

# Between George Floyd and Amazonas - Or When the Air Became Human Rights

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I remember one day,  
In my childhood, when I joked with my cousins  
about the fact that we had to pay for everything  
so maybe one day we would be charged  
for the air we breathe.

I laughed with them then because I was  
small, innocent,  
and also right.  
It is not possible to sell air.

But here we are  
In lines waiting for oxygen tanks,  
Lying on the ground, begging for air  
Holding our breaths  
while something so essential  
became a luxury.

I.  
It has been about breathing,  
For a long time, it has been about breathing.  
But was only during the 2020 election that I realized how bad it was.  
I was holding my breath for a while, maybe since Trump was elected.  
But it was in 2020 that it got worse.

I hadn't really payed attention to how I was breathing,  
but it was during that time that I noticed something.  
It was like I was breathing in tiny spams,  
holding my breath like I was about to dive in a deep and scary ocean.

It was only when he lost the election  
that I began to breathe more freely,  
and felt the air coming back to my lungs.  
What a weird feeling: so much air!

The truth is: air has become a problem,  
in this crazy politics of suffocation.

II.

The pandemic was one of the first alerts,  
And it probably gave me a new lens to think through retrospectively.  
When I first learned about the pandemic, it sounded serious,  
but too dystopian to be real.  
My work deadlines were approaching as always and life was pretty much the same.  
But soon, the problem was here,  
nearby me and us,  
and suddenly other people's air was not safe anymore.  
My air was not safe to others, either.  
And we all needed distance.  
We all must use masks,  
isolate ourselves,  
protect one another from the unsafe, dangerous, contaminated air  
that we might share between us.

More than that, we should all suspect one another,  
Judge one another in case of our masks were not perfectly placed  
The air became a check list to gauge how informed people were,  
how much people believed in science,  
how much people cared for each other.  
We started to examine each others behavior closely, rigorously and millimeter(ically)  
Because air itself became untrustworthy, and people as well.

Finally,  
the lack of air became the scariest idea,  
and a constant idea in our minds,  
because Covid was killing people by taking their air,  
or their ability to breathe.  
In millions of cases,  
doctors, medicine, good care or ventilators  
Could not ensure life.

Indeed, life is all about air.

III.

Soon people were transformed into numbers,  
Friends and families were portrait in graphics.  
Charts were produced to measure the disaster,  
And each dot in those charts represented one person:  
- a singular, full of life, full of air, person.

At some point, the numbers were unintelligible,  
And there was no way to mourn  
Or mourn together the collective loss.  
Because we must not breathe and cry together.  
The air that was unsafe. And us, to one another.

IV.

But life continued going on as always.  
While we pretended (or tried) that everything was fine,  
we continued dealing everyday with the unsuspected unfairness we are used to,  
when suddenly there **he was**  
laying on the ground,  
pressed beneath a racist knee,  
asking to breathe.

Holding our breathes  
watching that obscene murder,  
we saw George Floyd imploring for his life,  
asking to breathe,  
the most ordinary and fundamental human right.

We took to the streets,  
Because we needed to chant.  
Because when violence happens  
We need lots of air  
We need air in our lungs to face racism,  
police brutality, the sense of uncertainty,  
and the physical separation from our loved ones.  
We needed a break,  
we needed to break something  
and get some air.  
Air that gives us energy and opens our hearts to cry our *dores*

V.

Time passed,  
We tried to survive.

Every single day.

And when Trump lost the election,  
I realized how much I had been holding.  
For a couple days,

I breathed.

And I saw so many relieved people breathing outside collectively.

But that did not last. Soon I was back again to my short breath.

Because...

Because my mind was full of longing and questions:

Am I going to survive?

Am I going to have a job?

Am I going to be able to renew my visa?

Am I going to see my family in person after five years without their warm Brazilian hugs?

Is my dad doing well?

And what if he dies ...

Better not to think about it

Better not to breathe excessively when those thoughts are coming. ...

VI.

Exhausted from breathing so constrained,

I continued to follow what was going on,

Reading the news from here, from there,

and a little bit from everywhere,

And then,

I could not breathe again.

There were people in Amazonas,

a place full of forest and oxygen,

That people started to die without oxygen, Asphyxiated.

They were dying.

Not because there were no ventilators,

But because there was not enough oxygen.

The images were breaking my heart,

People were dying without oxygen,  
Families waiting in lines holding the most precious thing they could have in that moment:  
Oxygen tanks  
To give air to their beloved ones.  
Just like that,  
the simple air we all need was in shortage.  
And I started to think about how much air I have.

Can you imagine that?  
Can you imagine watching people in lines waiting for oxygen?  
Not lines for milk,  
Not lines for bread,  
Not lines for water,  
Lines for air.

VII.

How can I work and breathe properly/normally while all of these things are happening?  
How can I finish this paper I am supposed to write?  
Or write a thoughtful email?  
How can I smile or be professional?  
How can I sleep?

Off course sometimes I practice actively some level of alienation.  
I do it as much as I can  
Otherwise,  
I couldn't even get up  
But my breath enacts/embodies these losses, I feel the bitter taste of unfairness, injustice,  
but also because of these unnecessary deaths  
And I begin to breathe in tiny spasms....  
Because how can I breathe?

And here I am  
A person who studies environmental issues,  
Reading endless articles for one more exam on my way to a Ph.D,  
The topic now is climate change.  
Yes, that's the truth, I am reading and studying  
About air  
About atmosphere,  
About how we are changing the air  
So rapidly  
that the ice is melting, and the forests are burning  
and the climate  
is changing.

The air,  
Is  
Becoming scarce,  
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VIII.  
To be honest,  
I am trying to breathe better  
because I was told that we can control anxiety, depression, sadness  
Basically, by breathing properly.

But so far, it is not working,  
Because now it becomes clear to me that air is not everywhere to everyone,  
Air is now a sign of inequality,  
A commodity,  
Something not available for all,  
Which means,  
We should add it to our list of struggles.

IX.

Hope:

Be able to learn how to breathe.

Hope:

We all can catch some air.

And fight back.

Otherwise ...

Actually,

I do not think we can afford other(wise)s.