



Violence sits in places? Cultural practice, neoliberal rationalism, and virulent imaginative geographies

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A B S T R A C T

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Through imaginative geographies that erase the interconnectedness of the places where violence occurs, the notion that violence is 'irrational' marks particular cultures as 'Other'. Neoliberalism exploits such imaginative geographies in constructing itself as the sole providence of nonviolence and the lone bearer of reason. Proceeding as a 'civilizing' project, neoliberalism positions the market as salvatory to ostensibly 'irrational' and 'violent' peoples. This theology of neoliberalism produces a discourse that binds violence in place. But while violence sits in places in terms of the way in which we perceive its manifestation as a localized and embodied experience, this very idea is challenged when place is reconsidered as a relational assemblage. What this re-theorization does is open up the supposed fixity, separation, and immutability of place to instead recognize it as always co-constituted by, mediated through, and integrated within the wider experiences of space. Such a radical rethinking of place fundamentally transforms the way we understand violence. No longer confined to its material expression as an isolated and localized event, violence can more appropriately be understood as an unfolding process, derived from the broader geographical phenomena and temporal patterns of the social world.

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"Imagine all the people,
Living life in peace"
– John Lennon, *Imagine*

Introduction

The idea that violence might be integral to cultural practice is difficult to accept. In concert with the abuse that the concept of culture has been subjected to as of late, where in keeping with geopolitical hegemony (see Harrison & Huntington, 2000), or perhaps more surprisingly in an attempt to argue against such hegemonic might (see Roberts, 2001), some cultures, particularly 'Asian', 'African', or 'Islamic' cultures, are conferred with a supposedly inherent predilection towards violence. Yet the relationship between culture and violence is also axiomatic, since violence is part of human activity. Thus, it is not the call for violence to be understood as a social process informed by culture that is problematic; rather it is the potential to colonize this observation with imaginative geographies that distort it in such a fashion that deliberately or inadvertently enable particular geostrategic aims to

gain validity. The principal method of distortion is Orientalism, which as 'a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts', is 'an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction' but a whole series of 'interests' which create, maintain, and have the intention to understand, control, manipulate, and incorporate that which is manifestly different through a discourse that is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power: political, intellectual, cultural, and moral (Said, 2003: 12). At base, Orientalism is a form of paranoia that feeds on cartographies of fear by producing 'our' world negatively through the construction of a perverse 'Other'. This is precisely the discourse colonialism mobilized to construct its exploitative authority in the past. In the current context, a relatively new geostrategic aim appeals to the same discursive principles for valorization in its quest to impose an econometric version of global sovereignty (Hart, 2006; Pieterse, 2004; Sparke, 2004). Neoliberalism is on the move, and in the context of the global south, Orientalism is its latitude inasmuch as it affords neoliberalism a powerful discursive space to maneuver.

This paper has two interrelated central aims. First, building on the work of Arturo Escobar (2001) and Doreen Massey (2005), I contribute to re-theorizations of place as a *relational assemblage*, rather than as an *isolated container*, by calling into question the relationship between place and violence. Second, informed by an

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understanding of Orientalism as performative (Said, 2003), and power/knowledge as productive (Foucault, 1977), I set out to challenge how neoliberalism discursively assigns violence to particular peoples and cultures through its employment of the problematic notions of place that I dispute. I argue that Orientalism maintains an underlying assumption that violence sits in places, and as an affect and effect of discourse, this Orientalist view is enabled because the production of space and place is largely a discursive enterprise (Bachelard, 1964; Lefebvre, 1991). But while violence can bind itself to our somatic geographies and lived experiences of place, in the same way that culture is not confined to any particular place, so too do violent geographies stretch inwards and outwards to reveal the inherent dynamism of space as multiple sites are repeatedly entwined by violence. Thus, following Michel Foucault's (1977, 1980) insights on power, I am not interested in the *why* of violence, but rather the *how* and *where* of violence. A culturally sensitive critical political economy approach alerts us to the power/knowledge-geometries at play (Hart, 2002; Peet, 2000; Sayer, 2001), so that while violence is clearly mediated through and informed by local cultural norms, it is equally enmeshed in the logic of globalized capital.

In the setting of the global south, where and upon which the global north's caricatural vision of violence repeatedly turns, authoritarian leaders may appropriate neoliberal concerns for market security as a rationale for their violent and repressive actions (Canterbury, 2005; Springer, 2009c). At the same time, because of the performative nature of Orientalism, an exasperated populace may follow their 'scripted' roles and resort to violent means in their attempts to cope with the festering poverty and mounting inequality wrought by their state's deepening neoliberalization (Uvin, 2003). Far from being a symptom of an innate cultural proclivity for violence, state-sponsored violence and systemic social strife can be seen as outcomes of both a state made 'differently powerful' via the ongoing 'roll-out' of neoliberal reforms (Peck, 2001: 447), and the discourses that support this process (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001; Springer, 2010b). Thus, when applied to the context of 'the Other', neoliberalism maintains – in the double sense of both incessant reproduction and the construction of alterity – a 'Self'-perpetuating logic. Through the circulation of a discourse that posits violence as an exclusive cultural preserve, and by inextricably linking itself to democracy, neoliberalism presents itself as the harbinger of rationality and the only guarantor of peace. Yet neoliberalism's structural effects of poverty and inequality often (re)produce violence (Escobar, 2004; Springer, 2008), and as such, neoliberalism perpetually renews its own license by suggesting it will cure that which neoliberalization ails.

To be clear from the outset, this paper is decidedly theoretical. While writing about violence directly in empirical terms is a worthwhile endeavor to be sure, it is one that – without significant attention and attachment to social theory – risks lending itself to problematic and even Orientalist readings of place. Thus, the purpose here is to critique the limitations of a placed-based approach to violence that merely catalogs *in situ*, rather than appropriately recognizing the relational geographies of both violence and place. Accordingly, I do not offer empirical accounts of particular places, as my intention is to call such particularized interpretations of 'place' into question. The punctuation in the title is very much purposeful in this regard. While violence sits in places in terms of the way in which we perceive its manifestation as a localized and embodied experience, this very idea is challenged when place is reconsidered as a relational assemblage. This re-theorization opens up the supposed fixity, separation, and immutability of place to recognize it instead as always co-constituted by, mediated through, and integrated within the wider

experiences of space. Such a radical rethinking of place fundamentally transforms the way we understand violence. No longer confined to its material expression as an isolated 'event' or localized 'thing', violence can more appropriately be understood as an unfolding *process*, arising from the broader geographical phenomena and temporal patterns of the social world. In short, through such a reinterpretation of place, geographers are much better positioned to dismiss Orientalist accounts that bind violence to particular peoples, cultures, and places, as was the mandate of colonial geography. We can instead initiate a more emancipatory geography that challenges such colonial imaginings by questioning how seemingly local expressions of violence are instead always imbricated within wider socio-spatial and political economic patterns. This allows geographers to recognize with more theoretical force how ongoing (neo)colonial frameworks, like neoliberalism, are woven between, within, and across places in ways that facilitate and (re)produce violence.

Following this introduction, I begin by establishing why an exploration of the discursive contours of Orientalism, neoliberalism, and violence, and their intersections with space and place necessitates a theoretical analysis. I argue that the confounding experience of violence makes it a difficult phenomenon to write about using a direct empirical prose. This does not negate that there are instances where we should attempt to do so, as I have done in my other work (see Springer, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010a, 2010b), but the purpose of this article is to focus explicitly on theory so that a more critical approach to understanding the relationship between violence and place might be devised. The following section draws on Massey's (2005) re-conceptualization of space and place to argue that, although violence is experienced through the ontological priority of place, these experiences are inseparable from the relational characteristic of space as a unitary and indivisible whole. This renders accounts of violence as the exclusive preserve of particular cultures untenable, a point that is expanded upon in the next section where I argue that all violence is rational because of the cultural meaning it evokes. The notion that violence is ever 'irrational' is an ascription applied to individuals and cultures in an attempt to mark them as 'Other', which is effected through the invocation of very specific kinds of imaginative geographies. The section that follows shifts the focus to neoliberalism and its relationship with Orientalism. Here I contend that neoliberalism came to prominence out of a concern for violence in the wake of the two world wars, and based on its call for a return to the principles of the Enlightenment, neoliberalism was able to construct itself as the sole providence of nonviolence and the lone bearer of 'reason' and 'civilization' in our world. Before concluding, I tease out some of the spatial and temporal fallacies underscoring neoliberalism and its intersections with Orientalism. In particular, I examine how the fictions of neoliberalism position it as a 'divine' salvation to 'backwards' peoples, thereby obscuring both the structural and 'mythic' violence neoliberalism is premised upon. The conclusion reminds readers that despite their relationship, Orientalism and neoliberalism do not presuppose each other. However, because neoliberalism can be understood as a contemporary incarnation of 'empire' (Hardt & Negri, 2000; Hart, 2006; Pieterse, 2004; Sparke, 2005), and since Orientalism is at base an imperial endeavor (Said, 1993; Gregory, 2004a), recognizing their convergence is vital to conceiving an emancipatory politics of refusal. My overarching concern in this paper is for the ways that neoliberal ideology employs Orientalist discourses to tie violence to specific cultures and particular places. Thus, I conclude by proposing that, while the interactions of violence with space and place are of course material, they are also very much imaginative. Out of this understanding, I suggest that perhaps peace is, as the late John Lennon once intuitively sang, something we must imagine.

Poetry after Auschwitz: the problem of representing violence

A perennial complication of discussions about human suffering is the awareness of cultural differences. In the wake of the damage wrought by Samuel Huntington (1993), some might contend that the concept of culture is beyond reclamation (Mitchell, 1995), especially with respect to discussions of violence. There is, however, still a great deal of resonance to the concept that can, and perhaps must be salvaged if we are to ever make sense of violence. If culture is defined as a historically transmitted form of symbolization upon which a social order is constructed (Geertz, 1973; Peet, 2000), then understanding any act, violent or otherwise, is never achieved solely in terms of its physicality and invariably includes the meaning it is afforded by culture (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004). An account of the cultural dimensions of violence is perhaps even vital, as focusing exclusively on the physical aspects of violence transforms the project into a clinical or literary exercise, which runs the risk of degenerating into a 'pornography of violence' (Bourgois, 2001) where voyeuristic impulses subvert the larger project of witnessing, critiquing, and writing against violence. While violence in its most fundamental form entails pain, dismemberment, and death, people do not engage in or avoid violence simply because of these tangible consequences, nor are these corporeal outcomes the reason why we attempt to write or talk about violence. Violence as a mere fact is largely meaningless. It takes on and gathers meaning because of its affective and cultural content, where violence is *felt* as meaningful (Nordstrom, 2004).

'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric', Theodor Adorno (1981: 34) once famously wrote. Confounded by the atrocities that had occurred under the Nazis, he failed to understand how a humanity capable of causing such catastrophic ruin could then relate such an unfathomable tale. Although struck by the emotional weight of violence, Adorno was wrong, as it is not poetry that is impossible after Auschwitz, but rather *prose*:

Realistic prose fails, where the poetic evocation of the unbearable atmosphere of a camp succeeds. That is to say, when Adorno declares poetry impossible (or, rather, barbaric) after Auschwitz, this impossibility is an enabling impossibility: poetry is always 'about' something that cannot be addressed directly, only alluded to (Zizek, 2008: 4–5).

For victims, any retelling of violence is necessarily riddled with inconsistency and confusion. The inability to convey agony and humiliation with any sense of clarity is part of the trauma of a violent event. Indeed, 'physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned' (Scarry, 1985: 4). As such, the chaotic bewilderment of experiencing violence makes understanding it an unusually mystifying endeavor. Thus, what can we say about violence without being overwhelmed by its unnerving horror and incapacitated by the fear it instills? How can we represent violence without becoming so removed from and apathetic towards its magnitude that we no longer feel a sense of anguish or distress? And in what ways can we raise the question of violence in relation to victims, perpetrators, and even entire cultures, without reducing our accounts to caricature, where violence itself becomes the defining, quintessential feature of subjectivity? To quote Adorno (1981: 34) once more, 'Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter'.

The confounding effects of violence ensure that it is a phenomena shot through with a certain perceptual blindness. In his monumental essay '*Critique of Violence*', Walter Benjamin (1986) exposed our unremitting tendency to obscure violence in its

institutionalized forms, and because of this opacity, our inclination to regard violence exclusively as something we can see through its *direct* expression. Yet the structural violence resulting from our political and economic systems (Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 1969), and the symbolic violence born of our discourses (Bourdieu 2001; Jiwani, 2006), are something like the dark matter of physics, '[they] may be invisible, but [they have] to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what might otherwise seem to be 'irrational' explosions of subjective [or direct] violence' (Zizek, 2008: 2). These seemingly invisible geographies of violence – including the hidden fist of the market itself – have both 'nonillusory effects' (Springer, 2008) and pathogenic affects in afflicting human bodies that create suffering (Farmer, 2003), which can be seen if one cares to look critically enough. Yet, because of their sheer pervasiveness, systematization, and banality we are all too frequently blinded from seeing that which is perhaps most obvious. This itself marks an epistemological downward spiral, as 'the economic' in particular is evermore abstracted and its 'real world' implications are increasingly erased from collective consciousness (Hart, 2008). 'The clearest available example of such epistemic violence', Gayatri Spivak (1988: 24–25) contends, 'is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other', and it is here that the relationship between Orientalism and neoliberalism is revealed.

Since Orientalism is a discourse that functions precisely due to its ability to conceal an underlying symbolic violence (Tuastad, 2003), and because the structural violence of poverty and inequality that stems from the political economies of neoliberalism is cast as illusory (Springer, 2008), my reflections on neoliberalism, Orientalism, and their resultant imaginative and material violent geographies are, as presented here, purposefully theoretical. As Derek Gregory (1993: 275) passionately argues, 'human geographers have to work with social theory... Empiricism is not an option, if it ever was, because the "facts" do not (and never will) "speak for themselves", no matter how closely... we listen'. Although the 'facts' of violence can be assembled, tallied, and categorized, the cultural scope and emotional weight of violence can never be entirely captured through empirical analysis. After Auschwitz, and now after 9/11, casting a sideways glance at violence through the poetic abstractions of theory must be considered as an enabling possibility. This is particularly the case with respect to understanding the geographies of violence, as our understandings of space and place are also largely poetic (Bachelard, 1964; Kong, 2001).

Imaginative bindings of space: geography and narrative

Despite the attention space and place receive in contemporary human geography, Massey (2005) has convincingly argued that there is a prevailing theoretical myopia concerning their conceptualization. Space and place are typically thought to counterpose, as there exists an implicit imagination of different theoretical 'levels': space as the abstract versus the everydayness of place. Place, however, is not 'the Other' of space, it is not a pure construct of the local or a bounded realm of the particular in opposition to an overbearing, universal, and absolute global space (Escobar, 2001). What if, Massey (2005: 6) muses, we refuse this distinction, 'between place (as meaningful, lived and everyday) and space (as what? the outside? the abstract? the meaningless?)'. By enshrining space as universal, theorists have assumed that places are mere subdivisions of a ubiquitous and homogeneous space that is 'dissociated from the bodies that occupy it and from the particularities that these bodies lend to the places they inhabit' (Escobar, 2001: 143). Such disregard is peculiar since it is not the absoluteness of space, but our inescapable immersion in place via embodied

perception that is the ontological priority of our lived experience. Edward Casey (1996: 18) eloquently captures this notion in stating that, 'To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in.' The inseparability of space and time entails a further recognition that places should be thought of as moments, where amalgamations of things, ideas, and memories coalesce out of our embodied experiences and the physical environments in which they occur to form the contours of place. As such, Massey (2005) encourages us to view space as the simultaneity of stories-so-far, and place as collections of these stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space. The production of space and place is accordingly the unremitting and forever unfinished product of competing discourses over what constitutes them (Lefebvre, 1991).

Violence is one of the most profound ongoing stories influencing the (re)production of space. Similarly, individual and embodied narratives of violence woven out of a more expansive spatial logic may become acute, forming constellations that delineate and associate place. Accordingly, it may be useful to begin to think about 'violent narratives', not simply as stories about violence, but rather as a spatial metaphor analogous to violent geographies and in direct reference to Massey's (2005) re-conceptualization of space and place. Allen Feldman (1991: 1) looks to bodily, spatial, and violent practices as configuring a unified *language* of material signification, compelling him to 'treat the political subject, particularly the body, as the locus of manifold material practices.' To Feldman approaching violence from its site of effect and generation (agency) is to examine where it takes *place*, thereby embedding violence in the situated practices of agents. Violence is bound up within the production of social space (Bourdieu, 1989), and because, by virtue of spatiality, social space and somatic place continually predicate each other, the recognition of violence having a direct bearing on those bodies implies a geography of violence. Foucault (1980: 98) has argued that 'individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application', and this is precisely how power and violence depart, as individuals are at once both the vehicles of violence and its points of application. In the end, because the body is where all violence finds its influence – be it direct and thus obvious to the entangled actors, or structural and thus temporally and spatially diffused before reaching its final destination at and upon the embodied geographies of human beings – place is the site where violence is most visible and easily discerned. Yet violence is only one facet of the multiple, variegated, and protean contours of place. So while violence bites down on our lived experiences by affixing itself to our everyday geographies and by colonizing our bodies, violence itself, much like culture, is by no means restricted to place, nor is place static. Thus, the place-based dynamics of violence that seemingly make it possible to conceive a 'culture of violence' actually render this notion untenable precisely because of place's relationality and proteanism.

The embodied geographies of experience (including violence) that exist in places stretch their accounts out through other places, linking together a matrix of narratives in forming the mutable landscapes of human existence (Tilley, 1994). This porosity of boundaries is essential to place, and it reveals how local specificities of culture are comprised by a complex interplay of internal constructions and external exchange. In the face of such permeability an enculturation of violence is certainly conceivable. All forms of violence are not produced by the frenzied depravity of savage or pathological minds, but are instead cultural performances whose poetics derive from the sociocultural histories and relational geographies of the locale (Whitehead, 2004). Violence has a culturally informed logic, and it thereby follows that because culture sits in places (Basso, 1996; Escobar, 2001), so too does violence. Yet the grounds on which some insist on affixing and

bounding violence so firmly to *particular* places in articulating a 'culture of violence' argument are inherently unstable.¹ The shifting, kaleidoscopic nature of space-time demonstrates the sheer impossibility of such attempts. So while it is important to highlight the emplacement of all cultural practices (including violence), whereby culture is carried into places by bodies engaged in practices that are at once both encultured and enculturating (Escobar, 2001), it is only through a geographical imagination constructed on a parochial agenda, rooted in colonial modes of thought, and dislocated from the dynamic material underpinnings of place that a culture itself can be caricatured as violent. In short, while violence forms a part of any given culture, it is never the sole defining feature.

The rationality of violence: power, knowledge, and 'truth'

That violence has meaning, albeit multiple, complex, and often contradictory (Stanko, 2003), infers that so too does it have a particular sense of rationality. Contra what we typically hear about violence in the media, sadly most violence is not 'senseless' at all (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004). According to Foucault (1996: 299) all human behavior is scheduled and programmed through rationality, where violence is no exception,

What is most dangerous in violence is its rationality. Of course violence itself is terrible. But the deepest root of violence and its permanence come out of the form of rationality we use. The idea had been that if we live in the world of reason, we can get rid of violence. This is quite wrong. Between violence and rationality there is no incompatibility.

Sanctioning certain acts of violence as 'rational', while condemning others as 'irrational' can be discerned as a primary instrument of power insofar as perceived rationality becomes misconstrued with legitimacy. Equally problematic is that such a dichotomy becomes a dividing line between 'civilization' and 'barbarism', one that is given spatial license through imaginative geographies (Said, 2003). The power to represent and imagine geography and its subjects like *this* rather than like *that*, is thus at once both a process of articulation and valorization (Gregory, 2004b).

Drawing on Foucault's (1972) recognition that the exercise of power and the sanction of particular knowledges are coterminous, Edward Said (2003) identifies imaginative geographies as constructions that fuse distance and difference together through a series of spatializations. They operate by demarcating conceptual partitions and enclosures between 'the same' and 'the Other', which configure 'our' space of the familiar as separate and distinct from 'their' unfamiliar space that lies beyond. Gregory (2004a) interprets this division – wherein 'they' are seen to lack the positive characteristics that distinguish 'us' – as forming the blackened foundations of the 'architectures of enmity'. Informed by Gregory's understandings, I use the descriptor 'virulent' to mean three things in qualifying particular imaginative geographies. First, I seek to emphasize those imaginative geographies that invoke a profound sense of hostility and malice, which may thereby produce tremendously harmful effects for those individuals cast within them. Second, through the simplicity of the essentialisms they render, some imaginative geographies may be readily and uncritically accepted, thus making them highly infectious and easily communicable among individuals subjected to their distinct brand of 'commonsense', and in this way they operate as symbolic violence.² Finally, the etymology of the Latin word for 'virulence' (*virulentus*) is derived from the word man (*vir*), and as related concept metaphors in contemporary English, 'virulence' and 'virility' are informed by masculinist modes of response and

engagement. The cultural coding of places as sites of violence is thus imbricated in gendered ideas about mastery, colonial control, and – drawing on the Orientalist ‘mature west/juvenile east’ trope – boyish resistance. Although a detailed inquiry into the various activations of Orientalist projections of violence on to groups of ‘Oriental’ males is beyond the scope of this paper, it is imperative to recognize how virulent imaginative geographies employ a sense of ‘virility’ to code ‘Oriental’ males as pre-oedipal and/or feminine. Such discursive emasculation, which is itself a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001), renders ‘Others’ incapable of managing violence with ‘patriarchal reason’, and here again, neoliberal rationalism becomes the salve. In short, virulent imaginative geographies are those geographical imaginations that are premised upon and recapitulate extremely negative, racially derogatory, and gender-laden pejorative assumptions, where the notion of a ‘culture of violence’ represents a paradigmatic case in point (see Springer, 2009a).

Through virulent imaginative geographies, the primary tonality ‘they’ are seen to lack is rationality, which is a claim to truth that is mounted through the production, accumulation, circulation, and functioning of a discourse (Foucault, 1980) that declares irrationality as the *sine qua non* of ‘their’ cultures, and is in turn used to explain why ‘they’ are violent. Such allusions, sanctioned by the accretions of Orientalism, are performative. In a substantial sense, the categories, codes, and conventions of Orientalism produce the effects that they name (Gregory, 2004a). So if violence is said to be the ‘truth’ of a particular culture, and *ipso facto* the places in which that culture sits, then power decorates this truth by ensuring its ongoing recapitulation in the virulent imaginative geographies it has created. In a very real sense then, violent geographies are often (re)produced and sustained by a cruel and violent Orientalism.

Space is endowed with an imaginative or figurative value that we can name and feel, acquiring ‘emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here’ (Said, 2003: 55). Places are accordingly transformed through fabrications where narratives inform us of meaning through the inflective topographies of desire, fantasy, and anxiety (Gregory, 1995). Thus, whether we recognize a place as ‘home-like’ or ‘prison-like’, a ‘utopia’ or a ‘killing field’, is dependent upon the stories-so-far to which we have participated in forming that place, but equally, and indeed wholly for places we have never visited, the imaginings that have been circulated, rendered, and internalized or rejected in forming our cartographic understandings. The experience, threat, or fear of violence in a particular place is perhaps the single most influential factor in our pronouncements of space (Pain, 1997), bringing a visceral and emotional charge to our ontological and epistemological interpretations. Likewise our attitudes towards particular geographies frequently fold back onto the people who comprise them. For example, if domestic violence is part of an individual’s lived experience or resonant memory, that person’s geographical imagination of her or his objective house (its corners, corridors, rooms) is transformed from a place of sanctuary, to a place of terror (see Meth, 2003). It is the actors who live in and thereby (re)produce that place who have facilitated this poetic shift in meaning, and as such they are imbricated in the reformulated geographical imaginings.

Similarly, the fear of ‘Other’ spaces is not based on an abstract geometry. Rather, such apprehension is embedded in the meanings that have been attached to those spaces through a knowledge of ‘the Other’ that is premised on the bodies that draw breath there, and importantly, how those bodies fall outside a typical understanding of ‘Self’, or what Foucault (1978: 304) referred to as ‘normalizing power’. We are ‘subjected to the production of truth through power, and we cannot exercise power except through the

production of truth’ (Foucault, 1980: 93), but the discourse of Orientalism claims that the truth about ‘ourselves’ is vastly different from the truth of ‘the Other’. This knowledge is productive in the sense that ‘it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth’ (Foucault, 1977: 194) concerning the supposed aberrance of ‘the Other’, and Orientalism functions to validate our anxieties (and fantasies and desires). Of course this knowledge is an imagined partitioning of space, as the feared constellations of violence that swell in any one place are never constructed in isolation from other sites of violence. Instead, violent narratives are collected from a wider matrix of the stories-so-far of space. So while it may seem intuitive to associate particular violent geographies with individual or even cultural actors, as they are the agents that manifest, embody, and localize violence, it is an Orientalist imagining of these geographies as isolated, exclusive, and partitioned that makes possible the articulation of discourses like the ‘culture of violence’ thesis.

Forming reason or fomenting Orientalism? Neoliberalism and its discontents

Classical liberalism is comprised of a trinity of beliefs that together assert that the degree to which a society allows an individual to pursue pleasure is its highest virtue. The first of these is the intense focus on the individual, viewed as the most qualified to articulate her or his needs and desires, so society should be structured on reducing barriers to the realization of this goal. Second, unfettered markets are considered the most efficient and effective means for encouraging individual autonomy, whereby individuals pursue their requirements and desires through the mechanism of price. And finally, there is a conviction for a non-interventionist state that focuses on the maintenance of competitive markets and the guarantee of individual rights fashioned primarily around a property regime (Hackworth, 2007; Plehwe & Walpen, 2006). Drawing on classical liberalism’s conception of an immutable desire for pleasure, in ‘*Civilization and its Discontents*’, Sigmund Freud (1930/1962) identified an insatiable sexual desire alongside an element of sadism arising from what he viewed as a primitive biological instinct for aggression. He established the notion that the Enlightenment saw ‘our’ culture overcome its cruel impulses, the achievement of which came primarily via the reason of liberalism, its laws, and its ‘civilizing’ effects. Rendered as such, violence was located beyond the boundaries of ‘civilization’, lodged in ‘barbarian’ geographies of pathological places and savage spaces. Civilization, nonetheless, was argued to have made for a perpetual feeling of discontent, which to Freud (1930/1962) was entropically evidenced by Europe’s relapse into brutality during the First World War.

In the wake of the Second World War, the Mont Pelerin Society – the original neoliberal think-tank (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009) – resurrected classical liberalism’s three basic principles, largely in response to the atrocities of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the Soviet Union, and a belief that government intervention to the peril of personal freedoms was responsible for the carnage. Out of this geohistorical context, the origins of neoliberalism as a political ideology can be seen as reactionary to violence, which it theorized could be suppressed and channeled into more productive outlets by a return to the foundations of the Enlightenment and its acknowledgement of the merits of individualism. Democracy was equally imbricated in this revival, as the apocalyptic outcomes of authoritarianism during the war years allowed neoliberalism to be constructed as the sole providence of freedom and hailed as an economic prescription for development. Those states that refused to conform became regarded as ‘rogue’, ‘failed’, or were ‘condemned to economic backwardness in which democracy must be imposed by sanctions and/or military force... by the global community of free

nations' (Canterbury, 2005: 2). Following proxy wars employing rhetorical appeals to democracy in Korea in the 1950s, and Vietnam in the 1960s and early 1970s, Keynesian political and economic forces began to unravel in the late 1970s and early 1980s, allowing neoliberalism to gain momentum as it became increasingly regarded as a salve for the global economic crisis (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Hackworth, 2007).

Neoliberalism's hegemonic rise and current political influence is owed to the 'rule of experts', or technocratic knowledge-elites (Mitchell, 2002) and their attempts to (re)constitute class power (Harvey, 2005). Such ascendancy comes attendant to American geostrategic aims operationalized via a series of crises or 'shocks' – either natural or manufactured – used to pry national economies open to market logic (Klein, 2007). This political economic reading also meshes with the poststructuralist view that knowledge and power are inseparable. Foucault (1980) recognized that power/knowledge must be analyzed as something that circulates, functions in the form of a chain, and is employed through a matrix. Thus, it was at least partially the successful organization of neoliberal knowledge-elites into a global network of think-tanks that aggrandized neoliberalism to orthodoxy, whereby the power of knowledge-elites and the power of elitist knowledge became mutually reinforcing (Scholler & Groh-Samberg, 2006). Neoliberalism-as-ideology gave way to neoliberalism-as-governmentality via the entrenchment of what Stephen Gill (1995) refers to as 'market civilization', or the transformative practices through which capitalist expansion became tied to a legitimating neoliberal discourse of progress and development.³ Neoliberalism then is an assemblage of rationalities, strategies, technologies, and techniques concerning the mentality of rule that facilitate 'governance at a distance' (Barry et al., 1996; Larner, 2000) by delineating a discursive field in which the exercise of power is 'rationalized' (Lemke, 2001), thereby encouraging both institutions and individuals to conform to the norms of the market. Neoliberalism's penetration at the level of the subject, or what Foucault (1988) called subjectivation, whereby one memorizes the truth claims that one has heard and converts this into rules of conduct is, in the context of the global south, colonialism's second coming. The 'white man's burden' and its salvatory discourse of modernization are resuscitated and mounted anew through the rationalization of market-mediated social relations as 'the only alternative', which has become integral to commonsense understandings of development.

Neoliberal salvation? From mythic to divine violence

The neoliberal doctrine conceives itself as upholding a new liberal internationalism based on visions of a single human race peacefully united by a common code of conduct featuring deregulated markets, free trade, and shared legal norms among states that promote civic liberties, electoral processes, and representative institutions (Gowen, 2001). More cynical accounts have questioned the 'peacefulness' of neoliberalism's advance, suggesting it more closely resembles a 'new imperialism' that conditions the use of violence to maintain the interests of an internationalized global elite (Harvey, 2003; Hart, 2006). This is an emerging sovereign that operates at times through direct military conquest, as in Iraq, but also through governmentality, subjectivation to particular norms (Larner, 2000; Lemke, 2001), and by regulating mayhem via financial means where the 'global economy comes to be supported by a global organization of violence and vice versa' (Escobar, 2004: 18). Either way, neoliberalism is premised on a 'one size fits all' model of policy implementation, assuming 'identical results will follow the imposition of market-oriented reforms, rather than recognizing the extraordinary variations that arise as neoliberal reform initiatives are

imposed within contextually specific institutional landscapes and policy environments' (Brenner & Theodore, 2002: 353). Neoliberalism is thus a spatio-temporal fiction. In a gesture that parodies divinity, neoliberal discourse contends that its prescriptions will remake 'the Other' in 'our' image through the logic bestowed upon them by unrestricted markets, while simultaneously believing the contextually embedded historical geographies to be quite inconsequential to its effective implementation and functioning. Put differently, neoliberal discourse produces a unified vision of history, which relegates 'Others' to a traditional past by presenting modernity as an inescapable trajectory, where inherited structures either yield to or resist the new, but can never produce it themselves. This occurs, James Clifford (1988: 5) argues, 'whenever marginal peoples come into a historical or ethnographic space that has been defined by the Western imagination. "Entering the modern world," their distinct histories quickly vanish. Swept up in a destiny dominated by the capitalist West... these suddenly "backward" peoples no longer invent local futures'.

Neoliberal ideology assumes that with the conferment of reason via modernity's supposedly infallible grip, the 'irrationality' of 'Oriental' cultures of violence will be quieted by a market rationality that recalls classical liberalism's pleasure principle and channels gratification – both sadistic and carnal – into consumerism and the pursuit of material rewards. Such an assumption is fantasy. The power of the neoliberal order consists not of being right in its view of politics, but in its ability to claim the authority of scientific truth based on 'economic science' when and where political goals are being defined. Neoliberal reforms are legitimized through a purported econometric supremacy, whereby the public comes to accept the supposed wisdom of knowledge-elites (Scholler & Groh-Samberg, 2006). It is the fetishism of place, the mobilization of popular geographical prejudices, and the supposed provision of rationality in the face of 'irrational' violence that gives neoliberalism its license to (re)direct public policy. Proponents never acknowledge that violence, inequality, and poverty are wrought by neoliberal reform. Instead, if conditions in the global south or among the lower classes have deteriorated under neoliberalism, it is said to be an outcome of personal and/or cultural failures to enhance their own human capital (Harvey, 2005). Dag Tuastad (2003) has called this the 'new barbarism' thesis, which explains violence through the omission of political and economic interests and contexts in its descriptions, and presents violence as a result of traits embedded in local cultures. Here again, violence sits in places; only in this case, through a grotesque representation of 'the Other', the virulent imaginative geographies of neoliberal discourse erase the contingency, fluidity, and interconnectedness of the spaces in which all violent narratives are formed. In other words, violence is problematically framed as though it is particular to a specific place/culture, rather than acknowledging the complex relational geographies that give rise to its formation and expression.

By recognizing that the structural violence of neoliberalism is everywhere (Farmer 2004; Uvin 2003), 'local' experiences of violence that seemingly occur in isolation from the wider matrix of space are in fact tied to the 'global', which renders violence somewhat 'everyday'. This very mundanity, however, is what is of primary importance in understanding the power of neoliberal violence, as this ordinary character marks it as 'mythic'. In 'Critique of Violence', Benjamin's (1986) primary distinction is one between a negatively pronounced 'mythic violence' and its positive other, which he called 'divine violence'. Mythic violence is equated with law, as it is both law-positing and law-preserving, and as such it is also the creator and the protector of the prevailing political and legal order. In contrast, rather than being positively defined, divine violence can only be delineated by what it is not, as it 'is simply

destructive of the given order without promising anything except the promise of the new itself' (Rasch, 2004: 86). Benjamin condemns the juridico-political order, finding the mythic violence that constitutes it 'executive' and 'administrative', and thus utterly deplorable and in need of elimination. Divine violence, as a 'pure immediate violence', is thus charged with opposing and even annihilating mythic violence and the order it has established:

Just as in all spheres God opposes myth, mythic violence is confronted by the divine. And the latter constitutes the antithesis in all respects. If mythic violence is law-making, divine violence is law-destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythic violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine [violence] only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood (Benjamin, 1986: 297)

In spite of the religious phrasing, mythic violence simply reproduces the existing structures of power and violence, whereas by being essentially anarchic, divine violence is thought to wipe the slate clean and thus holds within it the promise of a new order, removed from the perpetuation of legal or any other form of force (Rasch, 2004; Žizek, 2008).

Mythic violence produces guilt through its appeal to legal and other forms of normativity, where the production of such guilt under neoliberalism occurs through the simple fact of being 'Other'. Deliverance, in neoliberal terms, comes through 'rationalization', 'civilization', and the final realization of transitioning to its particular juridico-political order. But to the marginalized, this does not expiate guilt; instead it simply compounds and intensifies it, and this is precisely where Benjamin would suggest that divine violence steps in on the side of the disaffected. Divine violence 'comes as if from the outside to limit the space of the political, indeed, to mark that space for demolition. ...it assumes that the perplexing knot of asymmetry at the source of the political can be cut by a single, simple act of violence that will "found a new historical age"' (Rasch, 2004: 94). Thus, although premised on notions of utopian salvation, neoliberalism is not divine, and neither is its violence. Neoliberalism and its structural violence are mythic, premised upon the geotemporal fiction of a flat, static, and planar matrix (Hart, 2006; Sparke, 2005) and the construction of a political, economic, and legal 'order' (Springer, 2009c). And while neoliberalism promotes the idea that it will dissolve direct violence, it often reinforces the structural violence that generates the very phenomenon it suggests it is attempting to nullify. It is this very ontological disjuncture that will inevitably shatter the neoliberal order's validity as it is inexorably placed at the merciless threat of subaltern divine violence.

Conclusion

The movement of neoliberalism towards economic orthodoxy, and its eventual capture of such hegemony, was not only achieved through dissemination of its class project geographically through 'shocks' or otherwise, but also by spreading its worldviews across various discursive fields (Plehwe & Walpen, 2006). Through this merger of discourse and an imperative for spatial diffusion, neoliberalism has constructed virulent imaginative geographies that appeal to commonsense rhetorics of freedom, peace, and democracy through the destructive principles of Orientalism, and in particular by proposing a static and isolated place-based 'culture of violence' thesis in the context of 'the Other'. These representations of space and place 'are never merely mirrors held up to somehow reflect or represent the world but instead enter directly into its constitution (and destruction). Images and words release enormous power, and their dissemination... can have the most acutely material consequences' (Gregory & Pred, 2007: 2).

Neoliberalism is a discourse, and words do damage as actors perform their 'scripted' roles. But neoliberalism is also a practice that has 'actually existing' circumstances (Brenner & Theodore, 2002) where new violences are created. Thus, the global south has become 'the theater of a multiplicity of cruel little wars that, rather than barbaric throwbacks, are linked to the current global logic' (Escobar, 2004: 18).

Yet there is nothing quintessentially 'neoliberal' about Orientalism. Its entanglement with the neoliberal doctrine is very much dependent upon the context in which neoliberalization occurs. Initially conceived during the Enlightenment, and later revived in the postwar era, neoliberalism had a 'western' birth, radiating outwards across the globe as the sun was setting on Keynesian economics. Orientalism is, however, entangled in the project of imperialism, which is 'supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination' (Said, 1993: 9). As the latest incarnation of 'empire' (Hardt & Negri, 2000; Pieterse, 2004), the principles, practices, theories, and attitudes of a particular class-based faction maintaining economic control over various territories remains intact under neoliberalism and so we should not be too surprised to discover that the pernicious discourses that support such 'resurgent imperialism' similarly remain unchanged (Hart, 2006).

If, as Richard Peet (2000: 1222) argues, 'economic rationality is a symbolic logic formed as part of social imaginaries, formed that is in culture', then like the project of colonialism, and indeed in keeping with the 'Self-expanding logic of capital and its fundamental drive to capture new sites for (re)production (Harvey, 2005), neoliberalism is intimately bound up in articulating and valorizing cultural change. Yet in order for such change to be seen as necessary, the 'irrationality' of 'the Other' must be discursively constructed and imagined. This is precisely where neoliberalism and Orientalism converge. Neoliberalization proceeds as a 'civilizing' enterprise; it is the confirmation of reason on 'barbarians' who dwell beyond. Reason, like truth, is an effect of power, and its language developed out of the Enlightenment as an antithetical response to 'madness', or the outward performances of those seen as having lost what made them human (Foucault, 1965). Reason as such, triumphs at the expense of the non-conformist, the unusual, 'the Other'. As a consequence, neoliberal ideas are proselytized to rescind the ostensible irrationality and deviance of 'the Other'. A closely related second reason for evangelism relates to the purported 'wisdom' of neoliberalism, which repeatedly informs us that 'we' have never had it as good as we do right now, and thus 'Others' are in need of similar salvation. If 'they' are to be ruled, whether by might or by markets, they must become like 'us'.

This theology of neoliberalism maintains a sense of rationalism precisely because it looks to reason rather than experience as the foundation of certainty in knowledge. As Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (2002: 353) argue, 'the manifold disjunctures that have accompanied the worldwide imposition of neoliberalism—between ideology and practice; doctrine and reality; vision and consequence—are not merely accidental side effects of this disciplinary project... Rather, they are among its most essential features.' In other words, the effects of neoliberalization (poverty, inequality, and mythic violence) are ignored (Springer, 2008), and in their place a commonsense utopianism is fabricated (Bourdieu, 1998). And so we stand at 'the end of history' (Fukuyama, 1992), or at least so we are told, wherein the monotheistic imperative of one God gives way to one market and one globe. Yet the certainty of such absolutist spatio-temporality is in every respect chimerical. Space and time are always becoming, invariably under construction. The future is open, and to suggest otherwise is to conceptualize space as

a vast lacuna. There are always new stories yet to be told, new connections yet to be made, new contestations yet to erupt, and new imaginings yet to blossom (Massey, 2005). As Said (1993: 7) argued, 'just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings'. This sentiment applies as much to the geographies of neoliberalism as it does to violent geographies.

If so much of the world's violence is made possible through virulent imaginings, then perhaps the *first step* towards peace is a collective imagining of nonviolence. Undoubtedly, this is an exercise made possible through culture via human agency because, '[i]f violence 'has meaning', then those meanings can be challenged' (Stanko, 2003: 13). Yet conceiving peace is every bit as much a geographic project. Violence sits in places in a very material sense, we experience the world through our emplacement in it, where violence offers no exception to this cardinal rule of embodiment. But there is no pre-determined plot to the stories-so-far of space, the horizons of place are forever mercurial, and geographies can always be re-imagined. Geography is not destiny any more than culture is, and as such the possibility of violence being *bound* in place is only accomplished through the fearful and malicious imaginings of circulating discourses. Put differently, it is the performative effects of Orientalism and other forms of malevolent knowledge that allow violence to curl up and make itself comfortable in particular places. What can emerge from such understandings is a 'principled refusal to exclude others from the sphere of the human' and an appreciation of how 'violence compresses the sometimes forbiddingly abstract spaces of geopolitics and geo-economics into the intimacies of everyday life and the innermost recesses of the human body' (Gregory & Pred, 2007: 6).

Violence is not the exclusive preserve of 'the Other' rooted in the supposed determinism of either biology or culture; it populates the central structures of all societies. The capacity for violence exists within the entirety of humanity, but so too does its opposite, the rejection of violence. There are choices to be made each moment of every day, and to imagine peace is to actively refuse the exploitative structures, virulent ideologies, and geographies of death that cultivate and are sown by violence. This emancipatory potential entails challenging the discourses that support mythic violence through a critical negation of the circuits it promotes, and non-violent engagement in the sites – both material and abstract – that it seeks to subjugate. It requires a deep and committed sense of 'Self-reflection to be able to recognize the circuitous pathways of violence when it becomes banal, systematic, and symbolic. And it involves the articulation of new imaginative geographies rooted not in the 'architectures of enmity' (Gregory, 2004a), but in the foundations of mutual admiration, respect, and an introspective sense of humility. By doing so, we engage in a politics that reclaims the somatic as a space to be nurtured, reproduces familiar and not so familiar geographies through networks of solidarity built on genuine compassion, and rewrites local constellations of experience with the poetics of peace.

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Endnotes

¹ Nonetheless, the literature is rife with examples where the phrase 'culture of violence' has been employed (see Curle, 1999; Jackson, 2004; Rupesinghe & Rubio, 1994). What these accounts have in common is that they either refuse to offer a definition, suggesting that both the concept itself and the lack of consensus on significance do not allow for one, or they fail to offer systematic attention to the presumed functioning of it dynamics. All that is certain about this confused term is its capacity to qualify particular peoples and places as inherently violent.

² 'Commonsense', as David Harvey (2005: 39) argues, 'is constructed out of long-standing practices of cultural socialization often rooted deep in regional or national traditions. It is not the same as the 'good sense' that can be constructed out of critical engagement with the issues of the day. Commonsense can, therefore, be profoundly misleading, obfuscating or disguising real problems under cultural prejudices'.

³ This is an oversimplified summary of neoliberalism's rise, as there were a number of struggles and setbacks before what started as a marginalized sense of idealism became a dominant global orthodoxy. While Harvey's (2005) 'brief history' offers an authoritative overview of how this ideational project was transformed into programmes of socioeconomic and state transformation beginning in the late 1970s, Peck (2008: 3) has gone further back to account for the 'prehistories' of 'protoneoliberalism', demonstrating that the neoliberal project was never inevitable, but one of '[d]issipated efforts, diversions and deadends'.

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