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## Capitalism and Death<sup>1</sup>

The article begins with the thesis that the relationship between capitalism and life is transforming into a connection between capitalism and death.

### On Necropolitics<sup>1</sup>

The term “necropolitics” was introduced by the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe and allows us to better define the transformation to the management of life under the extreme conditions created by regimes of death. Its specific place in Western epistemology therefore calls for holding up a mirror to the model of the Western epistemic matrix, which cannot be understood without something we call the colonial matrix of power, but at the same time, Mbembe’s use of theoretical techniques such as recalibration and racialisation, allows for the critical actualisation of the contemporary historical moment.

Necropolitics is a coinage uniting *necro-* (death) and politics.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, necropolitics involves “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death.”<sup>3</sup> And, in order to put this forward, three key procedures are central to necropolitics: the right to kill, enmity, and impunity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Marina Gržinić, “The Emergence of the Political Subject”, *Emancipation of the Resistance*, March 2013, <https://emancipationofresistance.wordpress.com/grzinic/>, accessed 22 December 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics”, trans. L. Meintjes, *Public Culture*, 15 (1/2003), pp. 39.

<sup>4</sup> This is how Edward A. Avila summarises these three points in his dissertation “Conditions of (Im)possibility: Necropolitics, Neoliberalism, and the Cultural Politics of Death in Contemporary Chicana/o Film and Literature”, PhD dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2012.

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Necropolitics refers to a system of governmentality in neoliberal global capitalism that is by no means a glorification of death in the sense of the old relationship between Eros and Thanatos, but an intensification of governance measures that not only brings about death, but also capitalises on it. Necropolitics always has, as a consequence, death as a systematic extermination, not just accidental death. Necropolitics operates with new forms of disciplinary and control technologies and with an authoritarian politics that shows itself in the normalisation of racist attitudes and an economy that is seen as completely detached from any production efforts, but is used as a pure political instrument for more and more oppression.<sup>5</sup>

As Mbembe conceptualises it in his seminal text “Necropolitics” from 2003:

Having presented a [necropolitical] reading of politics as the work of death, I turn now to sovereignty, expressed predominantly as the right to kill. For the purpose of my argument, I relate Foucault’s notion of biopower to two other concepts: the state of exception and the state of siege. I examine those trajectories by which the state of exception and the relation of enmity have become the normative basis of the right to kill. In such instances, power (and not necessarily state power) continuously refers and appeals to exception, emergency, and a fictionalized notion of the enemy.<sup>6</sup>

Necropolitics regulates life from the perspective of death, thus transforming life into a mere existence below the minimum of any life. I have axiomatically defined necropolitics as “let live and make die.”<sup>7</sup> To illustrate this point, I have drawn a parallel with a form of life conceived by Michel Foucault in the 1970s called “biopolitics”. I have axiomatically described Foucault’s biopolitics as “make live and let die.”<sup>8</sup> I have also argued that biopolitics in the 1970s represented a situation of regulating life in the so-called capitalist first world and

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<sup>5</sup> Marina Gržinić and Aneta Stojnić, “Reclaiming the Body: Fem Positions Repoliticized”, in M. Gržinić and A. Stojnić (eds.), *Shifting Corporealities in Contemporary Performance: Avant-Gardes in Performance*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 24–25.

<sup>6</sup> Mbembe, “Necropolitics”, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Marina Gržinić, “Capital, Repetition”, *Reartikulacija*, (8/2009), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* See also Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975–76*, M. Bertani and A. Fontana (eds.), trans. D. Macey, New York, Picador, 2003.

welfare states, but also a situation of abandoning or delegating death to the so-called other worlds, the second and third worlds.<sup>9</sup>

These two modes of life represent a brutal difference in the management of life and death. In biopolitics, life is controlled, but it is about providing a good life for the citizens of the sovereign capitalist countries of the first world. Today, on the other hand, it is about a pure abandonment of these structures (let live), while at the same time death is managed, used, and capitalised by the war machine.<sup>10</sup>

This was clearly demonstrated in the 2008 crisis. In such a situation, death becomes the focus of a field of power that, in global, neoliberal necrocapitalism, takes the form not of biopower but of necropower. In order to understand what necropower means exactly, we should relate it to “bare life”. The latter concept was introduced in 1995 by Giorgio Agamben in his book *Homo Sacer: Il potere sovrano e la vita nuda*, translated into English as *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* in 1998.<sup>11</sup> *Homo sacer* is the Latin term for a sacred, perishable life. Historically, it already existed in ancient Rome; Roman law refers to it. Today there are many people who fall into this category, the best known being refugees, although before them those detained at Guantanamo had the status of bare lives. In these two examples it is clear that the figures are situated between life and death, because what they possess is precisely what Agamben calls bare life. Bare life is a product in between sovereign power and something that is a surplus or a leftover of human life.

Moreover, bare life is always constructed through a system of invisible, secret, hidden procedures and is also endowed with the performativity (of power) that terminally affects the (in/human) body. This denotes a very clear procedure by which social, economic, legal, or political power must resort to the state of ex-

<sup>9</sup> Gržinić, “The Emergence of the Political Subject”.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* I developed the core of my thinking back in 2007. I developed it while reading about the crisis in the former Yugoslavia, and in the same period I was dealing with necropolitics as part of my teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna with my students. At that time, a decade ago, and still today, although to a lesser extent, the refutation of necropolitics was very present. And why? The answer is that neoliberal global capitalism today exhibits stubborn life, also thanks to biotechnology, in order to hide the hyper-profit made from death.

<sup>11</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998.

ception in order to produce bare life as a leftover or surplus within a structure (e.g. a state, sovereign, or institutional structure). In order to kill with impunity or abandon people or whole nations of civilians, a system of politics, law, economics, and social relations must be developed that presents itself as extrajudicial, exceptional, or emergency. Furthermore, the sovereign, as Agamben describes it, is an exception unto itself that decides on its exception. As Agamben shows, the legal right of the sovereign is the effective prorogation of the right itself and of a “state of exception”, both of which are confused in the last instance: the one who decides on the exception, which is a confusion of law and fact, is the sovereign itself. The result is pure circularity, another feature of global capitalism, which presents power as increasingly subjectless – and yet it decides as a subject.<sup>12</sup>

The relationship between biopower and necropower. I spoke about this in an introduction to a book by Adla Isanović.<sup>13</sup> Necropower and biopower are inseparable concepts, when thinking about the relationship between the state and the people who live or have lived there. Foucault states in “*Society Must Be Defended*” that the nineteenth century was a kind of possession of man as a living being by the State, a kind of nationalisation of the biological.<sup>14</sup> He sees racism as whatever “justifies the death-function in the economy of biopower by appealing to the principle that the death of others makes one biologically stronger insofar as one is a member of a race or a population.”<sup>15</sup>

In this way, he presents the population as a biologically racialised entity that is kept in unity by the elimination of threats. At this point of what can be thought about the nationalisation of the biological by the state we see the central role of biopower. Biopower can unfold under the protection of massive security measures, which we see again and again, this time in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. For biopower to function, which is suddenly a precondition for the possibility of the biopolitical, it is important that it is accepted and embraced by the population.

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<sup>12</sup> Gržinić and Stojnić, “Reclaiming the Body”, pp. 25–26.

<sup>13</sup> Marina Gržinić, “Foreword: Questioning Digital Technologies, Forensics, and Human Rights Law”, in A. Isanović, *The Regime of Digital Coloniality: Bosnian Forensic Contemporaneity*, Frankfurt am Main, CEEOL Press, 2021, pp. 7–12.

<sup>14</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, pp. 239–240.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

Necropower thus focuses on the negative goal of control over death as opposed to the positive goal of biopower, control over life. Moreover, it appears that necropower controls large populations through the management of death (as opposed to the individual executions of a classical sovereign) rather than through the management of life. In David Theo Goldberg's view, "necropower can take multiple forms: the terror of actual death; or a more 'benevolent' form—the result of which is the destruction of a culture in order to 'save the people' from themselves."<sup>16</sup> As in biopolitics in relation to biopower, necropower is a central aspect of necropolitics. Necropower is the power of the state over the production and management of death,<sup>17</sup> which also includes power over collective memory and the historical reappraisal of the past. Mbembe says that necropower is the exercise of sovereignty in cases where "*the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*" is the central project of power, not autonomy.<sup>18</sup> In the last instance, the shift from biopolitics to necropolitics must be reconsidered precisely in the zones of indistinguishability between the sovereign and life, between citizens and non-citizens, and between biopower and necropower. Mbembe specifically situates his analysis of necropolitics in the context of contemporary colonial occupations (e.g. apartheid in South Africa or the Israeli occupation of Palestine). The concept of necropolitics thus opens up a critical space for discussing a land of dead, violated, and ultimately disposed bodies in necrospace.

Agamben describes the appearance of the state of exception. The state of exception, Agamben says, "is not a special kind of law (like the law of war); rather, insofar as it is a suspension of the juridical order itself, it defines law's threshold or limit concept."<sup>19</sup>

It is important to note that the state of exception is not exceptional; it is not derivative but constitutive of the way neoliberal states function today. Moreover, as Santiago López Petit notes, what characterises neoliberal global capitalism is

<sup>16</sup> David Theo Goldberg, cited in Mbembe, "Necropolitics", p. 22, n. 38.

<sup>17</sup> Mbembe, "Necropolitics".

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14; emphasis in the original.

<sup>19</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. K. Attell, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 4.

the transformation from nation-state to war-state.<sup>20</sup> In fact, this transformation means that the former imperial, capitalist, colonial states that have turned into war-states exist simultaneously as the fragmentation of all social and public sectors of the state. Petit calls this fragmentation “postmodern fascism,” which functions by sterilising the Other, avoiding conflict in social space, and fragmentation.<sup>21</sup> The war-state, especially in the capitalist First World (us) and former Western European context, exists to maintain the illusion of society and the biopolitical mode of life, while within the neoliberal capitalist biopolitical system the necropolitical imposes itself and metastasises onto it. The illusion of society maintained by the war-state presents itself as a biopolitical standpoint, a politics that cares about the lives of the population, even though the population is systematically controlled, fragmented, and ultimately abandoned (think of the complete annihilation of society by the Covid-19 pandemic). The contemporary state is in fact turning into a necropolitical regime, a political system that only participates in the war of transnational capital (see the current relations between the United States and China) and abandons citizens to find their own way to survive.

In this transition from nation-state to war-state there is also the so-called missing link: the racial-state. The path from the nation-state to the war-state leads via the racial-state, at the centre of which is racism.<sup>22</sup> It is also important to note that this triad of state forms only became possible with the rise of neoliberalism.<sup>23</sup>

“Necropolitical power proceeds by a sort of inversion between life and death,” Mbembe explains, “as if life was merely death’s medium.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Santiago López Petit, *La movilización global. Breve tratado para atacar la realidad* [Global Mobilisation. A Brief Treatise on Attacking Reality], Madrid, Traficantes de Sueños, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>22</sup> Gržinić, “The Emergence of the Political Subject”.

<sup>23</sup> I have developed this trajectory in the political genealogy of films that have a relation to these three formats of states, with the racial state at the centre in a contribution entitled “Politics of Death in Europe”. See Marina Gržinić and Jovita Pristovšek, “Race and Its Far-Reaching Contemporary Ontological and Epistemological Implications”, in M. Rosen (ed.), *Diseases of the Head: Essays on the Horrors of Speculative Philosophy*, New York, punctum books, 2020, pp. 197–235.

<sup>24</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. S. Corcoran, Durham, Duke University Press, 2019, p. 38.

## Is There an Escape from the Necropolitical Topography of Injustice? On Migration, Necrocapitalism, and Civil Bodies

After the mass deaths of refugees off Lampedusa in 2013, Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta said: “The hundreds who lost their lives at Lampedusa yesterday [on 3 October 2013] are Italian citizens as of today.”<sup>25</sup> The state funeral that the victims received was less costly than returning the bodies to their place of origin. But what about the survivors? According to the law in force at the time, they not only did not receive citizenship, but also faced fines and imprisonment for attempting to illegally cross the state border of a foreign country.

The Lampedusa case made me think about what was not reflected upon in public, namely that these dead people got what they wanted, but in a deadly way, they got EU citizenship, which finally gave them a chance to have their own life in the EU, but only if they died. We see in global capitalism the emergence of a new form of citizenship, divided in two from within (similar to what Agamben did with life): on one side a necropolitical citizenship and on the other a biopolitical citizenship.

Necropolitical citizenship is given to those left to die (refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants). Whereas our EU citizenship is no longer an “old” form of “natural” citizenship (it never was!), but only biopolitical citizenship. So, in global capitalism we have at least two different forms of citizenship, necropolitical and biopolitical citizenship, which could easily be exchanged by neoliberal governments in the near future.

I would also like to point out a way out, through my own political experience that emerged on the other side of the Berlin Wall in the former Yugoslavia, where I come from. This border, which became imprinted in my philosophical thinking in the late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, gives me a certain historical legitimacy to speak of a hegemonic process that the Western, first capitalist world carried out vis-à-vis the rest of Europe.

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<sup>25</sup> Valentina Pop, “Italy Grants Citizenship to Lampedusa Dead”, EUobserver, 7 October 2013, <https://euobserver.com/rule-of-law/121681>, accessed 27 December 2022.

Basically, the last decades have shown that neoliberal global capitalism, historically, in order to move forward, has not only removed the Berlin Wall, but has also reinforced a rupture in the manner of ensuring proper governmentality. I can say that necropolitical and biopolitical citizenship require that these two distinctive forms of governmentality make their mode of operation explicit. In the 1970s, Foucault made it clear that there is a way of managing the life of the Western world, which he called biopolitics, because bio means life and politics is a takeover of the life of the population. The formula of biopolitics is “live and let die” (let die all other worlds outside the first Western world). In 2003, Mbembe wrote a text entitled “Necropolitics” (necro is death now administered by politics, but with the implementation of a military corpus, and this is what we have seen all over the great globe after 2001). Obviously, the sweet slogan of the 1970s welfare state has morphed into “let live” (for the first capitalist world) and “kill” (everyone else).

Biopolitics refers to the relationship between life and politics and operates through a variety of regulatory techniques in people’s everyday lives. According to Michel Foucault, biopolitics refers to “the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques.”<sup>26</sup> The biopolitical, as Gilles Deleuze understood it in the 1990s, thus came out of the disciplinary society, the vast enclosures that lead from one closed space to another, and each space with a law.<sup>27</sup> The disciplinary society came after the society of sovereignty, of taxation instead of the organisation of production, of the rule over death instead of the administration of life, the Napoleonic period as set out by Deleuze, as opposed to the French Revolution; after World War II we were no longer a disciplinary society but a society of control. Paul Virilio’s free-floating control.<sup>28</sup> The apparent acquittal of the disciplinary society, between two incarcerations and the limitless deferrals of the society of control. Or what Balibar exposed in the 2000s: the passport of a “rich person from a rich country” increasingly means “not just mere national belonging, protection and a right of citizenship, but a *surplus* of rights.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley, New York, Pantheon Books, 1978, pp. 141–142.

<sup>27</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control”, *October*, 59 (1992), pp. 3–7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, London, Verso, 2002, p. 83; emphasis in original.

My thesis is that everything we theorise today about the status of refugees and asylum seekers, and also about citizenship, including the living conditions, must be seen through a necropolitical lens; biopolitics is not enough, although there are many attempts to think of the borderspace as a European biopolitical space that is undergoing major changes.

I argue that these biopolitical borders, borderspaces, are subject to strict necropolitical procedures. They are becoming more and more militarised, and therefore all we see around Fortress EU are landscapes of death, which is a necropolitical category. It is also important that necropolitics works through measures of increased racialisation. This is not just the old racism, but new forms of the exploitation, dispossession, and expropriation of people or even states through the constructed category of race, which has become the norm today.

### ***Aggregate A qq***

In the first part of this sub-section, I will focus on the question posed in the section title “Is There an Escape from the Necropolitical Topography of Injustice?” Topography is understood here as the arrangement of the natural and artificial physical features of an area. To do this, we need to recall the state of affairs regarding refugees in the EU.

Thousands of refugees are scattered on the Greek islands, others live in seclusion in poor refugee camps, thousands wait to enter the European Union via Hungary and remain in Serbia. In all these situations, there is oppression in the name of security, although according to Mbembe’s definition we clearly see that necropolitics creates spaces of death that are no longer the biopolitical spaces of the regulation of life and protection to save lives; on the contrary, life becomes part of a process that extinguishes life. This process, which was pointed out by James Stanescu,<sup>30</sup> can help us grasp what is going on in the landscape of death at the border. Agamben said that since the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall,

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<sup>30</sup> James Stanescu, “Beyond Biopolitics: Animal Studies, Factory Farms, and the Advent of Deading Life”, *PhaenEx*, 8 (2/2013), pp. 135–160. See also Marina Gržinić, “Afterword: ‘Afterwards’. Struggling with Bodies in the Dump of History”, in N. Jiménez del Val (ed.), *Body between Materiality and Power: Essays in Visual Studies*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, pp. 159–178.

we have had two forms of life, bare life and life with forms.<sup>31</sup> Bare life is a life with nothing, it is naked life, but I can say that we see that the life of refugees is a form of “deading life.”<sup>32</sup> Mortal life is not bare life, but a thoroughly designed and constructed life under the pressure of death.

If we assume that biopolitics and necropolitics are two forms of governmentality that apply modes, procedures, tactics, logics, laws, and institutional regulations in a neoliberal global capitalism, then all these fenced and closed spaces in Europe and hyper-ghettoisation are linked to a very perverse situation. As Eric Fassin and Marie Adam have noted,<sup>33</sup> it is primarily a process of ghettoisation, which is nothing more than a form of security governmentality, but the aim is to contain, deter, and expel asylum seekers, but not yet to expel them completely, because as we can see in the Western European context, complete expulsion would violate their rights.<sup>34</sup> So all these procedures are closely linked to the taking of life – it is a path towards death, but not yet death.

The question of perversity in relation to law becomes even clearer when we refer to Seyla Benhabib’s remark from 2008,<sup>35</sup> a remark on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which we found exposed in a timely manner in a 2015 text by Kirstine Nordentoft Mose and Vera Wriedt entitled “*Mapping the Construction of EU Borderspaces as Necropolitical Zones of Exception*”:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was negotiated and adopted in 1948, when almost half the world was under colonial subjugation and consequently did not form part of the United Nations General Assembly. States and subjects under colonial rule did not participate in the negotiations, nor were they considered to fall under the allegedly universal scope of human rights. Today, the UDHR grounds a universal right to emigration in Art. 13, stipulating that ‘Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and return to his coun-

<sup>31</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

<sup>32</sup> Stanescu, “Beyond Biopolitics”.

<sup>33</sup> Eric Fassin and Marie Adam, “Calais, jungle d’Etat”, *Libération*, 23 April 2015, [https://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/04/23/calais-jungle-d-etat\\_1261872/](https://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/04/23/calais-jungle-d-etat_1261872/), accessed 28 December 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Fassin and Adam cited in Debarati Sanyal, “Calais’s ‘Jungle’: Refugees, Biopolitics, and the Arts of Resistance”, *Representations*, 139 (1/2017), p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 30.

try’, and anchors everyone’s right ‘to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution’ in Art. 14. However, there is no provision for a right to entry.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, ghettoisation, which is nothing but a form of security governmentality, works hand in hand with another form of governmentality, namely humanitarian governmentality. Both support and enhance necropolitical management.

Debarati Sanyal, in her text “Calais’s ‘Jungle’: Refugees, Biopolitics, and the Arts of Resistance”, showed how these two forms of governmentality, we will say within necropolitical neoliberal global capitalism, operate. Sanyal referred to the words of Bernard Cazeneuve, then French Minister of the Interior, when he and the French government decided to “cleanse” the Calais Jungle of from 2,000 to 6,000 bodies. In 2016, the Calais Jungle, which was a “fortified space of deterrence and detention, with routine administrative procedures of harassment, incarceration, deportation, and destruction,” and where a “large police presence, composed of the *gendarmerie mobile* and riot police (the CRS, or *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité*) [...] deployed to contain the ‘undesirables’,” was “cleansed.”<sup>37</sup> As Sanyal notes, this last attack was, in the cynical words of the French authorities, an evacuation, “a humanitarian stage of intervention,” carried out with “respect for the dignity of persons” in order to protect them from the indignities of their situation.<sup>38</sup>

We see the ultimate perverse description, a boundless cynicism that Sanyal comments on as follows: the evacuation undertaken in the name of dignity “showed bulldozers razing the makeshift shelters under heavy police protection, while tear gas and water guns were fired at protesting refugees.”<sup>39</sup> Such doublespeak is not only symptomatic of the hypocrisy in which humanitarian language masks security violence, but, as Sanyal aptly puts it, represents the “aporia of border security practices, which positions ‘the “irregular” migrant as *both* a security threat *and* threatened life in need of saving.”<sup>40</sup> The double aim of security vi-

<sup>36</sup> Benhabib cited in Kirstine Nordentoft Mose and Vera Wriedt, “Mapping the Construction of EU Borderspaces as Necropolitical Zones of Exception”, *Birkbeck Law Review*, 3 (2/2015), p. 297, n. 76.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1; emphasis in original.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Nick Vaughan-Williams cited in Sanyal, “Calais’s ‘Jungle’”, p. 2; emphasis in original.

olence, which here is to generate even more violence, enables state repressive apparatuses and legal procedures to control this violence. So, it is not about justice, because justice is a lost cause in necropolitical capitalism.

Sanyal notes that borders not only materialise as walls or fences that separate territories, but also function as pre-emptive membranes that selectively filter and regulate the movement of bodies through new technologies.<sup>41</sup> In such a context, the law and the justice system are used for this whole preventive system.

However, we also see that although Sanyal has accurately captured the escalation of necropolitics, she still dwells on the biopolitical. For example, she refers to the escalation of visual surveillance technologies in the nation-state's management of life and death in 2006 as "photobiopolitics."<sup>42</sup> Returning now to my thesis, and as argued by Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt, visual technologies participate in the landscapes of death as photonecropolitics. The difference is crucial.

If we insist on the necropolitical, we can note another fact (following Sanyal's reading of Didier Fassin), namely that the "political right to protection enshrined by asylum has been replaced by an appeal to moral sentiments such as compassion and empathy."<sup>43</sup> Humanitarian governmentality, she argues, thus relies on the asymmetries of compassion rather than the reciprocity of justice and equal rights. When not dismissed as economic migrants or labelled as potential threats, "asylum seekers are frequently positioned as 'speechless emissaries' whose wounds speak louder than the words they say."<sup>44</sup> Liisa H. Malkki's text entitled "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization", to which Sanyal refers, shows that this process already began in the mid-1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is important to point out that this process was recognised a decade ago, but it did not ring a bell because at the time it was not seen that refugees represented an attack on what was called "our way of life."

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<sup>41</sup> Sanyal, "Calais's 'Jungle'", p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32., n. 40. Sanyal refers to Irving Goh's "Prolegomenon to a Right to Disappear", *Cultural Politics*, 2 (1/2016), pp. 97–114.

<sup>43</sup> Sanyal, "Calais's 'Jungle'", p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Liisa H. Malkki cited in Sanyal, "Calais's 'Jungle'", pp. 4–5. See Liisa H. Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization", *Cultural Anthropology*, 11 (3/1996), pp. 377–404.

As Sanyal says:

In the words of a Bangladeshi refugee I interviewed in Paris, “We have to show that we are victims, pure victims.” Humanitarian reason capitalizes on trauma, suffering, and victimhood, reducing refugees to supplicant bodies in need of intervention and protection. It yields an impoverished view of asylum seekers’ subjectivity, narratives, and political energies, in a pre-emptive gesture of exclusion from equal citizenship.<sup>45</sup>

In such a situation, which first shows that neoliberal global necropolitical capitalism tends to be pure or total, that is, to acquire the element of its ultimate goal capital, and this self-valorisation of capital as a subject and the complete privatisation of everything and especially the making of profit with the military machine, the question remains: Is there way out of the topography of necropolitical injustice?

Justice cannot be upheld by normative law and Western legal systems. Therefore, it is an attempt at self-rearticulation as destruction, which is the erasure of fingerprints. For migrants in the Eurozone, mutilating fingerprints with razor blades, fire, or acid is an attempt to escape access by Eurodac, the database that collects and manages the biometric data of asylum seekers and illegal entrants in the European Union.

Alexander G. Weheliye’s 2014 book *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, also develops the concept of racialising assemblages along these lines, which are important in capturing the racialising forms of violence that take place in borderspaces, deathscapes.<sup>46</sup> *Habeas Viscus* analyses the flesh or viscus to preserve the gendered and racialised particularity of biopolitical regimes. Weheliye not only brings Black feminism into the conversation with continental philosophy, but also articulates Black Studies as an intellectual endeavour that “pursues a politics of global liberation beyond the genocidal shackles of Man.”<sup>47</sup> Weheliye’s analysis of the

<sup>45</sup> Sanyal, “Calais’s ‘Jungle’”, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 4.

flesh is a critical one. This means, as Amber Jamilla Musser points out in her review,<sup>48</sup> that flesh, as used by Black feminism as a signifier of the gendered but not quite human and not quite animal body, is a space of possibility because it offers a way of thinking about “alternative modes of life alongside the violence, subjection, exploitation, and racialisation that define the modern human.”<sup>49</sup>

Building on the important work of Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Winter in Black Feminist Studies, Weheliye criticises bare life and biopolitical discourse for failing to understand and counter the racialised hierarchies that sustain unjust global power structures and the corresponding forms of political violence. Therefore, we can see that the processes that oppose unjust systems are a form of razor blades and acid to liberate the body from a form of hyper-technological data archives and challenge the empty centre of biopower through necropower racialisations. It is also scary that we are losing our bodies. But it is really the only thing we have in neoliberal global capitalism. We have no politics. We do not have anything. We only have our body, and everyone wants to keep that identity. The way to get rid of it is to undermine necrocapitalist surveillance at some level.

In this article, we would like to conceptualise, deepen, and not just disentangle biopower and necropower, as they are interwoven through neoliberal capitalism. In this context, it is important to question the “myth” that in Western liberal capitalism there is an empty center of power (usually found in the so-called public spaces, etc.) that is not managed by the state power structure. This was the case in the 1970s and was systematically overturned as early as the 1980s, but it was still not understood that it was ultimately a myth. Today through the necropolitical wars, the necropolitical abandonment of refugees, and racialisation, this is no longer as valuable, and there are no longer spaces detached from the repressive and ideological structures of the state in which civil society could assert its demands in the public sphere.

Weheliye proposes the concept of racialising assemblages to illuminate and deconstruct the “sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full hu-

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<sup>48</sup> Amber Jamilla Musser, “Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human”, *philoSOPHIA*, 6 (1/2016), pp. 156–160.

<sup>49</sup> Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 2.

mans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans.”<sup>50</sup> I would insist on looking at the other side of this division as well. Thus, if on one side we see not-quite-humans and non-humans, I will argue that on the other side there is nothing like humans, but only post-humans. On both sides, a profound process of racialisation is already underway, and in the desert of global capitalism, there is no human on the horizon. The human being is not desired as a category! So instead of eliminating the division of people by race, nationality, or gender, these dividing lines turn out to be even more racialising processes.

This will intensify as we know that in October 2020, as commented by Daniel Thym, “a new start” was proposed by the EU Commission regarding the Dublin regulations on migration,

the Commission proposes to abolish the Dublin III Regulation and withdraws the Dublin IV Proposal. But [...] ‘the Migration Management Proposal’<sup>51</sup> reproduces word-for-word the Dublin III Regulation, subject to amendments drawn [...] from the Dublin IV Proposal! As for the ‘governance framework’ outlined in Articles 3-7 of the Migration Management Proposal, it is a hodgepodge of purely declamatory provisions (e.g. Art. 3-4), of restatements of pre-existing obligations (Art. 5), of legal bases authorising procedures that require none (Art. 7). The one new item is a yearly monitoring exercise centered on an ‘European Asylum and Migration Management Strategy’ (Art. 6), which seems as likely to make a difference as the ‘Mechanism for Early Warning, Preparedness and Crisis Management’, introduced with much fanfare with the Dublin III Regulation and then left in the drawer before, during and after the 2015/16 crisis.<sup>52</sup>

What changes will the proposal bring? It reflects the prevailing trends in the European Union regarding the regulation of migration: regaining control over the situation, ending large-scale “irregular movements”, and “protecting” the EU’s

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Communication from the Commission on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM(2020) 609 final of 23 September 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2020:609:FIN>.

<sup>52</sup> Francesco Maiani, “A ‘Fresh Start’ or One More Clunker? Dublin and Solidarity in the New Pact”, *EU Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy*, 20 October 2020, <https://eumigration-lawblog.eu/a-fresh-start-or-one-more-clunker-dublin-and-solidarity-in-the-new-pact/>, accessed 30 January 2023.

external borders are the primary goals. As Conne Island, a self-managed youth cultural centre in Leipzig, stated on 25 January 2017, in reference to Dublin IV (apparently off the grid): “We have joined forces to fight against this abominable system under the name EUmanity, especially against Dublin IV, the latest instrument of foreclosure.”<sup>53</sup>

We cannot say it otherwise than that the apparent abolition of Dublin IV is by no means an abolition of the “Orbanisation” of EU asylum law. A book by Keith Breckenridge entitled *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*, published in 2014, shows how the twentieth-century South African obsession with Francis Galton’s universal fingerprint identity registry served as an incubator for today’s systems of biometric citizenship being developed across the South.<sup>54</sup>

Sanyal explains that the production of illegibility using razor blades, fire, sandpaper, or battery acid is a political tactic developed in resistance to the biopolitical apparatus that manages bodies and controls borders.<sup>55</sup> I would say that all this goes hand in hand with an intensification of the system of necropolitics that develops new forms of governmentality, such as humanitarian, security governmentality.

Sanyal also points out a dilemma that I will leave open from the perspective of the autonomy of migration:

the migrant is the harbinger of a politics beyond the exclusions of representation, visibility, citizenship, and (human) rights.

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In its focus on agency and resistance, the autonomy of migration perspective poses an important challenge to the humanitarian and securitarian reduction of refugees to bodies that must be managed. Yet the celebration of anonymity and dis-

<sup>53</sup> “Wir haben uns zusammengefunden, um - unter dem Namen inEUmanity - gemeinsam gegen dieses abscheuliche System zu kämpfen, konkret gegen Dublin IV, das neueste Instrument der Abschottung.” Conne Island, “Was ist Dublin IV?” [What is Dublin IV?], <https://conne-island.de/terminlang/2017.html>, accessed 29 December 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Keith Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

<sup>55</sup> Sanyal, “Calais’s ‘Jungle’”, p. 17.

appearance remains a perilous gesture, given the tragically embodied reality of these terms in the mass grave that is the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>56</sup>

Even if we acknowledge the cunning and creativity of refugees in crossing borders, as Sanyal continues, we cannot assume that mobility takes precedence over control when so many migrate in response to intolerable forms of control and their flight is halted by the camps springing up on European shores. Moreover, it is difficult to assign a temporal priority to the movement of migrants as the border pre-emptively filters out “risky” bodies through the increasingly sophisticated technology of biometrics.<sup>57</sup> Even as “techniques of resistance such as fingerprint mutilation continue to be practised by the exiled in sites like Calais, Europe’s unparalleled anxiety about potential routes of terrorist infiltration, materialized in France’s ongoing state of exception, is compromising such room for manoeuvre.”<sup>58</sup> We must constantly watch for balance, because necropolitical capitalism is without balance.

### **Aggregate B**

I now come to the second part of my sub-section title: “On Migration, Necrocapitalism, Civil Bodies”. I would like to return to borderspaces and reflect in detail on their political-legal construction by the European Union. In this part, too, I mainly refer to the analysis by Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt entitled “*Mapping the Construction of EU Borderspaces as Necropolitical Zones of Exception*”.

We can see a vocabulary of violence emerging to deal with systems of surveillance and screening that uses shortcuts:

FRONTEX – European Border and Coast Guard Agency

EUROSUR – European Border Surveillance System

NCCs – National Coordination Centres (in EU Member States)

ENP – European Neighbourhood Policy, which mainly consists of bilateral political agreements between the EU and the respective partner countries outside the EU

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

Since the summer and fall of 2015, the European Union's borders have been a militarised borderspace that is emerging under neoliberal necrotechnologies such as drones, etc.

Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt see the militarisation of borderspaces through (1) a horizontal expansion of border control through agreements with countries of origin and transit countries, and (2) a vertical intensification of surveillance by drones or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).<sup>59</sup> Of course, each of these levels has its own history. For example, on the US-Mexico border drone surveillance was introduced in 2006. Today, drones patrol more than half of the border, with the long-term goal of 24/7 drone operations.<sup>60</sup>

At the heart of this restructuring or hyper-reconstruction of surveillance under the label of protection is the increasing militarisation of the border under the shield of surveillance. Why does this matter? Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt argue that the militarised border surrounding the European Union is termed an “area of justice, freedom and security.”<sup>61</sup> Or, if we recall the specific surveillance and policy techniques underlying *Regulation (EU) No 603/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on the establishment of a European Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems*, they all focus on the area of freedom, security and justice.

Political agreements with countries of origin and transit, mainly consisting of bilateral political agreements between the European Union and the respective partner countries, extend the borderspace horizontally. The ENP covers sixteen countries, divided into two regional groups:

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1) ENP-East countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, and 2) ENP-South countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt, “*Mapping the Construction of EU Borderspaces as Necropolitical Zones of Exception*”, pp. 279.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281, n. 8.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>62</sup> Eurostat, “*Background – European Neighbourhood Policy countries (ENP)*”, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/european-neighbourhood-policy/background>, accessed 29 December 2022.

Former German Chancellor Merkel met with Tunisian Prime Minister Chahed on the second day of her North Africa trip in March 2017, when Merkel called Tunisia a “hopeful project”, reflecting the importance the chancellor attaches to Germany’s relations with this relatively stable country to manage migration to Europe and speed up deportation procedures.<sup>63</sup> The basis is the EU-Morocco Action Plan, negotiated in 2006 and signed under the ENP, which aims to “prevent and combat illegal migration to and via Morocco,” “improve cooperation with regard to the readmission of Moroccan nationals, stateless persons and nationals of third countries,” and “strengthen border management” through equipment and assistance for staff training, increased control and surveillance of border areas, enhanced regional cooperation, and funding for governments outside the EU.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, “A revised draft action plan [from 18 February 2022] drawn up by the European Commission on a ‘comprehensive migration partnership’ with Morocco now suggests that the North African country should be informed of ‘the potential benefits of a status agreement with the European Union’ that would allow the deployment of Frontex officials on its territory.”<sup>65</sup>

So, what do we have here? The three-dimensional space of control that has been widely implemented since 2013 must be seen in the context of the border, which is always a colonial border when it comes to establishing a relationship between the European Union and its neighbouring states. As Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt have pointed out in relation to the architecture of the borderspace, the border is a permanent “zone of exception” where violence is exercised against certain people in the position of migrant or refugee and exceptional measures are part of the political-legal order.<sup>66</sup> It is therefore not a space without or outside the law, but a space that is in a permanent relationship with the law. In Agamben’s understanding, our current state of exception is an empty space located at the

<sup>63</sup> Deutsche Welle, “Migrants, Security Top Merkel’s Agenda in Tunisia”, 3 March 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/migration-security-top-agenda-on-merkels-visit-to-tunisia/a-37793509>, accessed 29 December 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Nordentoft Mose and Wriedt, “*Mapping the Construction of EU Borderspaces as Necropolitical Zones of Exception*”, p. 284.

<sup>65</sup> Statewatch, “Tracking the Pact: EU Eyes Future Frontex Deployments in Morocco”, <https://www.statewatch.org/news/2022/march/tracking-the-pact-eu-eyes-future-frontex-deployments-in-morocco/>, accessed 29 December 2022.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

centre of power, and in this empty space, “a human action with no relation to law stands before a norm with no relation to life.”<sup>67</sup>

The empty centre of power is a problem that clearly misses the processes of racialisation found in forced “repatriation” and a hypermilitarisation of border control, now also supported by the technology of control such as drones.

Again, we are not dealing with an empty space, but with an obliterated space; this is an essential difference, for it is transformed into a landscape of death. Secondly, we do not see here the reduction of life to mere life, to nothingness as life, but we can say, with reference to Stanesco, that we get a vanishing life, a life that is not yet dead but is in the process of vanishing, which is one of the main characteristics of the life of refugees. It is not yet just a zombie life, a living dead, but it is a life that is under the systematic, procedural pressure of death. Indeed, the life of us, the neoliberal first world citizens who are socially, politically, and economically depoliticised, is a zombie life; we are the living dead without a political agenda. The vanishing life of refugees is a political life under violent destruction where the erasure of fingerprints turns their own flesh into political flesh.

### ***Aggregate C***

We could thus create a genealogy that moves from the necroscape to a volumenscape of (necro) death as represented by the changes in the borderspace and by the surveillance technology developed in this context.

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So, the genealogy of these spaces, their changing topography and their changing dimensional relations, is also an imposition of the procedures of necrocapitalism and their digital technologies on space. Therefore, we speak of a regime in which all of these necrospaces and the volumenscape of death are intermingled with sunken spaces, and all these spaces/scapes are not only adjacent to each other but embedded in death.

The changes can be seen in the difference to a conception of space in modernity that moved away from a utopia and turned out to be a dystopia in the neoliberal

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<sup>67</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*, p. 86.

biopolitical outcome, with a multiplicity of heterotopias, of which there were a greater number in the Occident and only a few in the Orient, which includes the former Eastern Europe.

### Topography of the Necrospace

Let us look at the topography of the necrospace and record the temporal changes as well as the transformations in order to grasp and conceptualise them.

An example of this conceptualization is the sunken space. It reappears in Jordan Peele's film *Get Out*.<sup>68</sup> I will explain it in detail, but I want to emphasise that the sunken space was already elaborated in electronically produced video works in the 1970s and 1980s.

The plot of the film *Get Out* revolves around African American photographer Chris Washington, who, along with his Caucasian girlfriend Rose Armitage, visits her parents at their home in rural upstate New York. Their visit turns into a terrifying battle for his sanity and survival as the entire Armitage family, as well as the townspeople, turn out to be White vampires who kidnap and literally possess Black bodies in order to preserve their White dream of immortality, their White "social and biological futurity."<sup>69</sup>

This sunken space was excellently explored in Bogdan Popa and Kerry Mackereth's 2019 text "Vampiric Necropolitics: A Map of Black Studies Critique from Karl Marx' Vampire to *Get Out*'s Politics of the Undead":

In *Get Out*, Missy Armitage psychoanalyzes Chris Washington to throw him into a space of doubt, anxiety and fear, which is identified as "the sunken place". As the film shows, this place is a tactic aimed at replacing Chris' black subjectivity with a dying white man's consciousness. In the therapy meeting, "the sunken place" exposes a central technology of racialization which asserts that black and non-white bodies can become as evolved and highly sensitive as white bodies. As part of the forced therapy session, Chris is paralyzed and cannot feel as deeply as the

<sup>68</sup> Jordan Peele, director, *Get Out*, Universal City, California, Universal Pictures, 2017.

<sup>69</sup> J. T. Roane, "Social Death and Insurgent Discourses in Jordan Peele's 'Get Out'", *Black Perspectives*, 27 March 2017, <https://www.aaihs.org/social-death-and-insurgent-discourses-in-jordan-peeles-get-out/>, accessed 29 December 2022.

white therapist. As Kyla Schuller shows, since the nineteenth century black bodies have been imagined as impermanent to change, and the capacity to feel impressions from external objects became a standard of racial superiority [...]. Chris is put in a state of heightened sensitivity because he does not have the resources to talk about his trauma.<sup>70</sup>

To show this, a visualisation of sunken space is used. In a conversation with Popa conducted for the experimental-documentary video film *Insurgent Flows. Trans\*Decolonial and Black Marxist Futures* by Marina Gržinić and Tjaša Kancler (forthcoming 2023), which will also appear in the book *Political Choreographies, Decolonial Theories, Trans Bodies*, edited by Marina Gržinić and Jovita Pristovšek (forthcoming 2023), I have elaborated that the sunken space shows a mode of total alienation in the time of necrocapitalism. It is like a triple gaze that takes place here, and this reification of the alienated position gives another direction to the sunken space. It is not just about the experience of the film's main character, Chris Washington, who says, "I am losing my body", but we already see this process of being sucked dry by capitalism, not just by labour. What the regime of Whiteness wants from Black people is their minds. It wants their discourse, because the regime of Whiteness does not even have that anymore. We no longer have our vocabulary. But when that happens, it is not just a modernist alienation. It is an alienation as a volume, as a space, because we see it like a block in front of our eyes. This is a fantastic Marxist trope, because this kind of reification means that you do not stop talking about your practice.

We understand that things are already going on, that Black positions actually have to build a block if they are going to resist it, because they do not just have a feeling, they actually see their feelings in front of them, like a TV canvas.<sup>71</sup> This sunken space (which is also referred to in relation to Peele's film as a sunken place) is much more than space itself, it is actually a necro three-dimensional

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<sup>70</sup> Bogdan Popa and Kerry Mackereth, "Vampiric Necropolitics: A Map of Black Studies Critique from Karl Marx' Vampire to *Get Out's* Politics of the Undead", *National Political Science Review*, 20 (3/2019), p. 171.

<sup>71</sup> I elaborated on this in a conversation with Bogdan Popa; see Marina Gržinić and Tjaša Kancler, "Insurgent Flows. Trans\*Decolonial and Black Marxist Futures: A Conversation with Bogdan Popa", in M. Gržinić and J. Pristovšek (eds.), *Political Choreographies, Decolonial Theories, Trans Bodies*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, forthcoming 2023.

space, a volume. This will also be my final thesis for a research direction on the changes in the topographies of spaces in necrocapitalism. Last but not least, this is now just the beginning, a necroliberal global “zero point” that calls for immediate further research.

## Coda

I conclude that today we are dealing with a necropolitical procedure of a violent security logic that produces images of death that first require a different analysis of spaces and temporalities, of necrospace and necrotemporalities. It also requires a rethinking of the possibilities of resistance to these necropolitical procedures by those who are by no means mute, by no means mere victims, but subjects who have undergone a process of (de)subjectivation that, as Mbembe would argue, amounts to the process of the destruction of their own subjectivity.

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