The Normative Emergence of Death in the Organization of American States' Responses to COVID−19: towards a Regional Governance of Death

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has been (re)creating new global geographies of death, which specifically impact the Global South and expose its continuum of vulnerabilities – unequally distributed in terms of race, gender, class, and so on. In the Americas, we can identify the emergence of a new regional governance of death, associated with a set of practical recommendations by the Organization of American States (OAS) constraining states' policy responses to COVID-19 and installing a new global governance lexicon. Recommendations concerning the disposal of dead bodies, full respect for both collective and family grief, and indications of alternative ways to conduct funerals and memorial services, for instance, seem to evoke new multilateral responses, paving the way for a new governance model: one that centres death within regional policymaking. This points to a change in the treatment of death from a purely private to a politically infused issue. Theoretically, this article aims to bridge the gap between Death Studies and Global Governance literatures. Supported by Michel Foucault's genealogical method, the goal is to critically reconceptualise the meanings and framings of death landscapes in the Americas, pointing us to the correlation of forces that enabled the normative emergence of death in the OAS in this particular historical moment.

Keywords: OAS; regional governance; policy responses; deathscapes; COVID-19 crisis.

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Introduction: how does death come into OAS politics?

A preliminary analysis of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' (IACHR) documents conceived during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic reveals new normative approaches towards death regulation coming from the OAS. This innovation led to some of the cruellest and intangible effects of the COVID-19 crisis, especially due to the limited possibilities of mourning in the presence of a dead body, the disrespect for both collective and family grief, and the absence of indications of alternative ways to conduct funerals and memorial services in a context of disseminated collective pain.

In September 2020, the Inter-American Commission, acting by way of the *Rapid and Integrated Response Coordination Unit for COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis Management (RIRCU COVID-19)*[1], established a practical guide concerning respect for the grieving, funeral rites, and memorials of those who died during the COVID-19 pandemic. The document supports state actors in the process of elaboration, adjustments, and implementation of public policies on this matter (OAS 2020c).

The following administrative actions were deemed human rights violations in the context of the coronavirus pandemic (and possibly beyond it), begging the question if they can be sustained as a new prohibitive model of regional governance, one that places death at the centre of OAS policymaking:

> [...] Burying a large number of human remains in common graves without identifying them or adhering to technical requirements; Subjecting family members of the deceased to heavy body searches, long waits for the disposal of the bodies; No protocols in place for migrants to be able to contact and find their family members; Problems with identifying and repatriating remains; Funeral homes and morgues overwhelmed, leading to: Corpses piling up in morgues and on streets; Inability to accept bodies due to lack of space and overwhelmed cemetery workers (OAS, 2020c).

It is quite evident, however, that an international grammar of death, translated by global governance structures, still needs to be developed through international norm-making. Simultaneously, the OAS, especially acting on behalf of its human rights system, (re) emerges as a pioneer institution in this sense.

Assuming genealogy as critique, meaning the practice of a philosophical-historical critique of the present, and in an attempt to decode the question *What does a genealogy do in the sense of this death grammar?*, we intend to approach the normative emergence of death within OAS as an actual *articulated submerged problem*, as Koopman (2013: 1, our emphasis) suggests:

> Genealogies articulate problems. But not just any problems. Genealogies do not, for instance, take up those problems that come with supposed solutions readily apparent, or those problems that appear difficult to many but are simple for those few who are in the

know. Genealogies are generally not targeted at problems that are themselves readily apparent to everyone or even just to everyone who ought to know them. *Genealogies are concerned, rather, with submerged problems*.

Further, if we are to follow Foucault's footsteps, the genealogical method can be revealing of a not-so-evident problem as it consists of a '[…] thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions' (Koopman 2013: 4). These elements are crucial in tracing entangled death meanings assuming both the contingency and complexity – which Koopman (2013) also attaches to genealogy – of the OAS' establishment of this regional governance of death prototype in times of disseminated political mourning in the Americas.

Such a concept is demonstrated by Pool (2021), as seen in her own experience with deaths occurring on 11 September 2001:

> To more fully explain how particular deaths shape political outcomes, I focus on how political identity and political responsibility intersect. For now, however, I simply want to highlight that there is a relationship between these two concepts. If we perceive a harm to those we identify as belonging to a political "us", we are more likely to respond to that harm and to mourn the losses of those we perceive as "ours".

Pool's concept of political mourning (2021, our emphasis) also functions as a compass for this current genealogy of death from OAS contemporary normativity, since the author calls attention to '[…] the boundaries around the *political* in *political mourning*' and to '[…] how some deaths have mobilised actors to call for political change with a particular focus on how the mourning for these deaths has become political rather than remaining private or even public'. The landscape of disseminated death occurring in the Americas over the duration of the pandemic has been a determining factor in the OAS' decision to install new modes of regional governance:

> The Inter-American Commission warns that the Americas continue to be the continent worst affected by COVID-19. According to the WHO [World Health Organization], one year after the pandemic was first declared, the Americas remained the continent with the highest number of deaths of COVID-19 in the world. By March 7, 2021, the number of confirmed infections in the region topped 51,531,438, while the number of deaths stood at 1,237,781 (OAS 2021)[2].

As Pool (2021) reinforces, the question must be reformulated from '[…] whether a particular death is political to instead ask how it comes into politics'. In this sense, this article poses, in genealogical terms: *How does death come into OAS politics?* For now, what we

know is that (i) the singularity of the above-mentioned landscape of death; (ii) the Latin and Central American identity, constructed through exposure to state violence and a state of permanent recovery from its violent past; (iii) and a vacuum of political willingness and/or governmental responsibility in facing COVID-19 deaths – which are distinguished by racial and social vulnerabilities, especially when talking about the United States, Brazil, and Mexico, the three most populated democracies of the region – are factors that can help us identify what seems to be a new global geography of death in the Americas, while understanding the OAS' normative production during COVID-19 as one that is able to politically frame death and mourning.

This article aims to uncover and reconceptualise the main meaning of death landscapes as deathscapes in the Americas by pointing to the correlation of forces that enabled the normative (re)emergence of death in the OAS at this particular historical moment. It is divided into three main sections. The first section, *(New) Global geographies of death and the quest for spatialisation: a literature review*, deals with the so-called global geographies of death, and is dedicated to mobilising studies of relevance that fall under the interdisciplinary field and umbrella term of Death Studies, aiming to demonstrate how the International Relations (IR) discipline reacted tardily to the possibilities of dealing with death as a political category and phenomenon. Such recognition seems to be articulated with a quest for spatialising death both regionwide and worldwide.

The second section, entitled *Mass death/Mass victimisation: a clear-cut face of death in the Americas?*, is guided by genealogy as its method and centred on critically revealing how death makes its way into OAS politics. While assessing the institutional death repertoire of the OAS, it is possible to understand this death grammar of the COVID-19 crisis in the region as a re-emerging one, within a continuum of old-new framings of mass death – and mass victimisation – and through the lens of *experiences of traumatic ambiguity* (Han, Millar and Bayly 2021: 11), both intimately attached to the phenomenon of forced disappearances and their ensuing open-ended deaths as an unfolded history of the Americas and consequently of the OAS.

In the third section, entitled *Multi-level governance and COVID-19: beyond a prototypic regional governance of death in the Americas?*, this article provides a multi-level understanding of OAS regional governance, targeting its responses to COVID-19 and their repercussions in terms of regional state actors' strategic behaviour. A concrete, yet low, impact of what can be assumed as an innovative grammar of death elaborated by the OAS is revealed.

(New) global geographies of death and the quest for spatialisation: a literature review

Recent efforts to address the political meanings, causes, and contexts of death that can be found in the IR literature can also correlate with the field of Death Studies, understood as '[...] an umbrella term for research spanning all aspects of death, dying and bereavement, including end-of-life care' (Borgstrom and Ellis 2017: 93). This vast and interdisciplinary

field of knowledge includes many perspectives, such as psychological, medical, social, and, albeit less often, political ones. Since Thanatology and Death Studies are a vast interdisciplinary field of knowledge with multiple and diverse topics of interest (Van Brussel and Carpentier 2014), it is not easy to systematize all existing contributions. These mostly include studies on grief, bereavement, sites of memorization, and funeral practices (Cann and Troyer 2017; Foster and Woodthorpe 2016; Hockey, Komaromy and Woodthorpe 2010; Thamann and Christodoulaki 2021; Woodthorpe and Rumble 2016). Considering these rich and multiple perspectives, and for our purposes in this article, we decided to organize the literature review around three core concepts that illuminate possible ways to understand death as a politically infused and a geographically situated issue. These concepts are (i) social death, (ii) necropolitics, and (iii) geography of death. These concepts, whether understood separately or together, deal with death and dying as unequal processes, an aspect that becomes more explicit when we situate them in specific spatialities.

Death has usually been understood and treated as a private or distant matter in Social Sciences in general, and particularly in the International Relations field. This negligence of death as a politically infused issue has its epistemological roots in Liberal Democratic Theory and the notion that '[…] the practices, customs, and institutional responses to death should be kept "quarantined" from political life and contestation' (Barringer 2016: 1). Guided by Michel Foucault's work on biopolitics, we can also add that in the specific liberal-capitalist regime, which started at the end of the 18th century in Europe and whose maxim 'to make live and to let die' remains central, death has (apparently) become '[…] something to be hidden away. It has become the most private and shameful thing of all […]' (Foucault 2003: 247).

Thus, in Western modernity, death is often treated from a medical point of view, as if it was naturally separated from political life and/or political processes. However, death was, at the same time, the grammar that organised the aspects of the daily life of enslaved people, as well as other matters under colonial domination, as stressed by Mbembe (2003: 21). And it is consistent to state that throughout this seemingly unending pandemic, such grammar has openly organised aspects of the daily lives of vulnerable people, worldwide and regionwide. Advancing such a modern framing of death, sociologist Tony Walter (2020) argues that economic and technological developments inaugurated by Western modernity have shaped death and dying in the modern world, involved by a myriad of factors such as culture, national histories – which can rely on the dead to create collective memories –, physical environment and so on.

Barringer (2016), a cornerstone intellectual contribution to this article, identifies two major groups that discuss death in the Political and Social Sciences. One refers to studies on vulnerability, loss, and grief/bereavement/mourning, with Judith Butler being probably the most notorious example due to her works, particularly *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), and *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009). Although most of the research on these themes focuses on funeral rituals and collective mourning, they still treat death as 'pre-political or post-political phenomena' (Barringer 2016: 7), implying that the approach to death is not politically centred. A helpful book

entitled *Transnational Death*, edited by Eerika, Hanna e Saramo (2019), is another example of this line of thought on death. The book gathers ten chapters divided into three sections (Families, Communities, and Commemorations) to analyse how certain groups (especially migrant groups) deal with death at a distance and with the absent bodies. Here, the internet plays an important role in connecting migrant families and communities, for example. Digital and online aspects of death, dying and grief have also been discussed by other authors (Sofka, Cupit and Gilbert 2012).

The second major group identified by Barringer (2016) is devoted to themes such as '[…] ethical and political uncertainty, incommensurable conflict and loss', with death understood as a '[…] universal limit that calls optimism and the powers of reason into question' (Barringer 2016: 7). Despite their ostensible efforts in calling into question the political dimensions of death, both groups do not successfully address the ways in which death is politically produced.

Studies on *social death* – a concept open to various interpretations – may be the first ones that succeeded in destabilizing the notion of death as a private matter. In an attempt to identify a conceptual framework common to studies on social death, Králová (2015: 246) proposes that there are three underlying notions within this field of knowledge, namely 'loss of social identity, loss of social connectedness and losses associated with the disintegration of the body'. She concludes that social death, as a multifaceted phenomenon, could be defined as the antithesis of well-being. For example, people living in social exclusion – such as enslaved people and refugees – experience some degree of social death (Králová 2015: 236). Though not explicitly, Králová's work provokes us to think how this social death is highly influenced by inequalities and social markers of difference, such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, and so on. In a more recent text, already influenced by the COVID-19 context, Králová (2022) argues that social death is the same as death by social causes. The author investigates the (in)action of the UK government towards Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, claiming it did not sufficiently provide for the well-being of these groups, leading to widespread preventable or avoidable mortality.

Although his work does not fall under the category of what we are calling Social Death Studies, Walter (2020) identifies economic insecurity as a strong factor shaping people's death and dying. Králová (2022: 79) goes further and argues that 'preventable mortality is hindered by socioeconomic inequalities hand in hand with social processes such as structural violence, racism, dehumanisation, et alia'. This points to a more political approach to the (global) unequal distribution of death.

More recently, in a special issue called *Dead in life. Lives pierced by death*, the journal *Death Studies* published a series of articles that drew from a more sociological approach to death (Gatti and Martínez 2020). This special issue offered an approach to death that differed from the journal's usual articles, which favoured a psychological or healthcare perspective. Gatti and Martínez (2020: 677), authors inserted into a Latin-American research agenda, claim that the idea for the issue was born of a concern for social disappearance – notably, how '[...] atypical deaths are produced, managed and lived'. Indeed, social contexts and situations need to be taken into consideration to better understand the borders

of life and death. It is worth noting how the lives of migrants are called into question, as well as those of women victims of sex trafficking, leading to the political construction of death spaces, deathscapes, and forms of death in life (Gatti and Martínez 2020: 677-678).

In the International Relations academic field, death is treated either through the lens of vulnerability, mourning, and grief or through Achille Mbembe's (2003) concept of necropolitics, particularly in the subfield of Critical Security Studies. *Necropolitics* is defined by Mbembe (2003) as a systematic and deliberate production of death carried out by actors with political power (not only state actors but also private ones). Central to Mbembe's analysis is race as a category to determine a person's (in)humanity, especially in spaces marked by (post) colonial realities. For him, the power to kill is the ultimate expression of sovereignty in the contemporary world, which provokes us to think about a key place of death in politics. Thus, the concept of necropolitics leads us to a myriad of studies that treat death as a politically induced phenomenon.

In the context of COVID-19, authors such as Lee (2020) and Sandset (2021) point to an already existing necropolitics that was exacerbated by the virus. Examining the functions of the public health system, the authors argue that structural violence and inequality, marked by racial difference, as well as by unequally distributed vulnerability, contribute to the necropolitical condition of 'certain racialized and economically impoverished communities' (Sandset 2021: 1418).

Though ground-breaking in its approach to thinking death as a political phenomenon, the concept of necropolitics has too often been used uncritically to address political processes that involve death on a large scale, as is argued by Alphin and Debrix (2020) in their recently published work, *Necrogeopolitics: On Death and Death-Making in International Relations*:

> Put succinctly, the study and theorization of necropolitics have been placed under the heading of extreme, large-scale, and gruesomely violent or brutal death and death-making in the contemporary global polity, often in the context of the security politics and policies deployed in the wake of 9/11 (and the insecurities they have produced), as the outcome of terrorist attacks in the West […]. We believe that necropolitical analyses too often target extreme, exceptional, or large-scale instances of death designed to make life live and, in so doing, occlude the multiple, endless, far-too-common, and often banal or seemingly trivial operations of death-making that biopolitics or regimes of biopolitical governance regularly undertake and that, furthermore, render a wide range of bodies superfluous, unnoticed, vulnerable, and often readily subjected to various forms of destruction and disappearance (Alphin and Debrix 2020: 2-3).

In that sense, mass death as a big event – such as great wars and genocides – becomes the clear-cut face of death, which ultimately occludes ordinary or hidden forms of death. In an attempt to go beyond this approach, Alphin and Debrix (2020) argue that IR needs

to place the geopolitical context of deaths at the centre of the debate. A critical geopolitical perspective and, more specifically, the lenses of spatiality contribute to more detailed and refined research on death, paving the way for a more spatial-oriented perspective on the topic. The authors insist '[...] on the importance of the "geo" in necrogeopolitics to show that spatial concreteness and materialities are very much part and parcel of instances of extra/ordinary death-making today' (Alphin and Debrix 2020: 5).

The COVID-19 pandemic appears to us as a big event, and the deaths of its victims can be understood as a global phenomenon. However, all deaths occur in their specific embodied landscapes. In a recently published collection entitled *Death, Grief and Loss in the Context of COVID-19,* Pentaris (2022: 2) affirms that the pandemic challenged society 'by placing death in the front row' and recognizing that the social life – and death – of different groups was impacted in 'varied geographical contexts' (Pentaris 2022: 5). Since COVID-19 triggered a public and constant visibility of death as covered in the media's 24-hour news cycle, it paved the way for its politicisation, which would come by way of socio-economic improvement measures to address social inequality (Pentaris and Woodthorpe 2022). It is worth noting that the authors speak from and to a particular space: the UK. In some spaces, such as the colonies, death has never been hidden (Mbembe 2003).

This leads us to a discussion on deathscapes, a concept that refers to 'the places associated with death and for the dead, and how these are imbued with meanings and associations: the site of a funeral, and the places of final disposition and of remembrance, and representations of all these' (Maddrell and Sideway 2010: 4). Deathscapes are not only material sites but interact and intersect with 'other moments and topographies, including those of sovereignty (sovereignty-scapes), memory (memory-scapes) and work, life and beauty (landscapes)' (Maddrell and Sideway 2010: 5).

Taking the Americas in general, and Latin America in particular, as examples, one can note that a specific form of deathscape has long been present in the region. Given its history of military coups and dictatorships, and, of course, going further back, European colonisation, Latin America is a region with a specific history of death and death making. One aspect of this death making that has plagued the region for decades, is that of forced disappearances, as will be discussed in the following section of this article. In that sense, COVID-19 in the Americas comes up as a clear-cut face of death, but one that needs to be addressed in dialogue with its 'mundane operations of death-making' (Alphin and Debrix 2020).

As put by Maddrell (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has been producing new global geographies of death that are uneven and reflect already existing inequalities. She argues that in the pandemic context, '[...] deathscapes are being writ large in regions and communities unprepared for the effects and affects of a pandemic as well as those sadly familiar with historically high death rates' (Maddrell 2020: 110). Put straightforwardly, these so-called new geographies of death are indeed (sub)products of old geographies of death.

More frequently, the concept of *geography of death* – or even of deathscapes – mobilised by scholars from the broader field of Human Geography, refers to material, symbolic sites such as graveyards, cemeteries, and memorials. In an effort of moving beyond this particular sense of spaces related to death, a Special Issue of the *Social & Cultural*

Geography Journal entitled *Geographies of Dying and Death* puts forward provocative discussions on '[…] the significance and politics of geographical location as site, cause and mediation of death, as well as the mobilization of different spatial practices and strategies in the face of death/s, dying/s and bereavement/s' (Stevenson, Kenten and Maddrell 2016: 157). Stevenson, Kenten and Maddrell (2016) argue that only recently a 'spatial turn' has been articulated in Death Studies. This 'spatialisation' of death in different research agendas can be seen as an effort to include matters of political economy, environmental crisis, migration, and identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class as important dimensions of social life that are connected to certain types of death and death making and how these are shaped in different locations, whether worldwide or regionwide.

If the term 'geography of death' lacks a specific definition and conceptual precision, its plural meanings can be found in some intellectual contributions. For instance, taking the city of Lisbon, in Portugal, as a reference to establish a relation between epidemics and cities, Antunes (2020: 129) seems to understand that the geography of death, in this specific case, is defined by one's place of residence and socioeconomic segment. These two factors, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrate that the geography of contagions is sensitive to the social morphology of territories (Antunes 2020: 131).

Vargas and Alves (2010) use the term 'geographies of death' to investigate the correlation between police brutality, and racialised and exclusionary social spaces in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. Although the authors do not precisely define what they understand by 'geography of death', they indicate that the term embraces multi-layered aspects of the state-sanctioned lethal violence they are investigating. Contemporary to Henri Lefebvre's works on the social production of space, Vargas and Alves (2010: 616) argue that '[...] all human geographies are the product of historical power struggles, and the social relations deriving from such struggles become spatialised according to the hegemonic political order'. In that sense, the social, political, and spatial inequalities that are historically (re)produced in a particular society are factors that contribute to producing a particular deathscape.

Although 'geography of death' is not a well-defined term, it leads us to the material, political, and contingent aspects of death. It not only evokes the vulnerability elements of certain social groups, but it also elicits us to dig into the historical realities and how these have created the deathscapes that are so present in the Americas. Thus, the spatialisation of death enables us not to treat death as a universalised experience; instead, we can better develop a comprehensive scheme of how and why some lives are marked by death in specific contexts and spaces.

With the Americas as our *locus*, in the following section we elaborate a discussion on the trajectory of death's meanings in the region, noting the re-emergence of a grammar of death in the OAS lexicon as part of a historical continuity of the political practices with respect to mass death and death making, especially in the case of forced disappearances.

Mass death/mass victimisation: a clear-cut face of death in the Americas?

As argued above, even though death has been central to the genesis and mainstream historiography of the International Relations discipline, laying down its roots in global war practices, scholars and policymakers must excavate further to reveal it as both an international political phenomenon and as a category that requires global mapping and improved spatialisation understandings.

The absence of such perspectives has been echoing in the International Relations analyses of the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing a clear-cut face of death and unfolding it as a multidimensional political process that must be dealt with:

> The inability to directly talk about mass death in our theorizing is not limited to the study of pandemics but is a general problem in the empirical study of political phenomena. International relations and political science scholarship rarely consider death directly as an analytical category. Instead, it is frequently posited as the implicit reason for politics; the risk of death justifies and underwrites the notion of the state (Han, Millar and Bayly 2021: 7-8).

Mass death is not a phenomenon that is new to the Americas' region, historically and politically marked by an ambiguous nature of death and its ensuing traumatic polyvalence in the face of several transitional justice experiences. Here, we accord special importance to the contribution of Han, Millar and Bayly (2021: 11) as it conceptualises and uncovers these regional experiences with mass death in terms of *experiences of traumatic ambiguity*:

> Focusing on the ambiguous nature of death thus allows us to cast the comparative net wider than focusing on the cause of death alone. For example, the experience of enforced disappearances – broadly defined as a state's refusal to acknowledge the occurrence of arrest, detention, abduction, or sometimes extrajudicial killings by state agents or concealment of the fate of the victims – produces similar experiences of traumatic ambiguity. The ability of families and societies to grieve and understand the loss of life is often forestalled by the explicit efforts of powerful state institutions to conceal, underplay, and obfuscate both the true fates of the victims and the role state agents have played in them.

Some death experiences are clearly grounded in spatialised realities and shall have their very birth acknowledged, especially when their meanings have been uninterruptedly travelling globally. Such experiences of traumatic ambiguity, rebirthed under the context of COVID-19 in the Americas, require a genealogy of a specifically Latin-American category of *desaparecidos* (disappeared). As some of the most

influential scholars in this intellectual terrain affirm regarding the question of political disappearance:

> The *archetypical examples were found in Latin America*, in particular its southernmost countries, and the military dictatorships that ruled them (from 1973 to 1986), as well as their transitional processes (still underway). However, starting in the 2000s, disappeared and disappearance stepped out of their original territories and traveled to far-away places (Gatti 2020, our emphasis).

As the methodological exercise of genealogy demands of researchers everywhere – even though this article opted for an '[…] use of Foucauldian genealogy as it is mobilized in a non-European geopolitical context' (Nigh and Erlenbusch-Anderson, 2020: 2) –, it is fundamental to recover the ambiguous idea of disappeared to offer a more complex framework of political and social death in the contemporary Americas and in different sites of its global and transnational (re)articulations:

> [...] the concept of disappearance has broadened: the framework within which we conceived of the *original type* of disappearance – in which the agent of disappearances is always the state or its accomplices, the subject of disappearance, a citizen, and the context of the disappearance is that of the rule of law – now falls short and fails to encompass the new modalities of disappearance (Gatti and Casado-Neira, 2020).

The deathscape of the Americas, mainly attached to the dictatorship period, has been enmeshed in a tangle of ambiguous loss that has not yet been overcome. As Gatti (2020, author's emphasis) suggests, '[…] disappearance is lack, loss, fracture. It is the impossibility of putting the world right side up. Like someone I interviewed in my fieldwork in Argentina told me: it is a *new state of being*'. Such a double denial of the disappeared – neither alive nor dead – has produced a very singular condition of victimhood in the region and in parallel has pointed to a non-recognition or at least to a disputed condition of trauma: 'Ambiguous deaths thus have a long tail in terms of not only trauma, as noted earlier, but also the potential for both unacknowledged or unrecognized trauma to unsettle the social order and conventional mode of political authority' (Han, Millar and Bayly 2021).

In this sense, parallel to the phenomenon of historical mass death – and enmeshed in grave breaches of human rights inflicted by dictatorial regimes in Latin and Central American countries, and in demands for transitional justice processes –, we note the emergence of *mass victimisation* (see Groenhuijsen 2014: 32), characterised by the presence of egregious human rights violations indiscriminately affecting many human beings regionwide and shaping a form of regional identity.

However, if it is possible to claim the existence of an international norm to hold those who commit such violations – known as perpetrators – accountable for their crimes and

to attach their responsibility to mass victimisation processes, such a norm did not keep pace with an international norm for the victims' protection[3]. An ordinary global notion of victim has its roots in the post second World War context of atrocious and heinous crimes. Nonetheless, while an accompanied tribunalisation of international politics in the moment, when a number of Nazi and Japanese leaders were condemned for their acts by their respective military tribunals and an incipient international individual accountability norm emerged, an international normative framework of victims' rights apart of such a retributive/punitive international criminal justice has not emerged until the cascading effects of transitional justice processes and dynamics both in some European and in Latin American countries (Sikkink 2011).

In this sense, the extraordinariness of some international crimes[4] – genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes – and the search for their authorship have made perpetrators individually visible, but it did not give rise to a well-developed notion or norm regarding the countless victims of such crimes and it did not go beyond this understanding to direct and/or indirect victims of a diffused global health threat such as COVID-19. Even though a '[…] transnational experience of ambiguous loss' (Han, Millar and Bayly 2021) has been recognized in the context of COVID-19 deaths, of collective and individual loss, and of limited mourning rites – faced with scores of dead bodies, both identified and non-identified –, the mere possibility of addressing its social-political-spatial situatedness reinforces a less globally homogenous distribution of death and dying, and, consequently, challenges another apparently global category: that of victim.

Emulating the scenes of ongoing conflicts in terms of death, where singularising victims is not viable given the scale of harm and trauma, COVID-19 mass deaths are intertwined with violent ways mass victims have been dealing with mourning, grief, and sorrow. For instance, the precariousness of mourning rites due to the COVID-19 crisis echoes fractured death practices and experiences that researchers of transitional justice in Latin America, with particular emphasis on Brazil, tend to point out while specifically addressing a regional political history of forced disappearances[5]:

> Death without a body and without rites of passage is fertile ground for emotional complications and impediment to the experience of mourning. [...] [W]e assume that a way of repairing this impediment caused by withholding information and concealing the dead body, the public reparation, would allow the families to perform the representation and, therefore, it would facilitate the processing of mourning […]. (Silva and Féres-Carneiro 2012).

Boti and Osmo (2021), in a recent contribution in dealing with the potential emergence of a human right to mourn coming from the IACHR during the COVID-19 crisis, have also identified new precedents that would allow us to recognise the Commission as a regional institution that is at least informally oriented towards a human right to mourn. Methodologically, they turned to the jurisprudence of the Commission, the quasi-judicial body of the OAS, with the purpose of collecting cases in which mourning disrespect is not

only exposed but also demands reparation as a way of delivering a policy of recognition to families and communities of victims as well. A historical pattern of family and community victimhood is underlined also in the face of different landscapes of Latin-American deaths, pointing to the fact that the IACHR has been attentive to cultural specificities in the terrain of mourning and grief, and their respective rites. Cassel (2006), in dealing with the IACHR institutionality, also identified a historical background of reparation following questions of burial and body remains, paying special attention to the risk of amplifying a political history – and, consequently, an identity – of unidentified deaths within the region:

> The Court appreciates that locating the remains of victims and ensuring their proper burial are important to the dignity of the dead and to the mental well-being of loved ones. Since 1996 it has ordered States in 12 cases of deaths and disappearances to take such measures as making serious efforts to locate remains, turning them over to families for burial, and transferring and burying them at State expense. In 2002 it went so far as to order Guatemala, the scene of hundreds of massacres, to institute a national exhumations program (Cassel 2006: 92).

Even though the global experience with COVID-19 deaths has been framed as a crisis since it is faced with so many dead bodies' records, many of those bodies are unclaimed and unidentified, and, as the Forensic Unit of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC 2020) reinforces, '[…] documenting their location and identifying features for future use' is fundamental, as well as dealing with very practical questions as *What will be the short and long-term approaches to managing unclaimed and unidentified bodies?*:

> […] Disappearing a body is not an easy thing, something remains in this dead body, the family member remains, the one who mourns for their loss and who, by insistent complaint for the missing and neglected bodies, makes explicit the crime committed there, making it eternal (Silva and Féres-Carneiro 2012).

In this sense, families (and their open-ended stories) behave as a shared cornerstone if we insist on comparing the current COVID-19 mass death landscape and that of deaths derived from mass human rights violations in the dictatorship periods in Latin America. As Han, Millar, and Bayly (2021: 12) suggest in terms of near-future potential demands for transitional justice:

> […] It is reasonable to expect that the politics of COVID-deaths will soon follow a similar trajectory, involving countermobilization by families and loved ones of decedents who contest broader state narratives of inevitable deaths and dramatic recoveries. In June 2020 for instance, Noi Denunceremo (We Will Denounce You), a group of COVID-19 victims' relatives, filed fifty legal complaints against

various Italian political officials to seek justice, answers, and accountability for their loved ones' deaths. Given the transnational nature of the pandemic, it is plausible to expect this mobilization to cross state boundaries and even take on an explicitly global character.

It is quite interesting to observe that after OAS' very first normative movement of addressing death in the pandemic – in Resolution 04/2020 (OAS 2020b), dating back to 27 July 2020 –, the Office of the High Commissioner in Human Rights (OHCHR) also responded to it in September 2020 with Eight Key Guidelines on Enforced Disappearances in the context of COVID-19, which was co-issued by the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. On this matter, the fourth guideline strictly mentions aspects related to the management of bodies of the deceased: 'Bodies of the deceased should be dealt with in a manner permitting identification by relatives and remains should be treated in line with their tradition, religion and culture' (OHCHR 2020). This guideline correlates the precarious treatment of the bodies of deceased persons and the risk of disappearances in a context in which families are not prompted to identify them. The soft law instrument also mentions that relatives shall have the chance to identify the remains,

> […] despite the various challenges that may be raised by the COVID-19 context (such as, for example, the lack of access to bodies for health reasons; the lack of capacity of the competent authorities to reply to requests for the return of remains; the unavailability of forensic experts as a consequence of the COVID-19 confinement measures, etc.) (OHCHR 2020).

The pioneering role of OAS in adopting Resolution 04/2020 and establishing terms of a very complete Practical Guide – mirrored in global instruments as the one we have mentioned above – seems to have a strong historical tie with practices of forced disappearances in the region. According to Boti and Osmo (2021), since the first IACHR's positions concerning forced disappearance under the context of Latin American dictatorships, the organisation underlined aspects related to trauma derived from the absence of family contact with the victim:

> [...] forced disappearance is a multiple violation of fundamental rights (to information, psychic and moral integrity, and justice); rights that are simultaneously individual and collective, belonging to victims and to society, and in relation to which extensive state responsibilities are defined (Azevedo 2018).

The IACHR also pointed out specific conditions of vulnerability under the umbrella of forced disappearance, which is a core repercussion of dictatorships' legacy in the region and is contemporarily '[…] considered as a practice from the repertoire of the language of urban violence' (Araujo cited in Azevedo 2018). Besides, some other vulnerabilities were

reinforced under the context of pandemics, such as those of migrants and their high risk of being victims of forced disappearance:

> States remain strictly prohibited from expelling, returning or extra-diting a person to another state where there are substantial grounds for believing that he or she would be in danger of being subjected to enforced disappearance (article 16 of the Convention and article 8 of the Declaration). The search and investigation into disappearances of migrants should continue without delay, with appropriate health precautions taken as required. […] States should also continue to co-operate with each other to assist victims of enforced disappearance to search for, locate and release disappeared persons, and to return remains in case of death (article 15 of the Convention and article 2 of the Declaration [both on forced disappearances]) (OHCHR 2020c).

Forced disappearances certainly inform a fundamental part of our specific regional deathscape and, 'This means no longer observing political disappearance as a condition found in a given historic reality and considering it instead as a category that is produced in and a producer of a *social field*' (Bourdieu cited in Azevedo 2018: 5, author's emphasis).

In choosing genealogy as our foreground method, and as far as it '[…] ably inflects the practice of critique as an inquiry into conditions of possibility with a historicist rather than a transcendentalist sensibility' (Koopman 2013: 19), previous institutional experiences and a well-established normativity in dealing with enforced disappearances proved to be genealogically significant in terms of the re-emergence of a death grammar contemporaneously. Such familiarity with certain geographies of death in the history of a region struggling for democracy has catalysed OAS responses to COVID-19 and enabled an initial politicisation of death from its institutionality onward.

Another interest in the use of genealogical analysis in the present article has also to do with a new normative momentum of an international victims' right framework, much less dependent on a global international norm of perpetrators' accountability, especially in a context of extremely diffuse and disputed responsibilities for the COVID-19 deaths. In other words, it is possible to point, for instance, to a right to mourn being internationally (re)constructed as an international human right and to the OAS as a regional institutionality capable of recognizing its geographically situated victims.

As a history of the present of the Americas, it is possible to signal for a political pattern of traumatic ambiguity that is reimagined and reinscribed through the COVID-19 crisis and that allows us to identify an American regional governance that innovates in its regulation of death in a context where death and dying have been strongly intertwined and are catalysts in a productive encounter between political and social meanings of death in the regional deathscape.

In our next and last section, it will be possible to reveal if such a normative (re)emergence of death can be read with sufficient enthusiasm and eventually frame a new regional governance of death with cascading potential to regional actors and those beyond this

regional aspect. Making use of a multi-level understanding of governance to characterise OAS more practical responses to COVID-19, this third section will reveal a low concrete impact of what can be assumed as an innovative grammar of death built up by the regional organisation in terms of the behaviour of regional strategic state actors.

Multi-level governance and COVID-19: beyond a prototypic regional governance of death in the Americas?

The concept of multi-level governance was first introduced by Marks (1992) in a paper entitled *Structural policy in the European Community;* it was conceived as a way to understand the political-institutional transformations of the European integration process. Nowadays, the concept is increasingly used as an analytical tool for the study of international politics. According to Rennstich (2017), the multi-level governance studies become a '[...] serious research framework contender for IR scholarship issues in areas such as global governance, security studies, or international political economy [...]'.

Such a conceptual framework allows us to understand the '[...] distribution of power, roles, risks, rewards and responsibilities among the actors involved' (Knopp 2011), encompassing both vertical and horizontal dimensions, which would be the consequence of increased interdependence between governments at different territorial levels and between governmental and non-governmental actors as well. These pluralised spaces of negotiation revealed a 'dynamic balance between autonomy, insertion and regulation of multiple actors' (Knopp 2011).

A multi-level governance system is influenced by and influences the concrete relationships established between actors, which are distributed at different levels of governance and with various forms of establishing cooperation. It is not surprising that the theoretical-conceptual framework of multi-level governance is also applied to understand responses to domestic and international crises, as the cooperation among actors directly affects policy outcomes. For this reason, multi-level governance seems to be a useful framework in order to complement this current analysis in terms of OAS responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Besides, as Herz (2011) suggests through her analysis of both OAS' history and its role in global governance,

> The complex geography of governance in our times leaves room for regional institutions. In this context, regional multilateralism and international organizations in particular, have a significant role to play as interaction is to a certain degree regionally based, in particular regarding economic flows and the security sphere.

Nonetheless, not all regions and regional governance structures are equally equipped to fight COVID-19 and their deathscapes. Regional disparities in terms of access to healthcare and other social structures are notorious, as is the case of Global South countries and the periphery of their states and municipalities. According to the WHO (cited in OCDE

2020), the coordination between national and subnational governments is the '[...] first step towards an effective response'.

The case of Brazil illustrates the importance of dialogue between different levels of governance and the risks of uncoordinated actions. As the report *The tragedy of Brazilian coronavirus/Covid-19: An analysis of the federal government's misgovernment, 2020-2021* reveals, the Supreme Federal Court decision was crucial in preventing the Federal Government from creating obstacles to state policymaking for the containment of the pandemic, and it did so by assuring the normative and administrative competence of states and municipalities.

As a region particularly affected by the pandemic, the Americas – especially Latin America – can be characterised by the decentralisation of financing and health-related decision-making, which has propelled challenges to deliver an integrated and coordinated health response (Garcia et al. 2020). Although Latin American countries have many economic, political, social, and cultural ties, COVID-19 has been representing a significant risk to regional stability, as Garcia et al. (2020) diagnose:

> Latin America is the most inequitable region in the world, as measured by the Gini Index. On average, 53% of LA's working population is engaged in informal work with precarious income and social protection. In some countries like Peru, the level of informality can be as high as 70%. In the region, around 185 million people's incomes are below the poverty threshold, of whom 66 million live in extreme poverty.

In theory, these unique characteristics of Latin America should result in stricter policies to contain the virus and support the most vulnerable states, municipalities, and specific groups. Besides, as we pointed out in the previous sections of this article, experiences with mass deaths in the Americas, especially in Latin America, are not a novelty introduced by COVID-19.

Unlike Europe that had to deal with a completely new landscape of mass death, death is assumed to be part of an everyday tragedy in the Americas. The death escalation in the region can also be associated with a past of violence, and it evokes a constant attempt to recover and re-establish justice in the region. Thus, deathscape in the Americas has been historically, socially and politically constructed and perpetuated by systematic and structural violence. This difference in pattern reinforces that death and its perceptions are not uniform in all parts of the globe, but it acquires its own geospatialised meanings.

Therefore, the COVID-19 context reinforces the idea of a geospatialised traumatic ambiguity. Based on the various annual reports we will deal with in this section of the article, and on the absence of effective policies that prevent violent processes in the Americas from escalating the vulnerability and death of certain groups, it is possible to reveal not only a landscape of consummated death, but also of an imminent, announced death. Aiming at understanding the landscape of death in the Americas, it is not only necessary

to recognize a backward-looking death but also to recognize a forward-looking death and how they intersect.

As an everyday, almost normalised tragedy, the normative repertoire towards death in the region appears circumscribed by violence and vulnerability frameworks. In this regard, comparing the IACHR Annual Reports from 2015 to 2020, and particularly highlighting United States, Brazil, and Mexico's experiences, it is possible to observe that:

- In the US in 2018, there was a report on the impact of weak gun control laws on extremely high levels of gun violence (OAS 2018: p. 45). In the latest reports (OAS 2018; 2019; 2020a), the IACH expressed pressing concerns about racial bias in the police violence against afro-descendants (OAS 2018: 50; 2020a: 186) and the death penalty in the country (OAS 2018: 48; 2019: 62). In addition, other vulnerable groups seem to be associated with death reality, such as migrants (OAS 2019: 67) and people deprived of liberty (OAS 2019: 63).

- In Mexico in 2015, there were reports on harassment, murders, disappearances and on lack of access to justice (OAS 2015: p. 15). The report also pointed out the lack of a gender perspective in cases of deaths and forced disappearances of women, and the lack of publicly available information on women victims (OAS 2015: 93). Gender violence is also shown regarding women in politics (OAS 2018: 69). In the reports of 2015 (OAS 2015:123), 2018 (OAS 2018: 68), and 2020 (OAS 2020a:143), homicides, disappearances, and attacks against the LGBTI communities were reported with serious concern. In addition, other vulnerable groups appear in association with deadly violence, such as children and adolescents (OAS 2018: 125; 2019: 98), and human rights defenders (OAS 2017: 50; 2020: 138, 142). Due to the COVID-19 crisis, a new vulnerable group category, the medical personnel, is also suffering attacks based on prejudice. The reports also pointed out unidentified remains unearthed in cemeteries throughout the country, which are the result of violent deaths (OAS 2017: 28), and, on the other hand, the high numbers of disappeared persons and murders without proper investigation (OAS 2018: 69; 2019: 93).

- In Brazil, there are high rates of violent death due to the security crisis in urban areas which increased the excessive use of force by the police, with a corresponding increase in lethality rates (OAS 2018: 19; 2019: 20). In addition, it was possible to observe an

> [...] increase in speech that incites violence on discriminatory grounds in public spaces and in social networks, especially with respect to women, LGBTI persons, persons of African descent from urban sectors, and social movements that struggle for land, housing, and the environment (OAS 2019: 19).

The widespread gender-based violence and murder (OAS 2019: 23), violence and threats against human rights defenders (OAS 2018: 22), institutional racism (OAS 2019: 21), violence against the LGBTI community (OAS 2020a: 45), and violence against people deprived of liberty (OAS 2018: 22) are some of the major concerns of the IACHR in the country.

The diagnosis produced by the IACHR demonstrates that, in these countries, death landscapes are strongly related to historical violence, which has been contemporarily framed by governances of vulnerability. Such governances are also reinforced by the Thematic Reports produced by the Commission, for instance: *Basic Guidelines for Investigating Crimes against Human Rights Defenders in the Northern Triangle* (2021); *Trans and Gender-Diverse People and Their Economic, Social, Cultural, and Environmental Rights* (2020); *Violence and Discrimination against Women and Girls* (2019); *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Pan-Amazon Region* (2019); *Recognition of the Rights of LGBTI Persons* (2019); *Police Violence against Afro-descendants in the United States* (2018), only to mention a few examples.

This diagnosis refutes the idea of a universal vulnerable subject (universally victimized) and reinforces the idea that vulnerabilities are geographically located and, consequently, that the geographies of death are unequal in several aspects. Concepts such as life, death, mourning, trauma, and victim must be anchored in grounded experiences in order to reveal their multiple meanings, mainly because distinct individuals, groups and communities can attribute different content to these ideas.

In light of the COVID-19 crisis, there seems to exist a governance of vulnerability that does not keep pace with the faster emergence of vulnerable groups and the demands for policy formulation in this regard, considering there is a prototypical governance of death together with an emerging process of its politicisation through the OAS. However, the reach of these normative orientations towards policy formulation in the Americas is at low rates.

The paralysis in the mechanisms of regional governance in the Americas, and especially in Latin America, can be related to the '[...] domestic polarisation and economic travails, to ideological divergence, personal rivalries among the region's leaders and U.S.-Chinese geopolitical competition, and all are hampering regional governance and negatively impacting the prospects of cooperation' (Merke et al. 2021) in an already fractured regional order whose incoherence was further deepened by the coronavirus pandemic and by the dissonant responses adopted by key states in the region.

The context of the coronavirus pandemic, which could be an opportunity for the states of the region to rework their understanding of democratic and human rights values, with new responses towards violence, vulnerability, and, finally, deathscapes in the Americas, has actually reinforced the lack of commitment of governments at the national level and the political weaknesses of the OAS:

> The OAS, the oldest and most influential regional body, is going through what is arguably its worst institutional crisis since its creation in 1948. Divisiveness over thorny issues, in particular how to handle the Venezuelan and Honduran democratic crises, has led to bickering and paralysis. Particularly harmful were the attacks led by Venezuela and likeminded states of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America against some OAS divisions such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, one of the

organization's most prestigious and important specialized bodies. These attacks sought to undermine the OAS as a whole and deflect attention from the accusers' problematic democratic and human rights records (Merke et al. 2021).

Concluding remarks

The crisis that the main regional institutions had been clearly facing was added to the coronavirus crisis and to its consequent regional pressures for new ways of relating to death. In the presence of dead bodies or of bodies demanding justification for their absence, amidst the precariousness surrounding mourning rites and forced violent adaptations in them, and assuming family and national grief processes throughout the COVID-19 crisis, OAS politics has normatively dealt with death but has not converted it into a newly established regional governance of death followed by policy formulation with enough impact in the region and worldwide.

Death seems to finally begin to be internationally politicised; that and Americas' (re) emergent deathscapes – demonstrated in this article through the regional history of transitional justice and its approach to forced disappearances as an atrocious crime – are key to the OAS process mentioned above. The Americas region consists of a clear-cut landscape of death, institutionally framed by OAS in terms of vulnerability and violence, with easily observable and measurable data exposed, but not often translated in terms of a frontal-view face of death that does not occlude ordinary death.

Genealogy as a method guided us into unfolding this death-making process that accompanied the region for decades, letting us notice that mass death is not a new phenomenon to the Americas region, which is historically and politically marked by an ambiguous nature of death and its consequent traumatic polyvalence in the face of various human rights abuses. The continuity of cycles of violent death throughout the pandemic seems to be possibly attached to near-future potential demands for transitional justice in the region, reactivating OAS undeniable repertoire of human rights.

Even though the announced prohibitive regional governance model, centring death within OAS policymaking, has not yet proved to be concrete, a well-established normativity in dealing with enforced disappearances has proven genealogically significant in terms of the re-emergence of a death grammar contemporarily. This new normativity also comes in a way that our attention can no longer be diverted from how uneven and unequal geographies of death can be globally and regionally produced. There is still intellectual and activist room for triangulating Death Studies, Global Governance, and a requested spatial turn in IR since death has been taking an extra political breath.

Notes

1   As the following excerpt demonstrates, this Unit was established as part of the OAS strategy to provide protection for vulnerable groups and populations under the context of COVID-19:

> The SACROI COVID-19 [Spanish acronym for Coordination Unit for the Rapid and Integrated Response to the COVID-19 pandemic] is directed by the IACHR's Board of Directors and coordinated by the IACHR's Executive Secretariat, with the participation of the Special Rapporteurships for Freedom of Expression and for Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights. The creation of the SACROI COVID-19 was part of a strategy already initiated by the Commission to monitor and closely follow up on the effects on the human rights of populations and groups in situations of vulnerability in the context of the coronavirus pandemic crisis (OAS, 2021, online).

2   According to the COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update, published on 6 July 2022, the Americas continue to be the region with the highest number of deaths – 2,762,527 cases –, representing 44% of global deaths. The Americas are also the second region to register the highest number of cases, with 163,205,242 (30%), behind only of Europe, with 228,917,538 (42%). Despite that, Europe has a considerably less mortal deathscape, with 2,027,968, 32% of global deaths.

3   Drumbl indicates the rise of Criminal Law for dealing with and regulating practices associated with extreme evil (2007: 3). It seems important to address that extreme evil, mainly through international criminal answers, tends to exhibit a human face, quite often (and easily) demonised. In addition to this, in our view, Criminal Law devotes limited attention to the victim and promotes little dialogue into understanding the emergency of an international norm for victim protection.

4   The differences between so-called extraordinary and ordinary crimes may be useful for our argument. Lobwein (2006: 200, our emphasis) helps us to understand this by introducing the topic:

> *The first difference* is the huge amount of fear that witnesses feel. For many victims of war crimes, the perpetrators of violence were many people, not a single person or a small group. The fear of reprisal from those individuals, their friends, family and protectors, means that witnesses feel threat all around them, in any part of the country. The fear is so great that it is very difficult for victim witnesses to believe that any protection measure will be sufficient to maintain their safety. *The second difference* is the scale of the destruction. The death of large numbers of people, particularly when the victims come from the same community, has staggering consequences for that community and indeed for the whole society. In the case of a domestic murder, the impact is felt on the immediate and extended family and in the living environment of the victim.

5   Following Feres-Carneiro and Silva (2012), the '[…] concept of disappeared person was developed as an artifice for the military government to say it did not do what it actually did, that is, for not assuming the blame for the murders it committed. Persons who disappeared for political reasons were by-products of the Military Dictatorship, those which were left of it, as explained by Agamben, those which remained as a gap, a hiatus, a rift in society and in the collective memory'. Azevedo (2018) also reinforces aspects of indigency correlated to disappeared persons:

> As the state now recognizes, during that period, a policy of disappearance was conducted, sometimes involving joint action between municipal funeral services, coroners' offices and the repressive forces. The disappearances involved combining illegal acts with the routines conducted by these institutions when handling cadavers considered to be those of "the indigent", those considered unidentified, or those buried by the state when no one claims the body.

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A emergência normativa da morte nas respostas da Organização dos Estados Americanos à COVID-19: rumo a uma governança regional da morte

Resumo: A pandemia do COVID-19 vem (re)criando novas geografias globais da morte, que impactam especificamente o Sul Global e expõem seu *continuum* de vulnerabilidades – distribuídas desigualmente em termos de raça, gênero, classe e assim por diante. Nas Américas, podemos identificar o surgimento de uma nova governança regional da morte, associada a um conjunto de recomendações práticas da Organização dos Estados Americanos (OEA) restringindo as respostas políticas dos Estados à COVID-19 e instalando um novo léxico de governança global. As recomendações sobre o descarte de cadáveres, o pleno respeito ao luto coletivo e familiar e as indicações de formas alternativas de realizar funerais e velórios, por exemplo, parecem evocar novas respostas multilaterais, abrindo caminho para um novo modelo de governança: aquele que centra a morte na formulação de políticas regionais. Isso aponta para uma mudança no tratamento da morte de uma questão puramente privada para uma questão politicamente infundida. Teoricamente, este artigo visa preencher a lacuna entre os Estudos da Morte e as literaturas de Governança Global. Apoiado no método genealógico de Michel Foucault, o objetivo é reconceituar criticamente os significados e enquadramentos das paisagens da morte nas Américas, apontando para a correlação de forças que possibilitaram a emergência normativa da morte na OEA neste momento histórico particular.

Palavras-chave: OEA; governança regional; respostas políticas; paisagens de morte; crise de COVID-19.