1 Introduction: Topic and Methodology

"[B]lack lives are necessarily geographic, but also struggle with discourses that erase and despatialize their sense of place" (MᴄKɪᴛᴛʀɪᴄᴋ 2006, cited in Hᴀᴡᴛʜᴏʀɴᴇ 2019, p. 1).

This quote by Katherine McKittrick (2006) highlights the importance of considering geographical aspects in thoughts of and opinions on Black people in regions and cities. This holds particularly for the United States. In the second part of her quote, McKittrick (2006) admits a reality: Black people must also counteract, and engage in, conversations about topics that geographically speaking have a negative impact on their lives, often initiated by Whites. She implicitly refers to issues that deprive Blacks of their historical, emotional, and locational connectedness to cities and neighborhoods. Empirically observable examples are processes of racialization, blatant racism, and exclusion, as well as gentrification efforts.

Thus, McKittrick (2006) further says, it is imperative to "take the language and the physicality of geography seriously, that is as an 'imbrication of material and metaphorical space', so that Black lives and Black histories can be conceptualized and talked about in new ways" (MᴄKɪᴛᴛʀɪᴄᴋ 2006, cited in Cᴏᴍʙs 2018, p. 41). She argues that it is impossible to view space as "simply metaphorical, cognitive, or imaginary, as this risks undermining those underlying experiences that are…critical of *real* spatial inequalities" (MᴄKɪᴛᴛʀɪᴄᴋ 2006, cited in Aʟʟᴇɴ, Lᴀᴡʜᴏɴ & Pɪᴇʀᴄᴇ 2018/2019, emphasis mine).

Hence, only looking at thoughts, perceptions, principles, or discourse is not enough. Instead, it must be considered how and where Black peo-

ple live, and under what conditions. In other words, there must be a certain materiality to the academic process (see ALLEN, LAWHON & PIERCE 2018/2019, p. 1012). Humans and living conditions are connected to spatial spheres, especially in the case of Blacks, so problems become visible in space (see BATHELT & GLÜCKLER 2018, p. 43). Douglas Allen and his colleagues Mary Lawhon and Joseph Pierce (2018/2019) argue that "relational place-making" (ALLEN, LAWHON & PIERCE 2018/2019, p. 1012) is a strategy to provide a platform for this nuanced way of analysis. It emphasizes the inherent hybridity, plurality, and commonality of places: They are defined through what different people, situations, and emotions make of them. This brings about a common sense of belonging.

The described inclusive academic discipline is called Black Geographies. As sub-discipline, it explicitly serves to understand societal dynamics and processes shaping Blacks' behaviors, needs, worries, and hopes, or as stated in the article *Placing race*, "black spatial experiences and visions" (ALLEN, LAWHON & PIERCE 2018/2019, p. 1002). Camilla Hawthorne asserts that "[t]he complex spatialities of Black life, oppression, resistance, and radical imagination" (HAWTHORNE 2019, p. 2) are fairly new to Geography.

However, incorporating African Americans and other Blacks into geographic research is an "ontological subject of study and an epistemological way of interpreting and interacting with the world" (ALLEN, LAWHON & PIERCE 2018/2019, p. 1002). It encourages perspectives transcending boundaries to combat inequalities of social, systemic, and political nature – such as inaccessibility and limited representation. Thus, it focuses on "affirmative black identities and affirmative black geographies" (ALLEN, LAWHON & PIERCE 2018/2019, p. 1004). Nevertheless, Black Geographies is not operationally separated from the white, more Western counterpart. They are rather in a vice-versa relationship to grasp the views, motivations, and practices of Whites and Blacks. Understanding both parts facilitates knowledge acquisition regarding submissive dynamics and the influence of counterreactions on the conception and making of space (see HAWTHORNE 2019, p. 4).

Moreover, it must be acknowledged that Black Geographies do not simply look at or describe Black people according to phenotype or other characteristics. Nor, Hawthorne (2019) says, should the discipline be a tool to designate a particular space as "Black space" (HAWTHORNE 2019,

p. 8) without notable exterior connections. Its inclusion into academia must be viewed as a comprehensive explanation of "subjects, voices, and experiences" (HAWTHORNE 2019, p. 8), not as a mere diversification of institutionalized academic teaching and discourse (see HAWTHORNE 2019, p. 9). For these reasons, the conceptions of the discipline proved helpful in writing this thesis.

Reading McKittrick's (2006) initial quote with this theoretical background, a dualistic observation can be detected. The first part is rather general, whereas the second part describes special dynamics linked to inequality, injustice, and hostility. Thus, her opinion as well as the description of the sub-discipline of Black Geographies naturally involve the dimension of human rights and democracy, a fundamental concept of socio-political analysis.

Simultaneously considering the three variables Black lives, geography, and democracy might appear as new at first. However, a closer look at the individual variables provides a better understanding of the reasons for their inextricable linkage. Practices routinely cutting off Black people from interactive patterns, isolating them politically, and making life especially in cities difficult have been around for decades. Further, the current situation of Blacks in the United States and its development have brought severe disparities and irregularities to the surface, perhaps more clearly than before. Therefore, the title of the thesis contains a pun of the word 'cities' and the 'atrocities' committed against Blacks. Writing the 'cities' part in capital letters should both allude to the disgraceful practices as well as to urban areas. The mentioned elements decisively threaten the democratic quality and stability of the United States. The activists of the *Black Lives Matter Movement* have thus gained substantial support and significance in the overall political and societal discourse. This is because they succeeded in incorporating the three variables into a broader agenda.

Arguably, many scholars and specialists in the academic fields of Black and African American Studies, Politics, and Geography seem to be focused on clear-cut, yet rather limited conceptions of their individual research realms. They indeed construct fruitful equations and relations of elements, but their analyses are often confined to stay within a single topical thread, without much visible transcendence or interdependence.

Nevertheless, there were several scholarly and other expert works that have proven helpful in both establishing an argument and writing the thesis, since they mention crucial aspects for further elaboration. It was necessary to find a combination between texts published in books or academic journals and texts written by scholars but published in magazines. Concerning the characteristics of *Black Lives Matter*, Juliet Hooker's (2016) *Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics: From Democratic Sacrifice to Democratic Repair* was crucial, as were Charles P. Linscott's (2017) *Introduction: #BlackLivesMatter and the Mediatic Lives of a Movement*, and Alondra Nelson's (2016) *The Longue Durée of Black Lives Matter* (see also e. g., RICKFORD 2016; HOGAN 2019). Moreover, articles in popular American newspapers such as *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times,* as well as published reports from news channels proved enriching. This was because they employ a socio-political and citizen-based rather than a pure academic lens – a dimension that should, of course, not be underestimated.

This thesis paper will discuss the question of how two distinct cities in the United States – Washington, D.C. and Minneapolis, Minnesota – can actively contribute to improving American democracy amid all hardships Black people face there; how Blacks can counteract detrimental practices, and what relevance the three variables have for the troubled United States. It will first introduce *Black Lives Matter* (BLM), people joining to achieve the end of anti-Black brutality and the subsequent rise of a strong, equal America without Black suffering and the "story of black inferiority" (LAWRENCE III. 2015, p. 392). Congruently, it will present the idea of a social movement and its characteristics (DOMARADZKA 2018; MILLER & NICHOLLS 2013; NICHOLLS 2008). Thus, it wishes to make the point that BLM is an indispensable factor in today's American social dynamics. Moreover, it will explain those topics making America a place of sheer hopelessness for Blacks, which are racism, police violence, and inaccessibility in various instances (e. g., COMBS 2018; DUNHAM & PETERSEN 2017, SMITH 2017). This provides a general understanding of the difficulties many African Americans and other Black Americans face. These three elements will be outlined by considering the omnipresent geographical implications. In the next step, the thesis will look more closely

at the two example cities to demonstrate those realities and local counteraction strategies, meaning a link to BLM and social justice activism (e. g., HELMUTH 2019; SUMMERS 2019). A last key component, then, is to describe the chances that BLM and their geographically motivated efforts offer the American democratic enterprise (e. g., RANSBY 2017). The thesis will mention the possibilities the country has for repairing damage done by racism and marginalization of African Americans, and finally summarize the core findings in a conclusion, which also gives a short outlook.

The thesis aims to argue that the three elements BLM – and Black lives in general – geography, and democracy are everything but mutually exclusive, as they have been intertwined for a long time. This is especially true when looking at cities such as Washington and Minneapolis. Therefore, they need to be integrated into what will be called a concise relational triangle of socio-geo-political analysis. The triangular model should ascribe equal relevance to all components, subsequently facilitating a correct assessment of the influential and exemplary role of these two cities for the American democracy.