

After Iraq: Trends Underlying the Initiation of Generalized, Global War

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It is possible to discern a future that is not simply alternative in terms of number and extension, but rather in terms of temporality—something still-to-come, yet always-already here, part of the historical difference—often repressed—of the past's (other) futures. This direction points to a form of the social not based upon putative homogeneity; a form of relationship that can effectively leave behind the devastating, linear logic of Capital for the diagonal lines of sustainable flight; and a sense of democratic community among "foreigners" rather than "men"—a community adequate to the age of generalized migration, not based on either the nostalgia for ostensibly "lost" bonds or the nihilistic "promise" of redemptive development...

In order to make this alternative-to-the-future-of-today part of who-we-are-now-becoming, effort is needed. Especially as new forms of capture press to equate Humanity as a whole with Stateness, it is now more important than ever to practice forms of sociality and address that are not necessarily defined by the homosocial/homolingual preoccupations of the nation-State and its modern accomplice-culturalism and civilizationism.

It is certainly in response to this unprecedented situation that more and more writers and activists have abandoned the exigencies of policy proposals or the general economy of existing institutional boundaries.¹ The concerns behind such forms of heterosociality and non-Statist forms of address, succinctly summed up by Neilson and Mezzadra as "migration, detention, and desertion,"² are implicitly based on a refusal of what Sakai has dubbed, "homosociality" and "homolingual address."³ This refusal has often been misleadingly portrayed as a form of anarchism. No doubt, there are some

people even today who continue to pursue this quintessentially nineteenth-century mode of thought and action—just as virtually every other tendency of 19th Century political thought, from imperial domination to historical determinism, has received renewed, nostalgic attention in the wake of the twentieth century's political failures. It goes without saying, however, that the forward-looking search for models of relationship—they need not be anthropologized, and indeed, might also include the need to think of what non-relationship is like—the search, then, beyond contract theory and decisionism in itself is neither particularly new, nor necessarily 'anarchistic.' To the extent that both contract theory and Hobbesian anarchism (depicted as the natural state of barbarity, all-against-all) were conceived within the liberal critique of absolutism, they both functioned as necessary fictions: theoretical devices that mark another place and time that, in fact, never actually did "take place."

One of the most influential theoreticians within this milieu, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, is well-known for what is widely considered to be one of the definitive treatises on the nature of modern sovereignty (*Homo Sacer* 1995) and a second, also now classic work, that easily resonates with the idea of alternative futures, *The Coming Community* (1990). The basis of the "coming community" is not a substance or experience of representation (such as "our" history) but a process of becoming based on the notion of "whatever singularities," rather than a process of return based on the notion of quantifiable givenness and identity. Concerning the politics of the future, Agamben has offered the following view: "the coming politics will no longer be a struggle to conquer or to control the state on the part of either new

or old social subjects, but rather a struggle between the state and the nonstate (humanity), that is, an irresolvable disjunction between whatever singularities and the state organization."⁴ From Agamben's perspective, this "irresolvable disjunction" is fundamentally different from the familiar notion of state versus society; an explanation of this fascinating distinction, however, would take us far away from our theme.

The following essay, inspired by the notion of the "coming community" (and liberated from its Europeanist milieu), identifies grave challenges—which are also powerful catalysts—to this ontogeny today.

Part I: Global Trends

1) The institution of a permanent state of emergency and the rise of political regimes around the world that associate security with instrumentalized identity. (The society of securidentity).

As sovereign power moves from an international order of class struggles within nation-states competing for territorial appropriation to a new kind of super "stateness" that lacks both a central republican body and the antagonisms of class or national interests resisting the unilateral logic of the market, we are faced with more and more institutions, for instance, those that deal with international commercial law, that are neither national nor international. This transnational stateness, motivated by a transnational, private, commercial understanding (as opposed to law, which must refer to a social body), pretends to produce a global civil society that would be a reign of law without the State. Since, however, there is no articulation of inter-individual to central contractuality, the reality is actually quite the opposite: a State without law. In this global state-without-law, the nature of sovereignty in its relation to the movements of the multitudes follows a logic of the police. Henceforth, the systemic struggle between center and periphery itself is aligned, or shall we say, complicitous, with the emergence of a super-state, or, quite simply, the identification of Humanity in general with

Stateness. Indeed, today's wars, now launched in the name of Humanity, signal the coming of an age in which the meaning of Humanity itself has started to gradually coincide with Stateness.⁵

The Gulf War set the precedent for global complicity with the order of sovereign police, consolidated by the war in Afghanistan, in which the two figures of modern central order, imperialist and statist, converged. Although the U.N. arrogated to itself the ultimate right, that of war and legitimate violence, which had formerly exclusively defined the power of the sovereign state, it immediately divested itself of this power by granting the conduct of the war to a private force, that of the United States and its allies, which appropriated the power of the police, placing itself beyond jurisdiction. Needless to say, the object of police operations is not an enemy, but an outlaw. Sovereign Police and the Foreign Outlaw: these are the fundamental figures of the political relation today.

Behind the "blood-for-oil" war in Iraq lie murkier motives that cannot be reduced to the rationality of economy (in fact, there is reason to suspect that the war may even threaten such rationality) or even geopolitical control. The need of an exceptional logic which joins the issue of security to that of identity in a single formation of social control—proto-fascism—is surely one of the trends that will outlive the war no matter what its outcome. This logic of the state of emergency is premised upon the notion of insecurity at a molecular level. Obsessed with fantastic desire configured as disaster or terror coming from "outside," yet at the same time actively producing disaster and terror everywhere on the borders (internal or external) between inside and outside, the contemporary regimes of "securidentity" recode social relations through the industrial production of fear—against which more depoliticized overconsumption is offered as the only sanctioned relief. The current situation in the United States is a militant, proto-fascist situation. Brought to power by a political putsch, the minority Bush regime has unleashed a social logic of the state of exception that enables the Bush regime to sustain its appropriation of the US state apparatus (reorganized around the incredibly destructive war machine as

Homeland Security) in conflict with the interests of global capital (including significant parts of U.S. capital), pitting U.S. Imperial Nationalism against global Empire. The only way to ensure that the state of exception continues in semi-permanent fashion is for continuous disaster or accident to occur. This is certainly the situation that has taken place with this war.

2) Regimes of security and media control (The society of policed sensation)

The impact of Guy Debord's situationist critique, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), remains an essential horizon for understanding our era. The critique of the "spectacular" or sensational side of society goes well beyond media studies to fathom the depths of the relations between commodity, image, and language. From this position, as Agamben points out, contemporary capitalism not only thoroughly expropriates productive activity, but extends this extreme expropriation to the very essence of the common-the linguistic and communicative nature of human beings.⁶

It is well known that knowledge in the Human Sciences has been deeply intertwined with national sovereignty and language in the modern period. The unique challenge of modernity has been to present us with a series of universalizing forms (in short, the commodity and the subject) that impose themselves on all fields of relation in a totalizing fashion. This universalizing tendency inhabiting the general economy of relationship has penetrated the very core of language-now invariably cogenerated with other languages as national language. Language today, always figured according to a universalizing logic as national language, is both instantly ideological and a witness to the vacuity of its own referent.

Hence, it is not enough simply to speak of structural complicity (such as that among elite classes who give extorted consent to the U.S. sovereign police while using anti-americanism as a tool to achieve their own ends) and systemic complicities (between national states and imperial organizations), but it is also necessary to speak of the kind of complicity found in the subjective

technology of translation that enables the nationalist appropriation of language to proceed concomitant with the expansion of global English.

Translation is precisely the point of suture between the structural (internal class difference) and the systemic (interstate competition) in a world formally organized around the contradictory principles of market and sovereignty. If the revolutionary response to class struggle has been the proposition of equality-plus-liberty, the parallel response to the systemic struggle of inter-state competition must be the notion of human multitudes, the multitude of foreigners that I am. Among the multitudes, however, one does yet not find a practice of address adequate to the multitude of foreigners that I am. Without such means, every discourse tends to fall back into the systemic logic of national translation which aims to make every enunciation comprehensible on the basis of its presumed destination.

In this regard, Naoki Sakai's work in *Translation and Subjectivity* suggests an essential point of departure for the sort of heterolingual/heterosocial practice adequate to the notion of the multitudes.

3) The displacement of the political crisis to the realm of fantasy and desire. (The society of industrialized production of fear)

An excellent illustration of this point can be seen in the commercial flash, accessible on line at <http://www.lexus.com/minorityreport/>, released by the Lexus division of Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., to coincide with the distribution of *Minority Report* (2002). The flash loosely follows the premise of the movie: the society of the future is a technologically-advanced place where everything from food preparation to transport is automated and engineered to anticipate user requirements. Nevertheless, the convenience of anticipatory resolution and guaranteed catharsis is not fail-safe. Indeed, the very fact that a special police bureau is required to interdict potential crime before it happens suggests that underneath the hi-tech veneer, society's anticipatory obsessions are in fact permeated by fear and

insecurity. The flash advertisement follows a "plot" in which the potential customer enters a simulation in which s/he has been framed for a crime s/he will not commit and must find a way out of danger. The solution proffered is escape-by means, of course, of a futuristic, "off-system" Lexus vehicle. Significantly, the flash stages the intrinsic link between systemacity and escape, consumption and fear, that Jacques Ranciere has described as a fundamental, modern difference between politics (the project of liberatory exodus) and police (the administration of order). Any possibility of escaping the operational theater of the police in order to open the space of the political, however, is forecluded by the act of consumption-the only means of 'escape' actually offered by the flash.

4) The deepening conflict, both within the United States and across its borders, between the global Empire of capital and U.S. Imperial Nationalism.

The Bush administration's political logic, the state of permanent emergency, is not necessarily favorable to the interests of Capital-not even U.S. Capital. Cf. Immanuel Wallerstein, "Empire and the Capitalists," Commentary 113, May 15, 2003. <http://fbc.binghamton.edu/113en.htm>

5) As the competition between global Empire and Imperial Nationalism intensifies, the creation of regional blocs and the creation of "new" particularistic identities are likely to move apace.

Although much ink has been devoted to the construction of sovereignty and its radical transformation in our age, very little attention has been given to the problems of culturalism and civilizationism which have effectively served as an historical supplement to the logic of sovereignty in the modern period. It is no wonder that as the status of national sovereignty enters a period of decline, the most aggressively supremacist elements of the so-called "West"

have embraced the concept of antagonistic civilizationism.

Throughout the period of colonial empire, the inherent instability attendant upon the institution of national sovereignty was managed by the supplement of a second, equally unstable, binary opposition: that between the West and the non-West. The ideology of this division has become known as either culturalism or civilizationism. Together, these two oppositions, national community and civilizational community, have formed the basis of a hierarchical international order organized for the benefit of Capital.⁷ From our perspective,⁸ the Cold War was also a means by which the fragmented imperialist centers could hide what the twentieth century had already made irrevocably clear: the distinction between the West and the non-West is completely untenable. Democratic thought, however, has been unable to implement this understanding according to a framework other than a universalistic one. Unable, that is, until the advent of philosophies of difference (e.g. Deleuzean and/or Derridean) that reinscribe the logic of the particular-universal into the singular-multiple. Nevertheless, and quite ironically, we have also arrived at an historical moment when political "exchange" between the so-called "West" and its others has never been more constrained by the very logic of particularism and universalism that sustains the West/Rest distinction.

The violent destruction of cultural relics following the looting of Iraq was gravely damaging. Yet, time will show that another, perhaps even greater, damage was inflicted by the looting and the war: once more, a so-called non-Western people has been cornered into a complete, abject spatialization of identity and the ahistorical essence or "substratum" this subjectivity inevitably requires. Just as Woodrow Wilson's call for national self-determination signalled the fact that national community would henceforth be considered the only legitimate form of human community (witness the fact that while the U.S. will defend a State without a nation-Kuwait-it will not take up arms to defend a nation without a State-Kurdistan), so it is now to be decreed that international community must

be based on the notion of common civilization—the basis for new, transnational, civilizational blocs. Without a doubt, preserving the cultural identity of the other has henceforth been identified as the key to preserving the security of "the West"⁹ even at the very moment when the inconsistency of Western identity has been made clear once again.

Certainly the dissension brought about within global Empire by the Franco-German opposition to the war carries a certain productive potential for the multitudes. Yet we must not forget that Turkey, recently denied admission to the EU, had the world's only elected body of representatives publicly opposed to the war. Perhaps the real point of mobilization for the anti-war movement in Europe ought to have been around the status of Turkey, rather than the Franco-German alliance.

Part II: Taiwan Trends

The current situation calls for a thoughtful response to the specificity of the Taiwanese situation, or again for a response to the relations networked or circuited through Taiwan that are intrinsically related to the War Machine. The following points are, minimally, the point of departure for mapping out these circuits:

1) The extremely high level of imbrication between high-tech industries, particularly the fabrication of semi-conductors, the global arms industry, bio-agent research (Taiwan has one of the most advanced bio-weapons research centers), and a politics of global complicity/competition. (Consider two aspects of the problem: 1) on the one hand, Taiwan and China have recently become the world's two largest arms importers, while the United States maintains its role as the world's largest arms exporter; 2) among the series of arms purchase scandals recently revealed in Taiwan, the purchase of Lafayette destroyers from France reportedly included payoffs to both Chinese and Taiwanese officials. Considered together, these facts signal the emergence of a highly complex regime of complicitous competition beyond democratic supervision).

2) Centralized sources of energy (such as oil and

nuclear) support socio-economic formations based on intensive overproduction and overconsumption, oscillating between rationality and irrationality.

3) The current move towards securitarian regimes based on the instrumentalization of social control. In Taiwan, this refers to government policies based on the assumption of an omni-present yet unspecified domestic enemy used as a pretext to re-mobilize the old state security apparatus and national security discourse of the martial law period for the new task of internal security and instrumentalized identity.

4) The massively overdetermined position occupied by the People's Republic: on the one hand, as the trend towards regional blocs intensifies, we might expect that China will become a crucial battle ground between the dollar, the euro, and the yen; on the other hand, Chinese labor will continue to play a crucial role in industrial production, bearing the brunt of dislocation and deterritorialization in the post-fordist, global economy, and supporting the consolidation of an extremely repressive power elite—the Chinese sovereign police.

5) The status of historical injustice and the continuing, general crisis of sovereignty in the Pacific region. (We suggest an approach that does not exclusively seek an impossibly contradictory "resolution" of these problems by appeals to the normativity of sovereignty itself, but rather aims also to redress the historical injustice in a global, yet not necessarily national or international, framework.)

6) The regime of unilateral translation that governs the capitalist infrastructure of communications and the distribution of knowledge will continue to prevent the demand for liberation-registered through the overwhelming desire for sovereignty—from being dissociated from sovereignty's surplus of normativity.¹⁰

7) The exceptionalism granted to both bourgeois "civil society" in the formerly imperialist centers and "organic national culture" in the formerly colonial peripheries is intrinsically interrelated and prevents the articulation of a new category of positive political barbarism.

Concluding Remarks

Clearly, the point of dividing these ruminations into two broad categories, local and global, shows the extent to which those categories themselves are insufficient to grasp the current future situation. By way of conclusion, it is apposite to consider the way in which the SARS epidemic may be related to the issues brought to light by the war in Iraq.

The spread of the SARS epidemic in Taiwan, as well as China, presents truly interesting problems for developing a politics of the multitudes—especially inasmuch as this concerns the possibility of articulating a different vision of what today we can only call "rights" essentially tied to the extremely compromised structures of State and Humanity.¹¹ Yann Moulier Boutang has proposed a point of view—the diagonal of exodus—from which the opposition between migrants and nationals is defeated, since everyone, within and against the logic of capital, desists and persists in the diagonal of exodus.¹² Hence, the possibility of history that is no longer national, indeed, not even "class" in the sense of being a unified subject—necessary if we are to be able to construct a similar sort of future.

The SARS epidemic has raised all of these questions again for us, in a way that ought to be as forceful and as far-reaching as the military operation in Iraq. Indeed, it is impossible to avoid the framework that links these events together. Yet what is so particularly interesting is the way in which the two events command our attention in such different ways.

1) The logic of sovereignty: Exclusion from the WHO. Perhaps at no time has the structural limitation of the WHO been clearer: it, like the UN, is essentially organized around the principle of national sovereignty. Hence, given China's opposition, Taiwan has been excluded. Within Taiwan, this produces a uniform, ubiquitous desire for the normativity of sovereignty. Surely there are, besides Taiwan, other populations that have been essentially denied access to WHO resources and expertise. By the same token, it is necessary to extend the analytic field within excluded populations, such as in Taiwan, to distinguish between those, working citizens,

who benefit from national health care, and those others who do not—especially the 100,000 or so foreign laborers who are not covered by the national health plan. This distinction was dramatized recently by the death on April 30 of the first foreign laborer due to SARS. Normally, according to the national health care benefits, a worker's family or dependents in such situation would gain monetary compensation. In the case of uninsured foreign workers, however, the law is extremely ambiguous, and one still does not know whether or not the government will extend benefits to the (foreign) family of the worker.

2) The decline of the nation-state and the end of the rights of man: Government officials and intellectuals marked with State desire have repeated at numerous occasions that in the face of the SARS epidemic, there is no question of human rights. Essentially, rights do not exist during the period of emergency. This is the same logic that has been mobilized, in Taiwan and around the world, in the so-called "War on Terror"—which itself is merely symptomatic of the irrepressible global crisis of sovereignty and the intense impasse created by this crisis. The most common, indeed virtually exclusive, response to the impasse has always been the politically reactionary logic of "return"—this time to the notion of civilizational blocs. From the perspective of the "non-European" imagination, it is impossible not to see the Franco-German anti-war alliance as a yet another "Treaty of Brest-Litovsk" that essentially excludes the "other." In this instance, however, it is not Poles and Byelorussians who are excluded, but Turks and other supposed "non-Europeans" in the crude, dialectical sense of the term.

Nonetheless, "Europe" remains essentially important to us, multitudes, as the site where a critique of the intrinsic relation between the logic of sovereignty and the problem of human rights has been critically articulated, in a lineage whose names must include but not be limited to Arendt, Balibar, Nancy, Agamben, Negri...and perhaps many others whom I ignore. Here it is extremely important, however, to qualify with great care what we mean by the historical experience that accrues in the articulation of an historical experience (i.e., at an epistemological level) as opposed to the historical experience of

(i.e., at a practical level) sovereignty's articulation of experience through a surplus of normativity. Indeed, the actual experience of the logic of sovereignty was made clear, long before it became decipherable to theorists in the imperial center, in the protocols of extra-territoriality that developed in various parts of the world such as Shanghai, yet because of the injustice of the difference, the so-called non-West has been perpetually unable to express that experience—except through the dialectic of sovereignty and its exception. Hence, we have today what may be called both the "Chinese exception" and the "Chinese sovereign police."

The SARS epidemic show us once again that we are desperately in need of a revamped concept of rights, a concept of rights—if we may still call them that—whose theoretico-practical aspects are not dependent on the exceptional logic that puts them into suspension every time there is a situation of emergency.

3) Lines of flight: Significantly, in Taiwan, many people infected with the SARS coronavirus, and others suspected of infection, have chosen to take flight rather than present themselves to a hospital and the absolute "care" of health authorities. Cases have even been reported of SARS victims who were only diagnosed post mortem—obviously, these people had evaded the medical system. By the same token, the government has taken advantage of the SARS epidemic to round-up homeless persons—many of whom have also attempted to evade control by taking flight, as well as making checks on foreigners and other social marginals. Indeed, in recent public statements, the Prime Minister has explicitly related the on-going social mobilization in the "War on Terror" to that of the fight against SARS.¹³

Clearly, in the face of epidemic, "flight" or "exodus" is an ethically indefensible choice of action. Yet this medical exigency to limit mobility has immediately and without problematization been taken as the justification for a political regime of internal and external "border" controls especially aimed at assuring labor productivity. Needless to say, one can go into isolation for medical reasons and still take a paid vacation from work. Hence, it is impingement upon us to

prevent the lines of flight—the diagonal of social mobility—from being purely and systemically absorbed by the biopolitical discourse of population control, and to reinscribe it in a positive reevaluation of diagonal mobility.

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Notes

- 1 At the moment of the U.S.-led military operation in Iraq, I, like many others, circulated a short essay—my two cents, as it were—that looked beyond the actual conflict and attempted to summarize important underlying trends likely to continue long after resolution of the immediate hostilities. The original two-page document, written in telegraphically-condensed fashion on two sides of a single leaf for convenient distribution both at an anti-war demonstration in Taipei and through e-networks, drew inspiration from a milieu that might be called the singular intersection, or crucible, joining the multiplicity of Continental philosophies of the limit and of difference to that of politics freed from the assumptions of self-sufficient autonomy and auto-determination (or, quite simply, sovereignty). This essay retains the original structure and viewpoints of that circular, adding commentary and explanation.
- 2 Cf. in English the important dialogue between Brett Neilson and Sandro Mezzadra, available on line at: http://www.borderlandsejournal.adelaide.edu.au/vol2no1_2003/mezzadra_neilson.html
- 3 Cf. Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1997). In Sakai's terminology, "homolingual address" applies to certain situations conventionally understood as "bi-" or "multi-lingual." The fact of mere plurality itself does not challenge regimes of homosociality, but may actually reinforce them.
- 4 Agamben, *Means without End*, 88.

- 5 The ideas in this section are largely taken from Jacques Bidet, *Theorie Generale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 2000). Cf. as well: "Sovereign Police, Global Complicity: Addressing the Multitude of Foreigners," Volume Four of *Traces: a multilingual series of cultural theory and translation* (Hong Kong, Seoul, Ithaca, Tokyo: forthcoming), edited by Jon Solomon and Naoki Sakai.
- 6 Giorgio Agamben, tr. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, *Means without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2000), 82-83.
- 7 Cf. Tazaki, Hideaki, "Konjitu no sei-seiji no naka no niche (Nietzsche in the context of contemporary biopolitics)" *Shiso* No. 919 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2000), as well as Carl Schmitt's postwar work, *Der Nomos der Erde im Volkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum*.
- 8 This point of view ought to be called something that is "non-European," provided we understand the prefix "non-" in the sense of "non-Euclidean geometry": certainly "Europe" is included.
- 9 This is indeed, for instance, the position adopted by Ulrich Beck in a recent essay: see *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol 19/4, 02.
- 10 Cf. Jon Solomon, "Taiwan Incorporated: Biopolitics in the Sovereign Police's Pacific Theater of Operations," in *Traces* Vol. 3 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University, 2003).
- 11 Concerning the relation between the rights of man and the rights of the citizen, see: Hannah Arendt, "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man," in *Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcour Brace, 1979), 267 -304; Etienne Balibar, "'Rights of Man' and 'Rights of the Citizen': The Modern Dialectic of Equality and Freedom," in *Balibar, Masses, Classes, Ideas* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 39-59; Giorgio Agamben, tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1998); and Giorgio Agamben, tr. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000).
- 12 Yann Moulier Boutang, tr. Bernard G. Prusak, "Between the Hatred of all Walls and the Walls of Hate: The Minoritarian Diagonal of Mobility," in *Traces: a multilingual journal of cultural theory and translation* Vol. 2 (Hong Kong: HKU Press, 2001), 104-129.
- 13 "Kangsha fankong jiehe, quanmin fangwei qidong [Fighting SARS and Opposing Terror Join Together as the Total People's Defense gets Underway]" in *Zhongguo Shibao [China Times]* (Taipei) June 1, 2003. Accessed on line at: <http://ec.chinatimes.com.tw/scripts/chinatimes/iscstext.exe?DB=ChinaTimes&Function=ListDoc&From=15&Single=1>.