

THE WOUND AND THE KNIFE: FIVE THESES ON CRISIS, *DEMOS*, AND COUNTER TERROR

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The most original feature of this terror formation is its concatenation of biopower, the state of exception and the state of siege. Crucial to this concatenation is, once again, race.

—Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*

I am both the wound and knife, both the blow and the cheek, limbs and the rack, victim and the torturer. / I am my heart's own vampire ...
—Charles Baudelaire, “L'Héautontimorouménos”

This short paper will examine preliminary materials for five theses situated in three conceptual categories : crisis, *demos*, terror/counter terror—categories visited with Professor Burawoy and Laleh Behbehani throughout their seminar course, *Global Sociology*. While the structure of the paper builds from a somewhat unconventional scaffolding, it is bound by one larger claim: insofar that the “Janus faced”¹ characterization of civil society is useful to differentiate civil society’s potential challenge (against the state and/or the economy) from its active collusion (with the state and/or the economy), the reverse is also true: the “Janus faced” characterization is reciprocally weak in its ability to conceptualize the potential challenge civil society *qua* civil society mounts as an already active collusion. That is to say, the terrain of potentially dynamic social, cultural, and political conflict provided by civil society is fundamental for the state and economy’s smooth reproduction—such potential conflict is ceremonial.² Not a “blurring at its edges” with the modern state and economy, but instead a relationship of co-animating interdependence.³

As Burawoy and Behbehani acknowledge in “Global Sociology: Reflections on an Experimental Course”: “In our search for a global civil society that might launch an effective counter-movement against the collusion of global capital and nation states, we found only fragments and failed attempts.” Perhaps then, we do not situate ourselves in—that is to say, we do not invest our optimism into or attempt to build as sociologists⁴—a fugitive global civil society; but instead look towards those spaces that appear to reproduce and proliferate as quickly as neoliberal capital: fragmented spaces of bare life—precisely those bits of space and territory “comprised of individuals without formal organizational presence”⁵ as our trench and vantage point. This paper essentially attempts to spatialize and expand this claim through the above mentioned conceptual categories. The challenges to this claim are immediate: looking at “bare life” for instance from the point of view of civil society as we have in our seminar, it appears “inchoate, disorderly, arbitrary”⁶— indeed, these are words we have used to define “bare life” itself. And so—taking a cue from sociologist Saskia Sassen’s short article “The World’s Third Spaces”—this paper attempts to draw out a view from a space that is *neither global nor national*, but partial, fragmented, bare.

1.1 Crisis: Surplus Populations: Dispossession and War

Our first, most basic thesis is one in which we've referenced time and again throughout the course, restated here: (1.1) that capital rallies (the production and regulation of) surplus populations—that is to say, the result of (in Harvey's words) "accumulation by dispossession" or (in Marx's words) "primitive accumulation"—in short, the main event of a globalizing/expanding capitalism or, in general, "the economy".

For instance we might begin by remembering that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994⁷ was a collaboration between actors within the economy and the territorialized violence of the nation state (in NAFTA's case the United States, Canada and Mexico). Perhaps in variance to Marx, we haven't developed a position where the state is purely superstructural—conceivably this is the case in its initial emergence (and it is always scarred deeply by this initial emergence). But instead it's a tricky position we have inhabited throughout the semester: we do not say that the state is an empty vessel within which either capital or civil society imposes itself—this position would appear to turn a blind eye to the question of the historical failure of national campaigns (anticolonial, socialist, or otherwise) and the reality of transnational capital—but we say instead that the state has its own logic, its own desire for reproduction and relevance in governance.

How then to understand NAFTA? On the one hand, for the economy, it is the smoothing of the space in which capital flows: the aligning of legitimated violence across territories to ensure the right of finance capital and commodities to move with ease; an alignment of violence to ensure the right to purchase that most useful commodity; a form of life as the object of labor power and to turn that object of labor power into further capital and further objects. Marx liked to say this was a *congealing* of life into dead capital and dead objects. Dead objects that flow from one territory to another. And while the *de jure* right of forms of life to do the same—that is to say, to *follow* those objects (and to follow not as labor power, but precisely as *forms of life*)—are denied. So on the other hand, in fact, the nation state mounts a "War on the Border" against these dispossessed populations. This war, like any war, is both a war of position and a war of maneuver. It uses many tactics: the state's prison system⁸ bolstered by new Federal Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities; federal ICE forces posted along the US-Mexican borderlands; Norteño-Sureño regulation throughout California; the camp biopolitics of body regulation through documentation/non-documentation; docile service labor in the cities and docile farm labor in the countryside; the reemergence of Bracero-era narratives about misogynistic, irreparably violent, disease-carrying hordes; the regulation of remittances; the banning and defunding of Spanish language courses and Ethnic Studies in schools and universities; the emergence of white militias (the "Minute Men") whose sporadic, fragmented, extra-state racialized violences serve to make the state's apparatus of racialized violence appear legalistic and procedural—that is to say, neutral; *ad nauseam*. And so *while capital produces surplus populations, it is—in the main—the state's war that produces racialized surplus populations*. This of course is not to imply that civil society could somehow end racialization through encounters with the state and legal challenges—civil society and the state in fact participate in governance together, a claim which will be explored in the next section. It is instead to say that capital's production of surplus populations is *immediately* racialized with the regulation of race war being the primary mechanism of the state's "War on the Border."

2.1 Demos: The Space of Governance and Difference

Democracy designates both the form through which power is legitimated and the manner in which it is exercised.

—Giorgio Agamben, *Democracy in What State?*

That a population is first *dispossessed* and then *barred* from a means of flourishing is the real “double movement” of capital and governance—this is a condition we have lamented throughout our course. The metaphor we might allow ourselves is one of distance—that is to say, a spatialized governance. Our second thesis claims simply (2.1) that the gap of dispossession between forms of life and objects is filled; the process/apparatus of maintaining and managing the exclusions of these populations from control over means to survive/flourish is called “politics” or “governance”—a terrain which has in modern history been dominated by a collaborative assemblage of the “nation state” and “civil society.” Further, this assemblage is situated *within the distance* between the surplus population and its means of flourishing; governance is an assemblage that functions as a moving barricade, a blockage, “politics”—and, in our case, democracy.

2.2 Demos: Concealment and Civil Society

Hence the turn to a universalistic rhetoric of human rights, dignity, sustainable ecological practices, environmental rights, and the like, as the basis for a unified oppositional politics.

—David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*

The distance between a surplus population and its means of flourishing differ in scale population by population—a distance which is then made into a redistributive economy of identities, the apparatus of difference-making, the broad and coarse fragmentation of race, and the fine fragmentation of individuation—identities and subjectivities through which civil society mobilizes (the citizen, the consumer, the person of color, the woman, etc.) and which the state imbues rights (that the individuated subject is a rights bearing individual, and in rarer moments—typically in reparation for a defined event of harm—a member of a class which bears rights). Our third thesis claims (2.2) that these disparities of distance are produced as externalities (to capital’s initial and main event of dispossession) that are then cycled through subjects. It’s at this moment that the apparatus of governance becomes more than a barricade, it penetrates the *demos*, it vitalizes and constitutes the population: while capital produces dispossession—that is to say, the initial distance—governance produces various disparities of dispossession (through a “micro-physics” of power, discipline, and control). What democratic governance *produces and subsequently conceals* is precisely these disparities of distance. To manage this, a rights discourse/democracy (a discipline/control deployed by the state certainly but also by civil society within its social movements⁹) appear to level differences between individuals—the difference for instance between racialized subjects. Which is to say that while we may all be dispossessed of the means of *production* vis-a-vis capital, some are re-enfranchised as consumptive subjects vis-a-vis governance. Just as extra-state militias make the state appear reasonable and neutral, race disparities are deployed precisely in order for the state and civil society to remedy.

And this compulsion to conceal partially succeeds: it is no longer, say, France 1848, where the symbol of nascent bourgeois democracy is the swift, painless leveling of the

guillotine— partially because we do not know which class to guillotine. “Dispossession,” Harvey writes, “is fragmented and particular,” (178); rights, on the other hand, are levelers and total. When Harvey says a “unified oppositional politics,” he is looking for a unified oppositional subjectivity—and our lamentation for the fugitive “countermovement” is still for this antagonistic subjectivity. What this allows us to do—perhaps—is to consider that if *difference* is produced as an externality to the “double movement” of capital and the state, and if it is then surely concealed by the state and civil society, then perhaps thinking through the abolition of the state and civil society is just as tenable and meaningful as is thinking through the abolition of capital—especially in those spaces where the productive factory floor is largely removed.¹⁰

3.1 Terror and Counter Terror: Bare Life and State Deterritorialization

“Terrorism” retains part of the original double meaning of “territory,” in that it refers not only to violence, but to space too.

—Mark Neocleous, "Off the Map: On Violence and Cartography"

If our third thesis argues that governance is a collusion between civil society and the state to produce and conceal difference, our fourth thesis regards a liberatory countermovement’s strategy and tactic—and this is in part a response to Erik Olin Wright’s ambivalence towards the “ruptural” and deference to the “symbiotic”—which is to simply say (3.1) that the tactics and strategies of “countermovements” are determined by to what extent the population (believes it) is included in / excluded from the negotiation of governance or “politics.” So, for instance, Sari Hanafi writes:

"The uprooted body (bare life) it [spaciocide] creates is a body 'ready to blow.' The deracinated body is a subject without relationship to territory; it is a body in orbit, a satellite, the body becomes an uncontrollable and unsupervised object bound to exercise its revenge. Satellites are the objects 'in need' of control, but are difficult to control, and the result is 'ground zero(s),' be it the work of individual terrorists (World Trade Center), or state terrorism (Falujah or Jenin Refugee Camp); and ... we know Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine are interconnected in American and the Muslim cognitive geography."¹¹

Of particular interest is Hanafi’s parenthetical mention of two sites: the Jenin Refugee Camp and Falujah. First, Jenin Refugee Camp is under the administration of the Palestine Authority—not a sovereign state but an administrative entity similar to a county government. Its borders, airspace, and, importantly, *trade* are controlled in fact by the Israeli state. Second, when referencing Falujah, Hanafi cites the 2005 Falujah Massacre during which the US and UK indiscriminately deployed white phosphorous bombs into civilian areas. So what interests us here is that while Hanafi makes the claim that the deterritorialized body is a “body in orbit,” a body “ready to blow,” here he also—without being explicit—makes the claim that a *deterritorialized state is a state in orbit, a state ready to blow*. It’s an argument worth bearing out: Hanafi is clear in that the Israeli state manages its population through biopolitics¹² (that of admitting into “political life” one fragment of the population and reducing other fragments of the population to various states of “bare life”¹³—that is to say, through this act of politics the state *produces terror in those reduced to bare life*:

“Bio-politics renders possible the spaciocide and spaciocide creates deterritorialized

bodies, for example, Palestinians without a place in this territory or refugees literally without land. Spaciocide leaves a body without space. This body, then, regains its subjectivity by blowing him or herself up together with an enemy who is also biologically and ethnically classified.”¹⁴

And again, certainly this is true: where exclusion from politics is total, the biological body is the only means by which one can struggle—“bare life”—perhaps, then, “suicide bombing” in Israel, or self immolation in Tunisia, or collective suicide by U’wa in Colombia or Apple/Foxconn factory workers in China. But here Hanafi also implies that *a deterritorialized state is a state without space, and must reassume its agency through self-abolition*. This is to say that two figures occur: first the political figure—the proceduralist, legal, ostensibly leveling but actually differentiating act of politics that produces terror in those reduced to bare life; and second the figure of state-terror itself, originating from the deterritorialized state—which itself produces more bare life, and thus more bodies without space. Thus there is a man from Leeds named Shezad Tanweer—who in 2005 weaponizes and detonates himself (killing seven others) on a London Underground train leaving Liverpool Street Station—and in the video communiqué he releases postmortem he directly cites the Falujah Massacre earlier in the year.¹⁵ This is to repose the possibility that Laleh Behbehanian opens for us, she:

"conceptualizes 'terrorism' as a new statist 'regime of truth,' one that produces the 'truth' of 'terror' by naming it as such. The emergence of terror as a new regime of truth involves two simultaneous developments: the carving out of a new field of state intervention referred to as 'counterterrorism' and the constitution of a new disciplinary subject known as the 'terrorist.'"¹⁶

So for Behbehanian the state makes itself relevant to a population (i.e. manages, regulates bodies and the relationships between them) by deploying “counter terrorism”—a “regime of truth” which itself produces the terrorist subject (and thus, eventually, individual subjectivity). The state through “counter terrorism” produces a subject it—and conveniently, only it—can “solve.” Like Hanafi, Behbehanian references Foucault to allow us to do something Harvey (for instance) could not allow us to do: by thinking precisely through the practice of domination and fragmentation as a mechanism of state reconsolidation in the-face-of/in-collaboration-with (either works here, so well that the difference ceases to matter) capitalist globalization, we see a deterritorializing of state power. A global “legitimate violence” without a given territory. This is the way the state makes itself relevant again. If civil society’s response to economic globalization is (was) a barely visible “movement of movements,” an “anti-globalization” movement in the 1990s and early 2000s, then the state’s response is deterritorialization. Thirty years of an attempted “exit” from the US state’s 1970s crisis in governance gives us a hyper “counter terrorism” in 2001.

3.2 Terror and Counter Terror: In Democracy, Guillotines for Everyone

This is modern democracy’s strength and, at the same time, its inner contradiction: modern democracy does not abolish sacred life but rather shatters it and disseminates it into every individual body, making it into what is at stake in political conflict.

—Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

Just as the production of bare life has two figures (one of which is state

deterritorialization), state deterritorialization itself has two figures at work: first and more obviously, deterritorialization implies the state transcends its physical borders “just as” capitalist firms do; but, secondly, the state also escalates its production and management of subjectivities—that is to say, the state transcends past the border of the physical human body, and past, too, the “soul,” and focuses heavily on the relationships, connections, and networking between bodies (and this parallels Foucault’s reading of the history of state discipline in *Discipline and Punish*). We can perhaps see a response to this second figure—the state’s management of connections and networks—in civil society via horizontal, rhizomatic network-based social movement organizing. Our fifth thesis argues (3.2) that the individuated, biological body is the material border of governance/capital’s primitive accumulation (value through identity production, governance through legal subjectivity, biopolitics, etc.)—a border that once transcended, power finds as its object relationships between bodies. Counter-terror is the management and production of these relationships on behalf of a state form that is both attempting to “make itself relevant” to a globalizing capital, but is also an attempt to remain on its own plane of coherence: as Behbehanian makes clear,¹⁷ the “War on Terror” is a tactical extension of the “War on the Border,” the “War on Drugs,” and the “War on Gangs.” And in so far that these prior wars produce and manage race, the “war on terror” is an act of race-production and management—that is to say, race war—in an ostensibly politically post-racial US. Counter terror appears precisely because of the first thesis (1.1); in the past three decades of producing surplus populations, race anxiety is high. Behbehanian charts for instance the National Entry-Exit Registration Scheme program whereby nearly 300,000 US residents were coercively registered, and 13,000 of whom were deported. To a degree, we are tongue tied— not into silence, but over our own words. We stutter and fumble and are dissatisfied when looking for and attempting to describe a “global civil society” precisely because democracy as it turns out is not the raising of human life to the divine—it is not the secularizing force that reminds us the basic point of the Young Hegelian, Ludwig Feuerbach: the sacred is an alienated projection of our own power. Global sociology’s divine, global force—even clutching our lists of “real utopias” and models of democratic and “ethical” capitalism—in this pithy way) is still missing. With democracy, dispossession of the divine and global. Agamben writes:

"And the root of modern democracy’s secret biopolitical calling lies here: he who will appear later as the bearer of rights and, according to a curious oxymoron, as the new sovereign subject (subiectus superaneus, in other words, what is below and, at the same time, most elevated) can only be constituted as such through the repetition of the sovereign exception and the isolation of corpus, bare life, in himself. If it is true that law needs a body in order to be in force, and if one can speak, in this sense, of 'law’s desire to have a body,' democracy responds to this desire by compelling law to assume the care of this body."¹⁸

We do not solve this problem: that the production (and management) of race relations is a coarse fragmentation, the atomizing oblivion of individual bodies. Democracy in fact tells us that the sacred is political life itself, the remaining populations are congealed, dead objects, some of whom are deterritorialized¹⁹ (as capital is, as the state is) and animated in various stages of bare life—a death necessary for governance. In democracy, the political subject is sacred yet earnestly prostrates, submits, and consents to the sovereign power of the state (and this is ostensibly some kind of delegating of sovereignty, a public ceremony of transfer)—the political subject is deeply distant,

fragmented, and removed from wielding sovereign power precisely by being animated by that power. There is a move (that both Sari Hanafi and Michel Foucault highlight) by sovereign power away from the territory (deterritorializing) and to the population, to the body. The social war of the 21st century is democratic in this way—producing and reproducing fragmentary life horizontally—each body a partial wound; each body a partial knife.

4.1 Theses

1.1 That capital rallies (the production and regulation of) surplus populations—that is to say, the result of (in Harvey’s words) “accumulation by dispossession” or (in Marx’s words) “primitive accumulation”—in short, the main event of a globalizing/expanding capitalism or, in general, “the economy.”

2.1 That the gap of dispossession between forms of life and objects is filled; the process/apparatus of maintaining and managing the exclusions of these populations from control over means to survive/flourish is called “politics” or “governance”—a terrain that has in modern history been dominated by a collaborative assemblage of the “nation state” and “civil society”;

2.2 That these disparities of distance are produced as externalities (to capital’s initial and main event of dispossession) that are then cycled through subjects;

3.1 That the tactics and strategies of “countermovements” are determined by to what extent the population (believes it) is included in/excluded from the negotiation of governance or “politics”;

3.2 That the individuated, biological body is the material border of governance/capital’s primitive accumulation (value through identity production, governance through legal subjectivity, biopolitics, etc.)—a border that once transcended, power finds as its object relationships between bodies.

Notes

1. Burawoy, Michael and Laleh Behbehanian, “Global Sociology: Reflections on an Experimental Course.” Accessed September 2, 2011. <http://globalsociologylive.blogspot.com>.^e

2. The cautious optimism we might invest into the liberatory potential of civil society is an optimism invested into democracy itself—which then is a claim about citizenship and the nation state, or for Negri-ists among us (who also claim the nation state is obsolete) it is a claim about the liberatory (regulatory) potential of larger statist formations like the European Union or perhaps the United Nations. This optimism describes a reproductive mechanism like civil society as an innocuous “blurring” with the forces of the state and the economy.^e

3. This is not to claim that social movements self-consciously embedded in civil society have not ever increased a “human flourishing” taken in the very general—indeed, the *flourishing of individual rights vis-a-vis the state and protected by the state* has certainly occurred in the history of the modern nation state. And, indeed, the state has in

the past responded in part to civil society and in part to its own threatened reproduction and growth by mounting incursions and regulations onto the economy. But it is instead to ask if—given the increasing weightlessness of present-day capital—the nature of governance, the nation state and of civil society have not been deeply scarred and altered by this 1970s “unexpected round of marketization.”⁴

4. These are among Burawoy and Behbehanian’s three concluding prescriptions in “Global Sociology: Reflections on an Experimental Course.”⁵

5. Burawoy and Behbehanian, *ibid.*⁶

6. These are the words in which sociologist Saskia Sassen uses to describe what she calls the “new realities” of “proliferation of partial, often highly specialised, global assemblages of bits of territory, authority and rights” seen from the point of view of the nation state. Sassen, Saskia. “The World’s Third Spaces.” Accessed September 3, 2011. http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/globalisation/world_third_spaces.⁷

7. Being children of the US “counter globalization” movement, NAFTA holds a special place in our hearts.⁸

8. By “governance,” as we explore in thesis 2.1, we mean a collaborative assemblage of the state and civil society.⁹

9. This is to say that whatever categorical identity is mobilized by a social movement to achieve state-recognition within a rights-discourse (that is to say, state-recognized *victimhood*) seeks to conceal differences (of distance from “power”) between its membership. Thus, the boundless, never-ending quality of “intersectional politics” within New Left movements that examine “intersecting oppressions”—and so the joke of “Oppression Olympics” or “You and I may be both Asian in the US but I am poor and thus you must ____”. Which is to say that once “difference” is summoned, a “____” is also summoned (the double movement of *producing and concealing*), and that empty space represents democracy, the mechanism of leveling difference, the reparation. In fact this will never be satisfactory to either the wealthier Asian or the poorer Asian because they are dissatisfactory categorical identities to begin with. They have only succeeded in dissecting and divvying power between already vanquished, powerless subjectivities.¹⁰

10. See Jasper Bernes’ “The Double Barricade and the Glass Floor” in *Reclamations Journal*, 1:2. Accessed May 5, 2011.

http://reclamationsjournal.org/issue02_jasper_bernes.html. Bernes writes on the “hidden abode of production”: “The project of the “seizure of the means of production” finds itself blocked or faced with the absurd prospect of collectivizing Wal-Mart or Apple, workplaces so penetrated to their very core by the commodity-form that they solicit nothing less than total destruction or total transformation.” Walter Benjamin also may be of some help here, he creates a latent potential for liberatory violence within his language of sovereignty. Through the breaking of the state’s laws in daily practice against disciplines and control, one at least begins to merely approach imagining the abolition of state/sovereign power—a power that by essence is within the unapproachable scale of “society” or “history.” In “Critique of Violence” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, (New York: Schocken Press, 1986), 299, Benjamin writes: “The critique of violence is the philosophy of its history—the

“philosophy” of this history, because only the idea of its development makes possible a critical, discriminating, and decisive approach to its temporal data. A gaze directed only at what is close at hand can at most perceive a dialectical rising and falling in the lawmaking and law-preserving formations of violence. The law governing their oscillation rests on the circumstance that all law-preserving violence, in its duration, indirectly weakens the lawmaking violence represented by it, through the suppression of hostile counterviolence. This lasts until either new forces or those earlier suppressed triumph over the hitherto lawmaking violence and thus found a new law, destined in its turn to decay. On the breaking of this cycle maintained by mythical forms of law, on the suspension of law with all the forces on which it depends as they depend on it, finally therefore on the abolition of state power, a new historical epoch is founded. If the rule of myth is broken occasionally in the present age, the coming age is not so unimaginably remote that an attack on law is altogether futile.”[☞]

11. Sari Hanafi, “Spaciocide: Colonial Politics, Invisibility and Rezoning in Palestinian Territory.” *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 2:1 (2009): 118-119.[☞]

12. Hanafi, “Spaciocide,” 114: “The sovereign power according to Agamben routinely distinguishes between those who are to be admitted to 'political life' and those who are to be excluded as the mute bearers of 'bare life.' It is a process of categorizing people and bodies in order to manage, control and keep them under surveillance and reducing them to a “bare life,” life which refers to the body’s mere 'vegetative' being, separated from the particular qualities, the social, political and historical attributes that constitute individual subjectivity. This is a new form of power which enables the colonial power to manage bodies according to colonial and humanitarian categories.”[☞]

13. Agamben writes in *Homo Sacer* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press), 73: “This is modern democracy’s strength and, at the same time, its inner contradiction: modern democracy does not abolish sacred life but rather shatters it and disseminates it into every individual body, making it into what is at stake in political conflict.”[☞]

14. Hanafi, “Spaciocide,” 118.[☞]

15. For excerpts from a transcript of the communiqué, see BBC News, “7/7 Pair visited al-Qaeda Camp.” Accessed May 9, 2011.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/5161526.stm [☞]

16. Emphasis original. Laleh Behbehani, “Logics of Pre-Emption: The Tactics of US Counterterrorism,” (draft: 2011), 6.[☞]

17. Behbehani draws tactical links across these wars.[☞]

18. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 73.[☞]

19. Behbehani, “Logics of Pre-emption,” (27): “Haggerty and Ericson argue that contemporary surveillance operates by 'abstracting human bodies from their territorial settings and separating them into a series of discrete flows.’”[☞]

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