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PANDEMIC AND RACE: UN(FORE)SEEN CIRCUMSTANCES, SAME OLD BIOPOLITICS OF EXTRACTION AND USE?

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ABSTRACT. In the article, I suggest that the interplay between pandemic and race, instead of opening paths towards an understanding of mutual interconnectedness and vulnerability, deepens the existing structural racial inequality by reinforcing the existing necropolitical regimes of exclusion and amplifying the importance of race in biopolitics. First, I question the biopolitical uses of race, discern the general capitalization of life and highlight the colonial nature of epidemiology. Further, I focus on the neoliberal subjectivity of the new working class and argue that the Foucauldian imperative "make live or let die" gave way to the differentiation between lives to be saved and lives to be risked. Then, I claim that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the race-based necropolitics of usable bodies and the biopolitics based on the distribution of differential vulnerability. Finally, I analyse decolonial, politico-economic, ecological, and solidary remedies that might help to find a way out of the current necropolitical condition.

KEYWORDS: biopolitics, inequality, pandemic, race, vulnerability.

PANDEMIJA IR RASĖ: NE(NU)MATYTOS APLINKYBĖS, TA PATI GAVYBOS IR IŠNAUDOJIMO BIOPOLITIKA?

SANTRAUKA. Straipsnyje teigiu, kad pandemijos ir rasės sąveika, užuot atvėrusi kelią žmonių tarpusavio susietumo ir pažeidžiamumo suvokimui, tik gilina esamą struktūrinę rasinę nelygybę stiprindama esamus nekropolitinius atskirties režimus ir rasės vaidmenį biopoliti-

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koje. Pirma, aš kvestionuoju biopolitinę rasės panaudą, atkreipiu dėmesį į visuotinę gyvybės kapitalizaciją ir pabrėžiu kolonijinį epidemiologijos mokslo pobūdį. Paskui susitelkiu į naujosios darbo klasės neoliberalų subjektyvumą ir tvirtinu, kad Foucault imperatyvą „gyvenk arba leisk mirti" pakeitė diferenciacija tarp gyvybių, kurias būtina gelbėti, ir gyvybių, kuriomis galima rizikuoti. Vėliau tvirtinu, kad COVID-19 pandemija leidžia įžvelgti rase grįstos panaudojamų kūnų nekropolitikos ir diferencialinio pažeidžiamumo paskirstymu grįstos biopolitikos egzistavimą. Straipsnio pabaigoje analizuoju dekolonijines, politines-ekonomines, ekologines ir solidarumu grįstas priemones, kurios galėtų padėti rasti išeičių iš esamos nekropolitinės padėties.
RAKTAŽODŽIAI: biopolitika, nelygybė, pandemija, pažeidžiamumas, rasė.

Introduction

Even if one were to relegate the political sphere entirely and go by the biological in the face of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the evidence that testifies the link between the pandemic and race is striking. Several studies suggest that the mortality burden of the pandemic hit racial and/or ethnic minorities the most, thus underscoring the importance of the social determinants of health in the face of a public health crisis (Aburto et al 2022, Silverio et al 2022, Solomos 2021). A medical study by Justin M. Feldman and Mary T. Bassett that focused entirely on the effects of race, ethnicity, and education on mortality due to COVID-19 and its complications found that mortality rates among most racial and ethnic minorities in the United States were a lot higher than the mortality of non-Hispanic whites within the same age group. Furthermore, were all racial and ethnic groups to have the same conditions as the latter, the mortality rate from COVID-19 and its complications within racial and ethnic minorities would be 71% lesser (Feldman, Bassett 2021). This encourages one to take a closer look at what lies behind these statistics, which may otherwise be explained by referring to supposedly innate racial differences, and tackle the issues related to the pandemic and race not in the biological, but rather in the politico-philosophical sense. And it is precisely here that the category of biopolitics makes its unexpected return to the forefront of philosophical debates, as the claim that the pandemic has ultimately illuminated and intensified racial inequalities around the world is supported by several theorists (Butler 2022: 4, 65; Boukalas 2023: 97; Randolph 2021: 8; Ristić, Marinković 2022: 3; Solomos 2021: 725–726).

While some philosophers accurately point out the theoretical and political shortcomings of biopolitics either as a general instrument of critique (Breu 2013: 49) or, more specifically, as a tool to address the COVID-19 pandemic (Lorenzini 2020: S40), many theorists agree that biopolitics made its return as an important

analytical tool precisely because of the fact that many world countries have decided to enforce strict political measures in order to prevent the spread of the global pandemic. Giorgio Agamben was quick to react in a somewhat explosive manner by claiming that the epidemic was "invented" by the biopower in order to extend its grasp and expand the state of exception beyond any limitations (Agamben 2021: 12). Others, for instance, Jean-Luc Nancy, argued for a more lenient approach to the measures enforced by states, suggesting that the pandemic is a biological, computer-scientific, and cultural exception, which requires exceptional measures (Nancy 2021: 27). But the relationship between the pandemic and biopolitics is perhaps most concisely defined by Jesús Ayala-Colqui, who claims: "It would be a mistake to reduce this early 21st-century pandemic to a mere biological fact, to a clinical dilemma, to a natural question, for it is also a political phenomenon, in the strictest sense. The COVID-19 pandemic is political insofar as it requires extraordinary government intervention in order to manage it, and also because those actions must be inserted into an existing mechanism of governmentality that affects human, non-human and natural biological life" (Ayala-Colqui 2020: 379). And though some thinkers prefer to analyse the pandemic by invoking other notions[1] – Christos Boukalas, for instance, locates the shift from biopolitical management of life to the management of threat, and thus prefers to speak of *threat governmentality* as a new modality of power, founded on the ontological certainty of the threat – it is clear that biopolitics, once thought to have retreated from the epicenter of philosophy, is back and must be revisited once again (Boukalas 2023: 142–146, emphasis in original).

To reconsider the relationship between the pandemic and race, several related notions and ideas are revisited in the following sections. First, the issues of biopolitical use(s) of race, the capitalization of life, and the coloniality of public health are being addressed by analysing the ideas of feminist, queer and race scholar Sara Ahmed, economist Gary Becker, and epidemiologist Eugene T. Richardson. Then, the focus turns to the questions of a neoliberal subjectivity of the new working class in pandemic conditions, situational vulnerability, and ecology by taking a closer look at works by Marxist economist David Harvey, philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler, and Slovenian cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek. Later, the attention turns to the ideas of Kandida Purnell and her necropolitics of usable bodies, as well as Daniele Lorenzini and his biopolitics of differential vulnerability. Finally, the question of possible remedies – decolonial, politico-economic, ecological, and solidary ways to resist necropolitical tendencies of the

[1] Others, for instance, Btihaj Ajana, distinguish between the politics of defence and the politics of sacrifice (Ajana 2021).

contemporary governmentality and the structural racial inequality, also question and challenge the biopolitical *status quo* itself – is being raised, with the help of ideas proposed by Richardson, Harvey, Butler, Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe, and political philosopher Myisha Cherry.

The Biopolitical Use(s) of Race, the Capitalization of Life, and the Coloniality of Epidemiology

Very often, even the most complex analyses can be reduced to one or two simple questions. In this case, the question can be formulated as follows: What's the *use* of race in pandemic biopolitics? I borrow the concept of use from Ahmed, who, among many other philosophical issues, analyses how use became associated with life and strength in nineteenth-century biological and social thought in her book *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use*, which allows one to read some of its fragments from the biopolitical perspective. Ahmed describes use as a contact zone and introduces the notion of use in the field of biopolitics by claiming that "a question of whose life matters is bound up with who gets to use what" (Ahmed 2019: 40). She argues that one cannot live one's life in isolation, that is, without coming into close contact with things. In the case of COVID-19, however, living one's life without coming into direct contact with the other quickly became a privilege, which often was distributed along the lines of the existing structural inequality. In the pandemic context, race might be seen as a vehicle for categorization, which is introduced by creating "a set of expectations of who will be useful for what, of what some bodies are *for* or how some bodies become *for*, of who and what becomes available as resources to be used up," an array that defines which bodies are useful and which are set to become disposable, since their utility, conceived of as a system for extracting life even from the death of those deemed a lower class, can be extricated through death by rendering both lives and deaths as resources (Ahmed 2019: 95, 136–138, emphasis in original).

Neoliberal biopolitical regimes, known for their potential to extract life not only from the "wretched of the earth" but virtually from all populations despite their race or class, allow for bringing the category of use into the vocabulary of economics. Becker introduces the concept of the statistical value of life, which he defines as "the willingness to pay for improvements in probabilities of surviving to different ages" (Becker 2007: 407). And while willingness and probabilities matter, it is clear that the ability to pay depends on the actual resources available. The definition of the value of life in terms of willingness to pay not only allows for transferring most of the responsibility for one's health to the individual, but also

acknowledges, albeit indirectly that not all lives are equally valuable, and therefore important. In the context of COVID-19, one quote from Becker is particularly telling. More than a decade ago, when considering the possibility of a global avian flu pandemic, he argued that: "While this is an enormous loss, how much precautionary actions are justified depends on the probability of having such a serious pandemic. If the probability of having a pandemic of the same order of severity as the flu pandemic of 1918–19 during the next decade is 1/1000, then the expected worldwide loss in the value of lives would be about $100 billion, which is big enough to justify hurry up efforts to develop vaccines and other protections. On the other hand, if the probability of such a pandemic is only 1/100,000, then the expected worldwide loss is only $1 billion, and crash vaccine and other programs do not seem urgent" (Becker 2007: 404). What is perhaps most shocking here is not Becker's words that explain the lack of readiness for such a global pandemic, but the overall tendency to make healthcare decisions, which in the event of a pandemic become crucial in solving the fundamental dilemma of biopolitics – to boost the chances of one's survival or leave one to die – by following the logic of capital, which allows one to speak of the general capitalization of public health – and of life itself. Butler calls such a logic "a post-sovereign or neo-sovereign form of calculation". According to her, such calculation brings about "a form of inequality that itself relies upon a metric of grievability – whose life, if lost, would count as a loss, enter into the registers of loss, even broach the status of an incalculable loss. And whose death can be quietly calculated without ever being named as such" (Butler 2022: 85–86). For Butler, these quiet deaths only prove that social inequality, which is often inseparable from structural racial inequality, goes hand in hand with necropolitical violence.

Of course, one may raise a quick objection to the treatment of health as human capital by claiming that despite economic inequality, there are certain public healthcare mechanisms that aim to prevent and treat pandemics. However, Richardson treats public health first and foremost as an apparatus of colonialism, which perpetuates and exploits global health inequalities through empirical models of infectious disease causation that serve the protected and the wealthy, and therefore only further entrenches racial and social inequality in the contemporary matrix of power (Richardson 2020: 4). Richardson considers colonialism as a certain kind of conceptual apparatus and perceives it as a matrix of power relations, which manifests itself continuously, transnationally, and intersubjectively by ignoring the statehood of former colonies, and includes not only class, political, economic, or social, but also racial orders imposed by European colonialism, which, having survived decolonization, continue serving the needs of global capital accumulation

(Richardson 2020: 3–4). But perhaps the strongest part of his critique is aimed at what he calls the epidemic of illusions – an epidemic spread by the colonialism of knowledge production, which is supported by certain mechanisms of public health science, especially epidemiology, and its tendency to monopolize the discourse of truth. By linking the concept of coloniality to theories of symbolic coercion, Richardson emphasizes the importance of separating epidemiological knowledge production from the neocolonial power matrix (Richardson 2020: 5, 65–88). And while it is true that future epidemiology should cease to function as an ideological apparatus that represents dominant interests, and instead parameterize the effects of slavery, exploitative colonialism, targeted underdevelopment, structural regulation, resources extraction, illicit financial flows, and gender-based violence, the postcolonial critique of public health should by no means be limited to the sphere knowledge production, as the pandemic has revealed that some deaths are way quieter than others, and more often than not race is an important factor in the equation.

Neoliberal Subjectivity, Situational Vulnerability, and Ecological Conundrums

Every personal experience of a global pandemic is inseparable from the state of being ill. In *Spaces of Hope*, a study of globalization and the working body in relation to late twentieth-century capitalism, Harvey has observed that in capitalism illness is primarily defined as an inability to work (Harvey 2000: 106). However, when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, it became clear that representatives of certain, so-called "essential jobs" are unable to work remotely, and due to their precarious position they cannot allow themselves not to work, even as it became increasingly dangerous at the height of the pandemic. In one of his more recent articles, Harvey claims that the workforce that is expected to care for the growing number of sick people, or at least provide the minimum services to restore daily life throughout the pandemic, is typically heavily gendered, racialized, and ethnicized. He calls these people "the new working class" and notes that the representatives of this new class face a double threat: they are constantly accompanied, on the one hand, by the greatest risk of contracting the virus while working, and on the other hand, by the possibility of being fired due to the economic austerity imposed by the pandemic (Harvey 2020). And it is precisely because of this that they face a paradox that contains an ugly choice: they either risk getting infected while caring for people and maintaining basic supplies or becoming unemployed and potentially losing access to adequate health care, thus bearing the brunt of a situation, in which

"biosecurity sacrifices the life *in* the factory in order to secure the life *of* the factory" (Boukalas 2023: 141, emphasis in original). Because members of this workforce have long been socialized to behave as good neoliberal subjects, they tend to blame themselves or God when faced with setbacks, and never dare to suggest that the causes of the problem may also lie within the system itself (Harvey 2020). And yet, even they manage to notice that they bear a disproportionately large burden in maintaining the reproduction of the social order. This brings back into focus the differentiation between lives to be saved and lives to be risked, which embodies the distinction between the political and the physical dimensions of life, offered by Fassin as early as 2007 (Fassin 2007: 501). However, in the framework of the pandemic and race these two dimensions cannot be distinguished anymore, as the political and the physical, or corporeal dimensions of life become intertwined due to un(fore)seen circumstances of the COVID-19 breakout.

Naturally, the need to choose "between life in the factory and life of the factory" means that any efforts of fighting racial inequality in pandemic times more often than not are seriously hampered. In her newest book *What World Is This?*, Butler analyses how COVID-19 and all its political, social, ecological, and economic consequences have challenged us to reconsider the sense of the world that such calamities bring about. Butler locates the issue of the so-called "essential jobs" at the heart of the "health of the economy vs. health of the population" debate, which arose at the breakout of the pandemic, thereby suggesting that those who advocate for the primacy of the economy in the face of a deadly virus accept the idea that human life must be sacrificed for the economic well-being. Moreover, she notices that those modes of reasoning that maintain the need to keep industry and workplaces intact give a new form to the fundamental contradiction inherent to the relationship between wage labour and the worker's immiseration, which Karl Marx has explicated in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*: "We open the economy – or keep it open – in order to sustain the lives of the working poor, but the working poor are those whose lives are deemed dispensable by opening the economy, whose work can be replaced by other workers, whose lives do not count as singular and invaluable lives. In other words, under the conditions of pandemic, the worker goes to work in order to live, but work is precisely what hastens the worker's death" (Butler 2022: 49–50). But what does that mean from the broader biopolitical perspective? Apparently, the classic Foucauldian "making live and letting die" formula seems not to be working anymore, at least not under pandemic conditions, as those populations who were disproportionately exposed to illness and death were precisely those who were not only left without adequate healthcare but also had no choice except continuing their work – in order to keep on living,

they were forced to face death every day, often without adequate protection from the deadly virus. Perhaps these dynamics can be best summarized by applying the concept of situational vulnerability, first introduced by Catriona Mackenzie, who distinguished a distinctive taxonomy of different sources (inherent, situational, and pathogenic) and states (dispositional and occurrent) of vulnerability, thus acknowledging the ontological vulnerability that is inherent in the human condition and enabling the identification of context-specific forms of vulnerability (Mackenzie 2014: 7). The concept of situational vulnerability is further developed by Schweiger. He claims that it is due to the situational vulnerability that some groups of people who are unjustly left unprotected are far more likely to contract the virus, or not be treated if they get sick due to social factors that may amount to a pathogenic vulnerability and are often based on previous existing inequalities (Schweiger 2022: 3). In the context of the pandemic, it seems to be precisely the case with structural racial inequality.

Finally, ecological questions are also inseparable from the interplay of pandemic and race. In a series of books dedicated to the COVID-19 outbreak and containing short essay-like texts, Žižek treats the pandemic in a slightly Vonnegutian manner by seeing it as a cynical reminder of "the ultimate contingency and meaninglessness of our lives: no matter how magnificent the spiritual edifices we, humanity, construct, a stupid natural contingency like a virus or an asteroid can end it all [...] not to mention the lesson of ecology, which is that we, humanity, can also unknowingly contribute to this end" (Žižek 2020a: 52). He argues that today's fundamental ideological and political struggle is first and foremost related to the interrelationship of the pandemic, the ecological crisis, and racism. While it is true that privileged classes try to keep these three areas separate from each other and even sometimes hint at the tensions between them, one should persistently maintain the idea of the unity of these three areas, since epidemics, broadly speaking, are not only a health problem but they are also related to an unbalanced relationship with the natural environment. Ultimately, Žižek agrees that some lives are more meaningless than others, as the representatives of the black race are more vulnerable than most whites, who are able to afford self-isolation and better healthcare during the pandemic. For Žižek, the three interrelated crises – epidemiological, ecological, and racial – are produced by the driving forces of global capitalism, and were not only predicted by the leading scholars but have been with us for decades (Žižek 2020b: 71–72). Therefore, serious doubts about the "newness" of the entire plight of the pandemic in terms of both the neoliberal subjectivity of the new working class and the global ecological crisis itself can be raised.

The Necropolitics of Usable Bodies, and the Biopolitics of Differential Vulnerability

All things considered, the shift towards the capitalization of life and the rise of situational vulnerability, which became evident in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, seems anything but natural. In her newest study, *Rethinking the Body in Global Politics: Bodies, Body Politics, and the Body Politic in a Time of Pandemic*, Purnell analyses the visual-emotional politics embodied through the COVID-19 pandemic and the fleshing out of contemporary necro(body)politics among many other important topics that deal with the relationship between the body and global politics. Drawing on the late Lauren Berlant's concept of *slow death*,[2] which describes the physical exhaustion of a given population and the deterioration of its health as a near-defining condition of both its experience and historical existence, Purnell suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated socio-politically conditioned, but usually slower deaths by revealing the extent of the current race, class and gender inequality, and acting as a catalyst to exacerbate existing inequality (Berlant 2007: 754; Purnell 2021: 79, 129, 138). Following Purnell, race can be seen as one of the mechanisms of today's necropolitical logic that aims to categorize bodies according to their usable parts, which can be used until death. For her, it is precisely the fact that there is far less basis for formal complaining about the bodies at the bottom of the global endoskeleton that is responsible for the availability of these bodies to be used and abused for the purposes of global capital – and discarded as waste without any sense of responsibility and guilt (Purnell 2021: 80–81). By consuming and disposing of bodies under the guise of "essential services" and placing these people in necropolitical confrontation with the power of death to profit others, the necropolitical logic, with the help of overlapping racialized, gendered, and classed classification technologies, disembodies people and transforms them into mere functional parts that serve other bodies during the pandemic. Due to the extractive and exploitative nature of such exchanges, where other bodies are sought to be freed and preserved, these parts are gradually consumed and expired. Because of the insatiable desire to calculate, value, extract, use and dispose of every animate and inanimate thing, which is peculiar to the modern neoliberal capitalist necropolitics, all populations are ultimately depleted and reduced to numbers and statistics (Purnell 2021: 83–85). And though Purnell paints a rather bleak pandemic picture, the statistics showing the effects of race,

[2] Berlant defines slow death as "the structurally motivated attrition of persons notably because of their membership in certain populations […] [that are] *marked out for wearing out*" (Berlant 2007: 761, 761n20, emphasis in original).

ethnicity, and education on mortality from COVID-19 that are supported at the introduction of the article, seem to support her statements.

Lorenzini, however, adds yet another layer to the analysis of the pandemic and necropolitics by introducing the concept of differential vulnerability. Building on Michel Foucault's understanding of racism as "primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die" (Foucault 2003: 254), Lorenzini stresses the importance of the differential exposure of human beings to health and social risks, which, according to Foucault, is a principal feature of biopolitical governmentality. In this way, Lorenzini contests a clear-cut biopolitical opposition of life and death, and instead suggests conceiving of biopolitics as an effort to differentiate the entire gray spectrum between life and death; for him, "biopolitics is always a politics of *differential vulnerability*," which not only does not erase existing social and racial inequalities but also "structurally relies on the establishment of hierarchies in the value of lives, producing and multiplying vulnerability as a means of governing people" (Lorenzini 2020: S42–S44, emphasis in original). So instead of reminding us of our common belonging to the same biological species, the pandemic reveals that our society all too often relies on the endless production of structural social and racial inequalities.

Looking For a Way Out: Decolonial, Politico-Economic, Ecological, and Solidary Remedies

Every illness demands a cure, just as every crisis demands an effective solution. And there are at least four types of possible remedies for the current maladies that are inseparable from the workings of what may now be referred to as the biopolitics of extraction and use: decolonial, politico-economic, ecological, and solidary. Today, when it is usually no longer possible to reduce complex phenomena to one specific cause, and those who think otherwise risk slipping into the realm of conspiracy theories, one must admit that these perspectives, which may appear rather different at the first sight, often are intertwined, and take over certain elements from each other.

The first – decolonial – cure is offered by Richardson, who notes that the relentless spread of the COVID-19 virus has brought the interconnectedness of humanity into the forefront and hopes that the awareness of this fact will help fight institutionalized racism and ensure universal healthcare. Richardson argues that pandemicity, which he conceives of as the binding of humanity through contagion, will potentially allow the colonists' descendants to realize the interconnectedness

of the world's people, just as the disproportionate mortality from COVID-19 is the daily experience of much of the global South, where every day due to entirely avoidable reasons almost 10,000 children die from these causes. Perhaps the global North would then begin to understand its actual contribution to the production and reproduction of structural injustice and inequality and realize that a response to every local outbreak of communicable disease should be as prompt as it was in the case of COVID-19 since it can easily become a problem for the entire humanity (Richardson 2020: 139–144). However, Richardson himself remains quite sceptical about this possibility, and does not rule out the likelihood that militaristic, xenophobic, and necropolitical tendencies may continue to gather momentum in today's world – and I must agree that a possibility of such enlightenment among the ruling elites of the global North sounds rather optimistic and is not entirely reasonable.

The second – politico-economic – solution is suggested by Harvey, who offers what may be labelled as a good old-fashioned socialist prescription while considering ways to change the status quo. He sees the pandemic as another chance to unleash the imagination, break free from the oppression of alienating labour and create a new social order that would take over capitalism's science, technology, and productivity (Harvey 2020). And while Harvey's ideas sound truly optimistic in the increasingly necropolitical pandemic landscape, it doesn't seem that the apparent collapse of capitalism has managed to become even a remote possibility since his predictions about a "collapsing bourgeois society" appeared in 2020. On the contrary, judging from the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems that after the 2008 crisis, capitalism has learned its main financial lessons and become much more flexible and operative – and thus able to survive global crises and deal with them in a more productive and less harmful way.

The third – ecological – way out is proposed by Mbembe, who perceives the pandemic as a spectacular expression of the planetary impasse, in which humanity finds itself today. He stresses the inherent oneness of humanity and the biosphere, considers the restoration of a habitable Earth as the only solution to environmental problems, and proposes the idea that all human beings, regardless of all racial, sexual, civil, and religious differences, are not only representatives of a single species, but also inseparable from other forms of life (Mbembe 2021c: S62). Quite unexpectedly, Mbembe presents a humanist version of the Stieglerian program that could be adopted to maximize universal equality and prosperity that consists of several strategies. First, we should enable the emergence of alternative aesthetics and politics of being human, living on earth, and sharing the planet with other human beings and other species. Second, we should resist the epistemic hegemony,

the temptation to reduce the earth and all life forms to a financial problem, and the accompanying drive to automate society. Third, we should link the fight against racism to ideas of human interdependence, radical sharing, and universal inclusion (Mbembe 2021a: 27–28; Mbembe 2021b: 20–21, 41). Yet ultimately, no matter how inviting these possible remedies may appear, the truth is, the complex problems brought about by the biopolitics of extraction and use are not likely to be solved by the power of words alone – concrete actions still need to be taken.

The last strategy to maximize universal equality and prosperity, as suggested by Mbembe, appears to be especially relevant when analyzing the interplay of pandemic and race, as it was precisely the lack, or even absence of human interdependence, radical sharing, and universal inclusion that has aggravated the existing structural racial inequality. The COVID-19 pandemic has only confirmed both the shared condition of social life and human interdependency, as well as the pervasive racial inequality that has largely contributed to the greater likelihood of dying for those who are racially marginalized and the actual number of deaths. In her brief, yet well-formulated overview of state racism and state violence in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, Cherry highlights the arbitrariness of state racism by arguing that all citizens are vulnerable to the phenomenon of racialization. The state can reduce a particular group to the subrace category at any time, while their delegation to that category and the violence that is directed to them, as a result, has a huge impact on all people, despite the colour of their skin. However, she sees this biopolitical condition not as a sign of impending doom, but rather as an opportunity to solidify a new sort of solidarity that is formed based on the vulnerability that we all face as citizens to be targeted and/or affected by state racism and state violence. Cherry does so by proposing the notion of vulnerable solidarity and offering two arguments in support of her cause. First, vulnerability is universal and powerful because it creates a stronger motivation to fight against injustice than emotions, such as empathy. Second, it acknowledges that every individual, despite his or hers ostensibly secure status, is susceptible to attack or harm by the state: "Vulnerable solidarity opens up the bonds of trusts among "vulnerable" groups, which may be difficult to do with groups defined by their supra- and sub-race identities. Instead of joining a cause because it has a direct impact on our social positioning now, people will join causes because they will know that all injustices have an impact on us all; if not directly, indirectly, if not now, in the future" (Cherry 2017: 360–361). Ultimately, such a perspective eliminates the need to identify with a particular vulnerable group, and, at the same time, marks a radical shift in the very approach to identity as such. A similar perspective is shared by Butler, who claims that the pandemic has allowed us to understand shared vulnerability and interdependency –

in a very direct, corporeal way – by making us realize that we share both the air we breathe and the surfaces of the world. For her, the idea that being infectious and becoming infectious are interconnected is inseparable from the phenomenological experience of the pandemic. Consequently, this understanding upturns our usual sense of the bounded self, as it reveals humans as relational, interactive beings, while at the same time rejecting the egological, self-interested foundations of ethics itself (Butler 2022: 11–12). This can be said to constitute the fourth, and perhaps the most promising – solidary – cure for the current necropolitical disease, whose existence is hard to deny when one takes a closer look at the interplay of pandemic and race.

Concluding Remarks

Notwithstanding the popular uproar against structural racial inequality and its ongoing long-term effects, the un(fore)seen circumstances brought about by the emerging COVID-19 virus, which rapidly caused a global pandemic, allowed for the intensification of the existing racial dynamics inherent to biopower. This manifested itself via the capitalization of healthcare and life itself, the replacement of the classic Foucauldian "making life or letting die" equation with the differentiation between lives to be saved and lives to be risked, or life in the factory vs. life of the factory debate, and the acceleration of slow deaths that merely exacerbated the existing racial inequality. And though numerous solutions have been offered that might help to combat the necropolitical effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on race, including decolonial, politico-economic, ecological, and solidary perspectives, the worldwide efforts to contain the pandemic often resulted only in deepening the existing racial inequality and reinforcing the existing necropolitical regimes of exclusion, largely based on extraction and use.

As the pandemic is nearing its end, one can finally see how the world has changed – or rather, how it hasn't changed at all. The anthropogenic climate change continues, radical political-economic transformations do not seem likely to be implemented anytime soon on a planetary level, and we are left aching for the solution to the age-old impasse of the biopolitics of extraction and use, which targets the most deprived and the most vulnerable, who are often racially marginalized. Unfortunately, this necropolitical deadlock will not be resolved, unless we reject the biopolitical logic, accept the understanding of humans as relational beings, and embrace the idea that everyone's life must matter, regardless of race and other categories that are way too often used and abused in order to justify and maintain the global structural racial inequality.

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