

# Necropolitics of the End Times

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*Characteristically, when defining biopower as the ability to divide people into survivors and chosen to die, Foucault (2003, p. 62) used the term 'racism' to describe achieved level of 'social normalisation'. During the pandemic we observed direct racial-sanitary segregation in the developed Western countries and now racist attitude is the base for biopolitics implemented within the geopolitical confrontation manifested in form of the energy crisis and war in Ukraine. It should convince us to deeper reflection on the thoughts of Giorgio Agamben, Achille Mbembe and Judith Butler, which could be consider kind of prophecies for today and especially for tomorrow.*

Thinkers developing Foucault's concept focused primarily on death as a result of state decisions, necessarily referring to their most evident example, wars, but also slavery and the Holocaust.

Therefore, questions have been asked not so much about Bio- but rather Necropolitics / Thanatopolitics as its ultimate emanation (Mbembe, 2019, p. 71). Inevitably, a reflection of this type concerned the basics of classifying those '*not worth living*'. It is an absolutely crucial issue for the further development (?) of humanity.

## "Homo sacer"

On the one hand, the pandemic situation seemed to remind us of the role of the state as a rescuer, but when it needed to be recalled, it was clearly not so obvious. And since saving of life was so special, it might suggest that not everyone could benefit equally, or even that not all equally deserve on it (Robertson and Travaglia, 2020). Noticeably, this question returned in the context of the West-Russian war (possibly also a global one soon), and moreover, *homo sacer* can be expected to be revealed again as part of the further classification of life, which can be taken away, but not sacrificed in the context of the climate crisis or the energy transformation. Announced at least 40% reduction in energy consumption sounds like the declaration of switching off not only unnecessary light bulbs, but also electricity and gas consumers themselves, considered unworthy to live and unnecessary, exactly as it was in the case of not rescuing the really ill and elderlies during the COVID-19 period.

## Biopower applied

It is no coincidence that the original meaning of the term crisis, the Greek '*Krisis*' meant the moment when Hippocrates had to decide whether the patient's condition justified making further attempts to save him.

In Christian eschatology the same concept was used to define the final decision regarding eternal life or death on the day of the Last Judgment (Agamben, 2021, p. 53). In March 2020, English doctors were instructed to explicitly suggest families of disabled people, e.g. autistic adults, to sign *Do Not Resuscitate* declarations (Mezzadri, 2022, p. 390).

During the first lockdown some kind of inverted '*triage*' was introduced in the English and Scottish care homes. Residents were divided by age, comorbidities and prognosis. In case of the SARS-CoV infection that was the sequence of their rescue. Author confirmed that by interviews with care workers (Sokol et al., personal communication by conversation, 20 May 2022). The oldest patients and those suffering from certain comorbidities were not allowed to get not only any medicines, but even a glass of water if they have been tested positive for COVID-19.

It was also an excellent opportunity to calculate the cost of saving single human being, e.g. by inquiring whether it is worth, for £500,000 per head, to extend the lives of sick and old people by an average of one and a half years (Young, 2020). The alternative seemed to be most acceptable from the point of view of the privileged classes: *that was a pity, that the old and poor had to die, but the ones, who survive thanks to it, were for sure a bit sad* (D'Eramo, 2020). It was then practical manifestation of the Necropolitics and a call to take advantage of the biopower. Pre-existed inequalities, reinforced as a result of the neoliberal agenda and austerity, seemed to be perfect as a criterion of life and death deciding (Lee, 2020). The list of applied biopolitics methods was supplemented with blowing up gas pipelines and bombing power plants.

## Racism

The systemic racism, especially of Anglo-Saxon systems, was and is naturally associated with Necropolitics, organising labour, housing and social context of living for racial and ethnic minorities. It was even further exacerbated in the realities of the pandemic crisis (Sandset, 2021, pp. 1417-1418). Taking a broader perspective, including peripheral areas (e.g. Central Europe) and accepting intersectional approach, while adjusting this experience with gender, class, age and immigrant status factors, we obtain the COVID-19 Necropolis pattern, which allowed to eliminate the bare life, excluded from politics, and then subjected to secondary politicisation as a result of basing sovereignty on biopolitics.

We have to remember that only the one who decide about the exceptions is the sovereign (Schmitt, 2005, p.5). In the cases discussed here: about exceptions to the right to life, previously treated as a social construct more even abstract than other principles, and increasingly filled with real, terrifying content. Thus, biopower returned to its basics, those noticed by Foucault (2000, p. 121) in the 18th Century epidemiology and understood as "*right to take life or let live*". These are the features of the dominant COVID government strategies, evidently based on the implementation of the Agamben's (2021, p. 84) permanent state of emergency, in which survival required not only self-realisation of one's own Butlerian *grievability*, i.e. experiencing a life that was really lived, (Buttler, 2016, pp.

21-22) but, moreover, it became necessary to prove the authenticity of that state.

## Permanent state of emergency

The COVID-19 crisis was a crisis of the capitalist way of life, which is now partially restored. Albeit the energy crisis and the Ukrainian war clearly indicate the persistence of the state of exception. *'The new normality'* is then not exactly as had been expected by those believing in some *'new impulse'* coming from the COVID-19 stasis.

Instead of the optimistically assumed crisis of hegemony (Mohandesi and Teitelman, 2017, p. 66), we are faced with a crisis of sovereignty confronted with the globally expanded Necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003, p. 68; Lee, 2020). Of course, during the pandemic, it was contrasted with the collective and communal effort of almost all classes, groups and individuals which even if not aware, then at least felt that their lives are grievable, worth living, and liveable (Butler, 2020, pp. 22, 28-31). Thus, not quite consciously, but there was also some resistance to the lockdown policy, initially rather weak but more noticeable with time. Unfortunately, as might be expected, one justification for a permanent state of emergency has been smoothly replaced by another, and just as the exception constitutes a rule, it eventually becomes the rule itself.

For as it was decided about access to saving lives, so today it is decided about the duration of direct exposure to death as a result of the war sustained by all forces. And soon, decisions will be made similar to those about turning off ventilators, as whoever decides to reduce the life-giving energy, with that act will take life, although not sacrificing it, because it was condemned from the very beginning, bare and biopolitical.

## Todeslager

It is not affiliation, but exclusion (no matter: pandemic, military, energy, climate one, etc.) that has been confirmed as an element constituting a community. The final biopolitical paradigm of the West is directed more and more clearly at achieving a state of normalisation which is nothing other than a KZ, *Todeslager*, the highest emanation of Necropolitics so far (Agamben, 1998, pp. 181, 187). A centre where exclusion and belonging are the one, the boundaries between law and exception, between fact and setting the principle are finally blurred. Systemic euthanasia, which in fact was the essence of the COVID's policy (COVID *Sozialer Mord*), endless war, deciding about life not worth living with one energy switch: all are the symptoms of the same process, sensed for the last several decades. Politics is over, biopower is winning.

This is the time of Necropolitics.

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