiquity of cases such as those discussed in Díaz’s ethnographic data and throughout this chapter points to the shortcomings and problematic nature of demanding ethnography first before theorizing everyday life regardless of whether one is engaged formally in what typically constitutes fieldwork. It is important to interrogate the tendency toward privileging anthropological empiricism, which presumes that ethnographic data are the most reliable evidence of phenomena like institutional racism, racial profiling, and white supremacy. To the extent that these phenomena are often perceived in dramatically disparate ways based on the racial positions of the actors involved, we might reconsider the limits of anthropological empiricism in relation to alternative systems of knowledge production. These include intersectional feminist conceptions of theory in the flesh, which situate embodiment as a historically mediated process that can simultaneously facilitate particular insights and obscure others. Rather than presuming that knowledge emerges

primordially from marginalized identities, theory in the flesh foregrounds embodiment as one among many legitimate ways of knowing. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1981, 23) suggest that “a theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity.” Relatedly, the ability of many racially minoritized anthropologists to understand daily encounters with racism in marginalized communities emerges from necessity rather than simply ethnographic curiosity. Their lives quite literally depend on the ability to understand these realities as scholars and theorists of race, racism, and racialization regardless of whether they are situated in a stint of fieldwork. Yet mainstream disciplinary skepticism of theory in the flesh, coupled with the privileging of anthropological empiricism, too often prevents scholars of color—particularly those writing about communities close to home—from being viewed as legitimate theorists or even legitimate anthropologists and instead consistently relegates their conceptualizations to the “savage slot” (Trouillot 2003).

Anthropological empiricism and ethnographic exceptionalism must also be interrogated in relation to hegemonic notions of scholarly authority. Mainstream conceptions of intellectual expertise are rooted in institutional racism and white supremacy through which many academic institutions are built and sustained. Any attempt to develop counterhegemonic approaches to the synthesis of theory and ethnography must grapple with the anchoring of these forms of knowledge production in white supremacist institutional structures. Countless ethnographies reproduce exoticizing and stigmatizing tropes that naturalize or obscure colonial histories and racial hierarchies. More specifically, there is a long and complex history of ethnographers working with and on behalf of the state (e.g., Benedict 1946), contributing more directly to the reproduction of institutional and structural inequalities. This history further underscores the importance of challenging assumptions about ethnographic authority and anthropological empiricism (Loperena 2020).

As both the ethnographic and popularly mediatized examples of state-sanctioned violence against people of color we have examined in this chapter demonstrate, these issues do not reduce to single cases that we might observe ethnographically. Ethnographic moments are part of larger systemic patterns that are readily recognizable in sites beyond fieldwork encounters. That ethnography should inspire theory is an anthropological given. That theory grounded in everyday lived experiences, particularly the lives of racialized people, might not require a two-year stint of fieldwork is perhaps a more radical proposal.

Unsettling Raciontologies

It is remarkable that in anthropological discussions of thing theory, the posthuman, and the ontological turn, questions of race have been largely avoided or ignored altogether. However, those who study race and racialization have always been confronted with the question of what it means to be institutionally defined as a particular kind of thing endowed with the capacity to act in particular kinds of ways—faced not simply with the ontological turn as a conceptual issue, but rather the everyday consequences of having

one's ontology twisted and turned, contorted in ways that produce not only Du Boisian double consciousness but also Batesonian double binds.

In an indictment of the failure to grapple with the foundational ontological status of race in widespread scholarly invocations of concepts such as bare life and biopolitics, Alexander Weheliye (2014, 3) suggests that "race, racialization, and racial identities," should be construed as:

ongoing sets of political relations that require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts, the barring of nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west.

These experiences of being positioned outside the category of the human necessitate strategies for institutionally navigating racial disembodiment and reembodiment, as Uri McMillan (2015) and Aimee Cox (2015) argue in their respective analyses of Black women's and girls' performances and presentations of self across institutional and broader societal contexts. Insofar as raciontologies involve long-standing colonial distinctions that differentiate legitimate human actors from nonhumans or subhumans, this line of thinking and critique can also be applied to the universalizing indictment of humanity associated with the theorization of the Anthropocene. This indictment obscures how that very specific modern Western political and economic mode of governance and lifeworlds, rather than humanity writ large, produced this geological period, such that it might be better framed as the raciopocene.

If, as Elizabeth Povinelli (2016) argues in her conceptualization of geontologies, we must reconsider the institutional and epistemological logics through which the life/non-life divide is constituted, we might take our cue from race theorists who have long been grappling with such divides. This could include James Baldwin's (1963) celestial characterization of white views of racial integration as "an upheaval in the universe" that "is out of the order of nature," in which the "black man," who "has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star" shakes heaven and earth to their foundations "as he moves out of his place"; or Christina Sharpe's (2016, 21) geological and meteorological theorization of anti-Blackness as "the ground on which we stand," "a total climate," "the weather," and the target of "an insistent Black visualsonic resistance to that imposition of non/being"; or Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987, 86) ecopolitical analysis, in which abject populations "count the days the weeks the years the centuries the eons until the white laws and commerce and customs will rot in the deserts they've created, lie bleached." Thus, the stakes of raciontological and raciopocentric perspectives, which seek to denaturalize hegemonic semiotic differentiations between being and nonbeing, are nothing short of a reimagination of alternative lifeworlds, forms of institutionality, and modes of governance.

Many critiques of US-based racial profiling focus on the need to ensure equal access to democratic processes and secure the integrity of the nation's fundamental institutions. Rather than simply seeking to secure or recuperate these institutions, we would be well served by a careful reconsideration of what, exactly, they have been doing to people like

Chris Guerra, Stephen Clark, Andrés Guardado, Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, Vanessa Marquez, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Atatiana Jefferson, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Alton Sterling, Esequiel Hernández, Breonna Taylor, Dante Wright, Sean Monterrosa, Freddie Gray, Adam Toledo, Rodney King, and countless others.

Notes

1. This chapter is an abridged and revised version of what first appeared as Jonathan Rosa and Vanessa Díaz, 2020. "Raciantologies: Rethinking Anthropological Accounts of Institutional Racism and Enactments of White Supremacy in the United States." *American Anthropologist* 122, no. 1: 120–32. doi.org/10.1111/aman.13353.

2. Dashcam transcriptions were provided to Díaz by Guerra's family, who hired a forensic specialist to analyze and transcribe the footage.

3. Velasco, Juan. 2013. State of California, California Highway Patrol Traffic Collision Report 13-08-04052. Los Angeles. January 1.

4. Walton, Charles. 2013. State of California, California Highway Patrol Narrative/Supplemental Report 13-08-0452. Los Angeles. May 2, 2013.

5. Brumfield, Ben, and K. J. Matthews. 2013. "Paparazzo Killed by Oncoming Traffic after Photographing Justin Bieber's Ferrari." CNN website, January 2. www.cnn.com/2013/01/02/showbiz/california-bieber-paparazzo-death/index.html.

6. The driver of the first car who hit Guerra was stopped, questioned, and sent on her way with no charges. In fact, per the police report, the CHP officer told the driver that "the accident was not her fault." The second driver was a hit and run, which is a felony, but no investigation followed.

7. "JB" refers to Justin Bieber.

8. Nicolini, Jill. 2013. "Celebrity Photographer Killed While Following Justin Bieber's Car." *Fox News* website, January 2. www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPNqmcybU4.

9. The extrajudicial killing of Latina actress Vanessa Marquez in her own Los Angeles home during a police wellness check was reported in an ambiguous fashion that reflects racialized hierarchies of humanity and vulnerability. The arrest and subsequent death of Sandra Bland, a Black woman, under the watch of law enforcement, was treated in a similarly ambiguous fashion in media representations. Intersectional power structures position women of color in ways that deny their humanity, vulnerability, and worthiness of sympathy.

10. In the later discussion of Chris Guerra's position as a racialized paparazzo, his camera became weaponized; the officer felt the need to protect celebrities from both Chris and his camera at the expense of Chris's life. Indeed, promotional merchandise for one of the main antipaparazzi lobbying groups, the Paparazzi Reform Initiative, includes a shirt with an image of a camera and the slogan "Weapon of Mass Destruction."

11. Anthropologists, too, have taken up questions about race and ontology. Virginia Dominguez (1997, 93) suggests that "the ontology of 'race' refers to the claims, premises, habits of thought, and other socially learned cognitive operations that support and underwrite the objectification of 'race,' that is, the often unconscious learned habit of treating 'race' as a thing in the world."

12. In her work on practitioners of African diasporic religions, Aisha Beliso-De Jesús discusses the notion of racialized—and specifically "blackened"—ontologies to address the embodied racializing experiences of Santería practitioners across various modes of racial identification (2014, 508; 2015, 7, 31). While Beliso-De Jesús speaks to a set of unique realities that encompass these particular forms of racialized ontologies, her conceptualization is an important precursor to raciantologies.

13. For more on this history, see Díaz (2014).

14. Halbfinger, David M., and Allison H. Weiner. 2005. "As Paparazzi Push Harder, Stars Try to Push Back." *New York Times*, June 9, 2005.

15. Pearson, Ryan. 2008. "Britney Beat": Paparazzi Are No Longer Faceless Pack Animals." Accessed January 10, 2011. Associated Press, April 3, 2008. www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,346212,00.html.
16. Winton, Richard, and Tonya Alanez. 2012. "Paparazzi Flash New Audacity: As Competition Grows, Photographers Trailing L.A.'s Celebrities Become More Aggressive." *Los Angeles Times*, *Nation*, October 16, 2005. Accessed September 10, 2012. <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/oct/16/local/me-paparazzi16>.
17. See also: "Photographers Sue!: Bachelor Wedding Airst, ABC Exploits Security's Attack on Photographers." X17 online, March 8, 2010. Accessed January 10, 2011. http://www.x17online.com/celebrities/the_bachelor/photographers_sue_bachelor_wedding_airst_abc.php#mjp52AAI935IRhkH.99.
18. Bouie, Jamelle. 2014. "Will Today's Hispanics Be Tomorrow's Whites?" *Slate* website, April 15. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2014/04/americas-future-racial-makeup-will-todays-hispanics-be-tomorrows-whites.html>.
19. US Marine Clemente Buñuelos, who killed teenager Esequiel Hernández on Hernández's family's property, was not indicted based on his defense's argument that Hernández's death could not have been a result of racial profiling (Márquez 2012, 498).
20. Referencing recent extrajudicial killings in which the names of US Border Patrol agents who killed people have been kept confidential by the state, Márquez asserts that "the namelessness of the agent reflects how he is transformed from a person who killed into a mechanism of the sovereign state, programmed to perform a duty that has been normalized as routine, just, and necessary" (Márquez 2012, 492).

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