How to Inscribe Nature and the Environment Into the Philosophy of Politics?

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The purpose of this text is to examine, describe, and elaborate on contemporary attempts to incorporate nature and the environment into reflection related to the philosophy of politics. Both attempts to extend Foucault's biopolitics and attempts to introduce competing concepts are analysed. This theme has a strong presence mainly due to the multifaceted degradation of nature and the environment, contamination, and over-extraction of natural resources in the era of climate and ecological crises. In this text, the author analyses interdisciplinary activities developed by researchers associated with very different fields, such as anthropology and art criticism, which are based on the philosophy of politics.

Keywords: biopolitics, necropolitics, geontopower, geontopolitics, nature and environment, extractivism

Introduction

The starting point for this text is the recognition that in recent years we have been dealing with various attempts to inscribe nature and the environment into reflection related to the philosophy of politics. In this text, I will try to show the most important tropes involving the inclusion of new, one might be tempted to say hitherto marginalized, actors in a biopolitical and necropolitical reflection. Nature and the environment were absent for a long time, few people noticed and analysed the practices concerning these actors arising at the intersection of biopolitical and necropolitical activities. Crucially, however, this has changed with the spectre of an impending apocalypse related to ecosystem degradation, rising water levels and average temperatures, climate change, or loss of biodiversity. The climate and ecological crises, which are caused by the consequences of extractivism, have sharpened our attention not only to the issues of nature and the environment, but also to the global factors and dependencies that affect the status and condition of these invisible actors which have become objects of constant plunder, exploitation, expropriation, poisoning, destruction, and appropriation by industry, capital, and the state—according to the dominant extractivist logic. The climate and ecological crises have therefore opened up new theoretical possibilities that can lead to updating the catalogue of concepts with which we are able to describe new forms of extractivism.

In addition, it is extremely important to note that various attempts to extend biopolitical and necropolitical reflection on nature and the environment come from very different sources. The starting point for the creation of a new catalogue of concepts is both philosophical reflection and the analysis of various art projects or activist actions. Thus, the conceptual expansion, seen most fully in philosophy, has interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary

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roots. This is also evidenced by the fact that concepts related to biopolitics (mainly as seen by Foucault) and necropolitics (Mbembe) are developed by researchers associated with very different fields such as anthropology or art critique.

In this text, I will try to describe two strategies aimed the inscription of nature and environment into the philosophy of politics. The first is to expand biopolitics. The second is to introduce a competing concept—geontopolitics.

Expanding Biopolitics

The basis of Michel Foucault's biopolitical conception emerged in the 1970s and was described in such items as *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Surveiller et punir. La naissance de la prison) (1977) or the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (Histoire de la sexualité), published in 1978, entitled *The Will to Know* (La volonté de savoir). Particularly important in Foucault's development of the concept of biopolitics were his lectures at the Collège de France in 1976, which were later published in print in 2003 under the title *Society Must Be Defended* (Il faut défendre la société).

Summarizing the philosopher's thoughts is an extremely difficult task. In the briefest of terms, Michel Foucault understood biopower as a form of management of social groups and the individual's way of life. In the first part of *The History of Sexuality*, entitled *The Will to Know*, he pointed out the connections between biopower and capitalism and drew attention to the techniques used by power to manage the human masses and individuals. Thus, the French philosopher unequivocally linked biopower with the development of industrial capitalism, which—to function and organize mass production—had to inject human bodies into the apparatuses of production. To ensure the uninterrupted development of capitalism, it was necessary to create mechanisms of supervision and control, in which it was not a matter of enslaving bodies themselves, but of inscribing them into the mechanisms of production, of adapting them to the rhythm of the factory, but also of integrating them within society and the state. In this way, the economic and political system asserted its unproblematic control over social groups and the individual's way of life. Foucault referred to this form of governance of the masses and individuals as biopolitics.

Michel Foucault's philosophical thought had a great impact on the intellectual life of the world in the 1970s and 1980s and was referred to by representatives of Italian Theory, including such philosophers as Giorgio Agamben, Antonio Negri, Roberto Esposito, and, more recently, Donatella di Cesare. Biopolitics has also been an important inspiration for philosophers of postcolonial theory, anti-colonial activists, and activists of decolonization movements. Coming mostly from countries of the Global South, the researchers transfer biopolitics to the context of Africa, the Middle East, or Asia, thus polemicizing with Foucault's account. Some researchers are creating their terms, such as Achille Mbembe—the creator of the term necropolitics, competing with the French philosopher's biopolitical thought.

A key task Mbembe poses is to polemicize against a Eurocentric or Western-centric approach to global political issues. In the case of Africa, and the Global South more broadly, this approach tends to be the product of optics, habits, and customs stemming from the colonial past. Interestingly, Mbembe takes up the debate in the field of political philosophy, discussing Carl Schmitt's concept of the state of siege, biopower, a concept formulated by Michel Foucault, and the concept of the state of emergency created by Giorgio Agamben, among others. Mbembe demonstrates and proves the incompatibility of terms, coined in the Global North, most often set in the context of 19th- and 20th-century industrial capitalism, which ignore the perspective of people in the

Global South and do not take into account the genocidal strategies employed in the colonies. As the philosopher points out, in the case of colonialism and the conquest of Africa, such strategies for managing entire populations and individual people as the state of emergency, the state of siege and biopower occurred together and continued uninterruptedly. In this context, it was death that was at the center.

Necropolitics, then, is a concept and an idea that refers to the infliction of death as one of the strategies of power. In the case of Africa and the Global South, it can be considered fundamental. But in doing so, it is worth noting that the Cameroonian philosopher is open to the diverse experiences of the Global South, going beyond Africa and history. Mbembe has researched and repeatedly described contemporary neocolonial practices in the Middle East, including Israeli policies in the Palestinian territories, namely the West Bank and Gaza, towards the local population. He highlighted the similarities between the historical, plantation-colonial model of colonialism and modern neocolonialism, which maintains power through segregated zones, camps, and the state of emergency.

The need to adapt biopolitical categories to describe what concerns the More-Than-Human was pointed out by Joseph Pugliese (2020) in his book *Biopolitics of the More-Than-Human: Forensic Ecologies of Violence*. In it, the author proposes to expand biopolitics to include new entities such as animals, water resources, plants, air, and soil. Analysing Israel's actions in Gaza and the war strategies of the United States of America, the researcher sees the need to expand the category described by Foucault as follows:

> My concentration on biopolitics throughout this book pivots on examining the caesura that human from that which is cast as altogether other-than-human and is thus categorized as lawfully killable. Within the context of this biopolitical schema, law plays a foundational role in determining where diverse subjects are placed along the life-death continuum. Within formations of biopolitical state power, I argue, law becomes yet another adjunct to the ensemble of governmentalities oriented toward expanding and consolidating statist ends. My focus on forensic ecologies will be oriented by a concern to delineate the complex assemblage of bio political forces mobilized by the Israeli state and the United States in their respective militarized campaigns. (Pugliese, 2020, p. 4)

Pugliese's extension of Foucault's category of biopolitics works primarily through the use of a whole series of terms whose subjects are More-Than-Human actors. As the researcher argues, these actors are subject to biopower equally to humans, but the different techniques of exercising power over them render them invisible and (seemingly) outside the theoretical apparatus associated with the reflection on biopolitics. What is exceptionally important is Pugliese's proposal to reject thinking about Non-human actors as if they were not subject to biopower. When, in the meantime, they are equally subject to it, the difference is only the various way of exercising it.

> In deploying the terms zoopolitics, aquapolitics, phytopolitics, aeropolitics, and pedonpolitics, my intention is to enlarge the biopolitical aperture to encompass qualitatively different targets—animals, water, vegetal life, air, and soil—that require the state to exercise different techniques of operation in order to realize its intended bio- or necropoliticaal goals. These different modalities of statist operation must be seen as operating within inextricable systems of relation that are nested in the superordinate matrix of the biopolitical. These different modalities of statist operation are tributaries that flow from the governing category of biopolitics. As tributaries, they affirm, consolidate, and extend biopolitical relations of power in a capillary manner through grounded, site specific modalities. They are at once its adjuncts and its site-specific on-the-ground operatives designed to target specific ecological entities. Collectively, they delineate the contours of the forensic ecologies that, in the context of the occupied Palestinian Territories, evidence Israel's differential and diffuse operations of biopolitical war by other means. (Pugliese, 2020, p. 86)

However, it is not surprising that the researcher takes militarized zones as an overarching example. The impact of wars on nature and the environment has previously been introduced by Eyal Weizman (founder and

director of Forensic Architecture) and Ines Weizman, among others, in their book *Before and After: Documenting the Architecture of Disaster* (2014). The researchers analysed, on the one hand, the classic understanding of war, which ruins what belongs to nature and the environment through bombing and shelling. On the other hand, they focused on a type of war in which, the relationship between war and nature and the environment is based primarily on a strong link between environmental and climate change and local social and political tensions. This is a phenomenon that operates almost as a closed circuit. Environmental changes determine wars, which consequently radically alters the environment.

What is most interesting about Pugliese's proposed concept of expanding biopolitics is the recognition that More-Than-Human actors have no place in its classical formulation. Thus, the researcher seeks both to expand the category of biopolitics, thereby bursting the anthropocentric dominance, and to give biopolitics an ecological dimension. It is exceptionally valuable to point out that biopower affects everyone, regardless of its status.

Geontopolitics—A Development or a Competing Concept

Other extreme attempt to incorporate nature into philosophical reflection (even though conducted in an interdisciplinary manner) by researchers comes from disciplines other than philosophy and uses different research methods. They propose both expanding biopolitics itself and going a step further and using new, competing concepts which, however, are based on Foucault's biopolitics and the necropolitics created by Mbembe.

One of the most interesting examples of such attempts is geontopower proposed by the American anthropologist Elizabeth A. Povinelli. The researcher assumes that this is, in a sense, a necessary activity, for what is at stake is a much more adequate description of the modes of power, governance, or management. Povinelli even proposes a complete reconceptualisation of biopower and takes a step forward. As she declares, this is not because the theories of Foucault or Mbembe are far from her mind. However, her work with indigenous Australians over the years has allowed her to see that although they are subject to many processes of biopolitical governance by the state, there is another factor related to the exercise of power in late liberalism. Starting from the diagnosis of the deficits of Foucault's biopower and the figures proposed by the French philosopher, Povinelli introduces the concept of geontopower. The difference between biopower and geontopower is described by the American anthropologist as follows:

> The simplest way of sketching the difference between geontopower and biopower is that the former does not operate through the governance of life and the tactics of death but is rather a set of discourse, affects, and tactics used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife. (Povinelli, 2016, p. 4)

The researcher refers to such a mode of power, which she herself calls and defines as geontopower—a force that operates by playing out the difference between the Life and the Non-life. Moreover, as she suggests, geontopower is not a new form of power to take the place of biopower, as it were, because

> (biopower) has long depended on a subtending geontopower (the difference between the lively and the inert). And similarly to how necropolitics operated openly in a colonial Africa. Only later to reveal its shape in Europe, so geontopower has long operated openly in settler late liberalism and been insinuated in the ordinary operation of its governance of difference and markets. (Povinelli, 2016, p. 5)

In this context, the category of geontopolitics proposed by the American art critic T. J. Demos is equally interesting. It, unlike Povinelli's, is not parallel to biopolitics, but is related to the expansion of biopolitical categories. Thus, the researcher includes in his reflection, nature, and the environment, i.e., areas that were

previously marginalized in a biopolitical discourse, and whose condition directly depends on global factors and interdependencies between states, private entrepreneurs, societies, and local communities. Nature and the environment are understood here as objects of plunder, exploitation, and expropriation, especially by industry, capital, and the state, and of poisoning, destruction, and restriction. These processes directly affect and condition the lives of people at many points on the world map, including in areas threatened by environmental disasters. In this sense, Demos postulates, biopolitics is intertwined with geontopolitics. As he points out, the notion of biopolitics and necropolitics should be expanded to include geontopolitics, that is, the management of relations between the Life and the Nonlife:

> In this antagonism that pits petrocapitalist states against environmentalists and in many instances Indigenous peoples— from Greece to Brazil, Honduras to the Philippines, Indonesia to Russia—biopolitics (the governance of human lives), transforms into necropolitics (the administration of death), and scales up and down to geontopolitics (the governance of the relations between life and nonlife), constituting an ascendant politics of earth-being in our age of extraction. (Demos, 2020, p. 48)

The researcher's definition of geontopolitics is based on the theories of Michel Foucault and Achille Mbembe. T. J. Demos adds his definition of the system, which he refers to as petrocapitalism, as does Elizabeth A. Povinelli, who uses the term "late liberalism" when describing geontopower. At the same time, the researcher takes the reflection to the activist ground, pointing, among other things, to the events at Standing Rock. It was there that the territory's resident Native Americans (Sioux people), supported by activists from around the world, initiated a rebellion against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, a 1,886-kilometer-long underground oil pipeline stretching from the oil shale fields of Northwestern North Dakota, through South Dakota, Iowa, to an oil terminal in Illinois. As Demos writes, the opposition was unique in many respects, with representatives of different groups, coming from different parts of the world, who collectively rebelled against the exploitation of fossil fuels, producing what could be called a transnational conflict zone. It was also a rebellion against the control of Life and Non-life while playing up the difference between the two. As the researcher points out, it is from this example that one can see the shift from biopolitical or necropolitical forms of power and administration to geontopolitics. Biopolitical attempts to manage protest through the use of force have moved, according to Demos, into the realm of necropolitics, scaling up to geontopolitics, reducing environmental elements to the role of commodities, performing the accumulation by dispossession that David Harvey described. What is important is that Demos also claims that economic and environmental violence is inextricably linked, while believing that only grassroots movements, such as self-help, can resist petrocapitalist practices.

Summary

In my text, I pointed out two strategies related to the integration of nature and the environment into the philosophy of politics. The first is to develop biopolitics. The second is to create a competing concept. The key here, however, is to see how the cited researchers define the main and characteristic feature of the economic and political system in which we have come to function. Pugliese, developing biopolitics, makes an attempt to adapt the term to the changes and conflicts taking place within capitalism. Povinelli speaks of late liberalism, and Demos of petrocapitalism. Late liberalism is understood by the researcher as a system related to neoliberalism, except that while neoliberalism is the governance of markets, late liberalism is the governance of difference. Povinelli treats both forms of government as parts and pieces of late liberalism. Demos, on the other hand, defines the system by the dominant form of the capitalist economy. He uses the name petrocapitalism, recognizing that

the modern economy is based on fossil fuels, so an economic and political system that depends entirely on energy, the ability to extract raw materials and transport processed fuels, must take this dependence into account.

In the introduction, I claimed that we are dealing with extractivism today, and that this is what the current phase of capitalism is sometimes called. Extractivism is based on unrestricted exploitation of resources and derives certain profits from them. In the context of nature and the environment more broadly, especially in connection with the debate about the impending climate catastrophe and the changing role of natural resources, this concept seems to be well known, established, even obvious. Each of us can recall from our memory images of open-pit mines on land or oil rigs at sea without much difficulty. However, the current, extractivist phase of capitalism, according to the University of Novi Sad professor, technology and new media researcher Vladan Joler, is distinguished by the fact that the economy is able to exploit, or basically "suck up", almost everything—natural resources found on the ground, underground, under the surface of the water, under the seabed, in space, as well as analog and digital data and labor and all human activities. To the list created by Vladan Joler in his essay "The New Extractivism", it is worth adding animals and living organisms, trees and plants, land and water resources, which are also subject to exploitation.

Moreover, it seems that the cited approaches have their origins in rather narrow definitions of the current economic and political system. Therefore, the researchers' identifications concern single phenomena or selected fields of activity, and may be considered partial and insufficient. Recognising extractivism, or extractivist capitalism, as a term that better reflects the nature of contemporary economic and political processes, I think it would be useful to consider an alternative possibility, which would be to recognise that the concept of geontopolitics in extractivism, which "sucks up" everything, works together with biopolitics and necropolitics, forming various combinations depending on the context.

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