

**Original Article**

# **Necropolitics and the Legitimacy of Violence: A Political Rereading of Tataka, Bali, and Ravana in the Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study re-examines the episodes of Thatakavadha, Balivadha, and Ravanavadha in Thunchath Ezhuthachan's Adhyatmaramayanam Kilippattu through the theoretical frameworks of power, violence, and moral legitimization. Traditional explanations have encountered these episodes mainly in the binary opposition between dharma and adharma, resolving them into winner vs. When viewed through the lens of modern political theory especially Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, this study argues that these killings become not merely acts capable of being read as moral victories but rather political actions whereby sovereign power decides which lives are worthy and may be protected, versus those who can legitimately kill or destroy. Using Michel Foucault's theory of power/knowledge, the paper first investigates how systems of power produce categories of knowledge to label certain beings as dangerous. The short-finger construction of a dangerous and inhuman Other likewise shows how violence is legitimized discursively; the scene builds the perverse moral, if not legal, basis for its own erasure prior to carrying out the violent act. In a similar way, the death of Bali illustrates how sovereign power uses exceptional violence to render its victim outside the realm of lawful justice. Moreover, Ravanavadha then signifies the culmination of a political order that legitimises violence by way of cosmic justice or moral compulsion. The resulting conclusion of the study will suggest that Thatakavadha, Balivadha and Ravanavadha's episodes are not merely stories exemplifying dharma vanquishing adharma. Instead, they expose the way sovereignty produces an ethics of moral justification for violence as a regeneration between life and death. A necropolitical interpretation thus provides a new perspective on the intricate interplay of power, violence, justice and dharma in Adhyatmaramayanam Kilippattu.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Necropolitics, Adhyatmaramayanam Kilippattu, Sovereignty, Legitimation of Violence, Otherness, Dharma, Political Violence.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Violence in the Indian epics has traditionally been understood as a necessary means of preserving and restoring dharma. Following this interpretive rubric, the Ramayana is read as a social history in which imbalance of virtue can be restored only through annihilation of forces represented by adharma. Thus it has come to be generally accepted as ethics that episodes like the killing of Tataka, Bali and Ravana are the morally justifiable safeguards for maintaining cosmic and social order.

But modern political philosophy asks us a different kind of question. Instead of presuming the legitimacy of such acts, it inquires into how moral and political authority to engage in killing is produced. Violence is Legal Under What Conditions; Who decides whose life is expendable or, worse still, even worthy of ever crossing over the threshold to be protected from death; and who can determine that such deaths that cross into this borderland might become morally politically defensible? Such questions move the focus of attention away from the ethical consequences of violence towards how violence itself is legitimised or justified.

In this paper, the three episodes from Thunchath Ezhuthachan's Adhyatmaramayanam Kilippattu: Thatakavadha, Balivadha, and Ravanavadha will be read and researched with these critical points. Based largely on Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics and Michel Foucault's discourse notion of power/knowledge, this approach studies how sovereignty produces racialized categories that render some lives as less worth living than others worthy to be killed. Instead of looking at these episodes simply as moments in which dharma triumphed over adharma, this study treats them as political narratives where power governs life and death through the language of morals. This is how a reading of the text can tell us something new about violence, sovereignty, justice and dharma in the Adhyatmaramayanam.

To examine these questions, this study uses the theoretical framework of Necropolitics as developed by African political theorist Achille Mbembe. While Foucault's Biopolitics describes the politics of life, Mbembe expands it to address the questions of whose death is politically permitted, whose is eliminated, whose life is defined as valuable and whose life can be abandoned. Therefore, power is not only the power that preserves life; it is also the power that legitimizes death.<sup>1</sup> When this

concept is applied to the forest scene in the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, it can be seen that the killings of *Tataka*<sup>2</sup>, *Bali*, and *Ravana* are not simply military victories, but political processes in which power establishes itself through the moralization of violence. It also brings into the conversation the concepts of Foucault's Power/Knowledge and Biopolitics, Giorgio Agamben's Bare Life, State of Exception, and Judith Butler's Grievable Life.

The main argument advanced by this essay is that violence in the *Adhyatma Ramayana* is not spontaneous. Any killing is preceded by a process of political and moral construction. An individual or a society is first defined as the Other; then he is presented as a threat; and then the elimination of that threat is declared a necessary act of dharma protection. It is through this process that violence gains moral and political legitimacy. This study develops around the three characters of *Tataka*, *Bali*, and *Ravana*. These three are not representatives of *adharma* in the same way; they are different political bodies constructed at different stages of power. *Tataka* is constructed as the initial threat of the forest; *Bali* is presented as the political form of *dharma* violation; *Ravana* is framed as the ultimate enemy against the universal *dharma* order. So, these three killings are not a repetition of the same event; they are three different stages in a political journey in which the legitimacy of violence gradually develops.

When reading the *Adhyatma Ramayana* in this light, it becomes clear that *dharma* is not just a spiritual value. It is also a political language that defines the boundaries between what is to be preserved and what is to be permitted. This study therefore proposes a new reading: the *Tatakavadha*, *Balivadhya*, and *Ravanavadhya* in the *Adhyatma Ramayana* are not just stories of the destruction of *adharma*; they are necropolitical narratives in which the legitimacy of death is constructed through the language of morality.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study theoretically draws on the concept of Necropolitics developed by Achille Mbembe. Michel Foucault introduced a radical shift in modern political theory with his analysis of power. Power is not viewed simply as the right of the sovereign to rule, but instead Foucault describes it as a network that regulates bodies, populations and knowledge. Biopolitics, in his view, is how modern states are ordered for life and its protection, as well as management.

Mbembe performs what he knows is the impossible task of laying bare that biopolitics alone cannot account for war, colonialism, genocide and slavery. As he argued, sovereignty in the end is "about being able to decide who can live and who must die". He refers to this politics of death as Necropolitics; it is a crucial theoretical framework through which the study will be conducted.

This view will help to understand the episodes of *Tataka Vadha*, *Bali Vdaha* and *Ravana-Vadha* in such a reading where they are, on the whole, considered personifications from the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. These killings do not read simply as statistics of rural devastation. In each case, the character is first constructed as a threat to the moral and social order and only then eliminated in the name of protecting *dharma*. Thus, violence is transformed into a morally legitimate act.

This study does not treat the *Adhyatma Ramayana* as a modern political text. Rather, it employs necropolitics as an analytical framework for examining the narrative's representation of power, violence, and moral legitimacy.

A second important concept is Giorgio Agamben's notion of Bare Life. Agamben argues that political power protects some lives while excluding others from legal protection. Those reduced to bare life may be killed without their deaths being treated as crimes. He explains this condition through the concept of the State of Exception, where the normal operation of law is suspended, and sovereign authority assumes extraordinary power over life and death.<sup>3</sup>

## 3. THE POLITICS OF DEATH: THE LEGALIZATION OF VIOLENCE

### 3.1. CONSTRUCTING THE OTHER: THE POLITICAL PRECONDITION OF DEATH

Not all deaths receive the same political or moral value. Some are celebrated as heroic, others condemned as crimes. This difference does not arise from death itself but from the political construction of the person who dies. Before violence is exercised, power produces knowledge that defines who deserves protection and whose death can be justified.

Achille Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics explains this process. According to Mbembe, sovereignty is ultimately expressed through the authority to decide who may live and who must die. Such decisions are never arbitrary; they are preceded by political and moral processes that construct certain lives as expendable. The *Adhyatma Ramayana* illustrates this logic through the figures of *Tataka*, *Bali*, and *Ravana*. None is presented as an enemy from the outset. Each is gradually represented as existing outside the moral order of *dharma*, making violence against them appear both necessary and legitimate. Hence the narrative shows that political exclusion anatomizes itself before physical annihilation.

Sounding postcolonial theory, well-meaning anthropologists similarly argue that otherness is politically constructed rather than given by nature. Power creates an Other in order to shore up its legitimacy, and then tells the story of that Other as a

threatening force against 'us' which is what Edward Said<sup>4</sup>, would call it. In this regard, the *Adhyatma Ramayana* is a feature of dharma and adharma balancing. Individuals who are within the parameters of dharma come to be agents whose lives must be spared; all those beyond this boundary, on the other hand, can become figures against whom acts of violence may and must legitimately be committed. In this model, the category of rakshasa is moral-political rather than biological. Characters are made rakshasas in virtue of being depicted as anti-sacrifice, violent towards sages and civilization among humans or wild forces elemental to Nature. So militarily opposed is their identity that it is politically constructed.

This process is further explained through Michel Foucault's theory on Power/Knowledge. Power functions not only through violence: it produces a classification of normal and dangerous, protected and expendable<sup>4</sup>. In the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, sages are at least framed as lives worth defending, whereas rakshasas become apologies for ended lives. The important political deed, then, is not murder itself but the classification that renders murder proper.

Judith Butler's concept of Grievability reinforces this argument. Not all lives are equally valued, nor are all deaths equally mourned.<sup>4</sup> The narrative mourns Jatayu as a noble sacrifice, whereas the deaths of Tataka and Ravana are either accepted or celebrated because they have already been excluded from the moral community. The value of death is thus determined not by biology but by the political language of dharma. The first political event in the *Adhyatma Ramayana* is therefore not violence but the construction of the Other. Once otherness is established, the subject becomes a threat; once the threat is accepted, violence appears morally necessary; and only then is death represented as an act of justice.

### 3.2. TATAKA: THE FIRST LEGITIMATE DEATH

The central question of necropolitics is not how one kills but who possesses the authority to decide whose life may be legitimately taken. From this perspective, Tataka's death in the *Adhyatma Ramayana* is more than Rama's first victory; it is the narrative's first construction of a killable life.

Tataka is introduced not through her own presence but through Viśvāmitra's description. Before she appears, she is represented as a destroyer of sacrifices, an enemy of sages, and a threat to the moral and social order. Thus, this narrative builds knowledge of Tataka before giving her a character. In the words of Michel Foucault, power functions by producing knowledge that categorises subjects and authorises intervention<sup>5</sup>. Such is the function of Viśvāmitra's description, which turns Tataka from a specific person into an identifiable political enemy that must be eliminated.

The tale reinforces this construction by portraying Tataka not as a flesh-and-blood woman but rather the savage power of uncontrolled violence, with supernatural powers. Once she is represented as the personification of danger, her annihilation is seen not only in a logic of violent murder but also and perhaps even more so de-contextualized from seeing-through empathy for an individual keen to their obliteration within protection against crime.

The killing of Tataka here is also not Rama's choice, but Viśvāmitra. Rama is simply following the orders of an authority that has already established her death as real. This is not unlike the way in which Achille Mbembe understands sovereignty as merely violence, or deciding who can live and die.

This episode is better elucidated by Agamben's notion of the State of Exception.<sup>6</sup> While the standard moral rule forbids killing a woman, Viśvāmitra invokes an exceptional state in which that prohibition does not apply. Since Tataka is a threat to dharma, her status as such provides an ethical exception that allows for the manner of Kagabushundi's death seen not so much as sin but rather in fulfillment of duty. Gender is equally significant. Tataka, while a woman and not rewritten into traditional femininity, is remade as the story comes to its conclusion; she has become an icon of violence embodied. She thus moves from the category of a woman who should be protected to that of an enemy who must be eliminated.

Tataka's death therefore marks more than the end of an individual. It inaugurates the necropolitical logic that structures the subsequent killings of Bali and Ravana: violence becomes legitimate only after power constructs an enemy whose death is represented as necessary for the preservation of dharma.

### 3.3. BALI: EXCEPTION AND SOVEREIGN VIOLENCE

Among the three major killings in the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, *Bali Vadha* raises the most complex political question. Unlike *Tataka* or *Ravana*, *Bali* is neither *Rama*'s personal enemy nor the cause of his exile or *Sita*'s abduction. It is an internal conflict within the Vanara kingdom. But that is a sovereignty question at its core: What right does Rama have to determine that Bali loses?

To understand this episode, we can borrow some principles from the philosopher Giorgio Agamben in his *State of Exception*<sup>5</sup>. An approximation of Agamben could be that sovereignty consists not only in the enforcement but also in one's capacity to suspend a law from its ordinary functioning. This logic is reflected in the Bali episode. Instead of resorting to physical war against Bali, Rama is not afraid; he knocks him dead from a distance, and here again the question became clear: no longer ask

who shall win in this battle but ask whether or not killing someone behind others' backs pure by any moral right. Rama repudiates not only on a personal basis, but as the defender of dharma; this subjective decision is thus rendered into an objective moral criterion.

This episode is made clearer by Achille Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics.<sup>6</sup> Sovereign power does not externalize violence; it justifies killing with moral and legal discourse. Thus, in this very tale, Rama is actually not depicted as killing Bali himself. It is not just the death of Bali as dictated by dharma - but it hides the sovereign violence under a register of ethical order.

There is a very political aspect to this episode as well. Rama being a political ally to Sugriva is not just friendly advice. Sugriva requires Rama's assistance to regain the throne, while Rama needs the Vanara army to rescue Sita. Bali's death therefore becomes the political condition for establishing a new alliance and a new balance of power. Its consequences confirm this political logic. With Bali's death, Sugriva ascends the throne, the Vanara army comes under Rama's leadership, and the campaign against Lanka becomes possible. In this way, violence<sup>5</sup> serves not just as an act of extermination but also the basis for a new political regime. It is this production aspect of violence that Foucault reveals in his concern with power. Power is not simply repressive; it generates new institutions, alliances and modes of political organization. The death of one person in Bali thus produces a king and establishes the appointment of new military leaders offering stability as well as breaking up another power political order. Violence therefore operates here as an instrument of political reconstruction rather than simple destruction.

The contrast with Tataka Vadha is significant. In Tataka's death, Rama acts under Viśvāmitra's authority. In Bali Vadha, however, Rama himself becomes the authority who pronounces the sovereign decision. If Tataka Vadha marks the initiation of legitimate violence, Bali Vadha represents its full exercise through sovereign power. Bali's death is therefore not merely the defeat of an individual. It is the clearest illustration in the *Adhyatma Ramayana* of how exceptional authority, moral discourse, and political necessity converge to legitimize sovereign violence.

### 3.4. RAVANA: DEATH IN THE NAME OF UNIVERSAL DHARMA

In addition to this, while the deaths of Tataka and Bali are motivated by political considerations for a pragmatic end goal (increase firepower), Ravana Vadha can be seen as an act restoring a suprapolitical order. Thus this tale is not simply a story of the death of an individual but rather the endgame destruction (as *adharma*) of an entire political and ethical universe.

Ravana is not merely characterized as a king, but rather as the symbol of moral decay. These actions turn him from the political ruler of a land into the archetypal enemy of dharma by means of Sita's abduction, hostility to gods and sages, arrogance in his power and transgressions. This is an example of the Necropolitics as described by Achille Mbembe, where sovereignty normalizes mortality through the treatment of this enemy as a fundamental threat to life and morality in political community<sup>5</sup>. So rather than dying as Rama's unique enemy, Ravana dies an inevitability justified by his position as opposing universal dharma.

The plot propounds this universal scene of struggle by relating Rama to the gods, sages, human figures and Vanaras. The war thus ceases to be a struggle between two rulers and becomes a cosmic confrontation between *dharma* and *adharma*. In Carl Schmitt's terms, politics is constituted through the distinction between friend and enemy.<sup>5</sup> The *Adhyatma Ramayana*, however, extends this distinction by transforming the political enemy into a morally illegitimate Other whose elimination restores the cosmic order. This narrative strategy also shapes the reader's response. Long before the final battle, Ravana's death is presented as both necessary and desirable. Violence is therefore not experienced as arbitrary force but as justice accepted by the moral community.

Judith Butler's concept of Grievability helps explain this differential valuation of death.<sup>6</sup> Whereas some deaths are publicly mourned, others are accepted or celebrated because political and cultural frameworks have already excluded those lives from moral recognition. Ravana's death is consequently represented not as a human tragedy but as the triumph of dharma, reducing his identity to the symbolic embodiment of *adharma*. From this perspective, RavanaVadha is not simply the conclusion of a war but the culmination of a necropolitical process. The construction of the Other initiated in Tataka Vadha and the sovereign authority asserted in BaliVadha reach their fullest expression in the elimination of Ravana, where death is legitimized in the name of universal dharma.

### 3.5. FROM THE POLITICS OF DEATH TO THE UNIVERSALIZATION OF DHARMA

Viewed separately, the episodes of Tataka Vadha, Bali Vadha, and Ravana Vadha appear as distinct acts of violence. Read through the lens of Necropolitics, however, they represent successive stages of a single political logic centred on one question: When does a life become politically abandonable?

The *Adhyatma Ramayana* answers this question through the language of *dharma*. Instead of framing death as a violent act, it legitimates killing with the protection and restoration of dharma (cosmic order) and justice. In doing so, this tale will recast

sovereign violence as a moral imperative. It represents the essential teaching of Achille Mbembe's Necropolitics. Sovereign power is not only that which exercises the right to kill; it creates, along with death itself, those moral and political conditions through virtual software in which certain deaths seem necessary and justifiable or reasonable. These three episodes thus each mark the eventual universalization of dharma as resulting from a progressively lesser legitimization of violence.

### 3.6. FROM TATAKA TO RAVANA: THE CLASSIFICATION OF DEATH

The episodes of Tataka Vadha, Bali Vadha, and Ravana Vadha represent successive stages in the necropolitical classification of death. Tataka's death marks the beginning of this process. She is first constructed as a threat to the sacrificial and moral order and only then becomes a legitimate target of violence. The political question is therefore not whether Tataka is a rakshasi, but how she is constituted as one.

In Bali Vadha, the focus shifts from the construction of the enemy to the exercise of sovereign authority. Bali's death is justified through dharma, while simultaneously enabling a new political order through Sugriva's kingship, the Vanara alliance, and the campaign against Lanka. This logic reaches its culmination in Ravana Vadha. Ravana is represented not merely as an individual ruler but as the embodiment of adharma. His death is therefore portrayed as the restoration of a universal moral order rather than the defeat of a political opponent.

The progression of the narrative may thus be summarized as follows:

**TABLE 1** Episodes and Their Corresponding Necropolitical Logic

| Episode      | Necropolitical Logic                                 |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Tataka Vadha | Construction of the Threat                           |
| Bali Vadha   | Exercise of Sovereign Power                          |
| Ravana Vadha | Universalization of Dharma through Legitimated Death |

Together, these episodes reveal a progressive political logic in which violence becomes legitimate only after power classifies particular lives as morally expendable.

### 3.7. DEATH AND MEMORY: WHOSE DEATH BECOMES HISTORY?

Another important element of necropolitics is the politics of memory. Not all deaths are remembered in the same way. While some deaths are symbols of heroism and sacrifice, some deaths are recorded only as a necessity of justice. This difference can also be seen in the Adhyatma Ramayana. Jatayu's death is remembered as a sacrifice because Jatayu stands on the side of Dharma. But the deaths of Ravana's followers or Tataka are not presented as sorrowful in the same way. Here Judith Butler's concept of grievable life comes into play. Some lives are accepted within the moral boundaries of society, so their loss is saddening, while other lives are accepted as natural because they fall outside that boundary.<sup>7</sup>

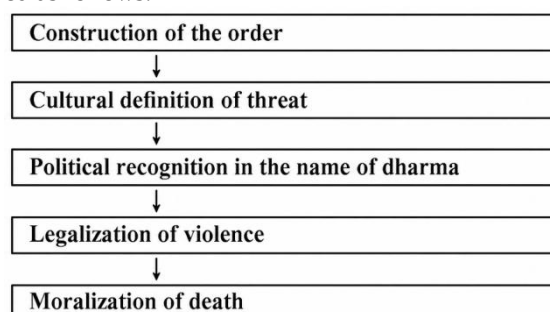
### 3.8. MORALIZATION OF VIOLENCE

The most important finding of this essay is this: in the Adhyatma Ramayana, violence does not appear by itself; it is transformed through the language of Dharma. When an enemy is eliminated, it does not remain as killing. It is renamed as the destruction of immorality, the preservation of world order, the establishment of justice, the triumph of Dharma. This renaming is the political power of violence.

### 3.9. FROM NECROPOLITICS TO MORAL SOVEREIGNTY

At the beginning of the exile, Rama is deprived of political power. Through the conflicts of the forest, however, he gradually acquires a different form of sovereignty: the authority to determine whose life deserves protection and whose death is justified in the name of dharma. This transformation constitutes the central argument of this study. Rama's power is expressed not simply through killing but through the moral legitimization of death. The deaths of Tataka, Bali, and Ravana mark successive stages in this development.

This political logic may be summarized as follows:



**FIGURE 1** Sequential Construction of Threat, Violence, and Death through Cultural and Political Processes



Viewed from this perspective, the killings in the Adhyatma Ramayana are not merely epic episodes but political narratives of power, violence, and justice. The politics of death begins with the construction of Tataka as a threat, develops into the exercise of sovereignty in Bali Vadha, and culminates in the universalization of dharma through Ravana Vadha. The central question, therefore, is not who died, but whose death came to be accepted as justice.

## 4. CONCLUSION

### 4.1. NECROPOLITICS AND THE LEGITIMATION OF VIOLENCE: TATAKA, BALI, AND RAVANA

The episodes of Tataka Vadha, Bali Vadha, and Ravana Vadha in the Adhyatma Ramayana have traditionally been interpreted as the triumph of dharma over adharma. This study, however, argues that these deaths also constitute a political process through which power distinguishes between lives to be protected and lives to be eliminated. Read through Achille Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics, these killings are not merely acts of war but exercises of sovereign power that legitimize death through moral discourse.

The analyses of Tataka, Bali, and Ravana reveal three successive stages in this process. Tataka is first constructed as a threat before her death is justified as the protection of dharma. Bali Vadha demonstrates how sovereign authority transforms political intervention into moral necessity. Ravana Vadha universalizes this logic by representing the destruction of an individual as the restoration of the cosmic and moral order. In each case, violence becomes legitimate only after the enemy is politically and morally constituted. At the same time, the Adhyatma Ramayana does not present violence in a simplistic manner. Episodes such as the deaths of Jatayu, the participation of the Vanaras, and Vibhishana's alliance with Rama reveal the complex moral negotiations through which dharma and otherness are defined. The text therefore not only narrates violence but also demonstrates how violence is interpreted and justified within a moral framework.

The central finding of this study is that violence in the Adhyatma Ramayana is not an act of personal revenge but the construction of a political and moral order. Through the deaths of Tataka, Bali, and Ravana, the narrative shows how power produces the enemy, classifies certain lives as expendable, and legitimizes their elimination in the name of dharma. A necropolitical reading thus reveals the forest and the battlefield not merely as narrative settings but as political spaces where sovereignty determines whose lives deserve protection and whose deaths become justice. Such a perspective opens new possibilities for understanding the relationship between power, violence, ethics, and dharma in the Adhyatma Ramayana.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 66–92.

Developing Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics, Achille Mbembe argues that sovereign power is ultimately expressed through the capacity to determine who may live and who must die. While biopolitics is concerned with the management and optimization of life, Mbembe contends that modern regimes of power also operate by exposing certain populations to death or rendering them socially and politically disposable. This concept of necropolitics provides a productive theoretical framework for a political rereading of the deaths of *Tataka*, *Bali*, and *Ravana* in the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, where violence is represented not merely as an act of warfare but as a politically and morally legitimized exercise of sovereign power.

<sup>2</sup>Unlike the deaths of *Bali* and *Ravana*, the killing of *Tataka* takes place in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, prior to *Rama*'s exile. It occurs during *Rama*'s journey with the sage *Viśvāmitra* to protect the sacrificial rites (*yajñas*) from disruption. As *Rama*'s first sanctioned act of violence, the episode establishes the political and moral logic through which violence is legitimized in the narrative. *Tataka* is represented not merely as an individual adversary but as a threat to the sacrificial and moral order, thereby making her death appear necessary for the restoration of *dharma*.

<sup>3</sup>Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup>Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 1–32.

<sup>5</sup>Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 26–37.

<sup>6</sup>Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 1–32.

<sup>7</sup>At this point, Judith Butler's concept of *grievability* becomes particularly relevant. Butler argues that not all lives are recognized as equally valuable or equally worthy of public mourning. Lives that are acknowledged within the moral and political boundaries of society are considered *grievable*, and their loss is experienced as a genuine social and ethical tragedy. By contrast, lives that are excluded from these normative boundaries are rendered *ungrievable*; their deaths are accepted as ordinary, necessary, or even justified, without eliciting collective mourning or moral concern. The distinction between grievable and ungrievable lives thus reveals how political and cultural frameworks determine whose lives are valued and whose deaths can be normalized.

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