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# Necropolitics in the New Word: A Biopolitical Reading of John Locke's *Second Treatise*

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## **Abstract:**

This project presents a reading of John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* through a lens of contemporary political and legal theorists. Informed by the historical work of James Tully and the philosophical frameworks of Giorgio Agamben, Achille Mbembe, and Peter Sloterdijk, reading John Locke's *Second Treatise* through a biopolitical lens allows us to see the underpinnings of Locke's thought as it is relevant to contemporary America and its ongoing colonial project. This paper seeks to prove the necessity of a historical, genealogical analysis that is grounded in the theoretical framework established in this essay. By tracing Peter Sloterdijk's concept of "desert" as it appears in *In the Inner World of Capitalism*, biopolitics as introduced by Michael Foucault in *A History of Sexuality, Volume 1* and further explored by Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, and Achille Mbembe's addition of necropolitics as a method to explore the effects of power on a hidden or oppressed population, drawing from *Public Culture* 15.

**Keywords:** John Locke, Achille Mbembe, Giorgio Agamben, Peter Sloterdijk, Necropolitics, Biopolitics, Colonialism, *Second Treatise On Government*

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## Introduction

The political structure that created the American form of chattel slavery and erased the presence of indigenous people from the land was created intentionally, and has yet to be dismantled. Until it is clear how this structure was developed, we cannot properly understand how we can affect meaningful, material change in America. The power structures that shape the American colonial landscape are well-disguised but observing their initial appearance and application can allow a rich understanding of how colonial power is exerted in America. By approaching John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* armed with the tools of contemporary biopolitical analysis, we can deconstruct the topological categories that the American colony rests upon. The *Second Treatise* is a pressure point that the works of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Achille Mbembe, and Peter Sloterdijk are all capable of investigating. By using all of these thinkers in parallel, the biopolitical and necropolitical structures that John Locke and his other constructed can be unearthed.

While reading this essay, please keep in mind the purpose of this essay is not to fully uncover these structures, but to show enough of them that the necessity of a greater project is revealed. A work of this length could not begin to encapsulate complex political structures, but can only argue for the full uncovering of the American colonial structure. The necessity of this genealogical project is hopefully made apparent in this essay, as without it, the American colony can not truly eliminate slavery or genocide from its action because the structure behind the action has these necropolitical paradigms as some of its most primal elements.

## Section 1: Sloterdijk, Agamben, and Locke

Nowhere is the biopolitical more apparent and a more effective tool for analysis than in the zone where *bios*' opposite is held in dialectical tension. *Bios*, indicating "the form or way of living proper to an individual or group,"<sup>1</sup> is a constant reference point throughout this essay, often in its negation. In Agamben and those after him, *bios* has come to mean a specific kind of politically qualified life that is allowed under the sovereign. The tensile strength of these opposites to *bios*, seen in Locke's wasteland, Agamben's zone of indistinction, and Sloterdijk's desertification allows for an ascent to a vantage point at which biopower relations can be more concretely observed. Agamben's logical formulation of life, with the categories of *bios* and *homo sacer* must be thought alongside the essentially topological colonial framework that Locke uses to justify expansion. In order to do this, this essay brings in Sloterdijk's topological understanding of life in the form of a specific *bios* that dwells or inhabits a place. This essay will develop this *bios* further into *settled life* over the course of this section to have a specific form of life that categorizes colonial life according to both Agambenian and Sloterdijkian accounts, both of which are necessary in order to read Locke's *Second Treatise* as a logically consistent work.

Sloterdijk, in *The Inner World of Capital* presents the desert and desertification to stand in opposition to the self without a place. These "[places] without a self... do not hold on to those who pass through them. They are alternately overrun or empty no man's lands; the transit deserts that proliferate in the enucleated centers and hybrid peripheries of

<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Agamben, "Homo Sacer," in *Homo Sacer*, trans. Daniel Heller-Rozen (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998, 2.

contemporary 'societies.'"<sup>2</sup> These created deserts and this process of desertification are our focus here as it is within the deserts and within desertification that the biopolitical is at its most obvious. The inclusive exclusion of life is the chief feature of desertification. The land that makes up the vascular American highway system creates a zone where life is defined by its prohibition. The zone is one that life is included in as it moves along the highway but excluded from, as it is life that does not live and does not cultivate life within this space. To attempt to cultivate life in the created desert is to run against an incredibly strong expression of biopower: an implicit, self-sustaining necropower, which draws its power from a hidden, implicit dialectical opposite to biopower. Sloterdijk adds topology onto Agamben's logic of the biopolitical: more so than thinking in zones, Sloterdijk's thinking in land gives us an additional lever by which we can uncover the power structures. His use of the term life defines a life that exists not just in space, but upon land that it settles. Settled life emerges here as a settler-colonial form of life that dwells within the topological container of the home.

This zone that permits life but not life's self-sustaining function of cultivation is not limited to the transit systems, factories, and holiday villages suggested by Sloterdijk, but can be found to include the entirety of American suburbia outside of the houses that are settled by life. Parks represent deserts as well: anyone living in a park is hidden away by the normalizing apparatus that Foucault identifies with modern political society. What is not a desert is in the process of desertification. What is grown there is determined strictly by political power, and the power structure would only tolerate the politically formed *bios*. Common space is regulated to

<sup>2</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, "On the Way to Thin-Walled Societies", in *Biopolitics, a Reader*, ed. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 312.

such a degree that the life is forced into a transitory mode. Life is only allowed to pass through the common space and is not tolerated to inhabit this area. There are no flocks of sheep grazing, no settlements emerging in the grassy areas between highways. The biopolitical move that creates the suburbs is one that removes all life from the common areas. Life is something that occurs behind closed doors, outside of the public view. That which can be seen must be a waste that is made unable to sustain life. There are exceptions, of course, but just as biopower is a normalizing force, an analysis of biopower can concern itself with an identification of the normal held by biopolitics. This essay does not seek to make a normative claim, but merely identify what has been normalized within the biopolitical tissue. By providing an analysis of what is normalized, one can induce the structure of biopolitical power from its contact points with.

The genesis of this desertifying move in America is one wrapped in the settler-colonial maneuver that allowed for the creation of the American colony. Locke's work in his *Second Treatise of Government* is foundational to the settler-colonial project: "Land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, *waste*; and we shall find the benefit of it amount to little more than nothing."<sup>3</sup> The creation of waste-land allows for the creation of a zone singularly distinguished by labour.<sup>4</sup> The zone itself is what can be distinguished by those living within it. If they labour, the zone is not waste, and there are people upon the land. If there is no labour as such, then the zone is waste, and there is only the savage, indistinct from the waste in which they reside. Then the justification for

<sup>3</sup> John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, § 42.

<sup>4</sup> In Locke's sense: pasturage, tillage, or planting

settler-colonialism lies in a simple moral proposition: “Nothing was made by God for man to spoil or destroy.”<sup>5</sup> Spoiled land is land that is to be taken, and those who spoil the land forfeit their right to such land and a protogenous *bios*. This initial colonial move makes the indigenous body into *homo sacer* under the laws of God as sovereign.

Locke’s justification of the settler-colonial project is wrapped up in the understanding of waste-land, and the waste-land’s relation to the common-land is the link that creates the necessary possibility for the desertification of common spaces. The project of the American settler-colonial is unique from that of the Spanish extraction-colonial in that the settler-colonial’s primary goal is to fill the land with political life. The colonial move against the life of the indigenous people that creates the category “savage” is one that can be thought partially in Agambinian terms but not within Agamben’s frame of human sovereign power. The proper frame for thinking Locke is of what he would think of as the most primal law, the “positive law of God,”<sup>6</sup> a law to which every living thing is subject. Because of the law of God establishing God as a sovereign, Locke must create a justifying structure for the colonizing of America. Created from a people, the “savage” is a category used to signify emptiness, an unnatural thing not qualified as life under the law of God. Agamben’s *homo sacer* is a good initial step towards understanding this category, but the “savage” is not a category created under a sovereign power but under the perfect omnipotence of God. The “savage” is not *homo sacer* included in the *polis* only through their exclusion, but a figure included in natural life as created by God and His laws only through their exclusion from it.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, §31.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, §3

In the natural desert of uncolonized America, there was no life yet found. The colonial goal was to fill the land with a normalized life that worked over the wasteland and into the commons, another topological category with which to be concerned. Common land is “the joint property of [a] country, or [a] parish.”<sup>7</sup> Land transitions from a state of nature, where it was given by God to all men to hold in common to the joint possession of a state by its members. In a strict Lockean sense, the purpose of this land is to be used for the grazing of livestock and for the mining of minerals but only to the degree that there is “still enough, and as good left; and more than the yet unprovided could use.”<sup>8</sup> This is the greatest distinction between the commons and the waste. The wasteland is lawless, but the common land is under the law of the land, the clause of “enough and as good left” protecting it from an exhaustion. The transformation of wasteland into commons allows for the land to no longer be waste, as it is used to generate value by those who possesses it in common. The land is now contained within a structure that gives it legal protection. As common land is used, it is filled, which leads to a need for more common land.

This project of colonization requires a dialectical aggregation of *bios* in order to fill the wasteland, transform it into that which is held in common, and then once the common is overflowing with life, spill into the waste again to repeat this cycle. Not simple generation of life, but a generation and simple continuation of what life has already been allowed to exist. The life that is aggregated is life in the most individuated sense. It is not that life is propagated, as a bacteria or species is, but a special sort of increase that can only occur in the political.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, §35

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, §27

Political life as *bios* aggregates, and as it does, so do the political relations within *bios*. The life that is aggregated, that aggregates itself, can be called *settled life*, a *bios* that needs quantitative land to settle upon, to live in. The life of the settler-colonist is settled life. The life Sloterdijk discusses in desertification is a settled life. Settled life relies on the idea of a wasteland as a condition for its aggregation, as it is a wasteland that settled life seeks to fill. Without a settled life, there is no wasteland – it is a created category generated so that settled life can fill it.

The motivator for the aggregation of life is this waste, without which, there would be no reason to overfill the common land already inhabited. However, because there is a waste that calls out to life, saying: “make use of [me] to the best advantage of life and convenience.”<sup>9</sup> Life can then respond to this motivating force by passively aggregating through reproduction, with the initial creation and enforcement of land as waste functioning as the only active aspect of this reciprocally determined dynamic. As life aggregates, it overflows from the land it currently exists in, spilling out around it, bringing with it the political relations it held within the political body of the commons. This political framework expands outwards, increasing the size of the settler-colony as waste is filled and turned into the common land of the colony. As the colony expands outwards, more wasteland is created out of what is “discovered.” The life found in this discovered land must be unpossessed of this land in order for it to be colonized. Locke’s structure does not constitute a remove of life from the land or land from the life, but a removal

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, §25

of life from life. The “savage” is created as a nonlife, a form-of-death that is used to erase life where it stands and ensure the emptiness of this wasteland so that it may be colonized.

All this is accelerated by money, which represents an abstract value that does not rot or die, and thus unfetters the movement of cultivation, as the limit to what ought to be farmed is no longer enough to be consumed and no more as to prevent waste but becomes an infinite point. The act of cultivation here can become abstract itself, no longer representing farming alone. The banker cultivates upon the land the money sits in, as does the landlord, who cultivates from the life of his tenants, as does the merchant who cultivates from the labour of his employees. This transition is telegraphed clearly in Locke: it is not the land that gives the most value, but it is that “labour makes the far greater part of the value.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, power, which is derived from value, comes to lie not in the land but in labour, which is a property of life.<sup>11</sup> This is not an immediate transition, but a result of the increased development of technology and discipline, making labour responsible for an ever-increasing portion of the value. This terminates in service labour, a labour without a cultivation of land. A labour that emerges purely from one’s own Lockean property, their body, can disregard the land entirely, except for the land that must be occupied to increase life, this increasing the rate at which value is aggregated. In contemporary America, most labour is not involved in the cultivation of land. The pattern of life is a movement into the common desert to labour or consume said labour. This is the structure that generates value, and the positive growth of life allows for an

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, §40.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, §39

ever-increasing generation of value. But how is it that this once-common space, inhabited by colonizing life, was made subject to desertification?

The basis for this shift lies in the efficiency of relations between the biopower structure and bare life. If life finds itself in a desert that can only allow for the existence of a transient bare life that cannot inhabit the land, but can exist within it, it is powerless to affect change against or defend itself from the great normalizing biopolitical structure that induces an efficiency to the generation of value. The worker is reduced to bare life, with his body being the site of extraction. The worker sells his body through his labour, owning only his own bare life as a thing that is alive such that it is the genesis of value through labour. Their *bios* is of no concern as it is their labour alone – the product of their body – that generates value. Since it is only value that the power structure concerns itself with, the encouraged form of life in this case is bare. It is this “*corpus* that is the new subject.”<sup>12</sup> The body is the site for production of value, but this body does not need anything aside from its ability to produce labour.

The body is responsible for the greatest part of the value of cultivation of any sort, as the body is what possesses labour. All non-labour functions of the body – with the major exception of the cultivation of life – are of no use to this settler-colonial normalizing structure that is the American biopolitical, and so the other functions of the organism are reduced as much as possible, in order to maximize the efficiency of the labour-process, for the sake of value. The apex of this efficiency is one in which all non-labour functions are rendered out entirely, and in the common space where the body is cultivated for value, what remains is only

<sup>12</sup> Giorgio Agamben, “The Politicization of Life,” in *Biopolitics, a Reader*, ed. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 149.

the body and its labour, which has been extracted from the body a priori through the contract of employment. What remains for the labourer is life alone, bare life.

As the body now possesses the full value of labour, the common space now possesses none. This is the basis for desertification, the condition for its existence. In a parallel process to the creation of wasteland, common land that is not used for the cultivation of value is reduced to a waste, again a waste where life is qualified as *bios* only when it is labouring. But now there is a law of the land applied to this waste that forbids the extraction of value from this common space. There is no longer enough land for every person in a state to use in common. What is forbidden in this new waste is what is forbidden in Sloterdijk's desert: there is no "cultivating relationship," that exists, because there is no need for one. The land is reduced to a new wasteland a true Agambenian zone of indistinction: all that remains is a transitory bare life, a *homo sacer* created by the properties of the waste. It is fair to say that an unhoused person could be in a public park, but they do not *live* there in Sloterdijk's sense. They are forced into a state of permanent transit, never allowed to settle by a power structure that discourages their appearance.

## **Section II: Mbembe**

Like Sloterdijk and Agamben, Achille Mbembe's work in *Necropolitics* gives the biopolitical a topological framework. His topology allows for the construction of a framework parallel to that found in the first section of this essay. Mbembe's work is crucial to this project because of how he explicitly lays out a framework for the power structure of plantation slavery in America as well as a framework for understanding the settler colonial power structure not

specific to any one colony. He does this through the development of the necropolitical, the form of “the subjugation of life to the power of death,”<sup>13</sup> an application of biopower turned towards the creation of death because of the value that death holds. For the purposes of this essay, two deaths matter the most: the death of the black body through its transformation into the death in life of the slave in order to remove value from the body; the ghostly form of death of the “savage,” created in order to unpossess the land from the indigenous people living upon it.

As Foucault identifies, racism is the inscription of “the basic mechanism of power, as it is exercised in modern States”<sup>14</sup> as biopower. Race introduces a break into life, allowing for power to enter within. It is “the break between what must live and what must die.”<sup>15</sup> It is through this gradation of life that biopower may articulate itself between groups. This has already been laid out in this essay, with Locke’s creation of wasteland and the so-called “savage,” an artificial type created in the settler-colonial process, that inhabits the waste.

The black body emerges early in the American settler-colony as the prototypical body assigned monetary value as the slave body. The conceptualization of the slave body in the settler-colony of America as “the perfect figure of a shadow,”<sup>16</sup> coming from a triple loss: “loss of a ‘home,’ loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status.”<sup>17</sup> The slave,

<sup>13</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” in *Biopolitics, a Reader*, ed. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 186.

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, “Society Must Be Defended,” in *Biopolitics, a Reader*, ed. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 74.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” in *Biopolitics, a Reader*, ed. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 169.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

belonging to the master, is subject to racialized terror employed so as to keep the life of the slave separated, shattered so that power may be applied directly. Blackness is produced here “to produce a social link of subjection and *a body of extraction*, that is, a body entirely exposed to the will of the master, a body from which great effort is made to extract maximum profit.”<sup>18</sup> The black body is assigned a value on its raw material, its capacity to be a site of extraction within the plantation system. The action of this extraction is an injury to the slave, and the complete extraction of value results in death. The life of the slave is the fundamental source of value within the plantation economy and exists as a function for the extraction of life out of the black body, a body not even considered alive.

In essence, the application of plantation slavery represents an abiogenesis, the creation of life as a storehouse for force out of the “figure of a shadow” of the slave. The slave has their force extracted from them forcefully and is kept alive in the necropolitical companion to bare life, a “death-in-life.”<sup>19</sup> The slave has been reduced to a bare life through the application of racism, which fractures them, reducing their life to bare life, which is then extracted from their body for its value in the production of labour with the force of their body. This absolute application of power within the plantation, inducing a zone of absolute terror and injury on the slave, such that they no longer exist except as body which creates value through force. Their life is death-in-life, and the power that exists to control this power is a necropower, as termed by Mbembe. In this account, necropower emerges as a precursor to biopower, not only in the translation of black life to the death-in-life of the slave, but as the same power that takes the

<sup>18</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Critique of Black Reason,” (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 18.

<sup>19</sup> Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 170.

“savages” in the Lockean wastes from unnatural to invisible, making the wasteland an empty zone. The settler-colony functions on a necropolitical framework wherein death is a special form of life lived by those whose existence must be made a nonexistence for the settler-colonial framework to function.

In the case of the “savage,” the extraction of the wasteland for cultivation is the underlying goal of the necropolitical framework acting upon them. They are reduced to a state of shadow so that the wasteland can be considered empty and open for cultivation. A reduction to bare life is not enough to account for the degree to which the indigenous population was annihilated. We must rely on Mbembe’s account of necropower in order to fully account for the degree of violence. Similarly, the underlying goal of the necropolitical framework surrounding the slave is the extraction of their body itself, so that it may be used to cultivate the land stolen from the “savage.” Both groups are separated along racial lines, a separation that induces a shattering of the body that allows power to enter and take control.

That the same form of power – necropower – can be exerted in both the case of the slave and of the “savage” is because the same underlying spatial geometry is applied to both. The slave body is made into an object without subject by the necropolitical mechanism acting upon the black body that has had being removed from body, putting the body in the ontological situation of death-in-life. The black body is made into a body without being through the structure of the slavery. The structure – which begins in the holds of the slave ship – is a site where power reduces one to bare life in order to act upon this bare life, robbing it of itself, creating the death-in-life of the slave, reducing a bare life to a body that possesses force. The extraction of value through labour, now possessed by the slave owner, is the end goal of this

process. The reduction of the black body to the slave body is the first step in the process of slavery in the American colonial system, and the perpetuation and further necropolitical extraction occurring in the compartment of the plantation. First though, it is important that the parallel generative structure of the death-in-life of the “savage” is sketched out. The generative process of the slave translates directly from that of the “savage” in structure, but the aim of the structure and its application are reversed. While the black body is reduced to the slave body in order to enslave the body and the forces it possesses but does not own towards the purpose of enriching the American settler-colonist, the indigenous body is reduced to “savage” in order to prove the legitimacy of their murder because their labour fails to generate value, from the perspective of the American settler-colonist. Both bodies find their being torn away, one so that the body can be exploited for the value it holds, and the other in the reverse: the body is made invisible by the “savage’s” inability to possess the type of normal labour in the necropolitical structure engineered by Locke in his *Second Treatise*. By having their being reduced to the body as it possesses labour, the legitimacy of their existence, reduced to the existence of their bodies, can be attributed to their labour. This is the necropolitical structure that exists in these two cases in the American settler-colony.

The qualifier, then, for the ability to *be* within this necropolitical framework for the nonwhite person is the capacity for one to generate value through labour for the white American settler-colonist. If one cannot generate value through labour, they are reduced to nonbeing beyond bare life, the death-in-life of the “savage” who exists so that the place they live may be qualified as wasteland and taken from them. If one can generate value through labour, they have their body and their being ripped from them, shattered such that necropower

can separate their life from them, and they are reduced beyond bare life to the death-in-life of the slave, who exists so that the full value of the force they possesses can be extracted fully from their body to create labour for the slave owner. The two outcomes mirror each other because the same necropolitical construct transforms them. This construct is the essential power behind the American settler-colonial project, the woodchipper that kills in order to clear up land and kills in order to create wood chips to burn in the labour-process. The necropolitical process contorts the being of the indigenous man and the black man alike through bare life and beyond it, into a death-in-life where their body, fractured from their being, is most easily manipulated by necropower. This process is one of self-reinforcement, the process fracturing, allowing a greater degree of necropolitical influence, an aggregation of death-in-life increasing the array of necropolitical techniques to be used on an increased number of bodies induced into a state of death-in-life.

The geometry of power accumulation is an effective feature of analysis in Foucauldian and biopolitical analyses, *Necropolitics* included. Mbembe's account of colonial occupation entailing "first and foremost a division of space into compartments... regulated by pure force, immediate presence, and frequent and direct action... it is the very way in which necropower operates... it is a world without spaciousness... sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not."<sup>20</sup> The compartments of the colony are clearly outlined in Mbembe's work. The compartment called plantation is one of deep complexity that leads to an incredibly powerful leveraging of necropolitical power upon

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 174.

the slave bodies within the structure, and the understanding of these power structures in parallel with that of the colony. It is a microcosm of settler-colonial power, of settler-colonial control. To grasp the power structure of the plantation one must also be holding the power structure of the settler-colony in the other hand to highlight their similarities in design and outcome.

The settler-colony is intimately linked to the frontier, the place that is in the process of becoming not-waste, a place becoming absorbed into the entity that holds the frontier as its object. The frontier is an adjective applied to land not yet recognized as land that borders land recognized . The American settler-colony “[has] not created a human world,”<sup>21</sup> it is “not organized in a state form,”<sup>22</sup> it is the interim period between the wasteland and the nation, with a necropolitical framework as described earlier that converts what is in the wasteland into the American nation. The colony is a place where lawlessness is met with absolute force, a place “where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of “civilization.”<sup>23</sup> The colony is an enclosed space where an absolute sovereign power acts upon everything within. What is within and what is outside is both clearly defined and constantly subject to change, with the colony expanding irregularly as it finds itself capable of doing. Mbembe captures Locke’s colonial gesture perfectly in *Necropolitics*, describing colonial terror, the act of expansion and enforcement of the colonial power structure as constantly intertwined with “colonially generated fantasies of wilderness and death and fictions to create the effect of

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

the real.”<sup>24</sup> The colony is a container of constant war against the indigenous population, founded on the fantastic wasteland. This container expands as it can, as the population allows for the moving of the frontier outwards.

The power structure that works upon the indigenous body begins with the indigenous body recognized as some form of *bios* under God’s law, but the *bios* is quickly reduced by the colonial creation of the wasteland to the unnatural *homo sacer* described earlier. After this colonial gesture, the position of this unnatural *homo sacer* is further reduced to a death-in-life, of the “savage” and then beyond that to a state of total invisibility, a ghostly form of death. Each stage of this process involves a special substructure in the overall necropolitical structure. Inside the colonial structure, the indigenous form of life is reduced to the created “savage” while the bare life is completely annihilated through intentional, direct applications of necropower by the colonial sovereign. The application of necropower upon the ghostly form of death the “savage” is one designed to obscure, to render invisible. The container of frontier applies this necropower to the “savages,” unpossessing the land underneath them as well as the form of their life. The colonial reasoning behind this structure is a racialized economic calculus. Just as with every other power structure in the American settler-colony, the increase in overall wealth of the white colonist is the end goal. The genocide of indigenous peoples in the American colony before and after its separation from Great Britain was not completed only because there was no longer profit in doing. A parallel, but inverted, structure can be seen in the loss of slave bodies through death on slave ships. It is “unfortunate” in the settler-colonial

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 173.

mindset only because it represents a lost expense. In the case of the “savage,” murder was only necessary in order to secure profit in the unpossessing of the wasteland.

The plantation, being similar<sup>25</sup> but smaller than the American colony, has the same necropolitical structure in effect, as outlined earlier, but in a condensed form. The plantation is a miniature colony, a zone “ruled over in absolute lawlessness [that] stems from the racial denial of any common bond.”<sup>26</sup> The power structure within the plantation can be outlined in this form, but a true analysis of its structure would require a genealogical account, the most crucial genealogical account that can be recommended in this essay. To be able to understand the power structures within the colony would be akin to Foucault’s ability to understand the power structures within the prison. Because the slave inside of the container of the plantation exists as utterly fractured and utterly possessed by necropower completely subjected to sovereign will, it is the most direct route of necropolitical domination. The site of the plantation represents the most focused and realized dominance of necropower on human life, even this early necropolitical form. Untangling and unmasking the power dynamics of the plantation via a genealogical account are essential for understanding the shift in history around The Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves of 1807, a moment that introduced biopolitics into the plantation as a mutation of necropolitics.

The Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves of 1807 is indicative of a new biopolitical technology developed for the further exploitation of value from the slave body. In addition to

<sup>25</sup> In the geometric sense of the word.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 172. The full quote is “That colonies might be ruled over in absolute lawlessness stems from the racial denial of any common bond between the conqueror and the native.” It is the same structure within the plantation.

the extraction of all forces from the body of the slave, value is gained from the cultivation of the slave body itself. The plantations whose main export was slaves, breeding plantations, were so effective in their goal that there was no longer any need for the importation of slaves. The plantation, initially defined as a container of land with special properties, turns into a portion of land defined by the special properties of its contents. The land of these plantations exists only as space because the slave body exists within space. Following Locke's paradigm, the production of force in the form of slave bodies that can be used as the slave owner's labour represents a much greater increase in overall value than the application of the slave body's force itself. A contrast to the aggregation of qualified *bios* occurring at the same time in the white colonial space, this form of cultivation is one upon the death-in-life of the slave body. The forced breeding of slaves that occurred upon plantations within the American colony was an unfiltered application of biopower. The slave body, already fractured completely and existing in a state of death-in-life, is exploited in itself. More so than the site of extraction, the slave body becomes the object of extraction. This is the most direct force of biopower applied upon life with no possibility for resistance or diffusion. This rape of bare life is the most hidden feature of the American colonial power structure, a function repressed through historical methods in order to maintain a different perception of national identity.

### Section III: The Agambenian Line

The through line of this essay is an Agambenian one: this entire analysis shows how there is an inclusive exclusion of bare life throughout the American settler-colonial project. Now finally these threads can be brought together through highlighting the various ways in which bare life is exposed, manipulated, and used for the furthering of the American settler-colonial project. These early necropolitical structures were some of the first tools the infant colony learned to use and manipulate, and it has not put them down since. The effects of necropower are felt by every person living within the colony, and especially for black and indigenous people.

The topological structure of service-labour in America represents the ultimate abstraction of Locke's conception of labour. Service-labour is entirely disconnected from any sort of land except land as a container for service-labour, which is entirely arbitrary. The worker labours in the desertified space, with their own *bios* forbidden from the space, constrained to their home and their body sold hourly for labour. There is no cultivating relationship between the grocery store clerk and the ground on which she works. The labourer experiences the place of their labour as a desert certainly, but what of others who come into this space? They cannot be said to live there in Sloterdijk's sense of live. The life of the unhoused person is permitted only in the barest, most invisible sense. And of the transit spaces, the parks, the public areas, they forbid life as well. All that remains is the home. A household is a place of special political importance in the American colony. The household is the remaining space in which the political organism is permitted to live. In the biopolitical shift that began with the plantation, the value is abstracted and removed from land and transferred onto the body. What is cultivated in this

space is not land, but life itself, in order to further the colonial project of expansion. Cultivation now occurs in the home, wherein life self-cultivates. The biopolitical structure enforces the cultivation of life, a developed form of the more primitive aggregation of life that occurred only for the colonial purpose of expansion. The impetus for aggregative expansion has been fulfilled, and the simple structure of aggregation has been sublimated with the complex biopolitical mechanism of cultivation. The aggregative structure's object, *bios*, remains the same, mystifying the new biopolitical structure's motivation and action. However this *bios* is quickly reduced to a bare life outside the home, as everywhere aside from the home it settles is a desert space that reduces one's being to bare life. The home is the sole topological category where the aggregation of *bios* is permitted. The desertified space outside of the home does not allow for any form of life outside of a fleeting, transitory one. To be able to *live*, as in to dwell, within the American colony requires a home.

The contemporary cultivation of life is less coercive than it was under its original project of slavery, but the motivator remains the same: an increase in abstract value, arising from an increase in overall life. But in this structure, *bios* is what is cultivated. A reversal from Aristotle's classical *Oikos*, the home is no longer the place of the simple fact of living (*to zēn*), but is the place that politically qualified life (*to eu zēn*) arises from, and is the container from which all politics concern.<sup>27</sup> The home, a complex container in American colonial space is the topological object that escapes desertification. The site for *settled life* to settle and live in, it is the implied living counterpart to Sloterdijk's unliving desert. Desertification arises as the biopolitical turn

<sup>27</sup> Giorgio Agamben, "Homo Sacer," in *Homo Sacer*, trans. Daniel Heller-Rozen (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 2.

within the American colony defines cultivation now as the act of cultivating bare life for the purpose of generating value. To use land for any other purpose would represent an inefficiency in land use, a waste. Thus the desertification of the common spaces, a dialectical movement to the category of waste through an inclusive exclusion from cultivation.

A nexus of biopolitical power relations in the American colony, this formulation of the home arises from a concentration of necropolitical power in the plantation. The same motivating factor drives an altered power structure. The contemporary biopolitics of the home is far less coercive than those of the plantation, but there is a deep resonance within this structure. This is the necessary genealogy that ought to be done. Due to the mystifying structures of the American colony, drawing out the relation between these two structures is not possible through analysis alone. All that can be done is to make clear how the impetus for these structures (maximization of abstracted value) and the outcome (the cultivation of bare life) are exactly the same.

This biopolitical structure of cultivation is not universal in the American colony. There is a gradation of its effects based upon race. To be a black person in contemporary America is to have your life, and the cultivation of your life valued differently than that of a white person. The contemporary black body is still object to the same necropolitical power structure of extraction in addition to the one genealogically traced from Locke, that of the person. Additionally, the indigenous body is excluded from this structure. The topological category of reservation is excluded from the law of the land, inside the structure of the colony only through its exclusion from the colony. The indigenous body is not cultivated by the colonial biopolitical structure but is still subject to the necropolitical structure that depossesses the “savage” of land, severing the

land from the bodies that once were upon it, rendering the indigenous people still living invisible, hidden away outside of the colonial panoptical power.

The desert, a place without a self, does not “hold on to those who pass through.” Bare life is a life buffed down to a point, it is perfectly smooth and cannot be held on to as such. All land outside the land used to live is reduced to waste, as it is in essence waste, as the most effective cultivation process is that of reproduction, and if not used for reproduction it is wasted. This is the endpoint of the American settler-colonial project: life, through the body as the possessor of labour, generates greater value than any other object. To generate life is to exponentially generate value, as it is the generation of value. This concludes with the reification of the household as the cultivator of life, in the barest sense. Bare life can labour, and the desertification of the common represents a totalization of this process of the barring of life.

In the American colony, one’s being is reduced to a state of constant transit outside of the home. This places those who do not have a home (in the normative sense of a home) into a special ontological category. This ontologizing force is gradated according to the amount of protection one has from the necropolitical force. One’s settled life depends upon one’s capability to settle within a container, and different containers offer different degrees of protection from necropolitical forces. The normative home, one privately owned, is the vestige of this colonial structure and this colonial power. The home, where settled life settles, is the contemporary container for the aggregation of *bios*. To try to aggregate any qualified life outside of this topological category would be to run against the necropolitical structures exposed thus far. What is outside the home is unsettled, a desertified space that life may only pass through.

Private property, the owned home, is the most settled container, granting the greatest protection against the contemporary form of the necropolitical force that created the “savage.” Their own container of the home is most secure from the threat of being reduced to a state of invisibility. A second would be of rented property. A rented property still protects the renter from the full force of this necropolitical structure, the renter is simultaneously under the duress of a method of extraction: the landlord who cultivates the life of their tenants for profit. One must pay<sup>28</sup> for the privilege of being able to assume the form of *bios*, if only in their own home. Of course, outside of the space they rent, they remain in the transitory state of bare life. The unhoused person is included in this structure by their exclusion. They have no such protection from the necropower of the American colony. They do not pay for the right to have a place to assume the political form of their life, and as such are not recognized as holding rights. Without a place one can call refuge from this created desert, the unhomed person is invisible within the colonial panoptical structure. There is an industry built around guaranteeing the invisibility of this category of bodies. An unhoused person may live in the back of a public park, hidden away, but if they make too much noise, attract too much attention, try to assert their existence publicly, and in doing so reject the desertifying structure, they are set upon by the colonial force: either killed, imprisoned, or driven away from the place they were on and forced into a more remote and invisible location.

The American colony is deeply intertwined with powerful necropolitical structures, ones that developed early on as forms of self-justification. The power structures involved in the

<sup>28</sup> With labour of course, but one also must pay by becoming enmeshed into biopower, buying into the structure.

creation and annihilation of the “savage” in order to depossess land and extract from it and the creation and removal of being from the slave body in order to extract from it are both foundational and typical of the American colonial regime. A genealogy is necessary in order to draw out the threads of both of these structures and pull upon them, showing where these same threads arise in the power structures of contemporary colonial America. Applying a necropolitical and biopolitical approach to this analysis allows for the greatest leverage as a settler-colony is a necessarily biopolitical project, due to its explicit concern with settling and settled life. The structures of extraction the American colonists applied to maximize value are explicitly necropolitical, as the reading of Achille Mbembe has shown in the second section. In holding both accounts of the power structure in this essay parallel, convergent evolution can be shown as both represent their other through themselves. As it is right now, these structures are deeply mystified, preventing a headlong approach from achieving an effective diagnosis of the condition with which the American colony is afflicted. A system so resistant to actual material change cannot be changed by action alone. The structure is both resilient and constantly grounding revolutionary energy in order to protect itself. To shatter the colonial prejudice of the American colony would require a shattering of the colony, and to do so would require a tight grasp on the seams that hold the power relations together.