

Abject Lives? Rethinking Sovereign Power in More-than-Human Worlds

International Interdisciplinary Workshop

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Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg

hosted by [Prof. Dr. Jonathan Everts](#) & [Larissa Fleischmann](#), Research Group in Human Geography

With public [Keynotes](#) by Jennifer Atchison (University of Wollongong) and Steve Hinchliffe (University of Exeter). Interested participants are very welcome to join!

For more information please visit our website: https://anthropogeo.geo.uni-halle.de/forschung/workshop_abject_lives/

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Kurzbeschreibung

This workshop contributes to the emerging field of a *more-than-human political geography*. It looks at forms of life that are rendered *abject* (Kristeva 1982). With this term, we refer to living beings that rarely become subject to moral considerations or human sympathy. *Abject lives* (Fleischmann & Everts, forthcoming) regularly provoke repulsion, disgust, or simply indifference. These lives often also escape academic inquiry since they are rendered too insignificant to be taken into account. As Moran (2015) outlines, such beings receive considerably less attention from human geographers – who often focus on large mammals and species stimulating more sympathetic feelings. We propose that abject organisms are particularly worthwhile of investigation: they constitute sites where sovereign power finds its uttermost expression. This becomes visible in an extreme form when abject lives are rendered amenable to elimination and culling – as is the case, for instance, with industrial pigs or species classified as vermin. Drawing on Agamben's (1998) notion of a *biopolitical threshold*, we suggest that these abject lives are confined in a zone of indistinction between life that is worth living and life that can be killed at any time.

In order to start conversations along these lines, our workshop in Halle (Saale) gathers empirical and conceptual contributions investigating moments when more-than-human lives become entangled in webs of control and power. This includes but is not limited to instances when life is rendered abject, made amenable to elimination and killing, confined in a threshold of life and death. Furthermore, workshop participants explore how more-than-

human beings resist attempts to be governed, remain unruly or become subject to human pity and affection. Our discussion revolves around the following questions:

- Governing: When and how do living beings become the objects of governance and control? How do these more-than-human power relations materialize in space?
- Abjection: How can a consideration of the spatial and political implications of *abject lives* contribute to ongoing discussions in the field of more-than-human geographies?
- Eliminating: How are living beings rendered amenable to elimination and culling? What can a consideration of elimination beyond the human contribute to ongoing discussions in the field of political geography?
- Contesting: When and how do more-than-human lives exceed their attempts to be governed and make themselves visible as unruly beings?