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Article

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Research in Globalization

Provided in Cooperation with:

Elsevier

Suggested Citation: Allam, Zaheer; Jones, David; Biyik, Can; Allam, Zarrin; Takun, Yusra Raisah (2021) : Rewriting city narratives and spirit: Post-pandemic urban recovery mechanisms in the shadow of the global "black lives matter" movement, Research in Globalization, ISSN 2590-051X, Elsevier, Amsterdam, Vol. 3, pp. 1-12, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resglo.2021.100064>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/330996>

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Rewriting city narratives and spirit: Post-pandemic urban recovery mechanisms in the shadow of the global 'black lives matter' movement

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

George Floyd
Black lives matter
COVID-19
Coronavirus
Urban recovery mechanisms
Inclusivity
Pandemic
Lockdown
Sustainable development goal 11

ABSTRACT

The social media live-broadcasted murder of George Floyd by Minnesota police officers in the United States ignited a national uprising as it highlighted continued discrimination of the African-American community. Amidst the coronavirus pandemic, this fuelled the 'Black Lives Matter' movement and gave way to protests of an unprecedented scale causing havoc in major cities in the United States, with losses tabled in both the public and private sectors. Interestingly, this momentum kindled similar protests in numerous cities in other parts of the world calling for racial equality for minority and Indigenous groups and a more equitable presentation of their culturally colonised stories. This paper surveys this global uprising exploring its precipitous momentum at a time where most of the world was in lockdown or in forced confinement. Included is how the protests, highlighting deep-rooted underlying social and cultural angst, may have far-reaching impacts in influencing post-pandemic recovery mechanisms in favour of more inclusive communities - a goal ironically embedded in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 that seeks to 'Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'.

Introduction

As the epicentre of coronavirus (COVID-19) moved from east to west, from China into Europe and taking flights everywhere, it brought with it devastating human impacts that are continuing today. In the United States (USA), that for almost three months hosted this epicenter, social unrest of an unprecedented scale erupted and was digitally-witnessed globally eclipsing their internal national concerns about the mortality implications of the virus. This unrest was prompted by the death of George Floyd; an African American of 46 years, who moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota, from Houston, Texas, in search of employment and different life for his family (Mee, 2020). His death came as a result of willful police officer brutality, that many, locally, nationally and internationally have described as an act of not only brutality, but one reflective of an ongoing pattern of discrimination against minority groups, especially people of the black race (Robinson et al., 2020), in the

US. The death of Floyd, that occurred on the 25 May 2020, was prompted by unfair accusation by a shopkeeper who alerted the police that Floyd had used a counterfeit \$20 bill. What raises pain and anger amongst human right activists and protestors across the globe is the way police, who responded to the calls by the shopkeeper, arrested and handled Floyd. It is reported that even after confirming that he was unarmed and forcing him out of his vehicle, where he was sitting with two other passengers, the arresting police officers shoved and pushed him towards their car with little regard to his human nature. More still, after immobilizing him, the police officers went forth pushing him down, securing his legs and with Officer Derek Chauvin, in a blatant abuse of human decency, adopted an 'unapproved' police technique of kneeling on Floyd's neck, despite Floyd pleading that 'I CAN'T BREATHE' (Furber et al., 2020) – words that have now become synonymous with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

This incident raised immediate societal concerns and pointed to

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resglo.2021.100064>

Received 22 June 2021; Received in revised form 4 September 2021; Accepted 7 September 2021

Available online 15 September 2021

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demonstrable racial discrimination as there were four police officers mishandling only one person. In particular, the action of Officer Derek Chauvin, of Caucasian decent, unmoved by the plea of Floyd, was interpreted not only as excessive police brutality but an indictment of the way the black community in the USA is viewed and treated by police governance (Cornelius, 2021). It was endemic of past incidences of how black people had been treated by both by the Minneapolis Police Department and police nationally that could not be divorced from what just happened. The difference in this case is that the incident was phone-captured and broadcast live on social media (Deliso, 2021). Thus, there was no opportunity for the police to later alter or re-narrate the account of what had happened. The power and influence of social media in the current era of technological and digital advancement has proved to be a strong tool in the fight for social justice and for voicing on-the-scene human uprisings and protests (Allam & Allam, 2020; Allam & Allam, 2020). It has even set the pace to service conventional major news outlets, that picked up its footage and helped share the story about police brutality on Floyd even further into conventional media venues nationally and globally.

While there has been a long history of racial discrimination and unfair treatment in the USA – especially targeting the black community in different states in the USA resulting in protest concentrations mainly in urban centres and the southern states – this incident in a northern state urban centre has sparked unprecedented rage accompanied with a wave of violent demonstrations across the USA that has subsumed and over-shadowed the initial peaceful ones. Such protests, exacerbated by COVID-19 lockdowns and pandemic spread, and unhealthy [anti-] Trump political rhetoric, has turned peaceful and socially-distanced marches into violent congregation later turning violent (Cheung, 2020; Sullivan & Sedensky, 2020).

First, the protests were locally organised, but as more people gained knowledge of the murder it fueled angst against local police authorities irrespective of which urban centre, with protests escalating a national scale, and later to even international levels (News, 2020). One commonality about these demonstrations in major cities globally, besides those being sparked by an unfortunate loss of life, is that throughout all places, a strong message against historical racial discrimination and inequality is being narrated. Such voices are not only restricted to the black community in the USA, but thematically call for the end to discrimination that targets all minority and Indigenous groups, not only in North America but on the global sphere (Mohamed & George, 2020). Included in this voice are the black, Hispanic, First Nation communities in the USA, and black communities across Europe and the UK, Aboriginal communities in Australia, and angst by the Māori community in New Zealand.

While we assert that friction erupted ‘globally’, we also concede that its intensity and focus varied nation-to-nation accordingly to their respective colonial experiences, their simmering negative memories like in India (Tharoor, 2016; Sen, 2021) and the contemporary strength of their First Nation People’s advocacy. While the BLM aroused interest and protests in numerous international contexts (some more seriously than others), the strength of this friction was inconsistent. Brazzaville, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in contrast re-erected its statue of Leopold II as parts of its 60th anniversary of independence celebration from Belgium at the end of June 2020, because, “For us ... it reflects a history, a memory. It is a reference for our children,” despite “millions of Africans from territory in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo [being] ... killed, mutilated or died of disease as they worked on Leopold II’s rubber plantations” (AFP, 2021). Thus, one could also argue that BLM was ‘global’ in that it has global significance as oppressed people everywhere battle for justice and equality.

The occurrence of these widespread protests has come at a time when different countries across the globe are drafting post-pandemic recovery strategies and mechanisms. The inclusion of inclusivity dimension, as anticipated in the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals,

especially Goal 11 (SDG 11) is particularly relevant in this context. ‘Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities’ seeks to ‘to make cities more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’ (Nations, 2020).

SDG 11’s rationale underpins these numerous protests and demonstrations. It can be witnessed in different capitalist and communist economies in the past, where the concept of political, economic and social inclusivity have been absent or wrongly defined (World Bank, 2013). It is the tenor of this paper that inclusivity, across its different dimensions (social, economic, political, religious), needs to be carefully considered and incorporated, as it is evident that the impacts of COVID-19 were again cross-cutting across colonized social values and communities (e.g. language imposition, cultural stereotyping and stratification, religious re-education, human slavery trafficking and child appropriation, cultural artefact appropriation and transferal, past historical narrative and histories erasure or re-casting as negative colonization temporal phases, etc.). Hence, the protestor voices are expressing that everyone should be equally treated in all of the COVID-19 recovery initiatives.

Interestingly, these international protests signal a dawn in re-narrating human values in the quest to redress what has often been overlooked, being deep-rooted inequalities engrained in each society. As the devastation of COVID-19 has demonstrated that human beings, despite our numerous differences are closely integrated and susceptible to similar challenges, the same human beings are raising questions and thinking through scenarios about the ‘new normal’ that challenges pre-COVID-19 ‘status quo’ especially if the post-script fails to address inequality issues in recovery post-pandemic strategies and mechanisms. Further, by addressing those inequalities, the potential of ‘new-normal’ collaborative partnerships and community building can be felt in the processes of reconstructing economies.

COVID-19 as an accelerator for social unrest

The COVID-19 outbreak and its unprecedented dispersal from early 2020 have prompted numerous ground-breaking challenges in the global sphere. As noted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021), it is the first time since the ‘Great Depression’ (1929 to 1939), when the world experienced a record unemployment rate, that the world is dealing with major job losses that will take many to recover from; over 114 million jobs lost in 2020 alone (International Labour Organization, 2021). The unemployment situation has been experienced across both developed and developing economies, questioning their respective resiliencies despite economic injection-interventions. For instance, in the USA, which claims strong structures and employment frameworks, unemployment rates reached a high of 14.8% in April 2020, and by May 2021, despite concerted efforts to shield and revive the economy, a 5.8% unemployment was still recorded (Falk et al., 2021). Globally, major economic sectors like manufacturing, transport (Airlines, 2021), tourism (United Nations World Trade Organisation, 2021) and others have not fully recovered, prolonged by the inability to achieve high rates of global vaccinations and divergent views on a ‘covid-passport’ system per nation. With nation-specific restrictions being instigated to contain the spread of the virus, to instigate and craft vaccination protocols and travel ‘passport’ systems, the recovery of these sectors is will remain gradual and slow (Miranda et al., 2021). Indeed, only some sectors, like Electric Vehicles and parcel deliveries, demonstrated through the stock markets, have been able to make unprecedented recoveries (Hausler et al., 2021).

The spiral effects of such trends in the global labour market includes issues like deepening socio-economic gaps, which were significantly notable even before the emergence of the global pandemic (OECD, 2021). Sen (Sen, 2021) notes that the poor, in particular, have been left disadvantaged. Sen draws this conclusion because most have no means to embrace and implement the new trends in the job markets and technological disadvantages, including working from home and lack of digital technologies and fluencies in such. In other cases, most who were

employed in the informal sectors have no means to access social protection and cautioning. For example, Oxfam (Oxfam, 2021) report over 2.7 billion people lie in this category.

Other areas that the pandemic, and the plummeting labour market, is exacerbating inequality includes the digital divide. In most countries, the 'new normal' is resulting in an acceleration in the use of technology in most sectors like education (e.g. online teaching) and businesses (e.g. online meeting engagements) where people to continue to interact virtually (Nguyen et al., 2020). This, however, has proven to be daunting especially with a majority of least developed economies that have insufficient digital infrastructures to support the use of digital solutions (Allam & Jones, 2020). For these reasons, institutions, such as schools, continue to face disruptions as continuing COVID-19 waves and scenarios unfold (Teräs et al., 2020). Such is having a particularly negative affect upon years 9–12 in the shadow of entering tertiary education or the general workforce irrespective of whether the student is in a developed or developing economy. The widening gap has also been experienced in regard to demographics, with women and youths and people of the minority races seen to bear the greatest consequences in various contexts (Falk et al., 2021).

Due to these challenges, internal-nation and international research reports are pointing to increased cases of health challenges (World Health Organization, 2021), increased domestic violence (Usher et al., 2020), increasing single parent headed households (Christner et al., 2021), and, amongst others, increased adolescent pregnancies with the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund projecting that these rates per nation would increase by approximately 28% in some regions.

The impact of COVID-19 on the global economic sector has prompted numerous challenges especially on microscale, small-scale and medium-scale businesses that commonly accommodate a majority of the global population. This has been translated into evident social stresses exhibited in increased domestic violence, increased child abuse, increased alcohol and substance abuse (approximately 12% increase by June 2020 (Panchal et al., 2021; Allam et al., 2020) and insecurities in community neighbourhoods (Mittal & Singh, 2020). On this, the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2021) reported that in some instances, there has been an increase of between 50 and 60% cases of violence against women and children in some regions due to social stress.

Excluding domestic violence, there has been an increase in numerous social unrest incidents arising from stresses emanating from COVID-19, including increased protests, as expanded in this paper through the case of 'Black Lives Matter' (BLM), witnessed in different parts of North America, Europe and the world (Arora, 2021). There has also been cases of protests against police brutality in different parts of the world, with experts linking these to pandemic fatigue (Gatopoulos, 2021). In fragile countries, like Syria, a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Harrison & Kristensen, 2021) concluded that issues like reduced food consumption due to economic challenges and reduced remittances that dropped by approximately 50%, were affecting over 1.2 million people having a high potentiality to trigger major social unrest. Such are further propitious where governments are observed as being authoritarian, especially in instituting and enforcing health protocols (Harrison & Kristensen, 2021; Kasambala, 2021; Heynie, 2021).

As the COVID-19 pandemic is still unfolding, with mitigation measures like global vaccination drives being pursued, it is expected that post-pandemic socio-economic research will shed more light on the long-term impacts of the pandemic on societal dimensions. It would be interesting, in particular, to investigate how the varying geographies have managed to navigate during this period, especially with fears that some high emitting economies may somehow overlook their emission reduction commitment in their pursuit to put their economies into recovery paths. Similarly, to investigate how discrete highly isolated economies, like those in the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), a distinct group of 38 United Nation (UN) Member States and 20 Non-UN Members/Associate Members, have traversed and navigated the

pandemic as their voices are normally little-heard in the global media noise.

Of interest, are pleas for anti-discrimination measures across different sectors towards promoting healthier and more inclusive communities at both corporate and city levels, thereby aligning with SDG 11. This includes increased calls for ethical imperatives to prioritise black communities in COVID-19, Māori's, Pacific Islander's (Houkamau et al., 2021), and Australian Aboriginal communities in vaccination rollouts due to their historical genetic lack of resilience to northern hemisphere-derived diseases (e.g. small pox, 'Spanish flu', respiratory diseases (including asthma), heart and circulatory diseases, high blood pressure, diabetes, sexual transmitted diseases, kidney diseases and some cancers) (Crooks et al., 2021; Follent et al., 2021; Hocking et al., 2010; AIHW, 2017). This lack of genetic resilience, and their social disadvantageousness per nation, underlines further discrimination trends in the mediation of COVID-19 and the roll-out of vaccinations, where mortality rates are observed to differ by geographic region and ethnicity, with disproportionate impacts on black communities and other First Nations People's (Ribeiro et al., 2020).

As stated by the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Indigenous Peoples

'The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic poses a grave health threat to Indigenous peoples around the world. Indigenous communities already experience poor access to healthcare, significantly higher rates of communicable and non-communicable diseases, lack of access to essential services, sanitation, and other key preventive measures, such as clean water, soap, disinfectant, etc. Likewise, most nearby local medical facilities, if and when there are any, are often under-equipped and understaffed. Even when Indigenous peoples are able to access healthcare services, they can face stigma and discrimination. A key factor is to ensure these services and facilities are provided in indigenous languages, and as appropriate to the specific situation of Indigenous people' (UN, 2021).

On the george floyd's protests in the united states and globally

Following the murder of Floyd, and the widespread sharing of the live-streamed video depicting how the incident occurred, the first wave of protests were reported on 26 May 2020; just a day after the actual incident. Goyette (Goyette, 2020) reports that this first protest, attended by hundreds of people, was organised by local citizens in the city of Minneapolis where the incident occurred. The number of protestors, though not as many as the subsequent protests that followed locally or in other States across the USA, numerically eclipsed those that were recorded in previous demonstrations in Minnesota state. While the previous demonstrations were also organised protesting against similar incidents, the intention and vigour in this one was unprecedented. The protest momentum surfed on the wider BLM movement, that emerged on 26 February 2012, after another black man, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, was shot dead in Sanford, Florida, by a non-black Neighbourhood Watch Volunteer named George Zimmerman. The movement's anger was reinforced after Zimmerman was acquitted of the murder (News, 2020). In addition, there has been a series of other unfortunate incidents that has fueled this movement, but the incident of Floyd is seen as the 'rally cry' that has gained international attention and sparked wider calls for immediate social justice change. This unrest has been especially prevalent in calls for the denunciation of oppression and discrimination faced by the black community in the USA. But it has also been evident in calls to rewrite slavery histories and past capitalist colonial exploitations in the USA, United Kingdom (UK) (M, 2020), Canada and Australia. Included has been an escalation of serious social and cultural questions as to the exploitative agenda of colonial empires of the UK across the globe including in India (Tharoor, 2016; News18, 2020) and Malaysia, questions of colonization and never-ceded sovereignty dispossession in Australia, the Dutch in Indonesia (Matbob and

Papoutsaki, 2006), Belgium in particular in Africa (Weisbord, 2003; Anon, 2020), and France in the Pacific Islands and Middle East.

Before the murder of Floyd, there were numerous signs of discontent by the US population arising from USA governance COVID-19 management and responsiveness, especially in the imposition management of containment measures (Allam, 2020; Allam, 2020; Allam, 2020; Allam, 2020). This includes USA constitutional civil rights rotating around a societal culture tenet caused by the Second Amendment to the *Constitution of the United States* that protects the individual's right to keep and bear arms as ratified on 15 December 1791 (Waldman, 2014). Therefore, the death of Floyd, though unrelated to the issue of COVID-19 has proven a catalyst for coalescing of people frustrated and weary from staying at home, loss of their livelihood, loss of their employment and the psychological and emotional uncertainties that the virus has posed. For this reason, the death of Floyd has only added to frustration levels being felt at the 'coal face' of the USA. Floyd's willful unwanted murder prompted community angst was a recognition that such killing had become 'one too many' (Roye, 2021). Thus, it was unsurprising to find so many people in the protests, black and white and yellow, masked and unmasked irrespective of their political allegiances.

As noted above, the first protest was attended by only hundreds, but the subsequent protests across the USA and in the international scene attracted many thousands, as reported by Guillen (Guillen, 2020). The situation was further fueled by conventional responses adopted by USA governance authorities and police departments, in particular by local police and by the White House through the Trump administration. In essence, it would be adequate to argue that the response was below empathetic, especially as such words and actions were seen to disregard the plight of marginalized communities, thus, sparking more outrage prompting protests that were to a large extent peaceful, but erroneously turned violent due to the participation of more right and left wing community cohorts. In this instance, although the Governor of Minnesota Tim Walz uniquely apologized to CNN (Cable News Network) arising from police mishandling of the media (Stracqualursi, 2020), the action by the black City of Minneapolis Chief of Police Medaria Arradondo of only terminating the services of the accused police officers without apprehending and charging them was not taken rightly by the protestors (Jany, 2020). The crowds were also frustrated and highly psychologically agitated from the COVID-19 lockdown policies that state and local governments had implemented. Thus, in dispersed in these protests were high levels of COVID-19 lockdown anxiety and frustrations, providing a platform for many people to express their displeasure at governance (Banks, 2020), and this partly demonstrates why the protest spilled over into other different countries, with large crowds of attendees being reported in the media.

Noting that the violence came amidst the COVID-19 economic, social and psychological challenges that people across the globe are, and have been, facing as a result of the pandemic, there has been reports of violence, economic damage, and in some cases, loss of lives arising from such protests. For instance, in the USA, when the protests escalated into different cities outside of Minnesota state, and the police and other authorities initiated conventional measures to contain such protests, including the use of tear-gas and rubber bullets. In the face of these measures, protestors responded by engaging in violence, that included destroying police vehicles, burning down businesses and defacing or pulling down some historical monuments that possess high colonization or racial inequality values or symbolism. For instance, according to *Market Watch* (Keshner, 2020), in Minnesota alone, the insurance bill arising from the damage and violence from the Floyd protests amounted to more than US\$25 million in less than two weeks, since the start of the protests. Similarly, the *Insurance Journal* (Sams, 2020), surveying the current protests, noting that they are not yet over at the time of writing, were projected to eclipse the damages experienced in the 1992 Rodney King riots in Los Angeles (Sastry & Bates, 2020) after a similar killing incident took place. The *Insurance Journal* has an estimated loss of over US\$775 million then, in 1992, equivalent to US\$1.4 billion according to

current USD values. The value attached to the current protests, in only 1 week since the protests started, is already estimated to nationally topple over US\$100 million, and rose exponentially as the BLM movement gained momentum and persisted in the lead up to the USA presidential election on 3 November 2020 (Sams, 2020).

Even outside the USA, the protests have been seen to have significant economic implications, linked to damages from violent expressions. For instance, in the UK, protestors pulled-down and damaged the bronze statue of former prominent city leader whom gain his wealth from slave trading, Edward Colston (Newburger, 2020). In other countries, like Italy, Australia, Germany, France and South Korea to name a few, although the demonstrations in support of the wider BLM aspiration, have in solidarity echoed the Floyd's family's words in their demand for peaceful non-violent justice, have also had indirect cost implications that cannot be overlooked.

Therefore, as anticipated in an article by the *Insurance Journal* (Sams, 2020), the Floyd's protests could prompt economic losses mirroring natural catastrophes that have in the past affected different parts of the globe. In particular, the protests are happening when governments across the world are grappling with the challenges of reopening and supporting their economies post-lockdown, of which many have suffered a critical blow from the coronavirus pandemic which has dragged for over six months since it was first reported (Allam & Jones, 2020; Allam et al., 2020). Thus, the real economic damage of the Floyd protests may never be accounted as they are positioned inside the larger COVID-19 economic damage pictures.

As to the collateral protests in different places globally that have arisen from or are directly allied to the Floyd's protests, Table 1 below offers an international survey of newspaper media reports. Table 1 documents the international breadth of these protests being not only limited to the BLM movement, but also to citizen demands for justice from different marginalized groups. Nevertheless, despite this, it is worth noting that since Floyd became a symbol his death has exacerbated calls for the recognition of the rights of the marginalized and a need to end all inequalities, as embodied in 'SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities' that seeks to 'to make cities more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' (Nations, 2020).

Discrimination and minority groups

Racial inequality is perceived by many marginalized and colonized communities as being engrained in their mainstream society, and that it

Table 1
Major cities calling for racial equality and anti-discrimination as a result of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

City	Country	Marginalised community	Refs
Multiple	USA	Blacks	Causadias and Korous (Causadias & Korous, 2019)
Sydney	Australia	Aboriginals (First Nations)	Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016)
London	UK	Blacks	Alexander (Alexander, 2018)
Strasbourg	France	Blacks and low-income earners	AA (AA, 2020)
Paris	France	Black and Arabs	Pedram (Pedram, 2020)
Berlin	Germany	Blacks	DW (DW, 2020)
Hamilton	New Zealand	Māori's	Tobin (Tobin, 2020)
Multiple	Canada	Aboriginals (First Nations)	Hall (Hall, 2020)
Guangzhou	China	Blacks	CBS (CBS, 2020)
Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia	Native People (Orang Asli)	Sia (Sia, 2020)
Rome	Italy	Blacks	Giuffrida (Giuffrida, 2020)
Jerusalem	Israel	Arabs	Daoud, et al. (Daoud et al., 2019)

transcends from succeeding generations, is perpetuated in colonial symbols and dominant-community societal written histories. Such may wither down as time progresses or suddenly be re-narrated arising from a controversial event. The most prominent forms of the origins of these inequities can be traced back to the time of European colonizations where these colonisers openly practiced racial prejudice and discrimination, re-constructing societies to suit their politico-economic imperatives (Allam, 2019). These are governance policy lessons learnt by post-independence countries as a means to assert majority sovereignty. Even after the abolition of slavery in European countries and the USA, and supposedly the end of colonization as formally narrated, racial bias continues to manifest, especially upon migrant workers, and even today, such trends still linger in the underbelly of cities and countries and sub-countries within a European-contrived political governance entity. Thus, calls from citizens inside various countries, as demonstrated in Table 2, as a result of the Floyd protests, are aiding the desire to remove statutes and or nomenclature that celebrates historical tyrants or colonizer exploiters that served on discriminatory practices to acquire power and wealth. The responses have rocked the very foundations of US society being associated to Thomas Jefferson, into UK with Robert Clive, Cecil Rhodes and Winston Churchill, and into Australia with James Macarthur and Captain James Cook. Even the innocent 'Coon Cheese' has succumbed to protests. Despite these personae still being glorified in public spaces statue and or nomenclature in major cities, it is aberrant, yet unsurprising, that some neighbourhoods are defined in terms of race, economic status, gender, and religious conviction amongst other such demographic parameters that have been used as basis for inequalities and prejudice.

This understanding of the plight of marginalized communities, as emanating from colonial and post-colonial practices, underpinned from politico-demographic profiles, aligns to colonization imperatives and capitalistic values of the time. For example, it is an unfortunate norm for groups like Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander's in Australia (Markwick et al., 2019), First Nation Indian's and other native groups in the USA (Findling et al., 2019), Jews in different parts of Europe (Vellenga, 2018; Zemke, 2019), and the Blacks in different parts of the world, amongst others, to face and experience discrimination every day. There has also been unprecedented discrimination on grounds like gender, where in countries like Iran and Afghanistan, women's rights are limited and mostly at the mercy of their male counterparts (Rezai-Rashti, 2015). Other forms of discriminations, like religion that gained roots in different societies, has prompted extreme reactions like terrorism and unending confrontations between different religious groupings. For instance, in countries like Egypt, Indonesia, and others, people who profess the Christian faith have faced persecution and other forms of discrimination (Malsin, 2020). The sudden partition of colonial India into Hindu-dominated India and Muslim-dominated (East and West) Pakistan in 1947 is a classic example of colonization policy, as also Britain's colonial exploitation and dismantling of the sub-continent's multi-ethnic/religious socio-economic system (Tharoor, 2016; Sen, 2021). Similarly, the erasure of Prussian/German place and street names during the First and Second Wars outside Europe similarly demonstrates the desire to re-write historical narratives, to hide a negative minority or a negative culture. It is also has played out in the conscious surname modifications that many migrants entertained *en route* to or at immigration venues in the USA, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand with human diaspora transmissions over the 1800s and 1900s. Likewise, those who profess the Islamic faith have also received immeasurable amount of discrimination in countries like Israel, the USA, and the UK, more so being labeled as terrorists and others (Di Stasio et al., 2021). But, of all those types of discriminations, racial inequality has lingered longer and has gained deep roots in our modern society.

The weight of racial discrimination is captured in various quantitative studies (Markwick et al., 2019; Katz & Braly, 1935) showing how people perceived to be of minority race, colour and such backgrounds

experience difficulties in the job market, in the education sector gaining access and assessments, in finding health care, and even in enjoying recreation activities like sports, visiting public parks and such. On breaking point, some form of revolt manifested through public protests are observed, calling for social reforms as being seen as the most effective and far-reaching means through which grievances are raised. For instance, as noted above, in 1992, when Rodney King was brutally killed by Los Angeles police in the USA, severe riots and protests were observed, resulting to significant destruction, but -at the same time, the intended message for social reform reached policy makers (Sastry & Bates, 2020). In the African continent, mass protests like during the fight against apartheid in South Africa associated with Nelson Mandela (Bond & Mottiar, 2013), the overthrow of Muammar Mohammed Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi in Libya in 2011, the overthrow of president's Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir of Sudan (Chandler, 2020) and Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria in early 2019, all highlight the potency people's power when discrimination goes unchecked (Marks et al., 2020). Similar protests have been reported in Hong Kong (Lau, 2020), but the global protests against Floyd's killing and the support for the BLM movement have given the fight for racial justice the impetus it deserves, especially in the 21st century when such issues like discrimination should not be happening.

The effect of the great global lockdown as protest amplifier

The outbreak of COVID-19 early January 2020 was unprecedented and caught the world by surprise. Over the months since, the human race has been turned 'upside down', locked down, shoved around and indoctrinated with 'the new normal' vocabulary and fashions in mask designs. In fact, although there have been other pandemics (such as the mischievously named 'Spanish Flu' of 1918–1920) and natural catastrophes (such as the devastating Hurricane Katrina in 2005) in the past, none can equate to this event. One of the most pressing issues that this pandemic has brought, besides the frightening number of deaths, is the widespread lockdown regimes and protocols that were initiated in numerous parts of the world, resulting in over 3.9 billion people being placed into forced confinement (Sandford, 2020).

The pandemic has also reverberated negatively upon global economies, with economic sectors like transport, education, tourism, and others bearing huge burdens. In the transport sector for instance, the grounding of airplanes, rail services, automobiles and water transportation have taken a toll on both the economy and lifestyle. In sum, all the health containment measures that had and are still being initiated in different parts of the globe have taken a toll on the psychological traits of everyday life and particularly upon the wider medical community. When such are coupled with other issues like economic downturns, increasing unemployment and the loss of loved ones and relatives that many people have endured, and other social issues, the frustrations amassed in under just a few months are immeasurable. Therefore, when the news of police brutality on Floyd, causing his death, were shared, people across the globe vented all their frustrations, anger, exhaustions, and hatred built-up from continued lockdowns and confinements, toward authorities resulting in violence in certain parts of the US.

On one side, these protests have served as a platform for people to unshackle themselves from what have been seen as a lack of freedom, a denial of their USA constitutional rights, particularly arising from the forced lockdowns that were seen to be unending. When coupled with loss of economic opportunities and income, and insufficient supplies, forced confinement has served to create an atmosphere of anger. Thus, any action, like that incidence of Floyd's death was enough to irritate the minority as well as the majority masses and spark protests. This was evident in the fact that protestors literary flaunted most of the health guidelines, including curfews, the wearing of masks in public and social distancing amongst others to manifest their frustrations. For the USA, those were happening even though they were at the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak. In other cases, some were seen wearing masks as

Table 2

Calls for toppling down of statues with tyrant pasts as a result of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

City	Country	Statue	Location	History	Reference
Antwerp	Belgium	King Leopold II (1865–1909)	In the market place in the Ekeren district of Antwerp	Killed 10–15 million in Congo during Belgium reign	Bernaerts (Bernaerts, 2020); Pronczuk and Zaveri (Pronczuk and Zaveri, 2021)
Brazzaville	Democratic Republic of Congo	King Leopold II (1865–1909)	Kinshasa (formerly Léopoldville)	The construction of the Congo-Océan railroad across the Republic of Congo from Brazzaville to the Atlantic port of Pointe-Noir	Daughton (Daughton, 2021)
The Orkneys	UK: Scotland	The Kitchener Memorial	B9056, KW17 2nd	Initiated concentration camps in South Africa, killing over 26 thousand women and children with starvation	Cole (Cole, 2020)
Bristol Philadelphia	UK: England USA	Edward Colston Frank Rizzo	Bristol Harbour	Notorious slave trader Opposed desegregation in schools, where as a police commissioner between 60s and 70s, he oversaw police brutality against African Americans.	Cole (Cole, 2020) Hurdle and Cramer (Hurdle & Cramer, 2020)
Toronto	Canada	Egerton Ryerson	Gould Street, Toronto	He is a renowned educator and politician, but he is also remembered for his contributions to the discrimination of Indigenous People (First Nations). in school systems	Manzocco (Manzocco, 2020)
Edinburgh	UK: England	Robert Dundas, 2nd Viscount Melville (1771–1851)	St Andrews Square	Delayed the abolition of slavery	Cole (Cole, 2020), Anon (Anon)
Newcastle	UK: England	Earl Grey	Grey Street in the centre of Newcastle	Though he was instrumental in the abolition of slavery, he was accused, as an accomplice, of having paid reparations to slave masters.	(Khan, 2020)
London	UK: England	Robert Milligan	West India Quay	Slave trader with two sugar plantations and over 500 slaves in Jamaica	BBC (BBC, 2020)
London	UK: England	Thomas Guy	St. Thomas Street, London SE11XJ England	Though he founded the Guy's hospital, there are indications that his fortune was built from his association with the South Sea Company, notorious in slave trade	(Harris, 2020)
Virginia/ Boston/ Minnesota/ Delaware	USA	Christopher Columbus		Though he is acclaimed for his explorations, he was accused of overseeing numerous killings, kidnappings and lootings, especially in the Caribbean islands with cruelty towards the Indigenous populations.	Milman (Milman, 2020), Diaz (Diaz, 2020)
Richmond, Virginia	USA	Jefferson Finis Davis	Monument Avenue	He was a civil war president for the confederate States of America between 1861 and 1865 and was seen as a symbol of racism, especially by African Americans whose grandparents were enslaved	Levenson (Levenson, 2020)
Birmingham, Alabama	USA	Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument	Linn Park	Installed 115 years ago, it stood as a physical symbol and reminder of how the confederates fought to in favor of slavery	Sheets (Sheets, 2020)
Nashville Tennessee	USA	Edward W. Carmack		An 1800s newspaper editor, in Nashville and Memphis, endorsing of the lynching of black people, and specifically for wrong doings against Ida B. Wells, playing an active role in the fight for rights for the black community	Davis (Davis, 2020)
Fredericksburg, Virginia	USA	Slave Auction Block	Corner of William Street and Charles Street	The stone was used as an auction block for slaves, and its presence was perceived as a reminder to the racial oppression of the black community during slavery	The Associated press (The Associated Press, 2020)
Charlotte, North Carolina	USA	Jerry Richardson	Outside North Carolina's Bank of America Stadium	The original owner of the Panthers National Football team, accused of being a racist and sexist, and though the team was sold to David Tepper in 2018, his statue remained outside the North Gate of the team's Bank of America Stadium	Newton (Newton, 2020)
Hamilton	New Zealand	John Fane Charles Hamilton	Civic Square, Hamilton	Decorated naval captain and commander, accused of participation in the killing of the Māori people in 1860s while defending their land against the British	Mail Online (Online, 2020)
Dearborn, Michigan	USA	Orville L. Hubbard	Michigan Avenue, outside old Dearborn city hall building	Mayor of Dearborn, who formulated policies promoting segregation, especially of black minorities	Dickson (Dickson, 2020)
Mobile, Alabama	USA	Raphael Semmes	LC-D4-19453	Lawyer, teacher, newspaper editor and captain of CSS Alabama cruiser, known for his role in sinking a Federal warship	Dickson (Dickson, 2020)
Richmond, Virginia	USA	Matthew Fontaine Maury (1873–1929)	Monument Avenue	Confederate naval commander	Miller, et al. (Miller et al., 2020)
Richmond, Virginia	USA	Stonewall Jackson	Monument Avenue	Cerebrated Confederate General	Miller, et al. [35 (continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

City	Country	Statue	Location	History	Reference
Richmond, Virginia	USA	J.E.B. Stuart	Monument Avenue	Confederate commander	Miller, et al. [35]
Cardiff City	UK: Wales	Thomas Picton	Cardiff City Hall	Historically depicted as a 'sadistic' slave owner, where his statue featured among the 'Heroes of Wales' in Cardiff.	Goddard (Goddard)
Leeds, Bury, Manchester, Preston, Tamworth, Birmingham and Glasgow	UK: England & Scotland	Sir Robert Peel	Several cities in the country	A two-time prime minister who contributed to the establishing of the Metropolitan Police in 1829; known as the 'Father of Modern Policing'	BBC (BBC, 2020)
Exeter City	UK: England	General Redvers Buller	Hele Rd, Exeter EX4 4H	Accused of introducing concentration camps in South Africa during the Boer War, where many natives died of starvation and of diseases	Breitbart (Breitbart, 2020); FitzSimons (FitzSimons, 2021)
Pretoria	South Africa	Paul Kruger	Church Square, Pretoria	a Boer leader and President of South Africa who advanced racism and the discrimination of Africans	Ngobeni (Ngobeni, 2020)
Nairobi	Kenya	Queen Victoria	Jee van Jee Gardens, Nairobi	The Statue of Queen Victoria in the park was seen as a representation of the colonial era	VOA News (VOA News, 2020)
Leeds	UK	Queen Victoria	Woodhouse Moor Park	A vocal member of the monarchy in the British quest for power and conquest, killing millions of natives across the world	BBC (BBC, 2020)
London	UK: England	Winston Churchill	Outside the UK Parliament Square	Former Prime Minister of UK and war leader, known for making racist comments	Gallagher (Gallagher, 2020)
Oxford	UK: England	Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902)	High Street outside Oriel College	British Imperialist, mining magnate and Prime Minister of Cape Colony, known for being displacing black communities in favour of industrial development.	Race and Briant (Race & Cecil, 2020)
Norfolk, Virginia	USA	Norfolk Confederate Monument	Norfolk Southern Museum	Confederate memorial place on the site of slave trading	Wavy Web Staff (Wavy Web Staff, 2020)
Norfolk, Virginia	USA	Johnny Reb	Atop Norfolk Confederate monument	Representation of common Confederate soldiers in the American Civil War	13Newsnow (13Newsnow, 2020)
Bentonville, Arkansas; Athens, Georgia; Rocky Mount, North Carolina	USA	Bentonville Confederate Monument, Athens Confederate Monument and Nash County Confederate Monument		These monuments were set in different cities and states to symbolize and celebrate the Confederacy	Shearer (Shearer, 2020) Neal (Neal, 2020) Mims (Mims, 2020)
Salisbury, North Carolina	USA	Gloria Victis		Confederate monument celebrating Confederate soldiers	Whisenant (Whisenant, 2020)

surrogate advertisements, thus demonstrating that even those who were still COVID-conscious of their health were already psychologically exhausted from being locked down yearning for freedom. Thus, joining the BLM protests was a way for them to at least agitate for a right, though not related to health issues. On this, Bracci and Castañón (Bracci & Castañón, 2020) acknowledge that it is natural of human nature to retaliate when a perceived ill is perpetuated on an individual or a community that was or is already suffering, and that this explains the mixed racial representation in the Floyd's protests globally.

Another reason that may be attributed to high turnout in the Floyd's protests may be associated with the degree of uncertainty and thus anxiety that the current pandemic has prompted. On this, in many countries, people are staring at increasing prolonged unemployment rates caused by the lockdowns and the near halting of activities in different economic sectors (Kretchmer, 2020). Even worse, the situation is expected to last, as economic experts (Stewart, 2020; Wearden & Jolly, 2020) warn, signaling that the world has already entered a recession with an unknown endpoint, especially since it is the coronavirus pandemic that triggered the recession and that the pandemic is yet to be contained. Additionally, there is no viable date also for when a vaccine, let alone the drugs to mediate the virus, will be available. With such unknowns, there are widespread fears all over the globe of an increase in poverty numbers, increase in food insecure population, and such would exacerbate the widening of the income inequality between the rich and the poor (Ahmed et al., 2020; Nicola et al., 2020). From a psychological standpoint, such numerous uncertainties and fears have the potential to cause frustration and anger (Barford, 2017), and when triggered, like in the case of racial discrimination, may erupt with excessive negative energy being applied to vent the feelings.

Besides the psychological aspects, the Floyd protests have benefitted

from the increased use social media and other technological advancements. Coupling this with the fact that most of the global population have for a reasonable amount of time remained in their homes, allowing them to explore at ease the wider social media mediums and time to peruse the different news channels, to participate in different social media discussions and activities, calls for protests may have reached a wider audience that may have occurred in the past 'normal'. With most people having excess time at their disposal, and most experiencing issues noted above, participating physically and digitally in the protests may have been viewed as way of forcing the ruling regimes in different countries to recognise the plights of their societies. The availability of 'raw news' from diverse sources like social media are now increasing and this is making social media a strong modern tool in the agitation for social, economic and political justice and electioneering amongst others (Smith, 2013).

Overall, the death of Floyd, coupled with factors noted above, have contributed greatly to global waves of protest calling for social justice (Campedelli et al., 2021). With a sizeable number of protestors being home due to lockdown due to health restrictions in-force in some countries, the protests have become even more amplified (Lima, 2021). Such points to the wider global impacts of the lockdown and that its numerous restrictions have 'worn down' the populace, and it would be worth handling situations in the future with more civility, restraint, respect and empathy. Otherwise, any situation that is seen to be negative may trigger unprecedented social consequences, resulting in costly outcomes both economically and in human lives.

The rise of the welfare state amidst the pandemic

Even though there have been numerous criticisms on how different

governments across the globe have, and are, managing the coronavirus pandemic, there have been gleams of hope nevertheless in some economies. This hope is pegged on the strengthening and emergence of welfare states, where numerous governments have been observed to go beyond their norm to cushion economies, employers, the unemployed, and the most vulnerable in the society, by not only introducing economic bailout packages, but by ensuring that employers are able to, as much as possible, retain workforce. These initiatives have also ensured that relief is extended to those who have no means of earning during this period of the pandemic. The need for such has been prompted by data like the 20% unemployment rate in USA that has dramatically increased from its 3.5% pre-pandemic to 8.4% in September 2020 (Statistics, 2020). Ellyatt (Ellyatt, 2020) notes that in Europe, despite the region receiving the pandemic's economic shocks, unemployment has been relatively lower as compared to the US, because European governments were quick to offer alleviation mechanisms to ensure employee retention. On this, since March 2020, when most countries in Europe adopted lockdown measures till the time of writing of this manuscript, the unemployment rate has increased from 6.4% as of March to 7.3% by June. In contrast, over the same period in the USA, unemployment rates have increased by over 20% in April, before it started to stabilize at 13.3%, after slow re-openings in some states as noted by the USA Department of Labor (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). The emergence of the welfare state in taking a benevolent role has been key in other regions like Asia, especially Japan, the Oceania region and in the Northern America.

Even in countries that did not have or had a weaker welfare state structure, the lockdown and the numerous challenges have prompted different sectorial responses. The economic shocks that almost every country has suffered, plus the unprecedented health pressures, have led to reforms to scales never experienced before. For example, there have been numerous legislative changes in different countries targeting measures to retain employability (Volkov, 2020); others focused upon crafting some form of 'insurance' shaped as a guaranteed universal basic income (Martinelli, 2020; Kaplan, 2020); the suspension of utilities and mortgage repayments (BBC, 2020); and the provision of favourable loans and guarantees, especially to small businesses and to the self-employed (Sweet, 2020; KPMG, 2020; Makortoff, 2020). In other countries, parliaments have allowed government to defer and exempt some categories of taxpayers from tax liabilities, and in others relaxation of capital and liquidity ratios have been availed to support businesses financially to defray the weight of the pandemic.

Other countries have even introduced a minimum income guaranteeing to help fight unemployment, and poverty, that may arise as a result of the impacts of COVID-19 (Martinelli, 2020; Kaplan, 2020). The latter include Spain with its new minimum income stating June 2020 at a varying rate of between €461 and €1,015 (McMurtry, 2020). Denmark is another country that has proposed to assist employers by paying 75%-90% of worker's salaries provided that the workers are retained during the period of COVID-19 (Euractiv, 2020). A similar proposal was made in The Netherlands, where the government offered to pay 90% of workers' salaries while the UK government has promised to pay 80%, and South Korea has made a 70% pay promise (Kaplan, 2020). Ireland has introduced a weekly financial support scheme where those experiencing unemployment and the self-employed would receive a payment of approximately €220, while Australia has introduced a payment of AU \$750 to low-income earners (Kaplan, 2020).

As the world strives towards 'de-lockdown', numerous support and recovery mechanisms are expected to enter in force (Martinelli, 2020), in addition to the minimal income measures, and it is the position of this paper that those will need to also include social reforms as discussed in the next section.

Discussion and conclusion

The global economy because of COVID-19 needs serious rethinking to revive itself. Any more incidents like the recently witnessed Floyd's

protests could be detrimental to it, as also to the USA economy specifically. This is why the lead up to the 3 November 2020 and any 'aftermath' might exceedingly test the mettle of the USA economy and its national-level governance. Already, the world has experienced several economic shocks in different frontiers like in transport, energy, tourism and hospitality industries, and many other sectors, bringing the world to a halt, as a majority of the global population went into lockdown. Such have prompted massive reductions in revenues in areas like the air travel and allied infrastructure industry where already, according to the recent financial outlook released by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the sector is set to account for a loss of over US\$84.3 billion this year (2020) (IATA, 2020). In the retail industry, it is reported that a loss of over US\$2.1 trillion is expected to be experienced (Forrester, 2020), and if a short sighted transition is computed from the pandemic to the anticipated recession, the outcome would be dire. Therefore, it would be appropriate for all players in global decision-making realms to ensure that as they craft recovery mechanisms, they also incorporate other aspects, especially addressing and towards mediating social issues that have already been seen to have potential in derailing the recovery processes.

While the reality of a slow and extended recovery is live and real, and different governments have been seen to rush to legislate and formulate policies targeted toward addressing different impacts of the pandemic, it continues to be a daunting task. In fact, besides the interventions in the economic and healthy sectors that governments have been observed to have been fully committed, more needs to be done. For instance, if the recent incidence of widespread, violent protests prompted by the brutal murder of Floyd by police are to be taken as a pointer, there is need for governments to then, in haste, craft strategies and ways of addressing issues like racial discrimination for the long term.

Already, as protests escalate calling for the erasure of markers of inequality in cities, as shown in Table 2 above, there is a strong wave of calls demanding the removal of statues, place/street nomenclature and emblems of personalities or institutions that have been directly or indirectly associated with racial discrimination. Before the pandemic occurred and prompted the grounding and restriction in the transportation sector, some of those statues served as prominent tourist attractions, and their removal means that their contribution to the economy need to be replaced, demanding further investment in a time where money is scarce. However, from a sociological point of view, their removal would bring some solace in the fight against discrimination, and justice will seem to be done, and such could be replaced with other statues and symbols or nomenclature that will not only help in an unification of a country's wider society, but will also contribute to economic growth.

Addressing the societal issues like racial justice in tandem with other dimensions like the economy and health will ensure that as the world transitions to the new 'normal', prompted by the emergence of coronavirus, everyone will feel an integral part of their country's society. This in turn will prompt positive outcomes in the creation of a more sustainable, resilient, and robust economies, which will not only encompass wealth creation, but job creation opportunities, hopefully also promoting higher liveability standards. Such could be achieved by a society that is deemed to be fair and has high propensity to democratize knowledge, distribute available opportunities and resources in fairly equitable manner, and strives to institute reforms that are acceptable by a majority in all levels of governance. Indeed, in such societies, though the concept of capitalism may prevail, there are some beliefs that the core sense of humanity will prevail.

The need for societies to adopt a paradigm shift in leadership and perception, from capitalist approaches to socially oriented assumptions has been gaining ground in the recent past, but the unfortunate Floyd incidence, and the protests that have ensued have demonstrated that there is need for the world to hasten towards adopting more humanistic approaches. This includes formulating economic, political, social and health policies, such that, ultimately, no one is left behind, as per the

motto of the United Nations (UN): 'Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet' (UN, 2020). Further, on the economic frontier, it has been seen that a more cohesive, happy, just and resilient society is a precursor for higher productivity and economic throughput (Ritzen and Woolcock, 2000). This is true as everyone, despite their demographic background are bound to positively participate towards the welfare and 'greater good' of the society. So, appropriately addressing recovery mechanisms that incorporate and address the need for social justice and equality would have long-term economic positives.

This paper therefore contributes to better understanding the global context of the BLM protests within the spectre of the COVID-19 pandemic, offering a grounded appraisal of its consequences upon our global social fabric and societal structures. Such points to the need for research to comprehend the tangible and intangible economic and societal ripples at the intersection of these two movements that are having upon our current lives, governance cultures and digital infrastructures but also going forward.

While such approaches may seem good on paper, they however, demand the support of policy makers and a wide range of stakeholders for them to materialize and be actualised. Therefore, with the momentum for change that has been sparked by the Floyd protests, plus the impetus that the coronavirus pandemic has provided, this is a propitious moment to implement long-term changes going forward. If all stakeholders could seize this opportunity and come up with an agreeable roadmap for recovery, not only in the economic sector, but in all facets of society, some of the past and current challenges, especially of inequalities could be overcome, and some anticipated goals like the SDG 11 would be achieved in due course.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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