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Concept of the enemy: an intersection of criminal policy, neoliberal governmentality, and the human drive

Conceito de inimigo: uma intersecção entre a política criminal, a governamentalidade neoliberal e a pulsão humana

Concepto de enemigo: una intersección entre la política criminal, la gubernamentalidad neoliberal y la pulsión humana

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Abstract

This article examines the concept of the enemy, understood as a narrative that legitimizes the exercise of criminal policy, from three perspectives: criminological, political, and psychic. It seeks to understand how this concept is employed in contemporary contexts, arguing that it is a construct arising not only from legal norms but also from power dynamics inherent to neoliberal governmentality. Operating through necropolitics, this construct functions selectively, promoting the exclusion of marginalized populations within the Brazilian context, which is marked by a colonial and racist legacy. The analysis highlights how this notion of the enemy has been constructed and progressively consolidated through an interdisciplinary process in which it is legally codified, politically administered, and psychically constituted.

Keywords: enemy; criminal policy; politics of enmity; necropolitics.

Resumo

Este artigo discorre sobre o conceito de inimigo, entendido como narrativa de legitimação do exercício da política criminal, a partir de três eixos: criminológico, político e psíquico. Pretende-se compreender o modo como esse conceito é utilizado contemporaneamente, sendo uma construção não apenas normativa, mas oriunda de dinâmicas de poder próprias de uma governamentalidade neoliberal, em exercício da necropolítica, operando de forma seletiva e promovendo a exclusão de populações marginalizadas no contexto brasileiro, marcado pelo legado colonial e racista. A análise destacará como essa noção de inimigo foi sendo construída e ganhando força, de forma interdisciplinar, ao ser legalmente codificada, politicamente gerida e psiquicamente constituída.

Palavras-chave: inimigo; política criminal; política da inimidade; necropolítica.

Resumen

Este artículo aborda el concepto de enemigo, entendido como una narrativa de legitimación del ejercicio de la política criminal, a partir de tres ejes: criminológico, político y psíquico. Se pretende comprender la manera en que este concepto es utilizado en la actualidad, constituyendo una construcción no solo normativa, sino también derivada de dinámicas de poder propias de una gubernamentalidad neoliberal que, mediante el ejercicio de la necropolítica, opera de forma selectiva y promueve la exclusión de poblaciones marginadas en el contexto brasileño, marcado por un legado colonial y racista. El análisis destacará cómo esta noción de enemigo ha sido construida y ha adquirido fuerza, desde una perspectiva interdisciplinaria, al ser codificada jurídicamente, gestionada políticamente y constituída psíquicamente.

Palabras clave: enemigo; política criminal; política de la enemistad; necropolítica.

1 Introduction

The notion of the enemy has gained increasing prominence in contemporary criminological discourse, particularly in the post–World War II era. This concept

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fundamentally challenges the core principles of a liberal democratic state, which, at least in theory, guarantees equal rights and due process to all citizens.

This article examines the concept of the enemy through three distinct theoretical perspectives (criminological, political, and psychic) demonstrating that each approach seeks to analyze the phenomenon from a different vantage point. Although each perspective provides valuable insights, only an integrated reading of these three dimensions can fully capture the political effects underlying this conceptualization, thereby facilitating an understanding of how the phenomenon gains strength and legal justification.

Accordingly, by theoretically integrating these three fields of knowledge, this study seeks to answer the following research question: how can an articulation of the criminological, political, and psychic perspectives contribute to explaining how the idea of the enemy has progressively gained traction over time and come to justify criminal selectivity?

The relevance of this investigation lies in the fact that the concept of the enemy is closely associated with the selectivity exercised through criminal policy and its agencies, revealing that the state's enemy is a specific, racialized segment of the population whose humanity is denied and whose right to life is relativized.

Likewise, this article demonstrates that such selectivity is intrinsically linked to the performativity of neoliberal governmentality through the exercise of disciplinary power and biopolitics, operating both upon individual bodies (disciplinary mechanisms) and upon populations (security mechanisms). The selectivity exercised through criminal policy, by determining which bodies are allowed to live and which are left to die, likewise constitutes a form of necropolitics.

The third analytical axis, focused on the psychic reception of the concept of the enemy, demonstrates that the phenomenon also responds to subjective demands shaped by the projection of the aggressiveness that the emergence of civilization sought to restrain.

The investigation of these three analytical axes is grounded in the work of scholars who have made critical contributions to each line of argument. Accordingly, this study draws on the works in which these authors developed concepts that are central to understanding and articulating the interdisciplinary framework proposed herein.

With respect to the criminological perspective, it is important to clarify this study's affiliation with critical criminology, which departs from viewing crime as an individual deviation and instead examines how structures of power define what constitutes crime, who is selected for criminalization, and how society and its institutions respond to criminality. Accordingly, the theoretical framework adopted here seeks to demonstrate how the penal system reproduces structural inequalities, including those based on class, gender, and race, thereby reinforcing stigma and exclusion.

Based on this theoretical framework, this study draws on the works of Carl Schmitt, Gunther Jakobs, Eugenio Raúl Zaffaroni, and Eduardo Balestena. It begins with Carl Schmitt's political analyses developed during the period of the two World Wars, progresses through the contributions of Jakobs and Zaffaroni formulated in the mid-2000s, and culminates in Balestena's more contemporary criminological perspective.

Carl Schmitt provides a significant theoretical contribution by examining state power in relation to the friend–enemy distinction, thereby exposing the authoritarian dimension concealed beneath the guise of legality. Gunther Jakobs was selected as the originator of the theory of *Enemy Criminal Law (Feindstrafrecht)*; Eugenio Raúl Zaffaroni for his substantial contributions, particularly in *The Enemy in Criminal Law*; and Eduardo Balestena for the interdisciplinary framework developed in *La Fábrica Penal*.

From a philosophical standpoint, the concept of the enemy is examined as a biopolitical apparatus of control. It is directed toward the expansion of state power and situated within a context of a permanent state of exception, oriented toward the exercise of necropolitics.

Accordingly, Michel Foucault's theoretical framework provides the basis for understanding the phenomenon of biopolitics. Giorgio Agamben contributes the concept of a permanent state of exception, while Achille Mbembe introduces the concept of *necropolitics*, demonstrating its operation in contemporary societies.

It is important to note that, in both *Necropolitics* and *The Politics of Enmity*, Achille Mbembe makes direct or indirect reference to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly the concepts of the death drive (destructive drive) and Freud's reflections on war. Building upon this theoretical articulation, the present study adopts a psychoanalytic framework to support the psychic perspective explored herein.

The primary objective of this article is to offer an interdisciplinary contribution by conceptualizing the enemy as a social phenomenon. It seeks to move beyond a purely legalistic understanding by incorporating the political, social, and psychoanalytic dimensions that shape and complicate its manifestation, thereby helping to explain how this idea has gained increasing prominence in contemporary society.

Accordingly, this study demonstrates how the construction of the idea of the enemy is intrinsically intertwined with broader political mechanisms of domination and the exercise of power. Likewise, this notion operates through the management of life and death while drawing upon deeply rooted psychic dynamics of hatred, projection, and dehumanization. Through the legitimization of this discourse, criminal law becomes an instrument for the extermination of a particular segment of the population.

This study employs the deductive method, proceeding from general premises derived from the three theoretical frameworks: criminological, political, and psychic. By analyzing how each field conceptualizes the idea of the enemy, it arrives at the specific premise that these bodies of knowledge converge to provide persuasive force to the dissemination of the idea that the enemy must be fought, thereby legitimizing the selectivity observed in criminal policy.

The methodological approach is qualitative and consists of a bibliographic review of the works of the selected authors. Taken together, these works elucidate each author's conception of the "enemy."

This study used the artificial intelligence system Gemini to support grammatical revision, reference organization, and technical compliance with the applicable standards. The use of this technology was strictly limited to improving the manuscript's form and verifying its technical conformity. Full responsibility for the scientific content and originality of the manuscript remains exclusively with the authors.

2 Conceptualizing the "enemy": a criminological perspective based on Jakobs, Zaffaroni, Schmitt, and Balestena

The term enemy, derived from the Latin *inimicus*, is etymologically associated with that which is foreign, hostile, and opposed. Zaffaroni (2019, p. 22) defines the foreigner as anyone who disturbs power — the so-called insubordinate or undisciplined individuals — who, as strangers, are unknown and, precisely because of this condition, inspire distrust and are regarded as potentially dangerous. The foreigner is therefore synonymous with the barbarian.

Accordingly, it is possible to observe that, since the earliest forms of social organization, the relationship of enmity has been closely associated with power, as one becomes an enemy only after being declared as such. To combat the enemy, it became necessary to suspend that individual's human condition, which was associated with the concept of citizenship.

From a political perspective, Schmitt (2008, p. 28) conceptualizes the figure of the enemy precisely as "the other," the one who bears the mark of difference and unfamiliarity. Thus, the political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically repulsive; it is sufficient that such a status be determined by state power. The true political enemy is the hostile one, in relation to whom "the possibility of war is always posited as the absolute negation of the other being or as the ultimate realization of hostility" (Schmitt, 2008, p. 34-35).

The notion of the enemy likewise encompasses two conceptions: while it defines those regarded as friends, it simultaneously identifies the stranger as the one who must be confronted. In this sense, the enemy is not the private adversary whom one hates out of personal antipathy, but rather the collective body engaged in conflict (Schmitt, 2008, p. 30).

Drawing a connection between Schmitt and Freud, Bobbio, Matteucci, and Pasquino (1998, p. 959) explain that both authors define politics on the basis of the friend–enemy dichotomy, that is, through the existence of conflicts among individuals and social groups. This does not refer to any ordinary feeling of animosity, since only conflicts of the highest intensity are regarded as political.

According to Zaffaroni (2019, p. 23), the enemy has never disappeared from either the operational reality of punitive power or criminal legal theory. He also demonstrates how punitive power has appropriated both legitimizing and delegitimizing discourses to persecute individuals or entire categories of people.

These individuals have had their humanity classified and labeled as enemies or undesirable subjects throughout the course of human history, particularly during the Middle Ages and the Mercantile and Industrial Revolutions, although this process was already present during colonialism and neocolonialism.

In this regard, the notion of the enemy in criminal law gained considerable academic and political prominence through the work of the German jurist Jakobs (2018). He grounds his theory in contractualism, drawing on Rousseau and Kant to argue that the wrongdoer or offender, by waging war against the State and ceasing to be a citizen, forfeits his rights as a human being. Jakobs (2018) therefore maintains that dangerous individuals comply with the legal order not out of conviction but through coercion.

For Jakobs (2018), punishment serves to reaffirm the validity of legal norms and restore legal certainty, focusing not on the meaning of the act itself but on its effectiveness against the dangerous individual. In other words, punishment is a measure that focuses not only on the past act (the offense) but also on future prevention. The issue of terrorism, particularly after the September 11 attacks, occupies a central place in his work because, in his view, combating terrorists is a means of ensuring the effective validity of the legal order.

By responding to this “breach of the social contract” through coercion, the State transforms the imprisonment of these enemies into a security measure, resulting in depersonalization and the annulment of rights in order to guarantee the security of citizens. Ultimately, Jakobs (2018) argues that Enemy Criminal Law constitutes a normalized exception incorporated by the State to safeguard public order.

Although Zaffaroni (2019) acknowledges Jakobs’s influence, he develops his critique from a Latin American perspective. He regards Enemy Criminal Law not as a legitimate legal theory but as a dangerous discourse that enables the selective exercise of punitive power, particularly against marginalized groups. He characterizes it as a “criminal-law discourse of containment” which, rather than limiting repression, risks expanding it by creating a category of individuals outside the law’s protective scope (Zaffaroni, 2019, p. 164).

In his book *The Enemy in Criminal Law*, Zaffaroni (2019) criticizes the enactment of emergency laws that normalize the state of exception, comparing them to Latin American national security legislation. The jurist also criticizes the denial of the enemy’s status as a person, thereby transforming the individual into a “non-person.” He argues that the State has no legitimacy to deprive anyone of their humanity, although it may revoke citizenship.

Zaffaroni’s (2019) primary concern is the unlimited power granted to governments to define the boundaries of punishment, allowing exceptional norms, which gradually become ordinary rules, to become permanent components of the legal order. He concludes that the idea of the enemy reflects signs of authoritarianism and that criminal law, insofar as it accepts such a concept, should be reformulated to conform to the Democratic Rule of Law.

Accordingly, it may be concluded that the very essence of Enemy Criminal Law is antithetical to the principles of a Democratic Rule of Law. By creating a category of enemies, the State effectively deprives these individuals of their fundamental guarantees and human rights, subjecting them to exceptional treatment and sanctions that ultimately violate the universally established framework of rights.

This leads to a process of “civic decomposition,” whereby the State, rather than protecting all of its subjects, actively delegitimizes and dehumanizes certain individuals, paving the way for unchecked state violence and the erosion of democratic principles. Zaffaroni (2019, p. 164) explicitly states that such a penal system is incompatible with a Democratic State and can exist only within an Absolute State.

It is evident that control over bodies has become increasingly pervasive, whether through technological devices or through capital’s relentless pursuit of profit, regardless of human lives and concerned solely with economic interests. Within this context, enemies are manufactured; indeed, “planetary power manufactures emergency enemies, with the corresponding states of exception, in series and at high speed” (Zaffaroni, 2019, p. 16).

Similarly, Eduardo Balestena examines criminal punishment not merely from the perspective of a legal system but as a social narrative deeply rooted in beliefs and mechanisms of segregation. In *La Fabrica Penal*, Balestena (2006) argues that the penal system, much like the witch hunts of the Middle Ages, functions as an “assembly line” that manufactures criminals.

According to the Argentine author, modern society, much like medieval society and its chivalric ideals, relies on narratives to conceal relations of oppression, stigmatizing one segment of the population in order to avoid punishing those who hold power. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the belief that evil exists “outside ourselves” leads to the creation of scapegoats — whether the heretic, the sick person, or the prisoner — under the pretext of preserving social cohesion (Balestena, 2006, p. 26-27).

In *La Fabrica Penal*, Balestena (2006) presents an interdisciplinary analysis of contemporary criminal policy. He argues that, within this selective conception of the enemy, the individual becomes an “effect of power,” while innocence and guilt are often predetermined by the very machinery of the system.

This criminal selectivity is justified as a pragmatic and necessary tool for combating serious forms of criminality, such as terrorism or organized crime. This justification also points to an inherent tension between proclaimed democratic ideals and state responses to perceived threats (Balestena, 2006).

It is evident that the procedural mechanisms of criminal proceedings, rather than guaranteeing the truth, frequently validate or subvert it. Ultimately, punishment is portrayed as an “immense factory” that produces symbolic punishment while disregarding human dignity and perpetuating exclusion (Balestena, 2006, p. 18).

The author (Balestena, 2006, p. 25) employs the concept of “symbolic cannibalism” to explain how society constructs the figure of the “other” who must be fought in order to reaffirm the preservation of its own privileges. From this perspective, the penal system may be critically understood as an arena of Manichaeic judgment, reinforced by the asymmetrical distribution of people and power.

It becomes evident that the entire theoretical framework legitimizing differentiated criminal treatment for enemies is grounded in emergencies — i.e., threats to the very survival of humanity or society — which have assumed the character of wars (Zaffaroni, 2019). The justification is therefore straightforward: because the threatening evil (the proclaimed emergency) requires war, the imperative to neutralize evil in action demands the elimination of every obstacle to defending against the powerful enemy (Zaffaroni, 2019).

The notion of enmity, as conceived by the criminological theorists discussed herein, seeks to demonstrate not only the mobilization of a differentiated punitive regime but also the construction of the idea of “danger” associated with particular individuals or even entire social classes. Through this mechanism, highly sophisticated means are developed to legitimize criminal policy choices, supported by a hostile social imaginary that reinforces prejudice and stereotypes through processes of dehumanization and segregation.

As the idea of combating criminals becomes naturalized in the name of social order and control, symbolic evil becomes institutionalized, thereby strengthening collective bonds. One illustration of this process is the pursuit of confession within the criminal justice system, understood as a means of obtaining the “truth” and functioning as a form of validation and justification for the entire procedural framework while simultaneously relativizing rights and legal guarantees.

Thus, a scenario emerges in which punitive logic exercises power through a symbolic operation resembling a ritual. It constitutes a form of symbolic punishment imposed upon individuals who are expected to be dominated and who, because of their social vulnerability, are unable to resist such violations.

As demonstrated by Balestena (2006, p. 21), the rationality underlying the attribution of punishment is mutable because it is a social construction. It therefore operates as a worldview that assigns value and meaning to its practices and to the commitments established by law.

In this context, when examining how this idea of the enemy has been critically addressed within the criminal sphere, one identifies the existence of silent subjects, that is, those who, even when they attempt to speak, will not be heard. The system does not listen to their voices simply because they do not belong to the class of enunciation; in other words, they cannot even be regarded as epistemic subjects.

This failure of the Criminal Justice System cannot be regarded as merely circumstantial. In reality, it stems directly from a historical process of institutional formation marked by structural inequalities, authoritarian legacies, and colonial practices of social control.

The trajectory extending from the period of slavery to the present day has consolidated the selectivity, inefficiency, and violence of the criminal system as constitutive elements of its rationality, which is oriented toward preserving the prevailing hegemonic powers.

The institutions comprising this system — the police, the Public Prosecutor’s Office, the Judiciary, and the prison system — maintain structural dynamics that reinforce patterns of exclusion, violence, and racial discrimination. Thus, statistics disproportionately identifying Black people, young people, and residents of peripheral areas as victims of homicide, violent police approaches, and mass incarceration demonstrate that these figures result from the manner in which the Brazilian State organizes its security policy and its everyday institutional practices. These groups have been selected to become “the enemies.”

3 The enemy as a biopolitical apparatus of control

Although several differences can be identified among the authors who have undertaken the study of relations of friendship, the Foucauldian perspective is considered particularly relevant because it brought the subject closer to institutionalized and deteriorated relationships, such as the family and marriage. The question of friendship is therefore situated within inequality, rupture, and variability.

According to Foucault (2010, p. 201), the nineteenth century, the era of liberal revolutions and the consolidation of capitalism, witnessed the nationalization of the biological, that is, “what might be called the assumption of life by power.”¹ It is from this new sovereign right that the form of power known as biopolitics was established, operating through a shift from the maxim “let live, make die” to a new axis: “make live, let die.”

In Foucault (2010, p. 204), this new technology of power extends to a set of processes, such as the production of births and deaths, the reproduction rate, and the fertility of a population. The biopolitics proposed by the author may be understood as a set of governmental techniques that consolidate the hierarchization of lives, that is, the organization of power over life, operating through the normalization and control of these experiences (Foucault, 2018, p. 150).

Within this dynamic, it is important to recognize that the mechanisms of normalization and control are no longer primarily directed toward disciplining the individual, but now target population flows. For this reason, the population emerges as a governmental issue, always articulated with the need for management aimed at maintaining control.

Therefore, this control does not operate merely upon a series of individuals, but upon an entire population segment as the object of a science and an art of government, characterizing what is understood as neoliberal governmentality.

The biopolitical government of human beings, under the imperative order of capital, represents an attempt to deny politics as a possibility by naturalizing social relations and domination and rendering them inevitable and indisputable. It is therefore possible to establish a connection between the concept of the enemy and stásis (civil war), seeking to demonstrate how this dynamic is maintained and reinforced in contemporary society as a biopolitical apparatus.

Agamben (2010) discusses the concept of bare life (zoè), biological life that may be killed with impunity and that, in modernity, is incorporated into politics for the control of bodies, that is, for the practical exercise of biopolitics. Agamben (2010) thus analyzes the intimate relationship between sovereignty and biopolitics, in which bare life lies at the origin of the concept of the sovereign.

The broader implication is that, when confronted with what they regard as “existential threats,” these States are willing to selectively abandon their fundamental principles. This creates a genuine “state of exception,” in which a certain segment of the population is effectively de-democratized or dehumanized, losing its status as citizens endowed with rights (Agamben, 2004, p. 13).

When the state of exception becomes the rule, it blurs the boundaries between inside/outside, exclusion/inclusion, and law/fact, creating a zone of indistinction. The sovereign, who is permitted to suspend the legal order, paradoxically stands outside the law with the purported purpose of preserving it, thereby transforming the exception into a structure of sovereignty.

Agamben (2004) argues that the state of exception is no longer a temporary measure but rather the rule and the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary democracies, operating alongside the Constitution. He further reiterates that war has become a biopolitical apparatus of power. The state of exception therefore emerges as a threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism, functioning more as a technique of government than as an exceptional measure, thereby revealing its nature as a constitutive paradigm of the legal order (Agamben, 2004).

Deluchey (2025) proposes the concept of “necro-liberalism,” coined at the intersection of neoliberalism, biopolitics, and coloniality. This convergence forms a neocolonial neoliberal biogovernment that hierarchizes lives and legitimizes the elimination of groups and individuals regarded as surplus to the capitalist system.

For Deluchey (2025, p. 149), throughout the development of total and continuous civil war, the global elite continues to legitimize the elimination of “human surpluses” through public policies, state repression, and moralizing discourses. Neoliberalism promotes this silent extermination, sustained by a biogovernmentality that naturalizes death as a collateral effect of progress.

¹ For the purposes of this article, all direct quotations from the original sources have been translated into English.

In this sense, it becomes clear that the radical social hierarchization of bodies forms part of the strategic objective of this new governmentality, intended to legitimize their unequal exposure to risk and death. This occurs because there is no room for everyone at the table of capitalism, and the selectivity exercised through this civil war serves the extermination of the surplus population through mechanisms such as coloniality, racism, and patriarchy.

Within this context, alongside the perspective of Enemy Criminal Law, lies the interest of the capitalist system and neoliberal governmentality in using the concept of the enemy as a strategy of extermination. This strategy is characterized by stripping individuals of their fundamental rights, thereby making the sovereign right to kill unmistakably clear.

When sovereign power is discussed, it does not refer solely to the State as a political unit, but rather, as established by Foucault (2018), to a network of micropowers. These micropowers are articulated with the State but permeate the entire social structure, which is why the police itself integrates and exercises power as a penal agency.

Death is progressively devalued; accordingly, processes of hygiene and disease control have been normalized, leading to the disappearance of the ritualization and spectacle of death. As death becomes increasingly banal, it also becomes invisible, something that must be concealed.

This political perspective, shaped by the interests of capital, concerns the idea of a relationship of enmity based on a hostile social imaginary, which, in fact, as proposed by Mbembe (2020), constitutes a reinterpretation of what occurred during colonization, updating colonial warfare.

In the essay *Politics of Enmity*, Mbembe (2020, p. 11) discusses the politics of enmity in contemporary democracies within the global context. The author highlights several events: the repopulation of the Earth, population circulation, the borders between human beings and their nations, the question of race and racism, necropolitics, terror and counterterror, and war as *phármakon*.

The introduction of a category of the enemy into contemporary democracies ultimately inserts a crucial narrative for legitimizing legal civil war as a biopolitical apparatus of control. This process promotes the expansion of state power and the consequent suspension of fundamental guarantees for a specific group of marginalized individuals.

As discussed, this is not merely a theoretical inconsistency, but an intentional practical mechanism that enables democratic States to exercise authoritarian control over designated groups. This feature blurs the boundaries between the Rule of Law and arbitrary power.

This legal mechanism therefore enables the transition from a biopolitical logic (the management of life) to a necropolitical logic (the management of death) directed toward specific groups, rendering their lives disposable under the pretext of maintaining security or combating exceptional threats. Consequently, it transforms legal discourse into a tool for authorizing violence and the expansion of authoritarianism.

In Brazil, the politics of enmity is based on the racial construct surrounding vulnerable populations, who are progressively confined and restricted to specific territories. These are lives cut short through the exercise of police power and socially admitted only when they satisfy the market imperatives of capitalist labor exploitation.

Mbembe (2018, p. 10) critiques and expands Foucault's concept of biopower, arguing that it is insufficient to fully understand forms of sovereignty, particularly in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Within this scenario, the central project of power is not merely to "make live and let die," but rather the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of bodies and populations.

The Cameroonian author Mbembe (2018) coined the term "necropolitics" to identify a new axis: the State's capacity to dictate who may live and, above all, who must die. It is a form of power that establishes parameters through which the subjugation of life to the power of death is legitimized, moving from a passive posture of letting die to an active posture of making die.

This inversion is the defining feature of necropolitics, in which the ultimate expression of sovereignty lies in control over mortality, permitting the "generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies" (Mbembe, 2020, p. 147). This alters the nature of governance by transforming life into a disposable commodity for designated groups.

This power over death, or necropower, is a structural element of contemporary neoliberal capitalism because it operates through practices and technologies that manage the deaths of certain groups. This frequently occurs through the suspension of the Rule of Law and the creation of "death-worlds."

Mbembe's (2018) work on necropolitics directly engages with Foucault's biopower and Agamben's state of exception. Although robust, these concepts do not fully encompass the extreme forms of control over life and death generated by colonial processes.

In *Politics of Enmity*, Mbembe (2020) describes the underlying forces shaping contemporary societies, including liberal democracies, through the lens of enmity. He argues that there is a fundamental desire for an enemy, which is not merely social but almost an ontological necessity for the constitution of the subject and the preservation of social order.

The politics of enmity is therefore expressed through the construction of physical and social barriers — walls, checkpoints, and fences — that intensify separation and create enclaves. The objective is to resolve the “excess of presence” of those regarded as threatening, reinforcing a sense of “us” versus “them.” This process is rooted in the colonial past, in which liberal democracy itself was founded upon colonialism and slavery (Mbembe, 2020, p. 48-49).

Dunker (2015, p. 31), in analyzing behavior in modern life from a psychoanalytic perspective, states that “the logic of the condominium” has become a defining rule of contemporary society because it represents spaces marked by the illusion that insecurity can be abolished through segregation and spatial isolation by creating homogeneous refuges.

For Mbembe (2018, p. 18), racism is the primary driving force of this necropolitical principle. According to the author, it functions as a “technology” that enables the exercise of biopower by regulating the distribution of death and legitimizing the murderous functions of the State.

The desire for an enemy is not merely social but almost an ontological necessity. In complex and fragmented societies, a clearly defined external threat provides cohesion and purpose. This ontological need implies that, even in the absence of a clear and objective threat, one will be invented or amplified to serve the psychological and political needs of the dominant group or the State.

This notion renders the enemy a highly flexible and adaptable concept that can be projected onto various marginalized groups — racialized populations, immigrants, and political dissidents — legitimizing their exclusion, violence against them, and even their extermination. This understanding transcends a purely legal or political analysis and is also related to the psychological foundations of violence.

Mbembe (2018, p. 27) argues that colonial processes and the slave system constituted foundational experiments in biopolitical and necropolitical control. Within this context, the sovereign right to kill was not subject to any rule, and colonial wars were not constrained by legal norms. This historical legacy continues to shape contemporary societies, particularly in the Global South.

In Brazil, necropolitical power is visibly present across several social domains. Examples include the two decades of military dictatorship, which resulted in deaths and disappearances, with opponents explicitly labeled as enemies, thereby conveying the idea that they deserved such a fate.

Today, this phenomenon materializes in the “war on drugs” and in far-right discourse on combating crime, which functions as a genuine contemporary necropolitical apparatus and leads to a “drip-by-drip genocide.” The criminalization of drug use is a selective practice that disproportionately affects Black and peripheral populations and is rooted in racist and positivist criminological theories, such as Lombroso's (2007) concept of the “born criminal.”

The pandemic clearly revealed necropolitical dynamics because the virus did not affect all individuals equally. The crisis therefore demonstrated how the capitalist system is founded upon the unequal distribution of life and death, whereby those regarded as lacking value may be discarded. These examples underscore how the enemy is constructed and managed through necropolitical practices that legitimize violence and exclusion against specific, frequently racialized populations.

4 The politics of enmity and the principle of destruction: the place of the enemy in the human psyche

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud (2010c) states that the disposition toward aggressiveness is constitutive of human beings and that social bonds can only be established through a certain degree of renunciation of it. Thus, in critically reflecting on the Judeo-Christian commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, the father of psychoanalysis problematizes this capacity to love the other. How can one love the other when that person is unknown, a stranger regarded with suspicion?

For Freudian psychoanalysis, love, essentially conditioned by its narcissistic constitution, makes it possible to love the person or object that reflects the subject back to oneself. In other words, I love because I can love myself through the other, because I can love my ideal image of myself.

It is therefore necessary to understand the distinction between the other who conveys something familiar and is consequently capable of being loved, and the potentially hostile other. In the latter case, an unrepresentable void emerges, marked by the death drive and by a malignant and threatening form of jouissance.

In discussing the threshold between these two cases, Freud (2010b) coined the term *unheimlich*, translated into Portuguese as “infamiliar,” to designate a liminal state between that which is simultaneously strange and familiar. He also demonstrated that the psychic articulation involved in forming these social bonds with the other is not so clearly divided.

Thus, if the renunciation of aggressiveness is only possible through a certain degree of anxiety, Freud (2010a, p. 65) states that love can bind many people together, provided that some remain toward whom a certain measure of hatred and aggressiveness may be directed.

Psychoanalysis demonstrates that horror of difference is a structural psychic feature of group societies. Societies therefore strengthen themselves through that which consolidates their identity, while violently opposing that which challenges it.

In *Politics of Enmity*, Mbembe (2020, p. 21) brings politics into dialogue with the drive, a concept derived from psychoanalytic theory. The author places his confidence in the function of language as “that which can bring back to life what had been abandoned to the forces of death.”

For Freud (1915), the drive (*Trieb*, in German) is the psychic representative of excitations originating in the body, although it remains at the threshold between body and mind. Unlike instinct, which is a fixed inherited behavior directed toward a specific object or purpose and found in animal behavior, the drive is far more plastic and variable, capable of displacement. It has no predetermined object; that is, it may be satisfied through different means and objects, and the drive becomes perceptible through the investment of energy deposited in and displaced among its objects.

The life drive, also known as *Eros*, may be understood as the set of drives that tend toward union, construction, preservation, and the perpetuation of life. It operates under the pleasure principle, which is present in the organization of the psyche and constitutes a tendency toward the attainment of satisfaction.

The death drive, or *Thanatos*, in turn, comprises the set of drives tending toward destruction, disintegration, and a return to an inorganic state. It seeks the dissolution of unities and the complete reduction of tension, that is, annihilation. For psychoanalysis, the psychic structure is organized through the coexistence of the life drive and the death drive in a state of constant tension.

Similarly, in addressing the politics of enmity, Mbembe states that this relationship is governed by the interplay of forces between the principle of destruction and the principle of life. Between the two, Mbembe (2020, p. 112) appears to place particular emphasis on the principle of destruction, defining it as the “cornerstone of contemporary politics of enmity.”

The Cameroonian philosopher wrote this work in light of Fanon and Freud, drawing on both to explain the principle of destruction and its relationship to the idea of a relation marked by difference. He therefore presents a psychological perspective based on the premise that, when we relate to an other who does not mirror us as subjects, that person becomes a threat to us.

Mbembe (2020) also develops the concept of the principle of destruction in connection with psychic forces that seek the annihilation of a version of the self that so-called civilized humanity believed it had concealed. He thereby demonstrates that remnants of primitive humanity remain deeply present in contemporary human beings.

In parallel, he grounds his work in the Freudian thesis that war revealed that this primitive human being can always be reestablished and that the primitive state of psychic life is imperishable, projecting itself outward and becoming determinant in social and political practices. In the philosopher's words (Mbembe, 2020, p. 117):

[...] if the death or destruction drive can in fact be largely diverted outward or directed toward objects in the external world, many other parts of that same drive always manage to escape domestication (the very object of the civilizing process). Moreover, the destruction drive (with all its sadistic and masochistic implications), when directed outward or projected, may be redirected inward or introjected. It begins by taking the internal Other as its target.

In working with the concept of the principle of destruction, Mbembe connects it to the Freudian concept of the death drive and articulates it with racism, considering the entire historical process of slavery and the subjugation of Black experience. For Mbembe (2020, p. 39), the principle of destruction can be located “as a technique of racist power, the purpose of the ritual of execution is to sow terror in the minds of its victims and revive the murderous drives that form the foundation of white supremacy.”

It is noteworthy how the death drive lies at the foundation of white supremacy, that is, how the mechanism is projected by a social organization that regards itself as hegemonic and uses this resource as a means of combating the enemy. Thus, he states that “if racism has become so insidious, it is because it is now part of the drive-based apparatuses and the economic subjectivity of our time” (Mbembe, 2020, p. 105).

As a political project of domination, this idea of the enemy and enmity is understood to be encouraged as an individual feeling, since “it is this bond of enmity that justifies the active relation of dissociation, of which war is one of the violent expressions. It is also the bond of enmity that makes it possible to institute and normalize the idea that power can only be obtained and exercised at the expense of the lives of others” (Mbembe, 2020, p. 65).

In psychic terms, therefore, economic and political dynamics reinforce the invention of a bad object that is presumed to haunt the individual and that the individual internalizes as something that must be fought. It may be argued that the manner in which the enemy is invented originates in a psychic locus that places political relations between the self and the other under tension, while also embodying and permitting the discharge of an internal aggressiveness:

The imaginary fixation on the foreigner, the Muslim, the veiled woman, the refugee, the Jew, or the Black person performs defensive functions in this context. We refuse to recognize that our ego has always been constituted in opposition to the other: a Black person, a Jew, an Arab, a foreigner whom we have internalized, but in a regressive form. This is precisely what many today refuse to admit: that, fundamentally, we are made up of various borrowings taken from foreign subjects and that, consequently, we have always been border beings (Mbembe, 2020, p. 57-58).

Thus, what the author calls the desire for an enemy concerns a locus in which the dissimilar person is the other as a disturbing object: “and because this object has in fact never existed, does not exist, and will never exist, it is therefore incessantly invented” (Mbembe, 2020, p. 77). If this object does not exist and is always fabricated, it shifts incessantly according to the historical and political moment. From the colonial era to contemporary democracies, societies cannot dispense with an enemy because the enemy provides an outlet for hatred.

Here, a paradox emerges: the enemy is this other who is also the self; the enemy is both internal and external. Given this thread connecting the self to its opponent, the place of the enemy is where hatred can be discharged from the psychic apparatus. The philosopher refers to an enemy drive, which would consist of a need for an enemy, a social demand “equivalent to an almost anal and ontological need” (Mbembe, 2020, p. 85).

As is well known, the investment in the other as a disturbing object and, consequently, as a fabricated enemy sustained the operation of the colonial order and is renewed in contemporary democracies. Liberal democracies must therefore create enemies. They tolerate crimes committed by some against others insofar as their very existence depends on a servile, racial, colonial, and imperial supplement.

The stigmatization of the oppressed in association with race continues to operate today. If Freud developed a complex account of war, situating it as a symptom of the broader conflict between human drives and the norms of civilization, it is necessary to understand that hatred continues to be channeled toward defending and refining the mechanisms of domination associated with white hegemony.

Perhaps psychoanalysis is important precisely because it subverts the logic of the “enemy.” Unlike other fields of knowledge that seek to investigate the threats posed by the other, psychoanalysis asserts that, to promote peace, it is necessary to understand that war lies within us.

5 Final considerations

As discussed, the concept of the enemy has several meanings and may be understood through three major axes: the criminological, the political, and the psychic. Notwithstanding the specific features of each theorist’s analysis, it may be concluded that the construction of this concept serves the promotion of control and domination.

As observed, the tendency to isolate the “self” from the “other” has always been present throughout the history of civilization and may be interpreted, according to its objectives, within social dynamics of power. At each historical

moment, the enemy was that segment of the population that needed to be dominated and, for this purpose, had to be stripped of its humanity so that such practices could be legitimized.

By articulating the three perspectives investigated, it becomes clear that the notion of the enemy serves a selective criminal policy, characterized by the fact that criminal law ceases to function as an instrument for protecting universal legal interests and instead operates as a form of targeted social control. It therefore falls upon a specific segment of the population, while also serving the market imperatives of neoliberal governmentality through the exercise of biopower and necropolitics.

Furthermore, it was observed that the figure of the enemy, characterized by the state of exception and institutionalized civil war, has racism as the driving force of hostility. On the basis of the idea that the enemy cannot be contained and must be eliminated, a legitimized war is waged through penal agencies, placing Black people as the primary military target of the State.

Following the historical and political process of expansion of a regime based on capital accumulation, it may be observed that penal repression systems have sought to divide the working classes. Consequently, they have transformed portions of the most vulnerable populations into internal enemies, depicted as the villains of the so-called “honest workers” or “good citizens.”

It may be argued that the segment of the population regarded as the enemy is that which, deprived of the power conferred by capital, seeks to challenge the logic of the system. Criminal policy therefore forms part of a governmental political project to isolate individuals and groups, transforming sociability among the poorest into a daily civil war and creating radical conditions of collective insecurity.

The system also manipulates personal identifications by attempting to disseminate ideologies of progress and merit, falsely attributed to the volume and quality of work performed. This means that poorer individuals will view, on the one hand, the wealthy and dominant person as a role model rather than an oppressor and, on the other, the criminal or socially “marginal” person as an enemy in light of their own attempt to progress and succeed. This generates a Manichaeian dynamic that ultimately legitimizes a politics of death and intensifies marginalization.

Within this context, Black people remain the primary enemies in terms of criminal policy because they are the subjects associated with the notion of threat and emergency. They continue to represent savagery, and their existence remains a constant reminder of colonial fear.

Moreover, the presence of a designated enemy serves the human psychic desire to project aggressiveness repressed by civilizing culture. For Freud, the life drive and the death drive represent opposing forces that impel human behavior and remain in constant tension. Contemporary necropolitical practices, marked by criminal selectivity and police lethality, are the ultimate expression of the death drive directed against the “racial enemy.”

Both the psychic logic of projecting evil and aggressiveness onto the “other” and the state structures of domination rely upon racialized mechanisms of social control. The “racial enemy” is therefore a social and cultural construction perpetuated across centuries and displaced according to political and market interests.

The image of the Black person as dangerous, criminal, and a threat to order is a historical construct forged in opposition to whiteness, which is regarded as synonymous with humanity and political status. The physical elimination of Black people is justified by the idea that their existence constitutes an ontological threat that cannot be neutralized by other means.

Thus, “racial enmity” legitimizes the unlimited and arbitrary use of punitive power by the police, who act as “small armies diverted from their proper function.” They adopt a logic of war within the country itself and in marginalized territories, where violence and death are regarded as inevitable consequences of conflict.

It may ultimately be concluded that this constitutes a vast apparatus operating from the intimate subjective level to political choices that consolidate systems of production. In this manner, it is capable of producing a genuine Brazilian genocide, revealing that the State maintains racial enmity as its normative foundation.

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