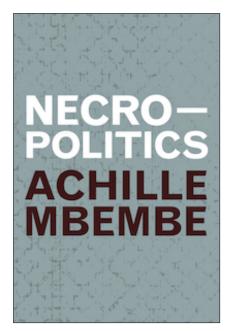Achille Mbembe, **Necropolitics,** Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019, 213 pp., $90.11 (hardcover), $25.95 (paperback), $17.52 (e-book).

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Achille Mbembe's **_Necropolitics_** begins with an introduction that connects the collection of seemingly scattered themes from colonial wars to Islamophobia, as well as from the shadow of modern democracy to the "anxiety of annihilation" (p. 2). Building from the concept of biopower proposed by Michel Foucault (1976/1990), Mbembe connects the themes of racism, sovereignty, national borders, prison, and civil rights in _Necropolitics_. The author critiques the modern democracy of the United States and European-dominated countries with the term _necropolitics_, which shows "contemporary forms of subjugating life to the power of death" that develops "the relations between resistance, sacrifice, and terror" (p. 92). Mbembe argues that the life of modern citizens is transferred into "the status of the living dead" (p. 92), while necropower is a way to understand the political dynamics behind the sacrifice, suicide, and freedom of the vast population around the globe. In this book, Mbembe defines the necropower as the capacity to control the life and death of citizens, because sovereignty has the power to exclude a community from the vast population, leaving them in a status of social death. The content of this book aligns with Mbembe's (2003) essay "Necropolitics," published in _Public Culture_, but it expands to discuss new terms and concepts, especially in the digital age, in which human beings are transformed and governed as digits in cyberspace. It offers an inclusive and broad conceptual map and a new perspective for scholars to interpret and analyze the struggles, violence, and discrimination in modern society.

In the first to fourth chapters, Mbembe explains the connection between race, democracy, and capitalism along with an illustration of his definition of necropolitics. The first chapter, "Exit from Democracy," depicts and decomposes the historical coexistence of violence and democracy in modern society and examines them from aspects of immigration, marketization, and war. Even though people live in a democratic society where physical violence and brutality are minimized and under control, violence is not eliminated but remains as the "nocturnal body" (p. 16) of democracy. Mbembe offers an example of the coexistence of democracy and slavery in the United States. Not only was the contradiction ignored but the inequality was legalized in the governance of the country and left impact on the present world. Furthermore, during the colonial wars, violence was exiled from democratic countries by sending the criminals and prisoners to colonies as a zone of brutal punishment, so colonies became the externalized space of brutality that supported the democracy of civilized colonialist power. As a result of slavery, colony, and their humanism counterpower, as slavery and colonies are eliminated from current society, violence still exists in the forms of Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, and other racist acts through the creation of cultural and

societal borders and "the Other" (p. 30). From the necropolitical perspective, racism functions to sacrifice the racial minorities for the development of a democratic society.

The creation of the Other, Mbembe says, aligns with the need for enemies in the second chapter, "The Society of Enmity." The government can only secure its citizens when their enemy's "physical death is warranted" (p. 47), so they distinguish between friends and enemies as well as to accurately identify enemies. According to Mbembe, liberal democracies need antagonism against enemies in the same way they need slavery and colonies, and violence is exiled from the country onto the "enemies of civilization" (p. 53). As a result of the borders drawn between countries and racial or cultural groups, the state is insecure because of the existence of others and the potential damage they could cause. The borders function as boundaries that not only guard the citizens but also cause anxiety and uncertainty to the states. Moreover, due to the history of the slave trade, colonialism, fascism, and other massacres and genocides, in order to protect themselves from potential vengeance, Western countries "employ racism like a hooked blade, the poisonous addition to a beggar's nationalism" (p. 51).

With that said, the third chapter, "Necropolitics," defines the term along with Foucault's biopower, while the fourth chapter, "Viscerality," explores its extension in the digital age. According to Foucault (1976/1990), "the sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing" (p. 136). In the perspective of necropolitics, sovereignty is evaluated by its power and capacity to decide the life and death of individuals. Hence, according to Mbembe, "politics is, therefore, a death that lives a human life. Such, too, is the definition of absolute knowledge and sovereignty: risking one's life as a whole" (p. 69). In order words, sovereignty has the right to determine national borders, wage wars against enemies, and decide who is disposable to a nation. Additionally, Mbembe defines necropower with three characters: First, sovereignty is the fragmented territories that render all movement and the generation of the apartheid state; second, sovereignty has a vertical control by locating on the high ground, surveilling and controlling the ground from airspace; and third, borders are reciprocally exclusive through the traffic network that separates the population.

In the fourth chapter, Mbembe introduces the digitalization of sovereignty and its goals. During the transition into a digital age, physical borders are digitized through technological surveillance and governance tools such as digital databases, drones, and sensors. With that said, the mobility of the population moving in and outside of a country is under the control of the government. As a result, to secure a country is to "affirm freedom but to control and govern the modes of arrival" (p. 104) and to identify and anticipate potential problems with technological tools. However, the goal of war by European countries is not to separate Europe from the rest of the world but to grant "Europeans alone the privilege of the rights to possession and free movement across the whole of the planet" (p. 103).

The last two chapters of *Necropolitics* quote from Frantz Fanon to understand the violence of anti-Black racism and critique capitalism on its support of racism. Racism is "never accidental" (p. 130) but an artificial structure to rationalize the fear and madness of the dominating White race. As an example, Mbembe argues that the Negro phallus is considered "an enormous power of affirmation" (p. 136) that threatens the racial domination of the white race. This argument aligns with *The Intimacies of Four Continents* by Lisa Lowe (2015). She not only argues that non-White races are considered "unfit for liberty" (Lowe, 2015, p.

7) but also highlights the role of racial classification in eliminating interracial intimacies and confirming a hierarchical structure in which European descendants become the superior class. Therefore, the White race protects the "supposed purity of the White woman by keeping the Black level with his death" (p. 137). Subsequently, the cultural representation of Black people in a racist context is to deny their existence.

In the sixth chapter, Mbembe argues that capitalism is "the compulsion to categorize, to separate, to measure, and to name, to classify and to establish equivalences between things and between things and persons, persons and animals, animals and the so-called natural, mineral, and the organic world" (p. 158). In other words, the economic system of capitalism leads a way to organize and redistribute power. People who are defined as valueless are "redundant" (p. 158) to the system, so they are forced to lose "its face and its name" to a status of "social death" (p. 158).

In the age of a global pandemic, the theory of necropolitics offers an insightful perspective to understand conflicts between nations. As the COVID-19 pandemic spread in the United States, former president Donald Trump used his Twitter account to publicly accuse China of being responsible for the global epidemic. However, his action can be understood to direct the enmity of the citizens toward a physical and tangible entity and to use China as a scapegoat for his failure in the prevention and suppression of the pandemic in the United States. Moreover, China and even the Asian community became the sacrifice for his need for maintenance of sanity and superficial peace in the United States. Even though Mbembe offers some inspiring theory that can help future scholars to understand, analyze, and criticize the current democratic system, race, war, and governance in a capitalist society, the history of Western imperial countries' invasion into China and the economic and political competition between China and the United States in recent years could be some examples that expand the coverage and applicability of *Necropolitics* into all racial minorities.

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