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Neoliberalism and regimes of Life and Death:
A Book Review of *Queer Necropolitics* by
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ABSTRACT: This review is of the newly published *Queer Necropolitics*, edited by Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman and Silvia Posocco. The collection includes writings about opening up the intersection of queer politics, gender studies, critical race studies, sexuality, anthropology, and colonial studies, offering insight into an array of approaches to a complex reading of contemporary politics. *Queer Necropolitics* adds to existing scholarship on the aforementioned subjects through engaging with scholar Jasbir Puar's conception of 'queer necropolitics,' as an expansion upon Michel Foucault's biopolitics (Puar 2011). This collection explores queer necropolitics as a tool for expanding on understandings of the regimes of life and death and their connection to transnational flows of capital, militarism, and power.

KEYWORDS: queer necropolitics, biopolitics, sexuality, race, post-colonial theory, decolonial theory, transnational studies

In light of this volume's call to focus attention on the intersection of disabilities and sexualities, the newly published *Queer Necropolitics*, edited by Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman and Silvia Posocco, brings insight to the mutual constructiveness



and complex assemblages of sexuality, race, class, ability, and nationality. The volume uses Jaspir Puar's conceptualization of 'queer necropolitics', as a framework that takes into account the ways in which 'queer subjects' are folded into a part of larger society, through transnational discourses and realities. Similarly, disability scholars have made connections between normative notions of the body, society, and economics and the ways in which some populations are viewed as constructive to life, and how some populations are left to socially die. Nirmala Erevelles, for example, urges that disability is an ideology of difference from which race, gender, and sexuality are on an axis in relationship with economic life within transnational capitalism (Erevelles 2011).

Similarly to disability studies, the concept of queer necropolitics owes its theoretical genealogy to Foucault's notion of biopolitics, or biopower, literally the ways in which 'techniques of power' control bodies and populations (Foucault 1978). The concept of biopolitics linked the discipline and control of the state through discourses of the individual body and control over the 'mechanics of life' of the 'species body', through constructing and identifying non-normativities through race, sex, and sexuality (Foucault 1978). Expanding upon Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics, Puar's queer necropolitics explores how queer subjects are being 'folded (back) into life' or the bio, while also exploring how naming racialized queernesses has become a means to 'discipline and control subjects and populations' (Puar 2007: 35). Jaspir Puar (2007) has taken up the conception of biopolitics, as a queer project, as she considers the ways in which 'non-normative sexualities are rarely centered in efforts elaborating the workings of biopolitics, although non-normative sexualities are always a marked 'perversion and deviance that is a key component of the very establishment of norms that drive biopolitical interests' (Puar 2007:35).

Queer necropolitics also expands on the notion of necropolitics as proposed by postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe. Mbembe (2003) proposes necropolitics, in order to problematize biopolitics as falling short of providing substantial theorization of the colonial/racialized encounter, but also the contemporary ways in which some populations are 'marked for death'. Mbembe introduces the notion of a necropolitics, which the author proposes more appropriately accounts for 'late-modern colonial occupation' and which includes a conception of death, or the necro (Mbembe 2003). Focusing primarily on the U.S. as an imperial power

in the 'war on terror', the volume is introduced as engaging with necropolitics to challenge transnational makings of the 'West', in opposition to the rest concerning bodies and populations, and thus, issues regarding sexuality, race, and nationality (Hall 1994: 275–320). The usefulness of the combination of queer and necropolitics, the editors argue, is that it provides a tool with which to examine 'unequal regimes of living and dying' in neoliberal times, or rather it provides a tool for expanding upon biopolitical theory, as well as necropolitical theories (Lubheid 2008:169–190). Thus, the various contributions throughout the book challenge the normalizing and deathly regimes of neoliberalism, which position some bodies towards life (bio), and others towards death (necro). In the theme of necropolitics, the book offers explorations into different terminologies, which further conceptualize the necro, such as 'zones of abandonment,' 'deathworlds,' 'social death,' and 'slow death' (Beihl 2001; Hartman 1997; Patterson 1982; Povenelli 2011; and Berlant 2007 in Haritaworn et al 2014). While keeping this queer necropolitics central, a 'reading sideways' of the politics of sexual rights is used throughout the volume as an approach, inspired by Puar to engage with the construction of queer. The use of queer ranges throughout the volume, from defining queer as dislodging conceptions of normality and therefore, systems of reference, which have typically created the connections between gay and lesbian subjects and identities, while also defining queer as 'a point of tension to normativity' where friction occurs (Haritaworn et al 2014: 1–216). This notion of queer is helpful to interrogate normativity intersectionally, an essential frame of thinking for disability studies.

In the first section entitled deathworlds, queer necropolitics is examined through 'war machines' (or Achille Mbembe's notion of contemporary militarized conditions of postcolonial African countries), the criminalization of AIDS, and transnational adoption in the exploration of "queerness as a speculative economy' (Possoco in Haritaworn et al 2014: 1–216). Che Gossett proposes queer and trans abolitionist critiques of prison and psychiatric institutionalization. The author suggests that such institutionalization is used as a solution by mainstream LGBT organizations, and relies on the state as such. The author further suggests that the reliance on law as the end all and be all is an uncritical, unjust solution promoted by LGBT organizations. Furthermore, Gosset provides a fierce analytical tool for examining the intersection of AIDS discourses and structural inequalities. Michelle R. Martin-Baron explores thinking through queer as in affect and ritual,

using necropolitics to analyze ‘war machines’ or ‘segments of armed men that split up or merge with one another depending on the tasks to be carried out or the circumstances’, and the ways in which queerness is a part of the ‘structures of patriarchy’ (Martin-Baron in Haritaworn et al 2014). Queerness is understood here as a ritual of kinship, as ‘a point of tension to normativity’ where friction occurs (Haritaworn et al 2014:95). Silvia Posocco explores necropolitics through a transnational lens, suggesting that transnational adoption is an assemblage of cultural forms, a form of commodified labour, and as such, is connected to life and death problematics. Posocco explores the ways in which such problematics in transnational adoption flows create racialized conceptions of political rationalities, which construct U.S. based adoption of Guatemalan children as a solution to a history of colonial violence.

The second section of the collection investigates queer necropolitics through the conception of wars and borderlands. This section explores Mbembe’s ‘topographies of cruelty’, Povenelli’s ‘zones of abandonment’, and the ways in which racialized bodies are subjected to such spaces. These spaces, or ‘topographies of cruelty,’ were, according to Mbembe, spaces of colonial terroritorialization, which now travel alongside capital in neoliberal regimes. In Sima Shakhsari’s piece, the author explores the concept of ‘zones of abandonment’ in which queer persons are regulated. Exploring such a trans necropolitics, the author explores the ‘politics of rightful killing’ through representations of queer refugee life and death, and how such are ‘inherently connected to the government of the population’ (Haritaworn et al 2014:95). The author thus challenges rescue narratives that seek to provoke a victim subject in order to maintain ‘binary frames of freedom and oppression’ (Haritaworn et al 2014: 95).

Building on the postcolonial insights of Spivak (1988) and Bhaba (1994), Jason Ritchie’s contribution analyzes the ways in which racialized queer othering subjects the colonized Palestinian queer to zones of abandonment or necropolitical spaces. Using queer as an interrogation of that which challenges norms, Ritchie’s most interesting insight lies in his challenging of dominant settler colonial gay and lesbian mainstream homonormativity and the supposed logic of ‘liberal gay politics of visibility and recognition’ and developmental discourses (Ritchie 2014:111–128 in Haritaworn et al 2014). These, according to him, hold power to create the victim/savior dichotomy, which rely on the essentialization of Arab cul-

ture as religiously making queer impossible, while hyper-sexualizing the Palestinian queer other. Aren Z. Aizura explores the notion of precarity and 'queer' or trans necropolitics. Using Butler's definition of precarious life, as the 'erasure of (certain) queer bodies from public discourse,' thereby marking the bodies as 'ungrievable,' Aizura explores trans feminine embodiment (Butler 2006 in Haritworn et al 2014). The author interrogates those processes that produce discourse and knowledge within capitalism, which rather simplify and instrumentalize trans feminine lived experiences on a global scale (Aizura 2014: 131 in Haritaworn et al). Aizura explores these processes as creating categories and identities, which withhold complexity of trans feminine embodiment, for example.

The third and final section of the book further explores Mbembe's concept of the 'topographies of cruelty' through incarceration and prison (Mbembe 2003 in Haritaworn et al). This section reflects on the ways in which topographies of cruelty, or the normalization of spaces and systems such as the prison, travel transnationally and globally as 'social death' through the war on terror and the globalization of the prison industrial complex, using bodies as raw material. This is examined by Sarah Lambie, who explores the ways in which 'affective economies' or the 'circulation and mobilization of feelings of desire, pleasure, fear, and repulsion, are utilized to seclude all of us into the fold of the state' (Lambie 2014:152 in Haritaworn et al). Lambie names queer investments in punishment as 'the material processes that accompany such affective economies' in channeling resources to the prison industrial complex (Lambie 2014:152 in Haritaworn et al). Following along the lines of interrogating the normalizing neoliberal state and criminalization of those who do not follow regulations, obligations, and state rules, Elijah Adiv Edelman looks at the necropolitical regulations of transfeminine bodies of colour as criminal. Edelman explores the ways in which such bodies are regulated through policies such as prostitution free zones (PFZ) in Washington D.C., which Edelman argues, show how necropolitical ideologies are enacted spatially. Similarly, Morgan Bassichis and Dean Spade, engage with the ways in which black bodies are regulated to spaces of social death. Their article particularly engages with the ways in which the 'wounded white gay citizen' must make claims for 'successful reproduction' in the U.S. nation through identifying their non-blackness and/or lack of criminality (Bassichis and Spade 2014:192 in Haritaworn et al). The article exposes how homonormativity relies on anti-blackness, therefore tying the notion of black suf-

fering and black premature death through claims to citizenship as feeding into a 'structuralized bodily terror' (Bassichis and Spade 2014:199 in Haritaworn et al).

In conclusion, the volume proposes useful ways of contextualizing neoliberal regimes and their effects on populations and individual bodies, a concept central to disability studies. Similar to disability scholars approaches to contemporary conceptions of normativities, the queer necropolitics collection connects constructions of such conceptions through transnational discourse, and examines which bodies are positioned in spaces of life (bio), and which of those are positioned in spaces of death (necro) of various means. The authors throughout this book offer critical insights into the many ways in which 'reading sideways'¹ through a queer necropolitical framework can accomplish understanding and contextualizing these contemporary regimes of life and death using queer, post-colonial, and de-colonial feminist tools.

Endnotes

- ¹ I am referring here to Jaspir Puar's notion of reading sideways, which was proposed in her publication, *Terrorist Assemblages, homonationalism in queer times* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2007)

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