

### **Bare life**

'Bare life' - or mere life - is a phrase that has recently been brought into debate by Giorgio Agamben.<sup>1</sup> It is used to signal a contrast between mere biological life and human life as cultural, political and civic. This distinction raises many questions about what it means to be - and to be recognised as - fully human.

In the enlightenment tradition, citizenship of a nation state implies rights, recognition, membership of a legitimate collectivity. The concept of human rights, though ostensibly a universal term, is closely connected to this idea; it is underpinned by quite complex ideas about what constitutes membership of humanity. As neoliberal globalisation intensifies some of these underpinnings are beginning to unravel. Nation states are less powerful; millions live beyond the protection of states, whether as internally displaced people or as refugees; and an increasing number of countries are regarded as failed states or rogue states. Alongside these developments, the United States has adopted a much more interventionist global stance in recent years. Its promotion of global markets has become infused with a revived sense of its mission to spread 'civilisation' to what it increasingly sees as barbarian badlands (see Jonathan Rutherford's commentary in this issue for more on this). All this is very bad news for the large proportion of the world's population that is at risk of slipping into a condition of 'mere life'.

In this issue, several contributors discuss terror and the 'war' against it. Faisal Devji focuses on Al-Qaeda, which, he argues, is itself the product of globalisation. He sees parallels between Al-Qaeda and other global movements, all of which have no forum in which they can have political purchase. This means that their politics is based on ethics and identity, rather than taking the form of a political organisation that is focused on transforming a state. He also shows how Al-Qaeda flourishes in the interstices of the global marketplace -

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1. See Giorgio Agamben, *Form-of-life*, *Means Without End*, University of Minnesota Press. The term 'mere life' comes from the work of Walter Benjamin - see 'Critique of Violence' in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Verso 1985. For a discussion of bare life in relation to asylum seekers, see also Nira Yuval Davis, 'Human security and asylum seeking', *Mediactive 4 Asylum*.

its existence is dependent on the global mobility of people and money. This is a movement that is dissolving traditional Islamic politics - hence its appeal to the young. Faisal Devji's approach is interesting because it treats Al-Qaeda as a political response to world events, rather than as a monster besieging the gates of civilisation.

Kurt Jacobsen documents the rise and rise of the rehabilitation of the strategy of 'pacification' in the United States. He traces the continuities between the pacification of the wild west and modern day military strategy. He shows how this policy failed totally in Vietnam - mainly because of the huge contradiction between winning hearts and minds (which is theoretically part of the strategy) and bombing and napalming people. An outside state's model of civilisation - however defined - is not something that can be violently imposed on another country. Violent imposition is predicated on a refusal to give credence to the standpoint of those who oppose you; it stems from regarding your opponent as less than fully human. And, as Mike Rustin shows in his discussion of Robert McNamara's recent recantations, this is an unlikely pathway to conflict resolution - and hence to any real peace.

Sayed Khan looks at the history of Afghanistan in the last century and a half. He shows how successive attempts at imposed 'modernisation' have resulted in the entrenchment of conservatism. The polarisations of the cold war then led the West to side with the mujahidin, with tragic and destabilising consequences for the region. The attempt to defend against the encroachments of the old communist enemy have helped to give birth to something even more frightening.

Doreen Massey identifies the beast that is driving so much of this agenda. She reminds us that it is important not to think of globalisation as something that always arrives from somewhere else. In her discussion of the GLA's London Plan, she draws attention to the fact that London - especially the City of London - is a main site in the *production* of neoliberal globalisation. This means that when we celebrate diversity, we should not forget the external effects of London's position as a world city (and this argument is generalisable to other global centres). We need to contest this aspect of London's role much more actively.

Many of those who live within the walls of civilisation also experience less than full recognition of their humanity. Ejós Ubiribo's moving contribution shows the pain that fuels the gun crime epidemic among some subcultures of

young black men in Britain. Through her dialogues with people involved in this life, she succeeds in conveying the sense of exclusion that drives people to try to seize their own version of the good life (money and respect - as in the mainstream) through violence. That this is a strategy borne of desperation can be seen in the death and destruction it has brought to so many.

Ruth Lister also draws attention to a key flaw in New Labour's 'respect agenda'; it has completely overlooked the lack of recognition and respect from dominant groups in society towards those who live in poverty. In pointing to the many exclusions experienced by those living on low incomes - from consumption, from recognition, from power, from dignity - she calls for the respect agenda to be turned upside down.

Elsewhere in the issue, Robin Wilson argues that making concessions to communalism, as in the Belfast Agreement of 1998, is no solution to inter-ethnic conflict. Instead he calls for a politics based on more fluid conceptions of identity and a civic cosmopolitanism. Richard Minns discusses the gradual transformation of the Israeli state - once firmly anchored in a corporatist Labour Zionism, it has now adapted itself to the neoliberal norm. These changes are analysed through the prism of what is going on in pension funds - institutions that are hugely important both financially and socially, and are consequently excellent barometers of wider attitudes.

**P**at Devine argues that after the falling apart of the postwar settlement in the 1970s, a move towards neoliberalism was not inevitable. The political history of this period, as well as alternatives put forward by the left at that time, is worth revisiting, since we are still living with the consequences of the reverses we suffered then.

Finally, Janet Newman offers some interesting reflections on competing ideas about the nature of the public and the different terrains across which battles are currently being fought. The retreat of the public under the onslaught of the market is another process which has been underway since the 1970s, and here too, as Janet argues, it is important to go beyond social democratic conceptions of the public sphere if we are to make a serious challenge to creeping marketisation.

# The world without light

Jonathan Rutherford

On 11 September 2001 I was part of a crowd that had gathered round a shop window to watch the World Trade Centre burning. When United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the south tower I felt the symbolic order of the world I'd grown up in reverberate in shock. In the days that followed I experienced a nostalgia for the TV-created America of my 1960s childhood. I recalled the programmes of small-town, homespun innocence fringed with the threat of disorder that had played such an important part in shaping my cultural imagination. The bloody borders of the American imperium with their torturing of enemies by proxies, the crushing economic exploitation and overthrowing of uncooperative governments were transmogrified into the TV and cinematic images of the mythic Western frontier in which the Indians bloodlessly bit the dust. In this celluloid Wild West, the military fort established in frontier country followed in the wake of the hunter and trader, consolidating US military power, securing markets and delivering white civilisation to the 'hostiles'. After 11 September large swathes of the world became 'injun country'.

## **'This is civilization's fight'**

In his January 2002 State of the Union address, President Bush spelt out his imperial mission. It contained three essential elements: 'active American global leadership' - the entire world is the battlefield and the enemy will be pursued wherever they are; 'regime change' - terrorist organisations *and* rogue regimes are targets in the war on terrorism; and 'promoting liberal democratic principles' - no nation will be exempt from

the 'non-negotiable demands' of liberty, law and justice.<sup>1</sup> Like the Cheyenne military culture of the nineteenth century, Al-Qaeda assailed the American imagination with its fabled devotion to spiritual violence and its embracing of death. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, described the threat: 'These folks are savages, mass murderers'. Donald Rumsfeld was more expansive. The enemy comes from a world that is pre-modern: 'They combine medieval views with modern tools and technologies. They operate within hostile and friendly nation-states and even within our own country'. A *Business Week* editorial (20.9.04) announced that, 'a new age of barbarism is upon us'. The terrorists have but one demand, 'the destruction of modern secular society'.

Osama bin Laden, in his 1996 'Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places', announced his fatwa with these opening words: 'Our youths believe in paradise after death. They believe that taking part in fighting will not bring their day nearer; and staying behind will not postpone their day either.'<sup>2</sup> Bin Laden confronted the West with its fear of death: 'Those youths are different from your soldiers. Your problem will be how to convince your troops to fight'. In Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down*, a film whose unspoken message is the moral righteousness of the American imperial mission, Somali militia men are all linked into the same nihilistic embrace of death. One tells a captured American helicopter pilot: 'In Somalia killing is negotiation. There will always be killing, you see. This is the way things are in our world'. The imaginary of the Global War on Terror has created a fragmenting world of chaos, inhumanity and unrestrained hatred. Mogadishu is depicted as a bankrupted Dantean inferno, teeming with armed black multitudes driven solely by the desire to kill Americans. Here is the dark abyss beyond the borders of the American imperium - the lands without light, literally.

P.H. Liotta and James Miskel, two academics at the influential US Naval War College, use this metaphor of darkness to describe the new world order confronting America. In their 'Redrawing the Map of the Future' they

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1. Gary Schmitt, Tom Donnelly, 'Memorandum to Opinions Leaders "The Bush Doctrine"', [www.newamericancentury.org/defense-20020130.htm](http://www.newamericancentury.org/defense-20020130.htm), 30.1.02.
  2. Osama bin Laden, 'Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places', [www.mideastweb.org/osamabinladen1.htm](http://www.mideastweb.org/osamabinladen1.htm).

reproduce NASA's image of the 'earth at night': flows and grids of light punctuate the azure of the earth's surface, identifying the areas of economic development.<sup>3</sup> Their interest in this photograph lies in the pockets of darkness - the Caribbean Rim, virtually all of Africa, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East, Southwest Asia and much of Southeast Asia. These are lands which have been excluded from global flows of trade and capital, where soon half the population will be aged 15-29 and without employment or educational opportunities. Here, they write, are the 'feral zones' of under-governed remote rural areas, the semi-urbanised collections of displaced populations, the 'bubbling petri dishes' of the new arc of mega slum cities - Lagos-Cairo-Karachi-Jakarta - and the militia run 'para-states' which behave like zombies kept alive by injections of aid. In these places, they argue, lie the future threats to the United States. Their solution is a marketised version of Bush's imperial mission. Intervene politically and economically and connect up these areas to the global economy: 'If September 11 taught us anything, it is that our security is inextricably connected to domestic governance shortcomings elsewhere.'

### **The military-market complex**

For some, markets are enough to lighten the darkness. Liotta and Miskell's prescription for the Global War on Terror has its origins in the Clinton Presidency of the 1990s. Clinton's priority of opening up markets in East Asia, creating the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA), and supporting the setting up of the World Trade Organisation, was a major force behind the growth of globalisation. Samuel Bodman, then Deputy Secretary of the US Department of Commerce, explained the strategy: 'The US economy is in recession, and our goal is to get America working again. The United States sorely needs the stimulus of trade ... Furthermore, it is evident that our security at home is inextricably linked to the security and stability of nations across the world.'<sup>4</sup> Charles Krauthammer, in his famous essay describing the 'unipolar moment' of US global

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3. PH. Liotta and James F. Miskel, 'Redrawing the Map of the Future', *World Policy Journal*, March, 2004, [www.worldpolicy.org/journal/articles/wpj04-1/Liotta.pdf](http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/articles/wpj04-1/Liotta.pdf).

4. Remarks of Deputy Secretary Samuel Bodman, at the 'Services 2002 Conference', A Business-Government Dialogue on US Trade Expansion Objectives, US Department of Commerce, 5.2.02, [www.uscsi.org](http://www.uscsi.org), [www.uscsi.org](http://www.uscsi.org).

hegemony, was less circumspect: 'America's involvement abroad is in many ways an essential pillar of the American economy.'<sup>5</sup> US policy has been an ambiguous relationship between brute self interest and the ideological belief that globalised capitalism will civilise the world. Under the Bush administration, the link between trade and security has increased exponentially with its policy of 'competitive liberalization'. His strategy attempts to tie together US military and corporate interests in regional and bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). In May 2003, he announced plans to create a US-Middle East Free Trade Agreement by 2013. Robert Zoellick, US Representative of Trade at the time, told an audience at the World Economic Forum in Jordan: 'Our trade agenda is a fundamental part of the President's broader Middle East initiative ... Our goal is to assist nations that are ready to embrace economic liberty and the rule of law, integrate into the global trading system, and bring their economies into the modern era.'

**T**he role of markets in the War on Terror has been most forthrightly championed by Thomas P.M. Barnett, a former researcher with the Centre for Naval Analyses (and a Democrat). After 9/11 he became Assistant for Strategic Futures in the Pentagon's Office of Force Transformation, an initiative set up by Donald Rumsfeld to carry through the comprehensive restructuring of the US military (the Revolution in Military Affairs). Barnett's proposals for military strategy are directly linked to his belief in the civilising mission of capitalism. Like Liotta and Miskell, Barnett identifies the limits of globalisation as a key factor in US security:

Show me where globalization is thick with network connectivity, financial transactions, liberal media flows, and collective security, and I will show you regions featuring stable governments, rising standards of living, and more deaths by suicide than murder ... These parts of the world I call the Functioning Core, or Core ... But show me where globalization is thinning or just plain absent, and I will show you regions plagued by politically repressive regimes, widespread poverty and disease, routine mass murder, and - most important - the chronic conflicts that incubate the next generation of global terrorists ... These parts of the world I call the Non-Integrating Gap, or Gap.<sup>6</sup>

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5. Charles Krauthammer, 'The Unipolar Moment', *Foreign Affairs* 70, 1991, p27.

6. T. Barnett, 'The Pentagon's New Map', *Esquire*, March, 2003.

According to Barnett, the United States faces three tasks. First, it must ‘bolster the Core’s immune-system response’ to ‘disruptive perturbations’ unleashed by events like 9/11. Second, it has to build a ‘firewall’ against Gap exports of ‘terror, drugs, pandemics’. ‘Seam states’ that lie along the Gap’s ‘bloody boundaries’ must be targeted: Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, Morocco, Algeria, Greece, Turkey, Pakistan, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Third it must steadily increase the export of security to the Gap’s worst trouble spots. Military bases should be positioned permanently within the Gap: there are no exit strategies.<sup>7</sup>

**B**arnett’s world is polarised into a threatening, uncivilised outside and a civilised inside that needs defending. The market is the means by which the civilised inside can be extended. He believes that victories in the War on Terror will be won by the private sector, not by the state or the military: ‘we don’t need business to “get behind the war”, but to get out in front of it.’<sup>8</sup> Bases will follow emerging markets in order to consolidate US geopolitical dominance. In 2001, Barnett worked with the investment bank Cantor Fitzgerald to map out future relations between commerce and the military. His ‘New Rules Set Project’ identified a military-market complex that will facilitate a steady rise of connectivity between national economies. Inward flows of private capital investment will utilise the ‘inexpensive but dependable labor’ of Gap countries. In turn they must develop ‘good governance’ and the enforcement of property rights and contracts. Barnett offers the example of Asia. In Asia, the commander-in-chief of US Pacific Command guarantees the security of the region. ‘We trade little pieces of paper (our currency, in the form of a trade deficit) for Asia’s amazing array of products and services. We are smart enough to know this is a patently unfair deal unless we offer something of great value along with those little pieces of paper. That product is a strong US Pacific Fleet, which squares the transaction nicely.’<sup>9</sup>

Barnett’s faith in an American imperial destiny, with the US acting as global moral compass and exporter of security, requires the naive assumption that its

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7. T. Barnett, *The Pentagon’s New Map*, G.P. Putnam, 2004, p179.

8. T. Barnett, ‘The Top Ten Reasons Why I Hate World War IV’, *Newsletter from Thomas P.M. Barnett*, 25.4.05, [www.thomaspmbarnett.com/weblog](http://www.thomaspmbarnett.com/weblog).

9. T. Barnett, ‘Asia: The Military-Market Link’, *The U.S. Naval Institute*, January 2002, [www.thomaspmbarnett.com/published/atmml.htm](http://www.thomaspmbarnett.com/published/atmml.htm).



economic interests do not conflict with those of other countries. It is in this contradiction that the civilising mission collapses and policing loses any appearance of neutrality. Capital accumulation and the pursuit of profit do not produce the collective, public goods necessary for sustainable and equitable development. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) does not deal with the root causes of poverty. Market driven globalisation will not reduce the huge, global disparity in wealth. C.P. Chandrasekhar and Jayati Ghosh, in their survey of current global balance of payments, show how the private capital flows that Barnett envisages as creating economic development simply enforce the dependency of peripheral economies on the centre. As they found: 'private capital flowed into developing countries to earn lucrative returns, and this capital then flowed out as investment in low interest Treasury bills in order to finance the US balance of trade deficit.'<sup>10</sup> Korkut Boratav calculates that in 2003 the US economy benefited by up to \$428 billions in net resource transfers from the rest of the world.<sup>11</sup> Financial liberalisation conscripts countries into a global financial system in service to the US economy. In the process it reverses the meagre political independence and economic gains made in the process of decolonisation. It's an economics of underdevelopment and it is never going to bring global harmony.

While those who refuse the civilising offer of capitalism place themselves firmly on the outside of world society, some of those within the citadel do particularly well out of the business security link. The War on Terror has enriched many of the corporate friends of the Bush administration. Despite systematic overcharging, Halliburton has won government contracts worth \$10.5bn for Operation Iraqi Freedom. The War on Terror is generating huge funds for corporate research and development. The technological sophistication of weaponry, computers and digital technology is a product of the symbiosis between the military and the civilian, high-tech, 'new economy' sector. Companies like Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, L-3 Communications, Alliant Techsystems and DRS Technologies have reconfigured the old military industrial complex that

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10. C.P. Chandrasekhar & Jayati Ghosh, 'The New Structure of Global Balances', Nov, 2004, [networkideas.org/news/nov2004/news11\\_Global\\_Balances.htm](http://networkideas.org/news/nov2004/news11_Global_Balances.htm)

11. Korkut Boratav, 'Some Recent Changes on the Relations Between the Metropolises and the Periphery of the Imperialist System', paper presented at the Conference on The Economics of the New Imperialism, New Delhi, January 2004, p5, [www.networkideas.org/feathm/feb2004/ft03\\_IDEAs\\_Delhi\\_Conference.htm](http://www.networkideas.org/feathm/feb2004/ft03_IDEAs_Delhi_Conference.htm).

powered mid-twentieth century US technological innovation.

However, the US's role as leviathan is contributing to its budget deficit. The military-market system is effectively financed by foreign creditors, not all of whom share its geopolitical interests. And its dominance in other areas is also being challenged. Its technological lead over China, Brazil and India is narrowing, and these countries are proving difficult to bully and bribe. Bush is finding it hard to persuade them to sign up for Free Trade Agreements - unlike more biddable states such as Chile, Morocco, Bahrain and the Dominican Republic. Samuel Bodman's search for a stimulus to trade as a source of recovery for the US economy remains elusive.

### **The future**

The US has practised a transient form of colonialism. It is unwilling to cast itself as an old-style imperialist, preferring to rely on free-market capitalism as the glue that holds the civilised world together. In its direct interventions, its proponents behave like 'tourists with guns' before returning home and leaving in their wake hybrid borderlands that are more cultural and economic than territorial. (Both Al-Qaeda and the War on Terror are the offspring of these borderlands.) Robert Cooper, a British advocate of liberal imperialism, argues that the barbarism of imperialism belongs to the past. We live in a post-industrial economy dominated by services and an information sector. The state is no longer founded on the principle of violence: 'Hence its unwarlike character. War is essentially a collective activity. In the post-modern state the individual is supreme.' Individual consumption has replaced collective glory as the dominant theme of national life. 'War is to be avoided: empire is of no interest.'<sup>12</sup> This is a variation on the theme of the market state, but it repeats the mistake of ignoring the conflict inherent in capital accumulation.

Contrary to Cooper, though wealthy individuals living in post-industrial societies might be unwilling to sacrifice themselves for the destiny of the nation, there are other means of executing war that can be called on if their way of life is threatened - as it increasingly will be, by global warming and the depletion of oil, gas and water. They will find the resources to police their borders and

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12. Robert Cooper, *The post-modern state and the world order*, Demos 2000, p31, [www.demos.co.uk/catalogue/thepostmodernstate/](http://www.demos.co.uk/catalogue/thepostmodernstate/).

pacify those living on the outside: when there is killing to be done, a partially denationalised protean form of imperialism will find its proxies, mercenaries and private military firms to undertake the necessary dirty work. The military-market complex, to quote from Foucault's telling account of the bio-politics of the modern age, will exercise the power to 'foster life or disallow it to the point of death'. Compliant populations of Barnett's Gap regions will be included where needed in the global labour market. But those who do not play by the rules, or who are simply superfluous (as Zygmunt Bauman has argued in *Wasted Lives*) become, in Walter Benjamin's phrase, 'mere life'. Stripped of their civic status and without recourse to the law and the codes of civility of the state, such peoples can be killed with impunity. 'With mere life', Benjamin writes, 'the rule of law over the living ceases'.<sup>13</sup>

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13. Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Verso, 1985, p151.

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