

LOVE to HATE

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A link between the outbreak of epidemics and xenophobia has existed in countless cases throughout human history. However, it is challenging to point to one set of factors that characterize such a relationship. Evidence can be found of various group's accusations of an outbreak of epidemics in the ancient world. Still, it seems that distinct expressions of violence in the context of epidemics have erupted mainly since the beginning of the early modern era. For example, Jews were blamed on the outbreak of the "Black Death" disease in 1347-1351, and hundreds of Jewish communities were destroyed as a result. Jews continued to be the scapegoat in the context of epidemics like the Plague and the Typhus in Europe for the next 600 years, until the 20th century.

The colonial and pre-colonial eras led to an increase in racial tensions, resulting in increased hatred of various groups. The establishment of an empire has always been accompanied by the fear of new diseases that might infiltrate from the colonies into the homeland, and great efforts have been made to prevent this, at the policy level, as well as at the ground level. So, almost invariably, the superpowers treated the colonies as a ridden with a deadly disease that must be exterminated, and the local inhabitants as infected and dangerous, or, on the contrary, as more durable and immune. Both conceptions originate from racist stereotypes, and both can cause a great deal of harm to its objects.

An example of the second view can be seen in the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1793 in Philadelphia, USA, which killed more than 5,000 people. Although it is now known that a mosquito transmits the disease, authorities at the time, who thought the disease was contagious, employed residents of African descent to treat patients and bury the bodies. They did it as they believed they were more resistant to the disease, thus exposing them to more bites. Many of them died. In this case, the particular resilience that has indeed been achieved among the black population, following centuries of exposure to the disease in West Africa, has led to an increase in suspicions and hatred towards them in America. However, thanks to the patient care given by them, the group also received some appreciation from the community.

A famous modern history example for the first view can be seen in the burning down of Chinatown in Honolulu in 1899, during an outbreak of a plague in the city. Authorities ignored the evidence that rats spread the disease and instead made Asian immigrants the scapegoat for a disease that killed a Chinese bookkeeper. They based their policy on racist stereotypes about Chinese homes being dirty, locking down people of Asian descent in the city for weeks. On the day of the fire, their belongings were thrown into the street, their homes were sprayed with acid, and they were forced to shower in public at makeshift cleaning stations, while officials began burning their homes, which later spread by accident to the whole town. The Chinatown fire was a tragic mistake, not a plan, but stemmed from

racism fueled by ignorance. But according to historian William Deverell, in other cases throughout the first half of the 20th century, the demolition of homes of "foreign" populations as part of an overall plan, in which residents of foreign origin or appearance were declared a public health nuisance so that their homes could be demolished without any compensation.

A different kind of tension, social and class, erupted in the context of other diseases, with different social groups being blamed each time. For example, women and sex workers were blamed for syphilis outbreaks in the second half of the 17th century, and at least up to the point when some key figures contracted the disease themselves, or in other cases where medical workers were blamed for cholera epidemics in 19th century Eastern Europe. Of course, the most prominent example of such tensions is the outbreak of hatred towards homosexuals, drug addicts, and sex workers during the outbreak of the H.I.V AIDS epidemic in the 1980s.

Indeed, fear of illness and lack of knowledge about how diseases are being distributed, have sparked racial attacks throughout history. The outbreak of COVID-19 by the end of last year and its rapid expansion have prompted many cases of racism all over the world. The long duration from the time of infection to the onset of symptoms, and the fact that these often do not appear, also contribute to the phenomenon, as they make it difficult to break the chain of infection and identify the specific people who transmit the disease to their acquaintances. Therefore, people who wish to accuse others of transmitting the virus can do so very easily, since their claims are almost impossible to contradict in real-time.

This article deals with how people harness the spread of COVID-19 to disseminate racist ideologies held by them long before its appearance. Also, it presents cases where disadvantaged groups can, thanks to the Coronavirus, turn their anger toward the centers of power, and demonstrates how they do this by using racist rhetoric.

President of the United States, Donald Trump, never concealed his foreign policy agenda regarding China, and long accused China of unfair trading practices. At the beginning of 2018, Trump initiated a trade war against China by raising the tariffs on goods imported from China. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus at the beginning of 2020, President Trump uses the virus to justify his foreign policy against China and calls the virus "The Chinese Virus," blaming China for all the US problems which occurred because of the pandemic.

A justification of racial ideology through the use of COVID-19 was also done by Matteo Salvini, Italy's former interior minister, a far-right-wing politician, who used the virus to attack the Italian government for "not defending the borders." He claimed that the government underestimated the Coronavirus and that allowing migrants from Africa to land in Italy was thus an irresponsible act.

However, at the time, he said these words there was only one confirmed case of COVID-19 in Africa and no evidence that the infections in Italy were due to African migrants.

Racism towards African peoples at this time is not unique to Europe, and also occurs in Africa itself. In South Africa, which is characterized by racial tensions, sometimes even violent, between its citizens and asylum seekers from neighboring Zimbabwe, the government allocated \$3.1 million to build a fence at the border between the two countries. The South African government argued that this block would prevent any “infected persons” from entering the country – even though at the time, Zimbabwe had no confirmed cases of the virus.

Racism and hatred are not only used by politicians wanting to distribute their racial ideology. In Israel, for example, an outbreak of the virus in Jewish ultra-orthodox neighborhoods resulted in allegations towards this sector by many secular Jews. The latter declared that the ultra-orthodox were dangerous as they “did not care about the rules,” a claim that has been addressed to them in pre-Corona days as well, and therefore were responsible for spreading the virus. The accusers did not refer in their allegations to the ultra-Orthodox's dense living conditions, that undoubtedly accelerated the rate of the disease spread, and that was out of their control, and attributed the high rates of morbidity for lack of compliance alone.

These outbreaks are the reason that the mayor of Ramat-Gan city, which shares a border with the Jewish ultra-orthodox city Bnei-Braq, suggested building a wall to prevent the ultra-orthodox Jews from entering his city. Moreover, social media is full of statements blindly accusing the ultra-orthodox of the outbreaks around the country and suggest severe measures against them. One example is a man who posted on his private Facebook account a hatred post, declaring that he lost his income and has to sit at home while orthodox jews do not respect the rules, and therefore have to be locked in their neighborhoods and be left to die.

Interestingly, in this context, the virus can sometimes be used to produce local power relations, which are usually seen as the opposite of the more general power relations. COVID-19 has been portrayed at the beginning as a ‘rich’ people’s disease, which is spread by people who have the means to travel between countries. Therefore, in some African countries, such as Uganda and Ethiopia, locals promoted racism, xenophobia, and discrimination towards white business people and tourists, denying them access to public goods and services like water and trade.

These events are an example of a racist, yet a rational response, of those fearing of COVID-19, as they turned their anger towards people who, hypothetically, may have entered the disease into their countries. Yet, it is mainly interesting as the virus allowed Africans to express a reaction against whites, which is not often possible, because of Africa's deep economic dependence on the West. Moreover, in

the early stages of the outbreak, many Africans believed it was a white-only disease and implied it was a payback to the Global North for the histories of colonialism and racism.

To conclude, it seems that the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus all over the world brought to the surface all the hatred that already existed and usually bubbled under it. The fear of death is a tool used by politicians to promote their agenda, and also a useful method to decrease self anxiety. When facing a threat that cannot be seen, and which spreads easily through the air, it is good to have an object, an “other,” that we are already familiar with, and “LOVE to HATE.”