

**Research Article**

**Defining and Legitimising Violence in the Modern World**

**Valeria Couttolenc Gonzalez**

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**Abstract**

This article aims to explore understandings of violence beyond the use of force and aggression through an analysis of the persistent and evolving nature of violence within the context of late-stage capitalism, (neo)colonialism, and imperialism, arguing that violence is not just a physical or immediate phenomenon, but also a systemic, symbolic, and slow process embedded within the structures of modern global societies. The text draws on the work of decolonial and Global South scholars to propose how, despite decolonisation movements, colonial legacies persist in the structures of neoliberalism, albeit in a less visible manner, and in the continued exploitation of the Global South by Global North countries through new forms of colonialism and capitalism. This piece proposes defining and understanding violence through different lenses and frameworks - acknowledging socio-political, economic, environmental and structural factors and how they interplay into systems of oppression and harm to perpetuate violence. It also offers criticisms of violent legacies of the past as well as violent practices of the present through imperialism and different modern-day expressions of colonialism. Moreover, discussions on the weaponisation of language to inflict and legitimise violence are explored, in tandem with presenting other conceptualisations of violence such as slow violence (with an environmentalist emphasis), economic exploitation through trade, and the forcing into debt of Global South countries in the name of development/modernity. To conclude, the text invites a critical reflection of current economic and political systems and their impacts on everyday lives to address the constant metamorphoses of violence as it continues to permeate the world we exist in, through the different manifestations of violence beyond

the use of force and aggression.

**Keywords:** violence, legitimization of violence, colonialism

The era of globalisation has intrinsically tied together different types of violence into a political and economic system under neoliberalism and (what is now) late-stage capitalism. The existence of violence in everyday lives is not a recent phenomenon; it is simply the latest manifestation of the systems put in place since colonialism. As Frantz Fanon states in *The Wretched of the Earth*, “colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence.”<sup>443</sup> Despite global decolonisation movements in the 1960s and onwards, many argue that colonialism has not gone away, as will be discussed throughout this piece. Instead, the structures left behind by colonialism hold steady as the ideological aspect morphs into a new, more subtle and human rights-friendly manner of expanding colonialism and imperialism. In our present age, colonialism is not monolithic; nation-states no longer rely solely on violence or armed forces to subjugate other states as colonies. Consider settler colonialism, as discussed by Patrick Wolfe, who states that it is not the elimination of the native people, but access to and control of the land that they’re in, that characterises settler societies. In these cases, the settler colony’s invasion is not a one-off event, but rather a structure built on the destruction and disintegration of native societies and the creation of a new colonial society that attempts to replace them.<sup>444</sup> To this definition, Lorenzo Veracini adds the important features of domination and reproduction to understand how settler colonies are constituted and function, acknowledging the coexistence of settler colonialism with colonialism, but also emphasising the distinctions between the two structural models of oppression.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1961), 61.

<sup>444</sup> Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 21, 2006): 387–409, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.

<sup>445</sup> Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2010), 1–173. See also Lorenzo Veracini, “Understanding Colonialism and Settler Colonialism as Distinct Formations,” *Interventions* 16, no. 5 (November 14, 2014): 615–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801x.2013.858983>.

Colonialism is also ongoing, as seen in rising inequality and other forms of systematic oppression. Therefore, if one understands colonialism as inherently violent, as Fanon states<sup>446</sup>, then how can its offspring of neocolonialism and imperialism be anything different? Furthermore, Aimé Césaire states that “no one colonises innocently.”<sup>447</sup> The rationalisation that Césaire presents in *Discourse on Colonialism* regarding the need to exercise colonial violence with impunity<sup>448</sup> is implicitly given by the neoliberal world order to countries in the Global North to oppress and exploit countries in the Global South for cheap labour and natural resources.

To understand how violence works in everyday lives, we must first ask what violence is beyond aggression and who has the power to legitimise or legalise it. In the field of International Relations, conceptions of violence centre on the use of force and aggression, with a specific focus on war.<sup>449</sup> This view is supported by environmentalist and scholar-activist Dr. Rob Nixon’s definition of violence being “customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, as erupting into instant sensational visibility.”<sup>450</sup> However, only understanding violence as a physical and immediate phenomenon overlooks the most pervasive types of violence that impact citizens across the world, often without their knowledge, and cause harm extending far beyond war casualties. These types of violence — including systemic, symbolic, and slow violence - are also addressed in the works of Jason Hickel and Achille Mbembe. Violence, in their analysis, does not necessarily manifest in a perceptive manner yet it infiltrates the structures, systems and bodies of the world.

In conversation with the authors above, Walden Bello’s analysis in *Counterrevolution: The global rise of the far right* offers the possibility to conceptualise violence beyond the use of force and aggression. Moreover, the emergence of analysis of different

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<sup>446</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1961).

<sup>447</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (1950; repr., New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 39.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> See Kant’s *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795); Galtung’s *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1969); Buzan and Waever’s *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (2003).

<sup>450</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

types of violence does not entail what is traditionally perceived as violence (i.e. use of force and aggression) is no longer a relevant understanding of violence. Meaning, physical violence can be used by those in power to further other types of violence and oppression, or can represent the culmination of other violent forces coming to the surface. It represents the face of violence that is invisible to the naked eye, but impacts everything anyway. Caitlin Cahill and Rachel Pain propose an understanding of violence as “...ongoing and always present, and informed by the past...”,<sup>451</sup> which in turn points to the need to analyse the past and understand how the current world system came to be from the 1960s (at the height of the post-colonial movements) to the present. The past informs how violence found in the structural and systemic legacies of colonialism developed into new forms of control and oppression exercised by the Global North on the Global South, thus leading to ongoing and always present attributes since violence is intermeshed within institutions and systems.

Jason Hickel, in *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions*, addresses the systemic or structural (used interchangeably throughout this essay) violence exercised by the current neoliberal politics, maintaining a hegemony of the Global North over the Global South.<sup>452</sup> Understanding that “development for some meant underdevelopment for others,”<sup>453</sup> it is hard to see the current world state as anything but a violent system of oppression that enacts violence through the structures that determine the functioning of the neoliberal capitalist global order. An example of such structural violence and a consequence of underdevelopment is the creation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) that push the development and neoliberal agenda in the Global South rather than the developmentalist practices implemented at the end of the colonial period.<sup>454</sup> Such programmes represented a form of neo-colonialist economic practices that have managed to ensure that countries in the Global South stay enslaved via debt<sup>455</sup> by neoliberal international organisations such

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<sup>451</sup> Caitlin Cahill and Rachel Pain, “Representing Slow Violence and Resistance,” *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 18, no. 5 (October 3, 2019): 1054–65.

<sup>452</sup> Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions* (London: Windmill Books, 2018).

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>455</sup> In the words of John Adams, “there are two ways to conquer and enslave a nation. One is by the sword. The other is by debt.”

as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.<sup>456</sup>

The SAPs and other more modern forms of debt perpetuate international systemic violence that supports the power imbalances capitalism needs to exploit and oppress countries in the Global South. In other words, countries from the Global South find themselves in a subordinate position in relation to the international organisations and countries from the Global North that are providing them with money for so-called development and modernisation. Hickel reframes this relationship, stating that “rich countries aren’t developing poor countries; poor countries are effectively developing rich countries – and they have been since the late 15th century.”<sup>457</sup> Such analysis supports the argument that colonialism was never really defeated in the late twentieth century or before; instead, it has just reincarnated into other types of colonialism and imperialism in a neoliberal global order.

Exploitation driven by capitalism remains exploitation, even if neoliberals comfort themselves by believing their humanitarian approach is genuine and distinct from past colonial practices. As set forward by Nicholas Vrousalis on *Exploitation as Domination: Why Capitalism is Unjust*, “...for all its pretensions to freedom and equality-of having superseded might-makes-right — capitalism remains a system of unfreedom and inequality.”<sup>458</sup> Vrousalis then, along the lines of Marxist critical theory, paints capitalism as still an exploitative relationship that is based on a power-induced domination of one party unilaterally over the other with a servitude-based labour flow, as well as within the structures of the current political and economic systems at a global level.

Moreover, understanding the exploitative nature of the neoliberal system and tying Walden Bello’s analysis of counterrevolutions in the post-colonial project, specifically Chile’s case study during the Cold War, one can see how the use of force can be tied

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<sup>456</sup> Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions* (London: Windmill Books, 2018).

<sup>457</sup> Ibid, 29. See also Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L’ouverture Publications, 1972).

<sup>458</sup> Nicholas Vrousalis, *Exploitation as Domination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 3.

into the use of violent economic policies with the Chicago Boys.<sup>459,460</sup> Here, Naomi Klein's concept of *disaster capitalism* through the *shock doctrine* becomes relevant to consider state violence through the imposition of neoliberal/capitalist economic practices during moments of crisis, which would later be replicated in other countries around the Global South.<sup>461</sup> Beyond the economic violence outlined here, the violence caused by the push for development and so-called modernity can be seen in rising inequality (necessary to keep the system working)<sup>462</sup> and poverty, as well as with the passage of time in other manifestations of slow violence as discussed below.

Slow violence, as defined by Nixon, whose work focuses on the struggles for environmental justice in the Global South, constitutes an event or action that occurs "gradually and out of sight...delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space...violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."<sup>463</sup> While Nixon focuses primarily on the environmentalist dimension of slow violence, there are references to the impacts of violence in other spheres of everyday life, such as housing (the existence of development refugees as a consequence of so-called modernity projects), claims to land (surplus people)<sup>464</sup>, and health (uranium poisoning from the deployment of weapons)<sup>465</sup>. Throughout his book, Nixon offers one of the most complete examples of how violence goes beyond the physical and immediate, as is portrayed in his case study on uranium poisoning during and after the Iraq War.<sup>466</sup> The international

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<sup>459</sup>The Chicago Boys were a group of Chilean economists trained in the University of Chicago, learning from Milton Friedman, who gained power after the 1973 military coup against Allende. Their economic policies "applied a "shock treatment" to balance the budget and to reduce inflation, reformed labor legislation, contained the power of unions, attracted foreign investors, and strengthened the rule of law." (Sebastian Edwards, *The Chile Project: The Story of the Chicago Boys and the Downfall of Neoliberalism* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), 2.)

<sup>460</sup> Walden F Bello, "Crucifying the Left in Chile," in *Counterrevolution : The Global Rise of the Far Right* (Winnipeg, Manitoba; Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2019), 62–78.

<sup>461</sup> Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2007).

<sup>462</sup> Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions* (London: Windmill Books, 2018).

<sup>463</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>464</sup> Nixon describes surplus people as mostly women and children that are "deemed superfluous to the labor market/ideal of national development and were forcibly removed/barred from cities" (Ibid, 150).

<sup>465</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

narrative tends to centre around war casualties by use of force as opposed to acknowledging other impacts that wars have on the environment in which they are waged. This can be seen in examples such as the contamination of natural resources leading to their weaponisation to be used against people who, instead of becoming casualties, become survivors of wars they did not start or partake in. Slow violence in this sense ties into Achille Mbembe's work in *Necropolitics*, addressing slow violence through slow death, as discussed below, emphasising the racial violence and attritional nature of the harms.<sup>467</sup>

The violent impact of the development or modernity agenda is seen in the living conditions across the Global South, and increasingly for certain populations in the Global North.<sup>468</sup> Tying into the environmental violence perpetrated through overconsumption, Hickel notes that "if poor countries increase their consumption, which they will have to do to some extent to eradicate poverty, they will only tip us further towards disaster."<sup>469</sup> If, as Hickel states, GDP growth is leading to more poverty than it is eliminating,<sup>470</sup> one can describe the current late-stage capitalist system as an unsustainable one because of the pressures that it causes on the finite resources of the Earth. The violence of this system lies in the negative impacts that it will have in the long term for those living in it. Harm to the environment is not something that is removed from humanity's future, no matter how many strongmen in positions of power deny the reality of climate change or how much the narrative is shifted away from this crisis affecting people in the long-term.<sup>471</sup> The most significant manifestations of violence that will impact humankind are not those in the news or on social media, but the legacy left by the structural violence of people considering the environment as infinite and looking the other way when a conflict or situation does not impact them directly. There is a need to understand violence this way to be able to address it, beyond the immediate and short-term media focus we are accustomed to, as Nixon

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<sup>467</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steve Corcoran (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

<sup>468</sup> Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions* (London: Windmill Books, 2018).

<sup>469</sup> Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions* (London: Windmill Books, 2018), 277.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>471</sup> Eve Darian-Smith, "Deadly Global Alliance: Antidemocracy and Anti-Environmentalism," *Third World Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (December 2, 2022): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2144206>.

argues.<sup>472</sup>

Looking beyond violence as occurring between nation-states, one can acknowledge how language is used as a form of violence that, in turn, impacts humans in a sometimes-imperceptible manner. In Amitav Ghosh's *The Nutmeg Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*, colonial violence is discussed as the Dutch discover the Bandana islands and colonise them.<sup>473</sup> Here the emphasis lies in the (in)visibility of violence, as in the narrative account undertaken by Ghosh as he describes the invisibilisation of the colonial violence inflicted through the use of language to describe massacres and the imposition of new names for places as part of colonialism (similarly seen in the Spanish crown's naming of New Spain for the territory spanning across Latin America and parts of the US)<sup>474</sup> as a new and symbolic violence.<sup>475</sup>

The use of language to legitimise violence manifests in different dimensions, too. Anthropologist Neil Whitehead discusses how the anthropology of the war subfield has approached the use of cultural and political violence in recent times. The central questions of study centre around cultural appropriateness of violence – as in who gets to decide when, why and how violence manifests as either a cultural expression, a discursive practice or a performance. In Whitehead's words, "these pseudo-anthropological attempts at explanation only serve to recapitulate colonial ideas about the inherent savagery of the non-Western world..."<sup>476</sup>. Coupled with "...to appreciate the links between cultural affirmation and violence leads to intractable political quagmires...where the violent insertion of Western models of political association only

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<sup>472</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>473</sup> Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2021).

<sup>474</sup> Raymond B. Craib, "Cartography and Decolonization," in *Decolonizing the Map: Cartography from Colony to Nation*, ed. James R Akerman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 18.

<sup>475</sup> Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2021). See also Mishuana R. Goeman, "Disrupting a Settler-Colonial Grammar of Place: The Visual Memoir of Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie," in *Theorizing Native Studies*, ed. Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014) and Brenda Nicolas, "Pertenencia Mutua : Indigenous Oaxacans Contesting Settler Colonial Grammars," *American Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (June 2024): 241–71, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2024.a929165>.

<sup>476</sup> Neil L. Whitehead, "Introduction: Cultures, Conflicts, and the Poetics of Violent Practice," in *Violence*, ed. Neil L. Whitehead (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 2004), 4.



serves to induce even fiercer opposition through violent means...”<sup>477</sup>, Whitehead illustrates a wider panorama on how culture interplays into understandings of what is violence beyond the traditional analyses.<sup>478</sup> Additionally, this constant “othering” of the non-Western world has only led to justifications of uses of force through invasions in contemporary times, even after the decolonisation movements in the 20th century, in turn leading to hostility towards the Global North for their modern exploitative, colonial, and violent practices as well as the continuous imposition of Western cultural norms and values (cultural colonialism).<sup>479</sup>

Furthermore, beyond the constant Othering lies what Saidiya Hartman describes as the “afterlife of slavery” to address both the denial and erasure of violent legacies as well as ongoing practices.<sup>480</sup> Such an analysis offers insight into how language is also crucial to legitimise or legalise violence, answering the question of who gets to determine what violence is and how this is achieved. Considering the practice by the West to sweep under the rug the most negative aspects of their history, as seen in the lack of common knowledge around Germany’s colonialism in Namibia<sup>481</sup>, King Leopold’s in the Congo<sup>482</sup> or residential schools in Canada and the United States<sup>483</sup>, it should not be surprising to discover the weaponisation of language to construct alternative narratives and hide violence from the naked eye.

Another example, found in another of Bello’s case studies, is the rise of the Hindu

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<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

<sup>478</sup> For further reading, see also Neil L. Whitehead, ed., *Violence, Violence* (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 2004).

<sup>479</sup> Sarah Amsler, “Cultural Colonialism,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, August 1, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosc202.pub2>.

<sup>480</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 6.

<sup>481</sup> Henning Melber, “Colonialism, Genocide and Reparations: The German-Namibian Case,” *Development and Change* 55, no. 4 (July 2, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12840>.

<sup>482</sup> Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: The Plunder of the Congo and the Twentieth Century’s First International Human Rights Movement* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

<sup>483</sup> Antonio Voce, Leyland Cecco, and Chris Michael, “‘Cultural Genocide’: The Shameful History of Canada’s Residential Schools – Mapped,” *The Guardian*, September 6, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2021/sep/06/canada-residential-schools-indigenous-children-cultural-genocide-map>; Rukmini Callimachi and Sharon Chischilly, “Lost Lives, Lost Culture: The Forgotten History of Indigenous Boarding Schools,” *The New York Times*, July 19, 2021, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/19/us/us-canada-indigenous-boarding-residential-schools.html>.

nationalism movement in India and its construction of an idealised past to justify and legitimise old and new mechanisms of domination through the dehumanisation of the Other - in this case, Muslims, Christians, Dalits and Adivasis in India.<sup>484</sup> Additionally, the Hindu right has used social media for what Bello calls organised trolling,<sup>485</sup> when online harassment transcends into offline violence as civil society actively participates in lynchings and mob violence that has been legitimised and justified by their government.<sup>486</sup> Building on this case, one finds the weaponisation of the internet to manufacture consent in the Philippines through the distribution of misinformation and attacking critics and dissenters of the Duterte regime<sup>487</sup>. The online space then offers the possibility for a type of violence that is not physical but is manufactured using language for the construction of narratives to further an ideology or political agenda. In some cases, this online-offline space dimension can also transcend and be used as fuel for physical violence. A more current example is the narrative manufacturing around the ongoing genocide in Palestine, committed by Israel with help from the United States and other countries in the West, which legitimises the use of violence and allows the media reporting on the genocide to alter the role played by Israeli forces.<sup>488</sup>

The invisibilisation of violence, in these cases, is connected to crafting narratives to legitimise violence, and can be easily dismissed and overlooked in future historical depictions of the current times. Ghosh looks at the invisibilisation surrounding the

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<sup>484</sup> Walden Bello, "The Hindu Counterrevolution: The Violent Re-Creation of an Imagined Past," in *Counterrevolution : The Global Rise of the Far Right* (Winnipeg, Manitoba; Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2019), 99–138.

<sup>485</sup> Walden Bello, "The Hindu Counterrevolution: The Violent Re-Creation of an Imagined Past," in *Counterrevolution : The Global Rise of the Far Right* (Winnipeg, Manitoba; Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2019), 99–138.

<sup>486</sup> Walden Bello, "The Hindu Counterrevolution: The Violent Re-Creation of an Imagined Past," in *Counterrevolution : The Global Rise of the Far Right* (Winnipeg, Manitoba; Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2019), 99–138.

<sup>487</sup> Walden Bello, "The Philippines: Emergence of a Fascist Original," in *Counterrevolution : The Global Rise of the Far Right* (Winnipeg, Manitoba; Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2019), 99–138.

<sup>488</sup> Nur Masalha, "Settler-Colonialism, Memoricide and Indigenous Toponymic Memory: The Appropriation of Palestinian Place Names by the Israeli State," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 14, no. 1 (May 2015): 3–57, <https://doi.org/10.3366/hpls.2015.0103>.

ordinary citizen's awareness of violence through a historical perspective.<sup>489</sup> Additionally, to tie into Nixon's environmentalist focus, Ghosh discusses how the language around the torture of witches was later used to legitimise the exploitation of nature and current ways of life under capitalism.<sup>490</sup> Such is achieved through a view of the Earth as an infinite resource, ready for the taking and exploiting,<sup>491</sup> without thought of consequences beyond the idea of a short-term development lens that has been pushed by the development agenda, as Hickel also notes in his analysis.<sup>492</sup>

Nixon discusses the aftermath of incidents, events, actions and how the language used to describe them contributes to the invisibilisation of the violence perpetrated there. For this, he uses Mike Davis's *dialectic of ordinary disaster*<sup>493</sup> to explain how narratives are interwoven throughout history to minimise the impact of disasters and alter public memory, since the burden falls on those living outside of the Global North. Likewise, Nixon argues that the currently waged battles are not only for material dominance, but also about who gets to control the narrative and its impact on appearances.<sup>494</sup>

In Mbembe's *Brutalism*, different types of violent forces interact with each other – ranging from the description of the process of brutalisation as a *making savage*,<sup>495</sup> to how understanding of this process should go beyond the traditional perceptions of violence in war and atrocities and into its pervasiveness in everyday life of those brutalised by it. This critique of the current world order emphasises how the civilian sphere of life has come to be shaped by an increased militarisation of public life, leading to dehumanisation, and in turn connecting to the use of necropolitics by States.

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<sup>489</sup> Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2021).

<sup>490</sup> Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2021).

<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

<sup>492</sup> Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions* (London: Windmill Books, 2018).

<sup>493</sup> Mike Davis, "Los Angeles after the Storm: The Dialectic of Ordinary Disaster," *Antipode* 27, no. 3 (July 1995): 221–41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.1995.tb00276.x>.

<sup>494</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>495</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Brutalism*, trans. Steve Corcoran (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2024).

The legitimization of violence in this case relies on the re-shaping of the human bodies and their value<sup>496</sup> – similar to Nixon’s arguments on surplus people.<sup>497</sup>

Additionally, Mbembe’s previous work on *Necropolitics*, specifically the focus on the state’s choice of awarding life and distributing death to whoever it perceives as a threat to its power, is also a clear manifestation of systemic violence.<sup>498</sup> This work also ties into racial violence through the racialisation of bodies when analysed through neo-Malthusianism<sup>499</sup> and the politics of belonging – which then ties back into a point raised by Mbembe on an interview for *Brutalism* mentioning “a long history of reshaping by force, of depleting, of exhausting both physical-psychic energies and of basically reinventing the human-or human forms in general.”<sup>500</sup> Neo-Malthusianism, in Mbembe’s account, allows nation-states to employ necropolitics to justify population control, leading to neo-eugenics and a language that alters the perception of what constitutes a body.<sup>501</sup> Foucault’s biopower and biopolitics<sup>502</sup> also come into play with neo-Malthusianism as capitalism’s demands need to be met to guarantee economic productivity that will uphold the system. Biopower regulates the lives of those in the system, while necropolitics decides who gets to be a part of it. What is this if not an example of violence that is deeply embedded into everyday life but not perceptible to

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solutions* (London: Windmill Books, 2018).

<sup>498</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steve Corcoran (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

<sup>499</sup> Neo-Malthusianism is an ideology prominent in the 1940s to 1960s, which stated that an overgrowth of the world’s population would lead to an economic, ecologic and humanitarian crises as the Earth’s resources, especially food production, would not be able to keep up with the demand. In turn, neo-Malthusians argued for different policies to control the growth of the population - see the Chinese one-child policy or India’s forced sterilizations for examples. (Marc Frey, “Neo-Malthusianism and Development: Shifting Interpretations of a Contested Paradigm,” *Journal of Global History* 6, no. 1 (February 23, 2011): 75–97, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1740022811000052>; Chelsea Follett, “Neo-Malthusianism and Coercive Population Control in China and India: Overpopulation Concerns Often Result in Coercion” (Washington DC: Cato Institute, 2020), <https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/2020-07/pa-897-updated.pdf>)

<sup>500</sup> Achille Mbembe, Transcript: In conversation with Achille Mbembe, interview by Paul Gilroy, Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the Study of Racism and Racialisation at University College London, June 17, 2020, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/racism-racialisation/transcript-conversation-achille-mbembe>.

<sup>501</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Brutalism*, trans. Steve Corcoran (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2024).

<sup>502</sup> Richard A. Lynch, “Foucault’s Theory of Power,” in Michael Foucault Key Concepts, ed. Dianna Taylor (Acumen Publishing, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1017/upo9781844654734>; Chloë Taylor, “Biopower,” in Michael Foucault Key Concepts, ed. Dianna Taylor (Acumen Publishing, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1017/upo9781844654734>.

the naked eye?

The arguments presented by Mbembe in *Brutalism* on the militarisation of borders and limited mobility<sup>503</sup> then speak to the politics of belonging, and a non-immediately threatening manner of necropolitics - such as the enforcement of hard borders and refusing entry to asylum seekers and refugees, or the open air prisons that Palestinians have been forced into since 1947 and the first Nakba in 1948,<sup>504</sup> which leads the threatened population towards a *slow death*. Thus, through this set of policies, violence is exercised in the name of “national security”, where imperialist states currently use language and power to justify their necropolitics and politics of belonging to decide who gets to be a citizen within their proclaimed territory.

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<sup>503</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Brutalism*, trans. Steve Corcoran (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2024).

<sup>504</sup> Al Jazeera, “The Nakba Did Not Start or End in 1948,” Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera, May 23, 2017), <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/5/23/the-nakba-did-not-start-or-end-in-1948>.

Violence does not exist in a vacuum. While this work has presented the ways that violence is not a specifically defined phenomenon but can take many forms, it is also important to note that more than one type of violence is usually coexisting. That is to say, in an instance where environmental violence is happening, political violence is most likely also occurring. In addition, violence is in constant metamorphosis, exercised by those in power to continue oppression through new methods that create new types of harm for society. Mbembe summarises how, even after decolonisation, “in the North in particular, old imperialist pulses now combine with nostalgia and melancholy”.<sup>505</sup> The power of language to push for the satisfaction of such needs created by the narratives and the imagined past, mentioned by Bello,<sup>506</sup> will continue to allow an avenue for the legitimisation of the use of violence on other nation-states and global citizens for as long as it is needed for oppression and exploitation in late-stage capitalism and the neoliberal world order.

To conclude, violence permeates every sphere of our existence, whether we are aware of it or not. That awareness of violence is dictated by the accessibility that we have to alternative forms of knowledge that go beyond the nation-states’ discourse and offer criticisms on violent legacies of the past as well as violent practices of the present through imperialism and neocolonialism. Addressing violence will require tackling the different factors that impact the manifestations of violence beyond the use of force and aggression. Here, the use of zemiological frameworks that consider not only the structural factors (economic, social, cultural, and political) but also social harms (i.e. criminalisation of poverty, human rights violations, securitisation of migration) can be useful for further understanding the construction of violence in our societies. The question of where else one can find violence in our everyday life is one that will remain open as late-stage capitalism and neoliberalism speed us into what can only end in destruction. Whether this destruction will represent the dawn of a new world with the “sun coming up on a dream come 'round...years from the empire now”<sup>507</sup> before it’s

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<sup>505</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Brutalism*, trans. Steve Corcoran (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2024).

<sup>506</sup> Walden Bello, “The Hindu Counterrevolution: The Violent Re-Creation of an Imagined Past,” in *Counterrevolution : The Global Rise of the Far Right* (Winnipeg, Manitoba; Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2019), 99–138.

<sup>507</sup> Hozier, *Empire Now* (Dublin, Ireland: Rubyworks Ltd., 2024).

too late or culminates in the destruction of our planet remains to be seen. Violence, meanwhile, will continue its metamorphosis and infiltration of every sphere of existence.

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