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"Is Your Dad a Towelhead?": Capitals of Shame and Necropolitics in Post-9/11 America

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ABSTRACT

Using the author's personal experiences as a Brown woman living in the United States after September 11, this paper uses post-9/11 violence enacted against Brown citizens to consider the nuances of necropolitics. Specifically, this paper argues that too often everyday acts of violence, such as gaslighting, are central mechanisms of necropolitical control. Frequently, these normalized aggressions make relegating people to the status of the living dead possible. Finally, this paper argues that necropolitics emerges from intra-actions, often causing the ontoepistemological death for communities of color in general and, in this case, Brown people in a physically and psychologically violent post-9/11 United States.

KEYWORDS

Necropolitics, Capitals of Shame, Assemblages of Violence, Critical Race Feminism, Queer Theory

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The bright sun stung my eyes as I fought back tears of frustration and anger. After years of training to become a nationally ranked gymnast, I rarely felt intimidated in my strong but petite body. Yet, in that moment, I suddenly felt dwarfed as I looked up at my tall, broad-shouldered classmate.

"Do I have to ask you again?" he barked. "Is your dad a towelhead or just someone who comes from one of those terrorist countries? Either way, this is gonna hurt," he said with shaking, clenched fists.

"Take her down!" another kid shouted.

"Goddamn towelheads wanted war. Fuck her up good, Brett!" shouted another, spitting spitefully at me.

"Stop calling my dad that," I seethed. "Go on. Say it one more fucking time."

"What? Towelhead? So you admit it? Your dad is a fucki—," the boy started but I didn't let him finish before I gave one quick punch to his stomach and thrust my knee into his groin. The small group of onlookers gave a loud, "WOAH!!!" as I pushed past them, leaving the boy, a person I once regarded as a friend, groaning, and coughing on the ground.

In the wake of the attacks on September 11, 2001, citizens across the United States grappled with the aftermath of the deadliest strike on U.S. soil since Pearl Harbor. To deal with a wave of post-traumatic stress disorder (Schlenger et. al, 2002), an array of coping mechanisms surfaced. For example, some citizens turned to religion (Lincoln, 2010) while others resorted to chemical dependencies (Nandi et al., 2005). Under the auspices of keeping citizens safe from what was quickly named the "war on terror" (White House Archives, 2001), the United States government dealt with the attacks by increasing surveillance under the Patriot Act. Intensified surveillance was initiated across contexts—from airports to government buildings, from cyber security to increased police forces (Lyon, 2003). The government's surveillance only seemed to heighten citizens' growing suspicion of the "Other," intensifying vigilance for any possible threat. Between the government and citizens, all nuance evaporated, leaving only a binary—you're either for or against terrorism (Žižek, 2002), you're either an "American"[1] or you're not. For Brown citizens whose ethnicity and national identity was not immediately clear, it was not uncommon to be quickly deemed a "terrorist" (Choudhury, 2006; Lyon, 2003; Selod, 2015); to be understood as a problem (Bayoumi, 2009; Dubois, 1903) that should be rejected, isolated, and, when possible, removed.

When September 11 occurred, I was seventeen and a senior at a small, overwhelmingly White[2] high school in the Midwestern part of the United States. In 2001, my once rural hometown was rapidly developing into a suburb due to White flight trends away from cities. White flight, or the migration of White communities away from urban spaces, continues to be a common occurrence in the United States as some families use their privilege to avoid racially diverse schools and communities (Clotfelter, 2001). Using my own narrative as a

[1] My use of the term "American" is intentional here as a signal of the marginalizing mentality that allows U.S. citizens to, on one hand, overlook the colonizing implication of the term and, on the other, to signal how it was used to further marginalize immigrant people and communities post-911 and, more broadly, throughout U.S. history.

[2] In this case, I am defining "overwhelmingly White" by two characteristics. First, the census data for the area states that the city was 97% white in 2001. Second, aligned with scholarly dialogues on whiteness such as DuBois (1903, Leonardo (2009), and Matias (2016), among others, whiteness is defined here as beyond a question of race and, instead, is argued to be the systemic production and reproduction of supremacy and privilege that largely benefits white people and communities.

queer, Brown woman in a very straight, White space, this paper argues that the exhaustion I felt in a post 9/11 United States was, on one hand, a part of the context of microaggressions that Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) regularly experience.

On the other hand, I argue that feeling worn down was an intentional use of friction (Tsing, 2005); a mechanism of control used in a post-9/11 United States against its Brown citizens. To explicate her theory of friction, Tsing uses the metaphor of a tire on the road. Friction, Tsing argues, is necessary to the vehicle's movement but, in the process of moving, friction wears down the tire and, eventually, the road. Metaphorically speaking, whether the tire or the road wears down more quickly is a matter of privilege and intention. In this case, I argue that using an array of physical and psychological warfare against those identified as Muslim—regardless of their actual religion or culture—was intentional, a way of wearing people and communities down to gain sociopolitical movement rooted in anti-Muslim bigotry. Further, as Selod (2015) argues, it is often the case that anti-Muslim bigotry strips Muslim-identified citizens from fundamental civil liberties and condones dehumanization of Brown people and communities. In short, the ideal of a "national identity" is too often denied to BIPOC citizens, as well as other marginalized groups, because of bigoted norms and values. As I will discuss below, these aggressions are yet another iteration of the many important discussions focused on fatigue and violence (e.g., Hartlep & Ball, 2019; Smith, 2014). In addition to these dialogues, such violence can be understood as an extension of necropolitical marginalization; a way to maintain sociopolitical control as a direct reaction to the collective trauma experienced by the events on, and those that stretched after, September 11. When everyday racisms became entangled with the reactive aggressions from 9/11, it layers reverberations of harm within an echo chamber of oppressions (Wozolek, 2021) that constantly and consistently impacted Brown citizens.[3]

Necropolitics, or the "capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die" (Mbembe, 2019, p. 66), employs various insidious weapons in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and communities. An extension of Foucault's (1978) dialogue on biopolitics, Achille Mbembe (2019) uses necropolitics in at least the following ways: to theorize the conditions under which people and communities become disposable, to trace the cartographies that normalize states of emergency and therefore governmental control, and to discuss how the "enemy" is often rendered phantasmal in the interest of buttressing sociopolitical violence. Across these points, Mbembe argues that necropolitics allows sociopolitical and cultural killing of the enemy without distinction. Necropolitics is therefore not only used to discuss physical death of people and communities—be it through genocide, enslavement, or apartheid—but also to theorize the conditions of what Mbembe calls the *living dead*. Recalling images of enslaved Africans, colonization, and concentration camps, Mbembe describes the conditions of the living dead—a space that relegates people to endure a state that exists between living and death. In this state, following a Foucauldian (1978) argument that power is omnipresent, actions like suicide can be understood as an enactment of agency against necropolitical control.

Like dialogues on necropolitics that emphasize the impact of colonialist violence, this paper will use necropolitics to discuss both the physical and ontoepistemological[4] (Barad, 1999) death of Brown U.S. citizens. While entangled with September 11, this paper recognizes that Brown death is enmeshed in broader anti-Brown sociohistorical norms within the United States that are notable in the foundation of the United States. Specifically, I am speaking in regard to the maiming and killing of Indigenous people and communities through

[3] While this paper speaks from my own experience, it is important to note that while many Brown people were identified as Muslim, and therefore faced physical and psychological violence, those who identified as Muslim were exponentially targeted, facing far more consistent horrors after September 11 than other Brown citizens and communities.

[4] Barad's (1999) use of ontoepistemology is used to signal an attention to how ways of being, knowing, and doing are fundamentally inseparable. Written here as one word "ontoepistemology," is also meant to signal ways of being (ontology) first that engender ways of knowing (epistemology), and the reciprocal relationship between those ideas.

colonization (Sabzalian, 2019; Simpson, 2014). Using necropolitics is important to unpack the impact of 9/11 on the nation and on individual communities for at least the following reasons. First, in terms of a national identity, post-9/11 culture reified violence as a necessity for the preservation of the nation (Adams, 2016); often providing the justification for torture and murder. This validation of violence can be seen in places like Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib that surfaced in 2004. These spaces of government-sanctioned torture were shocking to many, yet were accepted by large parts of the U.S. population. Acting on President Bush's rhetoric that the nation would create a context that is "inhospitable to terrorists and all those who support them" (White House, 2003, p. 11), private citizens took up the President's call to action in particularly violent ways (Nguyen, 2005). The murders of Balbir Sing Sodi, Waqar Hasan, and Vasudev Patel by other U.S. citizens are but a few examples of how "Americans" took their cue from the government to incite terror against a government-created "Other."

Second, necropolitics is helpful when attending to the impact 9/11 had on individuals and marginalized communities because it acknowledges the exhaustion that people often experienced from consistent microaggressions, a phenomenon that is known as racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2014). As I will discuss in detail below, this exhaustion is multifaceted, springing from points of physical and psychological violence, such as gaslighting (Sweet, 2019; Wozolek, 2018). Similarly, necropolitics recognizes that in a post-9/11 context, fatigue can move beyond bone-weary exhaustion and toward a consistent state of terror. Living with/in a heartland horror (McCollum, 2017), necropolitics is central to tracing the contours constructed by presidential rhetoric and everyday racisms that not only shaped the country but the lives of Brown citizens (Wray, 2010); relegating some physically and many more metaphorically to the status of the living dead. Further, it is important to recognize that such oppressions are common in the United States and Canada. Though on a much larger scale, one only needs to consider the internment of Japanese citizens, the enslavement of Africans, and the genocide of Indigenous peoples to understand how violent oppressions have continued to function across the United States and Canada since their inception, although arguably manifesting differently in each country. The violence that followed September 11 is yet another example of sociohistorical necropolitics at work, a point to which I will return below. To explicate the use of necropolitics, this paper will now turn toward a brief discussion on fatigue and gaslighting as they are knotted with necropolitics before further engaging in my own narrative of a Brown person who has experienced a post-9/11 heartland horror.

Nationalism and Necropolitics: Gaslighting in the Midwest

September 11, 2001, like any event that captures the horror of mass death in a televised loop, was not isolated in its violence. Elsewhere I have argued that violence is always already an assemblage (Wozolek, 2021); an entanglement of aggressions and oppressions that is made of past, present, and future iterations of hostilities and deaths. While I will not restate the complexities of assemblages of violence here, it is significant to think about how all violence is folded into what Barad (2007) calls "intra-action."

Barad (2007) describes intra-action as the mutual constitution of entangled agencies.[5] Intra-action is important because it is central in reconsidering relationships between both human and nonhuman bodies. Take, for example, September 11. One could argue that 9/11 was not just an event but a phenomenon that was made and unmade through the intra-actions of bodies. Intra-actions are therefore the sewing together and pulling apart of human bodies, as well as the bodies of communities, discourses on terrorism, the role of local and less local politics, political pundits, news channels, and fear. These bodies are knotted within the phenomenon that is 9/11; something that knots all bodies together in a sociohistorical and politically violent event. The intra-

[5] For more on this theory as it has been developed specifically by those in the field of Social Studies Education, please see Adams and Kerr (2021).

action from September 11 separated citizens into new, co-constituted subject positions. Through intra-actions, citizens became "Americans," "terrorists," "victims," "survivors," among other constructed positionalities. Not every citizen *inter*-acted directly with the attacks; meaning that not everyone was present in New York and Pennsylvania, nor does everyone know someone who experienced the attacks firsthand. However, the nation *intra*-acted with the 9/11 phenomenon. All citizens are therefore central to what was produced through these intra-actions—from the discourses to the subject positions.

Perhaps not surprisingly to those connected with U.S. sociopolitical and cultural history, one thing that materialized from the intra-actions of September 11 was a wave of anti-Brown, and specifically anti-Muslim sentiments. While the country was in shock and mourning, fear of the Brown "Other" was subsumed in patriotic rhetoric and notions of freedom that justified psychological and physical atrocities against Brown citizens (Lyon, 2003; Nguyen, 2005). Hate crimes surged across the nation that were, as aforementioned, fueled by the Bush administration's press releases that used terms like "searching for," "finding," and "hunting" those deemed "terrorists" (Lazar & Lazar, 2007, p. 50) in what the White House argued was a significant and necessary national pursuit of justice.

The violence became so prevalent that the United States Department of Justice created a webpage dedicated specifically to the discriminatory backlash that was common in a post-9/11 United States. This page was meant to show, though perhaps performatively, the government's "priority on prosecuting bias crimes and incidents of discrimination against Muslims, Sikhs, and persons of Arab and South-Asian descent, as well as persons perceived to be members of these groups" (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015, para. 1). This page, along with the narratives documented by scholars (e.g., Nguyen, 2005), outlined the beatings, murders, vandalisms, cases of arson, and bombings that were directed at homes, businesses, places of worship, and carried out against people and communities. Like all hate crime reports, these numbers tend to include the more egregious offenses (Levin & McDevitt, 2002), leaving out implicit everyday racisms that resonated against Brown ways of being, knowing, and doing. As this rhetoric spilled from the White House and into communities across the nation, it emboldened "righteous" citizens to engage in the very violence that the justice department purported to censure and interrupt.

Although the Justice Department used this platform to show contempt for violence against Brown people and communities, it should be noted by early November 2001, Justice Berman revealed that more than 1,200 people had been detained for simply fitting the profile of the suspected hijackers, regardless of their status as U.S. citizens or innocence (PBS, 2002). In the months after 9/11, these numbers continued to rise. The consistent fear of violence from private citizens, along with anxiety about the prevalence of unfounded detainments, shaped Brown citizens' existence; shrouding it in an all-too-familiar exhaustion that has been experienced by Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) (Giroux, 2012; Simpson, 2014; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).

Deleuze and Uhlmann (1995) argue that being "tired" is transitive, something that can be attached to an object or idea. Exhaustion, however, is intransitive in that pure exhaustion often means being fatigued by everything and nothing at once. This bone-weary fatigue is certainly not a new idea. It has been discussed by critical race theorists (Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007), queer theorists (Halberstam, 2003), and Indigenous scholars (Hartlep & Ball, 2019; Mamdani, 2001), to name a few. In the wake of the attacks on September 11, many citizens across the United States articulated a fear of the "Other." Anti-Muslim bias that had been brewing in the country were, for many citizens, affirmed by the attacks, a sense of fear that was infectious (Puar, 2017). For Brown citizens, regardless of their ethnicity or religion, many expressed a sharp rise in exhaustion (Ghalaini, 2020); an affect shaped by the rising tide of hatred and fear that spilled (Gumbs, 2016) across contexts throughout the country.

One way to read the exhaustion experienced by Brown citizens in post-9/11 America is through an un-intentional process of gaslighting that has become an all-too-common form of oppression. A term borrowed from the 1944 film, *Gaslight,* gaslighting is understood to be a psychological manipulation that forces the victim to question her sanity, thereby maintaining systems of power through a feedback loop of uncertainty. Gaslighting is insidious in that it is both explicit and implicit. While there are several possible ways to theorize gaslighting, there are two ingresses to gaslighting that are particularly relevant here. First, as it is most commonly used, gaslighting is often carried out with a sense of intention; a means of psychological control whereby an aggressor targets a particular victim (Sweet, 2019). Second, gaslighting occurs through everyday policies and practices aimed at maintaining the status quo (Wozolek, 2018). Things like institutional racism, sexism, and queer-prejudices are designed to plant seeds of doubt across marginalized communities. The scenes of subjugation (Hartman, 1997) across colonized spaces and places like the United States are an intra-action between bodies and culture that are often formed and informed by sociopolitical and culturally normalized systems of gaslighting.

Mbembe (2019) argues that there are many ways to establish the living dead. In many cases, necropolitical control is not achieved abruptly. It happens over time, with violence shaping the lives of citizens with incremental changes. Concentration camps, for example, would not have been possible without previous intra-actions between people and anti-Semitic rhetoric, policies, practices, and normalized iterations violence (Finkel, 2017; Weisel, 1972). These intra-actions co-constituted both political control and the limitations of agency, what I call agentic contingencies (Wozolek, 2021). Returning to Tsing's (2005) dialogue on friction, gaslighting is one way to wear down the oppressed while eliciting a sense of supremacy from the oppressors. Gaslighting is therefore central to the friction needed to engender and maintain certain kinds of power. Through this lens, gaslighting can be understood as one of the "weapons deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons…conferring upon [marginalized citizens] the status of *living-dead*" (Mbembe & Meintjes, 2003, p. 40). While the violence inherent in gaslighting is, by far, not the end stage of necropolitics, it is certainly a significant facet in what Mbembe discusses as a process of dividing people and space to render citizens with certain identities as "disposable."

The disposability of Black, Indigenous, People of Color and their communities within the United States has been a longstanding conversation across the social sciences (e.g., Hartman, 1997; Puar, 2017; Simpson, 2014). One way to render a person or group as a "problem" or as "disposable," is to cause an ontoepistemological death through necropolitical intra-actions. Or, as Woodson (1933) argued, "Why not exploit, enslave, or exterminate a class that everybody is taught to regard as inferior" (p. 4)? The journal entries presented below were written when I was in high school. They are presented here as an engagement with narrative inquiry, something that Clandinin and Huber (2002) argue is at once profoundly personal while being always already knotted within the social. The purpose of these entries is not to be evocative but, rather, to describe the self-social entanglement in ways that unpack the co-construction of identities (Butler, 1990; Miller, 2005) that emerged from necropolitical intra-actions.

September 11, 2001

The country was attacked this morning. There are only a few TVs in our school, and I think I'll remember for the rest of my life. We were crowded in the Commons and, if you know the Commons, you know it's rather exclusive. Seniors only. That's the deal. This morning, anyone who could fit had shoved their way into the room. The air was thick and hot. I'm short so I felt like I was suffocating amid the thick air and bodies as I watched the breaking news flash across the screen. Who would do this? Who would kill so many

people? Ms. Dunbeck,[6] my favorite teacher of all time, was standing next to me. Her presence was comforting. I felt like we are all in this together. I asked her who she thought did this. She shrugged. "Anyone, I suppose. It's not like the United States has always been a peaceful country." I asked her if she thought this was an isolated event. She shrugged again. "No idea. No way to know if you're safe when there are planes falling from the sky." The bell rang. We've heard that sound thousands of times, but everyone jumped a bit. The room emptied. The hall was filled with people, but everyone was quiet. There was no laughter. Just whispers and the sound of some people crying.

I went to social studies. He must know about this, right? That's his job. To think about governments and politics. I asked him what he thought. He looked devastated. "Terrorists," he said. His voice was gritty and angry. "Damn terrorists," he mumbled. I said, "From where?" He just looked at me. "Any place they live, that's where. Middle East. India. Africa. Those places. Speaking of which, isn't your dad from one of those places?" The classroom noise stopped abruptly at the question. I felt the eyes on me. "Yes….Both of them (my dads). I just don't think they would…." "You never know," interrupted Pete (a classmate). Pete's a stoner and his voice is usually slow and indifferent. This time it was filled with fear. "You never know who you can trust," he continued.

September 15, 2001

I went to work (coaching gymnastics) today. Some of the parents have asked Glenn (the owner of the gym) about my nationality. He pulled me aside to talk about it. They feel uncomfortable keeping their kids in my class. Glenn has asked that I step down for a bit. There goes my cash. We can't always afford the mortgage. What if we need help this month?

October 15, 2001

There are rumors that they are rounding up anyone who potentially fits the description of the terrorists. My parents are afraid. My mom has checked out my passport status and asked me to keep my drivers license on me at all times. She said something about sending me to India. Then something else about Canada. I recall learning about Nazi Germany in history class. What will it be like when they ask me for my papers? What if I don't have my license on me? I guess my cousin in Canada has asked that my brother and I come stay with her until this is over, but this is my senior year! Why should I sacrifice this year because they are afraid of terrorists?

October 16, 2001

Jake's dad, a doctor in town that I've been to before, stopped me outside of school today. He asked me if I'd date his son. I've already told Jake no, twice. I'm not interested in him. His dad used my patient records a few weeks ago and gave my number to Jake so he could call me at home and ask me out. I said no then, I said no to his dad now. When I asked his dad why he wanted me to date his son so badly, he said, "You're beautiful and exotic. I think it's important that my son get experience with a girl like you before he settles down with a nice wife someday." I asked why I wouldn't make a good wife to someone someday. He said, "You're the type of girl you spend time with, get some experience with, sexually speaking. That way you know what to do when you get married. Besides, after these attacks, that's all you people are good for as far as I can tell. Besides, I'm asking. He's asking. We're at least asking. It's not like the rape that happens where your family is from, right?" I felt sick. When I got in the building I threw up, twice. It was really hard to sit in front

[6] Pseudonyms are used throughout these entries.

of him in band this afternoon. I think it's going to be hard to look at him for the rest of my life. I think I'll need a new doctor too.

October 28, 2001

I was pulled over this afternoon driving back from school. I wasn't speeding. The officer knew me. He knew who I was dating. He knew about gymnastics. He knew a lot. He asked me if I had any weapons in the car. I tried to joke about using a gymnastics leotard as a weapon. He was not amused. He asked me if I'd been out of the country. I asked him why I was being pulled over. He said I ran a red light. I hadn't gone through any red lights. He let me go but mentioned that I was a "pretty girl who should drive safe." Did he talk to Jake's dad? Why did he say that?

November 1, 2001

I stopped at the gas station to get coffee on the way to school. The attendant at the counter told me I couldn't get it. That managers can refuse to serve anyone they want. He told me to go to the QuickMart down the street. The QuickMart is run by an Indian family. Fuck. I just want my coffee. I'm so tired.

November 21, 2001

That history teacher was at me again. He spent most of class asking about my family background. A 30-minute inquisition. I've only been to Goa once in my life. I can't remember it well because I was so young. The memories are like a Monet painting. Fuzzy at all the edges. He made it sound like a terrible place. The other kids just kept quiet. After class one kid from history class pushed me into the lockers. Didn't say anything before or after, just shoved me and walked away. I reported the teacher to the principal during lunch. I was told that it's "within the scope of the curriculum to talk about foreign countries because it's a world history class" but that he would "talk to the teacher about his approach." He also reminded me that the negative experiences I am having are "not universal." He said, "It's important to remember that it's not everyone. Just a few people." The principal then asked me about where my dads are from and about my family. It felt like I was reliving class all over again. After almost fighting with Brett last month, I'm feeling more paranoid every day. I know not everyone is against me but sometimes it feels like that. They want to fight me. They want to fuck me…No, not just fuck, rape. But not rape because it's apparently a choice? They want to fire me from my job. They won't serve me coffee. They want to round up anyone who looks like me. I can't talk to my parents about it. I can't talk to my brother about it because he's busy at college. I just feel alone. I feel like my life doesn't matter. I feel afraid.

December 5, 2001

I was talking to Fatima after school. She said something that stuck on me. She said, "I hate myself. I hate them. Right now, I just hate everyone." She's been having a rough time, too. I don't know why I haven't talked to her of all people about this. Maybe because I didn't want to make her feel worse. Maybe because I was afraid if we were talking people would see it and assume we were plotting something. Her parents don't go out much. They barely let her come to school. As one of the few Muslim families in this town, maybe the only, they are afraid. I can't blame them. But what she said, about hating herself, that felt familiar. I can't tell which way is up sometimes. I've started having bad dreams about my family in India. Started wondering if perhaps my teacher is right, that you can't trust anyone. Calls are so expensive, and we don't go there every year so it's not like I know them. I mean, really know them. What else don't I know, even about myself?

Being, Knowing, and Doing: The Ontoepistemologies of the Living Dead

Arendt (1968) argues that "race is, politically speaking, not the beginning of humanity but its end…not the natural birth of man but his unnatural death" (p. 157). To engage with racist norms and values is to experience what Mbembe (2019) discusses as the "shattering experience of otherness…for the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the state's murderous functions" (p. 71). There is no doubt that physical violence against Brown people and communities enacted post-9/11 was, and continues to be, acts of terror in and of themselves. For the brief remainder of this paper, however, I focus on how everyday acts of violence "make possible murderous functions." Specifically, it is important to theorize how intra-actions co-constitute both agentic contingencies—or the factors that inhibit and interrupt one's agency—and the agentic possibilities for oppressors that emerge from systems of power that are inherent to violent intra-actions. These agentic possibilities encourage and reinforce the privilege to physically and psychologically maim others without, or with little, consequence. Afterall, as Tsing might argue, while both the tire and the road are worn down, only one gains movement from friction.

Due to multiple points of friction, my sense of self quickly eroded in the months that followed 9/11. One way to read the data is to understand the aggressions as isolated instances of violence. The principal's gaslighting that I focus on the singularity of aggressions—that it was "not everyone," therefore suggesting the issues were not as dire as I had expressed—is an all too familiar response that marginalized people receive as a reaction to someone calling out systemic racism. The reality is that racial battle fatigue rarely occurs from one trauma but, as Smith (2014) argues, it is the ontoepistemological death of a thousand cuts. Sociopolitical gaslighting is similar in that the manipulation happens across contexts—from history class, to my place of employment, to the gas station, to the sexualization of my body. The toll gaslighting and other forms of violence has on an individual often causes an ontoepistemological death, what DuBois (1903) discussed as a "choking away" and what Woodson (1933) argued is a metaphorical lynching of one's ways of being, knowing, and doing. When society seeks to kill off a person's ontoepistemology, leaving it "ugly and distorted" (DuBois, 1926, p. 292), they relegate them to a space of sociopolitical control, to the living dead. It comes of little surprise to those attending to state-sanctioned and culturally condoned oppressions that marginalized people might enact agency over life through such means as suicide and self-harm, something my last entry hinted at as I wrestled with depression during that time.

It is also significant to recognize the effect that my marginalization had on my White classmates. As Mbembe (2019) argues, death and freedom are woven together, and into one's identity, through necropolitics. Across contexts, from the school yard to the classroom, my peers witnessed my oppression. Their silence was certainly an acceptance of, and therefore participation in, violence. It was also likely a response to systems of power, like that of a teacher asking inappropriate questions about a student's family background. Regardless of the reason, the response remained the same. Yet, it was not just my ontoepistemology that was shifted by violence. My peers were also being formed and informed by normalized aggressions. As scholars have discussed (e.g., Apple, Aasen & Cho, 2003; Giroux & McLaren, 1989), the bodies of policy and practice are co-constructed through intra-actions with human bodies. Likewise, necropolitics maintains systems of power through the process of co-constituting subject positions. Just as I was gaslit into accepting the dehumanization I faced, one can understand the oppressors as the agents of living with/in and enacting violence.

Tracing the contours of the post-September 11 United States through the lens of necropolitics is important for at least the following reasons. First, as Mbembe (2019) argues, necropolitical power is so ubiquitous that it blurs lines between the living and the dead, effectively creating a space where precarious conditions of living are not only socio-politically normalized but the desire to maintain such conditions for the oppressed are encouraged. After 9/11, the government's call to seek out and isolate anyone who could possibly

be a terrorist, condoned violence that reinforced the notion that Brown lives are disposable. This was more than just national security, as the Bush administration argued under the Patriot Act, this was a way to maintain the dehumanization of Brown citizens.

Second, as one traces the contours of the post-9/11 necropolitical landscape, the culmination of aggressions becomes apparent. Part of the exhaustion Brown citizens experienced was knotted within sociocultural gaslighting. In my narrative, the exhaustion caused by gaslighting was everywhere, and yet nowhere. It was a fatigue that resulted from uncertain looks, whispers of fear, implicit and explicit threats of violence and arrest, and aggressions that were always already in-corporeal. Mapping 9/11 necropolitics makes clear that to effectively deploy all manifestations of power, it is far easier to exercise control when the victim is shrouded in doubt. As Woodson (1933) argued, "when you control a [person's] thinking, you do not have to worry about [their] actions…[That person] will find [their] 'proper place' and stay in it" (p. 10). When sociocultural norms degrade someone enough that they believe they appropriately belong to the living dead, control often comes easily.

In conclusion, violence can always be understood through an entanglement of intra-actions. The aftermath of September 11 is just one note in the necropolitical history of the United States that constantly and continuously frames Black, Indigenous, and People of Color as disposable. If one were to fold that 9/11 note back into the symphony of violence that always already re-creates the living dead, the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement, the need to defund the police, and other social injustices become clear. The desire to subjugate my life to the power of death—be it ontoepistemological or physical—by my classmates, teachers, principals, and the broader community was therefore maintained by post-9/11 fear but it certainly did not begin on or after September 11. It was always already in the water, so to speak. As long as BIPOC lives are disposable, the assemblages of violence that are filled with necropolitical norms will only continue to thrive in this homeland of horror where the "land of the free" will always be knotted with the "land of the dead."

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