Introduction: Necrocapitalism and psychic violence

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Framing

I am in the process of working through; a working through that is, at once, neither new nor complete — a working through that usually feels suspended. And yet, it also feels illuminated in its multilayered radiant texture when articulated through the mechanics of world making, or "worlding" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021) in each moving contribution to this special issue. This special issue of *Social and Health Sciences* presents an intervention that mobilises and platforms a decolonial global synergy as a counterforce against necrocapitalist violence and its resultant and sustained psychic intrusions. These psychic intrusions are far from being accidental and/or a "glitch", as Stephen Sheehi operationalises Lauren Berlant in his piece "*Al-nizam*: Lebanon as necrocapitalist state". Instead, these psychic intrusions emerge as the organising weaponry of necrocapitalism, providing it with a relational and psychic realm mediated by death and dying—in its multiple dimensions, forms and processes—as a primary function of its all-consumptive oppression. But necrocapitalism further capitalises on the dead themselves, positioning asphyxiatory and murderous practices as a predicate of life for some, a "some" whose contours are determined, shored up and sustained by and through the moribundity—whether they are white nontrans women, as we see in Moira Ozias and Z Nicolazzo's contribution; the Zionist settler *mukhabarat,* as in Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Stéphanie Wahab's contribution; German settler colonists in Zoé Samudzi's contribution; or borders themselves, in Furaha Asani and Guilaine Kinouani's contribution.

My working through process has been lengthy and ongoing. Yet, it took on an urgent fervor when I found my grief "suspended in explosion"[1] following the catastrophic blast that rocked Beirut, Lebanon, on 4 August 2020. The affective charge of this blast marked a shift, or perhaps a consolidation, in my psychic mnemonic strategies to re/de/construct Lebanon and its particularities. The explosion also happened amidst a global pandemic, a portal – according to Arundhati Roy – that fleshed out the skeletal

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1   Original piece found at: http://www.analytic-room.com/essays/grief-suspended-in-explosion-by-lara-sheehi/#:~:text=Karachi%20is%20underwater.,%3A%20hardship%2C%20plight%2C%20poverty

and visceral knowledge of "the wreckage of a train that has been careening down the track for years"[2]. Simultaneously, we were watching virulent and blatant spectacles of fascism with a global connectivity and networks that illuminated a deeply entrenched logic of white supremacy from the settler colony now known as the United States of America, to the settler colony now known as Canada, to the settler colony now known as Israel, to India, to Hungary, to Brazil, to the United Kingdom, and onwards. The depth and breadth and seeming arbitrariness of the violence in Beirut intensified the suspension of my grief, mobilising – perhaps as a personal defence – my long-standing clinical interest in the pervasive psychic elements of social, economic and psychic structures that naturalise systems of large-scale violence.

So what made the Beirut blast imprint on my own psychic-soul in an even more indelible way than all the banalities of state and social violence enacted daily on the Lebanese population since the end of the Civil War? What made this event of representative state neglect and corruption create a crater in my own psychic world nearly the size of the crater of state neglect and militia violence against Palestinian refugees in Lebanon dispossessed for more than 70 years? What was the texture, the tinge of *something else*, that alerted me to a psychic, unspoken-known? This special issue is an attempt to answer those questions—not individually but, rather, in community – a global community of solidarity in our struggles.

Necrocapitalism

In August 2020, as I attempted to organise Karachi under water, Gaza without power, Lebanon on the brink of famine, and global fascism all at once, I found myself, perhaps not surprisingly, contemplating Achille Mbembe's *necropolitics*, specifically his articulation of necropolitics as "contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death" (2003, p. 39), governed by what he notes is "necropolitical power", from which emerges "death worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of the living dead" (p. 40). It is evident that Mbembe's seminal theoretical framing reverberates across each of the contributions in this special issue. Yet, with the centrifugal force of violence emanating in this particular sociopolitical moment, the contributions do more—that is, they go beyond the necropolitical, pushing past only articulating the ways in which governing state and corporate regimes manage the social, psychic and embodied life and death of bodies under their sovereignty. Rather, each contribution attends to a specific iteration of the psychic violence enacted by necrocapitalism, as well as, movingly, living/breathing *presence* in defiance of death. In this way, this special issue emerges from the powerful affective pull of that moment in Beirut and its aftermath, as well as from an affective tracing of how, in this particular

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2   Arundhati Roy, *The Pandemic is a Portal*, found at: https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca

global political moment, we are experiencing leakage beyond necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003)—a secretion that discloses structures that are non-aberrant but, rather, systemic. While taking in the magnitude of these contributions, then, one thing that became glaringly clear was that necrocapitalism is a set of practices imbued with social, affective and psychic relations, among which are the necropolitical.

Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee (2008) was perhaps the first to use the term "necrocapitalism". Building on Mbembe's necropolitical, he was interested in further excavating how capitalism, specifically, is undergirded by imperialism and colonial plunder. More specifically, he was interested in illuminating how "violence, dispossession and death that result from practices of accumulation occur in spaces that seem to be immune from legal, juridical and political intervention where permanent transgressions of sovereignty seem to be more the rule than the exception" (2008, p. 1544). For Banerjee, "a theory of necrocapitalism requires us to pay attention to the specific practices that result in the subjugation of life to the power of death. These are the practices that create states of exception that enable accumulation by dispossession" (p. 1559). In this way, this issue emerges as speaking of, to and through various forms of dispossession, not as by-product(s) but as constitutive of the very mechanics of necrocapitalist "accumulation". Put simply, this issue speaks truth to the incommensurability of necrocapitalist violence and livability (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2020), or what Banerjee (2008) notes as "a power to decide the value of life, which would allow a life to be killed without the charge of homicide" (pp. 1544-1545).

Through conversations with Nadera Shalhoub-Kervorkian over the course of the year of my working through, we came to conceive of necrocapitalism as comprising four layers that form the loci of this issue and on which each author was asked to reflect in crafting their unique contributions. Thus, necrocapitalism, in relation to but different from the necropolitical,

1) capitalises on, monetises and manipulates death and dying, while manipulating affect in and during death with specific intent to operationalise its oppression;

2) manipulates death and dying as political capital, both in the local and global sphere;

3) is an economic system of social domination that invades and demolishes psychic sovereignty as readily as bodily sovereignty, with specific intent to kill off; and

4) maintains authority's spread and permanence through the economy of life and through the deployment and exposure to vulnerability and, ultimately, deadly violence and psychological demolition.

In addition to Banerjee's (2008) articulation, necrocapitalism, then, in its most base mechanics, not only relies on psychic and physical death and dying as a primary function of its oppressive process, but also capitalises on the dead themselves through inherently exploitative processes that rely on the most virulent consumptive habits that are cathected on, for example viral images or commodity fetishisation, or through the literal withholding of bodies and/or personal data/information as carceral state "secrets",

as outlined by Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Wahab. In this way, necrocapitalism, even as it is mobilised to amass and peddle in excess, actively disimagines even the dead *as an antecedent* to its viability and that of the structures of oppression that maintain and sustain it.

Communal working through

Movingly, each contribution in this special issue highlights – through variegated texture – how the logic of necrocapitalism does not exist in psychic displacement alone but, rather, pulsates in the material realities of those present, past and future who suffer under its violence. In this way, discrete and localised structures of necrocapitalism, as it comes to be articulated through these pages, create a global matrix of violent possibilities exacted through psychic intrusion, physical dispossession and the exploitation of death states in gendered, raced, classed and indigenised realms. The contributions are bold, politically radical, moving and personal. They include poetry, person-centred narratives and are, importantly, all decolonial, feminist and internationalist in their approach. If, as Ozias and Nicolazzo highlight, "the climate is also necrocapitalism", this issue then aims to prioritise an articulation by each author of life-making and life-giving affirmations that defy necrocapitalist violence, especially in its pernicious psychic form. As such, each long piece is interspersed with a poetic piece, an in-vivo materialisation of psychic undoing, a holding of communal space and a reclaiming of art as a necessary mode of necrocapitalist-busting.

The issue opens with Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Stéphanie Wahab's "Colonial necrocapitalism, state secrecy and the Palestinian freedom tunnel", speaking and writing out loud, in parallel process, to expose the weaponisation of "secrecy" by the apartheid Israeli state. Here, they remind us that "necrocapitalism is imbedded in the colonizer's yearning for destruction" and "its exclusionary politics are central to understanding secrecy as security, whereby profit flows from visible and invisible violence, as well as the killing of the colonized as a state of fear generates continuous insecurity, which generates a demand for security goods … within global capitalism". In what they note is a Palestinian, indigenous, feminist epistemology, they foreground personal narratives of Palestinians who have been threatened with "secret information", itself a carceral tactic that is both punitive in reach and strategically intangible so as to create a psychic effect of destabilisation, induce "paranoia" and vacate the safety even of interiority. Here they note that "secrecy, within the politico-economic life, constitutes a central strategy for increasing the scope of domination", specifically mobilised by the Israeli settler colony against indigenous Palestinians.

In the same way, Hannah Young's three poems punctuate Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Wahab's message and kick off our poetic pieces with *home: dark: blue*, *what silence said,* and *why do you lean me at the edge of realization.* Azad Ashim Sharma's STEP[PING] TO THE LEFT OF ONTOLOGY punches us into reflection, reminding us through

Jazmine Linklater's voice to "harness the power of quiet". In the same breath, he recalls that

> Existenz is paused
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> to be free in the ruin or to hold the popul vuh
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> following the guidance to re-allegorise the allegory –

Zoé Samudzi's "Looting the archive: German genocide & incarcerated skulls*"* concretises the reach of necrocapitalism by distilling, in exquisitely wrenching detail, the necrocapitalist amassing of Ovaherero and Nama skulls, especially, as a pointed project of indigenous seizure enacted by German colonisation of present-day Namibia. More specifically, Samudzi articulates how "through genocide (a method of population/racial management, to be sure) of the indigenous peoples of present-day Namibia and the scientific episteme that affirmed and naturalized a white-over-Black racial hierarchy that Germanness was continuously stabilized". Here, Samudzi explicates how "archival incarceration" locates and locks Oveherero and Nama peoples, specifically, into "a temporal bracketing that forecloses the possibility of state citizenship in the present *and* render their sovereignties illegible". Strikingly, Samudzi details how this "acquisition" represents a pernicious type of commodification that enshrines indigenous erasure even as indigeniety is marked as prime "property" by colonisers and colonial institutions through exploitative hoarding, where "objects no longer narrate life but rather 'death histories', a forensic death-writing".

In Moira Ozias and Z Nicolazzo's "She/her/hers: Pronouns, possession and white women's consumption of gender", we are stunningly reminded, in likeness of the unrelenting power and truth-telling of Fanonian analysis, of how white nontrans women, especially, actively mobilise the gears of necrocapitalism to create "deathworlds for women who do not or cannot look, move, perform, or buy (into) *she* as white nontrans explorer/colonizer". In so doing, they trace for us a set of cisheteropatriarchical and raced logics of "the absolute right to exclude" vis a vis entitlement as articulated through and by property of white nontrans womanhood. Here, they remind us that this logic "targets the ~~beingness~~ of trans women and womanhood as a necessary condition of life under racialized (necro)capitalism, marking an ongoing emergency of death, in both quotidian and spectacular forms" (Snorton & Haritaworn, 2013, p. 66)—a logic that accounts for an expanse of violence, including the proliferation of pronouns-as-signifier-owned, as well as the erasure of black and indigenous trans livability.

Foluke Taylor's "The dysautoethnographyst's *oríkì*" lands on the reader as a soul-piercing embodiment of the journey to articulate one's self, to "talk back" (hooks, 1989) in the face of forced dislocation, psychic intrusion by white hegemony and the enforcement of a legibility of a particular "home" and subjectivity and against "the meaning-killing conditions in and through which [she writes]". Rather than succumb to the necrocapitalist violence of colonial temporal stamps, foreclosed possibilities of

meaning making and triumphant assimilationist narratives, Taylor reminds us, "*dysautoethnographyst* should be understood as a meantime name; a placeholder for fugitive futurity", especially for her and for those who are "coded algorithmically as already dead". It is here that her *oríkì* lands in its sublime defiance, in its *presence* and in its enactment of transnational and transgenerational politics of refusal.

In a different type of refusal, Stephen Sheehi brings home the magnitude of the 4 August 2020 Beirut blast in "*Al-nizam*: Lebanon as a necrocapitalist state" by defying the popular reading of the explosion as merely a by-product of state neglect or an extension of the corrupt sectarian *nizam* that was solidified by colonial France. He reminds us, rather, that "the explosion is a symptom of the *structure* of the ruling regime of Lebanon, known as *al-nizam*, (al-nizham, النظام) and only an opportunity to recreate Lebanon in the image of its ruling elite". By unpacking *al-kawniyah* (universals) and *al-khususiyah* (specifics) of Lebanon against the grain of a readily available sectarian trope, he offers "necrocapitalism as an analytic rubric that considers the political economy of sectarianism, of kleptocracy, and state capture within a series of ideological-affective mechanisms that bind elites to subordinates and the state to both". This analytic not only reworks prevailing understandings of Lebanon and what mobilised (long prior to the blast) its cataclysmic meltdown, but also how necrocapitalism codifies a social order that stokes "the affective power of ideology, and the durable identarian attachments, as the essential glue that binds subjects to ruling elites".

In a most fitting sign-out piece, Furaha Asani and Guilaine Kenouani's "Migration, homelessness and internalised displacement" maps for us the psychic violence and intrusion enacted on migrant bodies by borders themselves. By embracing a black feminist call for location, narration and truth-speaking, they offer a first-person recounting of each of their subjective experiences, capturing the intensity of the psychic imprint of constraints on movement, choke points (Puar, 2017) of state power, and what they term "epistemic homelessness". Through their bold narration, we hear the power of Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987, p. 3) reminder that "borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary." Here, necrocapitalism is vivid in its violence, naming both the possibility of suicidality-as-crossing, while also reminding us of who is deemed killable. Indeed, Asani and Kenouani remind us, "whilst the migrant body is kept out of proximity by the violence of border control and territoriality, its subjectivity and psychological world is breached, entered and inhabited without their consent".

World-making

What distinguishes this special issue is a particular type of suspension of end-product—a decolonial turn to possibilities that are made and remade, done and undone, through the very process of working through. In this way, what I hope for our readers is the

power not only to witness, alongside siblings, the psychic violence wrought by necrocapitalism, but also the life-making practices that are essential in warding off its intrusion. In these pages you will read of communally forged talismans, some complex and some as sublime in their simplicity as playing in a street in Jerusalem, summoning ancestral knowledge once inscribed in a memory-unknown, becoming "nobody" and reclaiming voice, history and archives.

The special issue itself, of course, represents a growing communal network, at the centre of which are our South African comrades in resistance. Indeed, the issue could never have come into being without the generous support, encouragement and decolonial vision of Ashley van Niekerk and Nick Malherbe, specifically, as well as Shahnaaz Suffla and Mohamed Seedat.

In this way, the "end product" is not so much an end but, rather, intensely palpitating in homage to *working through* as a subversive, decolonial praxis that defies necrocapitalism's demands on fixed psychic interiority. Additionally, it offers that grieving, as with my own for Lebanon after the 4 August 2020 blast, is not melancholic, nor complete, but rather an open invitation to struggle in solidarity.

Bio

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