Biopolitics and necropolitics during the pandemic from a gender perspective: The case of contemporary Japan

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If the final victor in the struggle for world domination is unable to "annex the stars,"
he would have no choice but to destroy himself in order to start an endless process anew.

(Arendt 2017:48)[1]

Introduction

In September 2020, the "Research group on the impacts and challenges affecting women during the COVID-19 pandemic" was established within the Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office of Japan. The study group, which focused on the impact of the pandemic on women, was set up to share information based on thorough research and investigation. Through the release of emergency recommendations and a final report, it concretely proposed comprehensive measures that included not only policies related to employment, health, and safety, but also the implementation of gender equality in decision-making spaces. The political significance of this action needs to be emphasised. The "Society for research on the impacts and challenges affecting women during the COVID-19 pandemic" played an important role in incorporating a gender perspective into the political process of Japan's COVID-19 countermeasures.

Based on the results of such political practices, this paper aims to examine the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on many women in Japan on a structural level, specifically due to problems related to the governance systems of the capitalist economy and the state that manages it. The fact that women's hardships became more clearly recognized through the crisis of the pandemic suggests that Japan's governance structure, as it exists in its stage as an advanced capitalist society, inherently requires the existence of so-called "abandoned people" (*kimin*). This does not merely mean that the "abandoned people" were made visible, but also that the risk of a broader range of people falling into an "abandoned" state has increased. To put it differently, the hardships and difficulties experienced by women in Japan during the pandemic cannot be dismissed as merely incidental but may instead be a violent consequence of the operation of the current neoliberal governance system, which functions through the power structures of gender hierarchies. If this suspicion proves valid, then beyond the solution proposed in the final report of the aforementioned research group—namely, the realization of a gender-equal and gender-inclusive society under ordinary circumstances—it will be essential to confront directly both the inherent violence of the neoliberal capitalist economic system and the state governance structures that sustain it. Without addressing these fundamental issues, it will be im-

possible to prevent a recurrence of situations in which many women face severe hardships and even lose their lives in times of crisis.

The present study reconsiders Japan's contemporary governance system through an inquiry into its underlying logic, with particular attention to its implications for women and the conditions that have driven many into states of "abandonment." To this end, it engages with the concept of governmentality—conceived as a mode of governance that ensures the smooth functioning of capitalist economies by operating on both individuals and populations. At the same time, it draws on Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, thereby opening perspectives that previous analyses of governmentality have largely overlooked and expanding the terms of the debate.

The configuration/reconfiguration of Biopolitics and Necropolitics and the historical development of Capitalism

> The idea according to which life in a democracy is fundamentally peaceful, policed and violence-free (including in the form of war and devastation) does not stand up to the slightest scrutiny. (Mbembe 2019:16)

In his later years, Michel Foucault coined the term "governmentality" to discuss governance practices that regulate the human body or attend to the survival conditions and living situations of humans as a biological "species", supporting citizens in leading healthy and fulfilling lives within the environment of a liberal capitalist society. In Foucault's own words, the power of governmentality is "the power to 'let live' and 'let die'" (Foucault 2003:241). As seen in instances of racial discrimination, scientific discourses—such as biological or medical discourses—have been mobilised to identify certain groups, associated with human attributes or characteristics considered as "negative", as populations to be excluded and positioned as entities to be "left to die". It is not difficult to find such cases in modern history.

Focusing on the elements of "death" inherent in such "biopolitics", several scholars, including Giorgio Agamben (Agamben 1998) and Roberto Esposito (Esposito 2008; Esposito 2009), have attempted to continue discussions of "governmentality". In recent years, especially, Achille Mbembe from Cameroon has attempted to boldly reform discussions on "governmentality" from the perspective of "necropolitics", considering the history of racism, the capitalist economy as a world system, and imperialism (Mbembe 2019).

Mbembe's discussion of "necropolitics" reveals a significant blind spot in the discourse on "governmentality" up until now. In this context, the key point was to broaden the previous discussions of "governmentality", which were primarily centred on the allocation and management of populations within national territories, to a geopolitical perspective. Specifically, Mbembe points out that the period in which democratic politics were rapidly advancing in Western Countries was also the era of imperialism during which the colonial competition between major powers was being carried out and slavery was functioning as a legitimate system of production. In other words, this means, that the governance practices of "biopolitics", which ensure that people lead healthy and happy lives, were only made possible by the existence of an outside — either areas outside of the nation-state that were subject to long-term armed conflict or groups of slaves excluded from the category of "human" by being seen as means of production to be traded on markets often literally "used" as disposable commodities.

Mbembe describes these two different sides of modern democracy as "two bodies". Namely, on the one hand, there is the "solar body", which refers to the situation in Western European countries, and on the other hand, there is the "nocturnal body" which refers to colonies that were originally penal colonies and plantations where slaves were exploited as a means of production (ibid.:22-23). In places corre-

sponding to the "nocturnal body", different laws and principles were applied and experimental methods and technologies for large-scale plunder and mass killings were used. As a result, in areas subject to slave trade and colonisation, substantial population decline occurred (ibid.:24). In this way, the development of democracy, plantations, and colonial rule unfolded simultaneously with this process leaving deep trauma in the regions designated as the "nocturnal body". Yet, this fact was never explicitly acknowledged by the places corresponding to the "solar body". According to Mbembe, for modern democracy to be maintained and function perfectly, a mythical logic needed to permeate the entire political society. Thus, the violence inherent in the politics of Western countries was continually externalised to plantations and colonies. This externalisation rendered the acts of violence occurring in these external regions invisible within the major powers themselves. This mechanism of externalisation continues to function in modern contexts through systems like detention centres and prisons (ibid.:27) and even under contemporary "necropolitics", "a large proportion of the population are exposed to survival conditions that confer the status of living corpses" (ibid.:92).

It is particularly interesting to note here, that in developing his discussion on "necropolitics", Mbembe explicitly revisits Hannah Ardent's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (2017) (Mbembe 2019:71-72). In Foucault's final lecture of his 1975-76 lecture series "Society must be defended" (Foucault 2003), Foucault himself identifies racism, in a manner strongly reminiscent of Arendt, as the logic mobilised when the people are put on either the side of "life" or "death". Moreover, the structure of the lecture itself can be read as reflecting the arguments developed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Therefore, Mbembe's reference to Arendt's text is not only a natural procedure for advancing the argument, but at the same time, by tracing back to Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, it becomes possible to organically relate the expanded scope of "governmentality"—broadened through the concept of "necropolitics"—to the issues of the capitalist economy as a world system.

As is well known, Arendt referred to Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* to argue that the driving force behind imperialist policies was the characteristic of capitalist economies to require an "outside" for the realisation of surplus value. Arendt explains this mechanism as follows:

> The adjustment of supply and demand within the borders of a single country was possible only as long as the capitalist system had not yet come to dominate all social strata of the population, that is, before the capitalist system had fully realized its entire productive capacity. Only when capitalism had permeated all structures of a nation's economic and social life, and when all social strata of the population had been integrated into the system of production and consumption dictated by capitalism, did it become clear that "from the very beginning, capitalist production, in its modes of operation and laws of motion, had taken into account the entire planet as a reservoir of productive capacity," and that the accumulation process, which would inevitably lead to the collapse of the entire system if it were to stop, constantly required new territories that had not yet been absorbed into capitalism—territories that could be further capitalized for raw materials, commodity markets, and labor markets. (Arendt 2017:50-51)[2]

When "primitive accumulation" within their own borders became impossible, leading European capitalism into a crisis, it embarked on imperialist policies as a means to continue capital accumulation and thereby avoid the "ruin of the entire nation." Arendt explained this process by stating, "Unless pure economic laws were broken through political actions, the collapse of the capitalist economy would have been inevitable" (ibid.:51)[2]. As a result, those who were positioned outside the framework of the "people" became subjects of "necropol-

itics." In this sense, "necropolitics" was an essential technology of power for the governance system of the nation-state, whose primary goal was the development of the capitalist economy.

David Harvey already rephrased "primitive accumulation" as "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2003), and Nancy Fraser emphasised the need to be aware of capitalism's "back-story" (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018). Such attempts, which reaffirm that violent power was exercised for capital accumulation during the process of development of the capitalist economy, are not limited to discussions of "necropolitics." However, by focusing on "necropolitics," a certain sophistication inherent in governance systems based on "governmentality" becomes clear. Arendt referred to the immigrants coming from the colonies as "human debris" (Arendt 2017:54). Indeed, many of them were marginalised within the nation-state based on race and ethnicity, or they were "separated from the ranks of producers after each crisis that inevitably followed the period of industrial expansion and were trapped in a permanent state of unemployment."[3] (ibid.) In other words, they were the individuals who became the targets of "necropolitics" within the nation-state. As such people went back to the colonies (or were discarded to them) and they came to exercise the technologies of "necropolitics" on those who were considered as "others" in regards of racial categories. In this way, the practitioners and subjects of "necropolitics" constantly change and shift. According to Mbembe, through such dynamics, the "cycle of hatred" expands, and its spread will not cease (Mbembe 2019:39).

Mbembe's discussion of "necropolitics" is primarily based on the academic work of Frantz Fanon and also aims to engage in philosophical speculation as a scientific endeavour. Therefore, the implications of the political economy of "necropolitics" and governance systems, as examined in this section, cannot be said to be a central issue in Mbembe's own concerns. One of the consequences of this point is that in Mbembe's argument, the "necropolitics" of the imperialist era can be read as a direct predecessor to today's developments. Mbembe acknowledges that the means and tools for exercising "necropolitics" have become more sophisticated due to advances in science and technology, but he does not explicitly discuss the changes brought about by the transformation of the capitalist economy, particularly the expansion of neoliberal influences. In contrast, as discussed by Nicholas Rose and others, the operation of "governmentality" in advanced capitalist societies, where the influence of neoliberalism has permeated, becomes more "sophisticated" in a way that is internalised by individuals, and people are encouraged to act as "productive self" (Rose 1999). How can we understand this process of the enhancement of "governmentality", when we reconsider "governmentality" in light of Mbembe's problematization of it as a technology of power that operates by the "power to kill, to let live and to expose to death" (Mbembe 2019:66)? In the next section, as a preparatory step for examining the development of "necropolitics" in contemporary Japan, I will attempt to trace the influence of politics rooted in neoliberalism on "necropolitics" while taking into account the contemporary Japanese context.

Neoliberalism as a "political project" and the development of governmentality

Recent scholarship on neoliberalism has proposed approaches that frame it primarily as a "political project," seeking to distance this perspective from purely academic debates while simultaneously underscoring the interdependence between the two (Harvey 2005; Mirowski 2013; Brown 2015, 2019; Davies 2017). For example, Mirowski examines how the Mont Pèlerin Society, established by Friedrich von Hayek in 1947, has not only exerted political influence on both levels of international and domestic politics by forming a "Neoliberal Thought Collective" which functions as an internation-

al intellectual network, but also spreads as "everyday neoliberalism" through the promotion of products and books aimed for self-improvement, and examining what is internalized and practiced by people (Mirowski 2013). Despite experiencing the global financial crisis, neoliberalism did not "die" (Crouch 2011) and was able to maintain its influence, not only due to the energetic enlightenment and propaganda activities by the "neoliberal thought collective," but also because it depended on the "everydayness" of neoliberalism. In other words, neoliberalism as a "political project" is supported by the "advanced" technology of governmental power that encourages to internalise a specific way of thinking and living, and for this reason, Mirowski asserts that "biopolitics exists here and will continue to exist in the future" (Mirowski 2013:148).

It makes sense here to confirm Mirowski's critique, that a gap exists between the elite-level discussion of neoliberalism and the everyday discourse, which was originally intentionally created. Mirowski refers to this phenomenon as the "doctrine of 'double truth'" (ibid.:68), but the problem is that the duality of such discourses often created contradictions between the two versions of neoliberalism. Mirowski in particular points out the "contradiction" that the Mont Pelerin Society was an anti-liberal organization run by hierarchical control, and that in contrast to Hayek's emphasis on "spontaneous order," the Society was a lobbying organization that sought to implement certain policies and disseminate ideas "from above," and thus its very mode of action denied the principle of "spontaneous order."

Wendy Brown's argument intersects with Mirowski's, who contends that neoliberalism as a "political project" involved the exclusion of non-elite individuals from the production of discourse and the unilateral imposition of specific ideas from above, making it, in reality, anti-liberal and authoritarian. Similarly, Brown considers the rise of phenomena such as the exclusion of immigrants, racist rhetoric, and the surge of misogynistic move-

ments in recent years — representative of an anti-democratic, anti-social, and authoritarian assertion of "freedom" — to be the logical consequence of neoliberal reason, referring to it as the "Frankenstein of neoliberalism" (Brown 2018; 2019). The neoliberal argument rejects collective control as inherently leading to totalitarianism. In contrast, Hayek emphasized that "spontaneous order" and the expansion of a protected personal sphere—grounded in market competition as well as in moral traditions of family and community—guarantee a life of freedom, understood as the absence of coercion, without recourse to collective intervention by society or politics. Thus, in neoliberal discourse, the expansion of the private sphere by a depoliticized, anti-regulation state is advocated. However, its practical consequences include the restructuring and adjustment of state institutions to facilitate activities of powerful corporations holding significant capital, as well as the justification of discriminatory rhetoric against racial and sexual minorities under the pretext of protecting private property, family traditions, and privacy. According to Brown, this results in "de-democratizing political culture and undermining the norms of inclusion, plurality, tolerance, and equality." (Brown 2018: 33). Furthermore, the emphasis on market mechanisms, tradition, and a morality that prioritizes family privacy leads to an understanding that the political community recognized as the "people" is "not constituted by democratic citizenship but owned" (ibid.:34). In such an environment, the urge to prioritise "shrewd" commercial activities that maximise private economic profits, while on the other hand, securing the safety of the "home", regarded as a place of refuge in a society where competition has become all-encompassing and increasingly perilous, intensifies. Laws and regulations, along with other state institutions, are reformed to support these tendencies and modes of behaviour. According to Brown, the consequences of this series of dynamics is a change in the nature of "freedom".

> Freedom becomes a weapon against the needful or historically excluded and paradoxically solicits the growth of statist power in the form of paternal protectionism, both economic and securitarian. (Brown 2018:74)

To maximize one's own economic activities and personal freedom, one uses the state's institutions to manage and control others, while simultaneously attacking and excluding them. The technology of such use of power reached by neoliberalism corresponds to the nihilism of an era where normative values lose their foundational meaning and are instrumentalised by turning them into commercial brands or political weapons (Brown 2019: 159–160). Actors in different spheres frequently mobilize the rhetoric of neoliberalism without considering the logical coherence of its outcomes, strategically mixing truth and falsehood in pursuit of political, economic, and private interests. As a result, those designated as "others" in such discourses are marginalized as not in need of protection. At this point, discursive resources usable to recover the "others" from marginalization are non-existent, because the norms of "inclusion, diversity, tolerance, and equality have already been undermined". On the other hand, the demand for "maximisation" acts in a way that expands the range of people that are assigned to the "others". Viewed in this way, it can be argued that within the operations of "governmentality" in an advanced capitalist society where neoliberalism has expanded its influence, the ones becoming the primary target of "necropolitics" are those who are "othered" by the "political project" of neoliberalism. In other words, these are people who do not or cannot become "productive subjects," and among them, there is a relatively high proportion of women and racial minorities who tend to be disadvantaged in the competition of the labour market[4].

In summary, the analyses of Mirowski and Brown show that the development of neoliberalism as a "political project" is essential for the operation of "governmentality" and that in this process "necropolitics" marginalizes and excludes people within and outside of the nation, who do not or cannot become "productive subjects". In other words, they are progressing in a way that renders them as "disposable". This understanding resonates with Zygmunt Bauman's discussion of "wasted lives" (Bauman 2004), as well as arguments pointing to the rise of the penal state and the advancement of exclusionary societies (Wacquant 2009; Young 1999; 2007).

So then, how is the concept of "governmentality", and especially "necropolitics", developing in Japan in connection with neoliberalism as a "political project"? Before proceeding with this analysis, it is necessary to confirm that, following prior research, the development of neoliberalism in Japan is recognized as having a certain uniqueness when compared to Western contexts underpinning the discussions referenced in this section, such as Mirowski and Brown. The following three points especially merit consideration.

Firstly, in regard to neoliberalism as a "political project", Japan is certainly a latecomer. Not only was there a time lag in its implementation compared to Western countries, but it also exhibited the characteristic of being introduced selectively, with specific targets chosen for its application. For example, in his recent work, Tanaka Takuji points out that the Nakasone administration, which is credited with introducing neoliberal reforms in Japan, implemented policies that deviated from the principles and tenets of neoliberalism, such as maintaining a labour-management cooperation policy and reinforcing the male breadwinner-model through social insurance and tax deductions (Tanaka 2020:168-170). Tanaka's argument describes the background to the fact that the traditional welfare system, which Miyamoto Tarō called "The threefold structure of Japanese-style social security" (Miyamoto 2021), was maintained even after the 1980s and how its instability became visible only in the

process of the late 1990s to the 2000s. The employment system and various regulations were gradually reformed in a process during which "structural reform" was advocated, however the male breadwinner-model has been maintained with some modifications to this day.

Secondly, the way in which neoliberalism was selectively implemented as a "political project" not only indicates that neoliberal reforms were not carried out in a systematic or comprehensive manner, but also that the scope and effects of the reforms were limited. What is interesting when considering this point is likely the inconsistency of the workfare policy in Japan as explained by Miyamoto. The workfare policies, which aim to guide welfare recipients toward employment, can be seen as a flagship policy program of neoliberalism as a "political project". However, Miyamoto's assessment is that, in Japan, these policies have "backfired". The reason for this, Miyamoto explains, is that in Japan's situation "there was no component corresponding to 'welfare'" that was considered the target of neoliberal reform, and that "if there is no welfare to cut in the first place, the workfare card cannot be played" (Miyamoto 2021: 109-113). On the other hand, the introduction of the workfare policy was accompanied by the dissemination of strongly normative rhetoric, which called for the necessity of reform, represented by the bashing of welfare recipients led by the ruling party. While rhetoric emphasizing norms is used excessively, the scope of institutional reform is limited. This trend can also be confirmed by comparing food governance reform attempts in the 2000s with the case of the UK. In the case of food governance, which is closely connected to family activities, gender norms strongly linked to the gender-based division of labour were publicly mobilized (Takeda 2011).

Relatedly, the third distinctive point observed in neoliberal reforms as a "political project" in Japan is that, in this process, the "male breadwinner family model", in which gender norms strongly operate, plays a central role.

As discussed in another paper, in the case of Japan, the advancement of "biopolitics" in the 1950s spread the idea of "family planning" through a national movement as part of corporate welfare, promoting its diffusion among working-class families. This approach positioned individuals as subjects practicing gender roles within the family, and, on top of that, encouraged the entire family to, in a sense, "corporatize"[5] (Takeda, 2005). After the 1990s, as corporate welfare receded and the structure of the family began to fluctuate, efforts were made to address "new social risks" and rhetorical shifts were attempted, promoting women's employment as an effort to "corporatize" the family (Takeda 2008). However, the institutional design of the "male breadwinner model" was fundamentally maintained (Ōsawa 2013; Tanaka 2017; Miyamoto 2021).

The review of the "male breadwinner model" has repeatedly been pointed out as an essential political issue not only from the perspective of gender equality (Ōsawa 2013; Miura 2018), but also in order to address contemporary hardships in daily life. As will be discussed in the next section, the tendency to advocate the "enterprizing" of the family unit has been carried over into the COVID-19 countermeasures. On the other hand, as has been pointed out by many scholars, the labour market and welfare state system in modern and contemporary Japan have been organized on the basis of the "male breadwinner model" and because of this, those who do not belong to it, particularly women, have long faced economic and social difficulties. This trend has continued to the present day. For example, in a paper analysing welfare policies under the Abe administration, Ōsawa Mari points out a dysfunction in the tax and social security system when comparing single-mother households and single-income households (both with two children) that fall outside the "male breadwinner model". She observed that the "net burden rate" is particularly heavier for the single-mother household in low-income groups (Ōsawa

2019). Such observations raise the question of whether the "Nocturnal Body" of democracy in Japan could have existed not only through race but also through gender hierarchy.

In Japan, at the stage when the COVID-19 pandemic became a reality, neoliberalism as a "political project" was operating with a certain degree of distinctiveness, as shown above. How "Biopolitics" and "Necropolitics" developed in such an environment will be examined in the next section.

Family and management of "life" and "death" during the pandemic in Japan

The Japanese government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the introduction of a "new lifestyle" to encourage changes in everyday behaviour and consciousness. In the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's introduction of practical examples [6] for this "new lifestyle", specific behavioural guidelines were encouraged. These included "individual basic infection prevention measures", "fundamental daily lifestyle habits", "lifestyle practices tailored to specific daily situations" and "new work styles". What I understand from the text, is that the recommendations do not only call for individual behaviours, such as wearing masks, washing hands, and maintaining social distancing, but also for certain adjustments in interactions with others and work practices, like "focusing on eating and keeping conversations minimal". These requests from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare may be interpreted as an exercise of power technologies associated with advanced forms of "governmentality." This mode of governance presupposes a "productive subject" who proactively optimizes their own existence and conduct.

Nevertheless, it must also be addressed here that the pandemic measures, including the introduction of the "new lifestyle and the development of the health care and medical system" led to job insecurity and difficulties in daily life due to economic disruptions. As a result, these measures necessitated significant political intervention by large public institutions. For example, as Kanai Toshiyuki discussed, the widespread school closures revealed the role schools had been playing as care facilities (Kanai 2021:193–199). Although, in the case of Japan, these closures were implemented suddenly without the provision of measures such as compensation for lost wages, resulting in significant chaos. This suggests that pandemic countermeasures would have been better grounded not in advanced forms of "governmentality," but rather in a 19th-century model of "governmentality." In this way, public institutions, in cooperation with specialists like medical professionals, establish systems and foundations designed to appropriately support people in leading healthy lives.

However, the government's response to large-scale organizational interventions, such as expanding testing and medical systems, providing compensation for business closures, or offering direct economic support through cash payments, was observed to be consistently passive.

Takenaka Harukata explains that the progress of COVID-19 countermeasures in Japan was limited and lacked a sense of urgency. This can be attributed to the complexity of power relations between the prime minister and local governments, as well as a lack of "capacity" resulting from administrative and fiscal reforms that had advanced since the 1990s. At the same time, Takenaka's descriptions of individuals within the Abe administration reveal a reluctance to engage in large-scale economic support, a preference for voluntary "self-restraint" measures, and a tendency toward neoliberalism as a "political project" (Takenaka 2020).

In this context, the family-based approach to governance was maintained, as symbolized by the fact that a fixed number of benefits was paid to the head of the household in a lump-sum payment for each family (Arami, special issue). In addition, with public social and economic support not progressing, families were required to manage various issues of dai-

ly life during the pandemic on their own, while continuing to live as families.

On the other hand, as already pointed out in the emergency proposals and reports by the aforementioned "Research Group on the Impact and Challenges of COVID-19 on Women," immediately after the declaration of a state of emergency and the issuance of closure requests to restaurants and other businesses, many women working in the service industry became targets of layoffs, non-renewal of contracts, and reduced shifts. After July 2020, the number of employed women began to increase, but from November of the same year, it plateaued and by March 2021, the employment level had not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau, 2021). According to the report by the "Research Group on the Impact and Challenges of COVID-19 on Women," a survey targeting female employees in dual-income households in private companies revealed that 18.8 percent of respondents who experienced a reduction in income reported cutting back on food expenses, compared to 7.7 percent of respondents who did not experience a reduction in income (Research Group on the Impact and Challenges of COVID-19 on Women, 2021:11 & Figure 12). The report further examined issues such as economic hardship, experiences of domestic violence from spouses, the disproportionate burden of increased time spent on housework and childcare falling on women, reduction in personal time, and heightened stress.

In line with these research findings, newspaper and magazine articles reporting on the increase of women's suicides during the pandemic convey how women, despite facing difficult circumstances, were driven into a corner precisely because they took on the role of "corporatizing" the family and genuinely tried to fulfil it (Rich and Hida 2021; Furukawa 2021; Shūkan Josei PRIME Henshū-bu 2021). The director of the Japanese Association of Mental Health Services commented in an article in *The Japan Times* that "women bear the responsibility for infection prevention" and that "they must pay attention to their family's health, maintain cleanliness, and are being looked down upon in case they fail to fulfil these obligations appropriately" (Rich and Hida 2021). In reality, women who are mostly regarded as the primary manager of the household due to gender norms, felt an immense responsibility to prevent infections within their families. Additionally, they also began to endure significant psychological burdens by blaming themselves as being a burden on the family due to unemployment or reduced income. However, with the state of emergency declared and a reduction in their personal time, it had become difficult to secure opportunities to release such psychological burdens outside the family. Moreover, when their families are at risk, they experienced a psychological resistance to prioritising themselves. In such a process, "biopolitics" and "necropolitics" seem to be closely intertwined. It is precisely because they are strongly motivated to "corporatize" the family that it becomes a significant psychological pressure. On the other hand, when they fail this "corporatization", in other words, when they deviate from the standard family model, they become acutely aware of being "exposed to death". When viewed in this way, managing a family during the pandemic was in fact a psychologically burdensome and life-draining task for women living with their family.

On the other hand, the tendency for women who do not fit into the "male breadwinner family model" to fall victim to "necropolitics" not only persisted but intensified due to the conditions of the pandemic. An article by an NHK reporter covering the case of a homeless woman who was assaulted and killed at a bus stop in November 2020[7] reported that the woman had gotten a divorce because of her husband's violence and subsequently moved from job to job, working as an irregular worker for a long time. Due to her work being irregular and short-term, she began sleeping in internet cafes a few years prior. During the pandemic,

when she was unable to find work, she sat at bus stops from late night until early morning, where she was reported to have fallen victim to the attack. According to the article, the man who killed the woman stated in his testimony that she was "in the way" and expressed a strong desire to get rid of her (Tokuda & Okazaki 2021). Additionally, Journalist Nakamura Atsuhiko has reported multiple cases of female university students engaging in "sex work"[8] during the pandemic to cover tuition and living expenses, some of whom were sending financial support to their parents (Nakamura 2020, Nakamura & Fujii 2020). In Japan's history, there exist countless of cases of women who, separated or widowed, found themselves outside the marriage system and were driven into low-wage, precarious work, as well as cases of young women engaging in sex work due to their family's financial circumstances. Due to the growth of the national economy, such cases became less visible for a time or shifted overseas. However, since the 1990s, with long-term economic stagnation and the advancement of globalization, they have become visible domestically, once more. In other words, "accumulation by exploitation" accompanied by "necropolitics" once again began to unfold openly within Japan, and (this situation) has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Could the situation currently unfolding not also be interpreted in such a way?

Conclusion

Mbembe describes "necropolitics" as a pharmakon. The interpretation that it is both "poison" and "medicine" may refer to its duality, in the sense that the community is protected by excluding the object deemed as harmful. Nonetheless, the simultaneous progression of opposing processes was the core of the discussion on governance in the first place. Going back to Foucault, governance refers to a process where, for the individual, it is both the act of becoming a subject and, at the same time, a process of being subordinated to power.

Focusing on this duality of governmentality, Benjamin Bratton argues that it is important to develop a positive form of "governmentality" in the post-pandemic world (Bratton 2021). As previously mentioned, it is indeed conceivable that the 19th-century model of "governmentality," in which the state establishes healthcare and welfare systems and undertakes large-scale interventions, is better equipped with the appropriate governance capacity necessary to respond to a pandemic. However, after re-situating the concept of "necropolitics", which has long remained inadequately discussed in discourses on "governmentality", it becomes necessary to carefully consider the extent to which the idea of transforming "governmentality" in a positive direction is both feasible and effective. In particular, it is necessary to ascertain how a positive form of "governmentality" can tame the drive toward "necropolitics" and suppress violent exclusion.

Based on Brown's argument, which concludes that neoliberalism has become a Frankenstein, the crux/core of the issue seems to lie in the fact that "governmentality" is grounded in a specific understanding of "the economy". In capitalism—especially neoliberal capitalism—individuals are required to outcompete others in the market, maximize economic benefits and, to that end, adhere to and defend their private sphere in order to optimize their own life and livelihood. The exclusion of others is therefore an essential element in the processes of neoliberal capitalism. In contrast, the cooperative model, which has been gaining attention in the context of over a decade of austerity policies following the global financial crisis, presents a contrasting understanding of economic dynamics and ways it relates to and supports others (Guinan and Hanna 2018). In this cooperative system, as the number of members increases and the organization expands, the more stability as an economic system is achieved. In other words, the relationship with others envisioned here is rooted in what Raymond Williams once discussed as "communication," conceived

as the act of first recognizing the existence of others in order to assert one's own claim to live, and then accepting those claims (Williams 2011 [1961]:58–59). When envisioning a system of governance, wouldn't it be essential to carefully examine how such differences in logic significantly influence the workings of power technologies?

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

[1] This quote is an English translation of the Japanese version of the book.

[2] The cited section is not included in the English version of the book.

[3] In the English version, the corresponding section is as follows: "Older than superfluous wealth was another by-product of capitalist production: the human debris that every crisis, following invariably upon each period of industrial growth, eliminated permanently from producing society." (Arendt 2017 [1951]:195).

[4] Due to their gendered existence, women often become "productive subjects" and face various challenges in continuing to act as such. This is discussed from different perspectives in the articles by Okano, Miura, and Schieder included in this special issue.

[5] In my cited work, I argue that through the development of such biopolitics, biological reproduction of humans (the birth of humans as organisms), economic reproduction (the recovery of workers from daily labour and the securing of necessary labour through the education, training, and socialization of the next generation of workers), and socio-political reproduction (the cultivation and preservation of the members of society and the nation, maintaining both society and the nation-state) are closely interconnected and practiced through family life. I discuss how this "reproduction system" once functioned in post-World War II Japan (Takeda 2005).

[6] https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000121431_newlifestyle.html (Last accessed: March 8, 2022).

[7] This woman's case is discussed in Katada (2021) and Amamiya (2021).

[8] The relation between women's poverty and "sex work" in Japan, including the ways in which the term "sex work" is used, has long been a subject of debate. What this paper seeks to address, is not the nature or social evaluation of "sex work" as a profession itself, but, as Fujita Takunori has pointed out, that in Japan, "sex work" often effectively serves as a de facto poverty countermeasure under the logic that "if a family lacks financial means, one can earn tuition or living expenses by engaging in the sex industry" (Fujita 2021:131).