

Antipode

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Rules Bloody Rules: Safety, Security, Stockholm Syndrome, and the State

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The truth is out, the lies are old
But you don't want to know
- Black Sabbath, *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*

I can't believe the news today
I can't close my eyes and make it go away
- U2, *Sunday Bloody Sunday*

Rain bring me the strength to get to another day
And all I want to see
Set us free
- Sepultura, *Roots Bloody Roots*

The 15 April bombing of the Boston Marathon and the explosion at a fertilizer storage and distribution facility in West, Texas two days later on 17 April can both be understood as particular formations of violence. The former can be read as a direct expression of malevolence intended to maim and wound, while the latter represents a more diffuse, or structural incarnation of violence (Galtung 1969), as although 200 people were injured and 14 lives were lost in the

tragedy, it is much more difficult to pinpoint blame on a particular actor. Both incidents have rightfully produced a public outcry in the United States, where much of the discourse that has followed has centered on concerns for public safety calling for an even tighter ratcheting down of the security regime that was initiated in the aftermath of 9/11, along with what is being viewed as a lack of adequate regulations, particularly with respect to the latter incident. At first glance, a regulatory mindset may seem contradictory as the call for stricter regulation is being articulated within a societal context that has been undergoing intensive neoliberalization for the past 30 years. Deregulation has evolved into a taken for granted concept under neoliberalism precisely because it seeks conditions wherein capital becomes unfettered by the demands of the state and may proceed along a more liberated axis of advance that, as the theory goes, stimulates growth. The problem with ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (Brenner and Theodore 2002) of course is that deregulation is never advanced in an emancipatory sense for people. In freeing up the terrain for the intensified roll out of accumulation practices, neoliberalization always involves intensive re-regulation, something geographers have recognized for some time now (Peck and Tickell 2002). The type of re-regulation that has evolved has not necessarily coincided with public safety, and instead, re-regulation aims to produce the conditions wherein ‘properly’ neoliberalized subjects might be made through the adoption of a mentality, or ‘governmentality’, that is favorable to capital (Barry *et al.* 1996; Lemke 2001; Springer 2012c). The other side of the coin is that public safety is increasingly spun in terms of the vilification of ‘others’ (Springer 2011b; 2012d) and the criminalization of the poor (Wacquant 2009), who are made to stand in as the primary threats to society, all while the real threat to society (i.e. neoliberal capitalism) goes largely unnoticed in its pilfering of public resources by undermining a cultural milieu wherein collective action and mutual aid are embraced by promoting individualism and self responsibility in their stead.

While it is important to challenge the grip of neoliberalism, we need to be very careful not to view a lack of regulation as *ipso facto* evidence of a more insidious form of institutionalized violence. Such a position treads the slippery slope of more regulation being somehow tantamount to less violence, which assumes a benevolent state or at least the possibility of one. Accordingly, it is imperative that we expand our political compass beyond the binary idea of neoliberalism—less regulation—bad versus socialism—more regulation—good and start thinking through the possibilities of ‘other socialisms’ (i.e. anarchism, autonomism, feminism)

that would tear up the social contract by recognizing that it has always and only ever been inked with the blood of innocents. In other words, we can't trade one form of violence for another form of violence as this simply perpetuates the cycle. Unless of course by 'regulation' we are really meaning community organizing and non-hierarchical consensus democracy with respect to decision making and safety protocols, in which case we should instead be asking questions about how the contemporary functioning of capitalism limits such forms of voluntary co-operation and direct action among workers precisely because of its ongoing relationship with the state (i.e., union busting), which ostensibly, and only ever ostensibly, has the best interest of the people in mind. My point is that states have repeatedly proven themselves untrustworthy insofar as safety is concerned, and aside from the explosion in West, Texas, we only need to look to the claim to a monopoly of violence and the toll this has taken in human lives through the centuries, often in the name of 'public safety' and 'security'. The ongoing deception that heightened security measures and safety concerns represent in the form of the notion that 'freedom is not free' is deeply offensive precisely because it licenses more violence by legitimizing the state. In many ways we can view this a case of Stockholm syndrome at a societal level, as almost anyone can appreciate the problematics of the state and the violence it perpetuates (i.e. police brutality, war, the death penalty, forced evictions, and so forth), and yet so often there is a suspension of critical thought vis-à-vis the state as individuals cede to the logic of this captor. Victimization and abuse are reinterpreted through a lens of affinity for the state producing a form of 'traumatic bonding', as although the state intermittently harasses, beats, threatens, abuses, and/or intimidates society, most members of that same society develop strong emotional ties and adopt the same values as the aggressor, presuming that in doing so, the threat to oneself will be minimized (Dutton 2001). Thus, although the interpretation that peace can only be secured through a collective willingness to unleash violence at perceived threats is so self-evidently oxymoronic, it nonetheless continues to resonate as imprudent 'commonsense'.

It is time to start thinking critically about security and safety within the contexts of our lives, neighbourhoods, and workplaces in a different light, not as a 'neoliberal responsabilization', nor as something that can be delegated to authorities on our behalf, but 'from the roots' as a radical endeavor to care for ourselves and as a practice of mutual aid within our communities. A neighborhood watch program, for example, promotes the idea of looking out for each other by passing authority over to the state and reporting all suspicious activities to the

police. The orientation here is not to bring the community together, but to produce responsible and vigilant subjects that maintain a property regime by mitigating threats to this order through a general distrust of ‘outsiders’. In contrast, mutual aid promotes the idea of looking out for each other through a rejection of authority and the embrace of voluntary association and the cooperative exchange of goods and services (Kropotkin 2008). The orientation here is to bring the community together by casting suspicion and doubt to the wind, and welcoming anyone who is willing to engage in a relationship of reciprocation with others. Such an orientation turns the question of public safety on its head, and because it is no longer exclusionary to the poor or hostile to ‘others’, mutual aid rejects the idea of a punitive social arrangement wherein we are reliant on authorities to intervene. Some might object that a bully could simply interject and disrupt the pattern of mutual aid, but the community is never powerless to such a process and can take collective measures that abate this potential (Clastres 2007). The idea that we might collectively need protection from latent bullies is, after all, a state logic and arguably its originary ruse. So far from advocating a neoliberalized model of personal responsabilization that treads too close to a neoliberal trajectory, mutual aid and the practice of reciprocity are about building community as opposed to individualism, solidarity as opposed to alienation, and empathy as opposed to apathy, which are customary mechanisms that also ward off despotic power. Likewise, regulation needs to be unpacked and rethought because if it does not come directly attendant to bloodshed, it indirectly gives rise to it by perpetuating the logic of sovereignty. The etymology of the word ‘regulate’ hints at its underlying intentions, coming from the Latin *regula*, meaning ‘rule’, which signifies the exercise of ultimate authority. Regulation is accordingly inextricable from the state, and like all forms of rule, it implies violence.

Although some on the political Left may be hesitant to entertain the idea of anarchism and its revocation of all authority given the scourge of neoliberalism over the past three decades, a better appreciation for how this particular form of capitalism has unfolded through re-regulation allows us see the proverbial forest *and* the trees (Springer 2010). I’m fully onboard in terms of a concern for not wanting to bolster neoliberal modalities, but I’m also equally enthusiastic about the potential of anarchism and the challenge it presents to all forms of *archy*, or ‘systems of rule’ (Springer 2011a; 2012a; 2012b). This is not a contradictory position as some contemporary political discourse in America might have us believe. I abhor ‘anarcho-capitalism’

and the way that it has misrepresented anarchism in the United States as a potentially right wing agenda, which severs anarchism from its decidedly anti-capitalist, socialist origins. I also reject the reactionary caricature of anarchism as chaos. Anarchism isn't pandemonium; it is the emancipated condition of free cooperation and the actual practice of mutual aid. As a reply to the uptake of anarchist organizing principles in contemporary social movements, along with the development of a more autonomist variety of Marxism (Holloway 2002; Federici 2004; Hardt and Negri 2004), we currently see a more vulgar form of Marxism rearing its ugly head once more in the form of an argument that recapitulates the supposed need for the state (Dean 2012). This thesis implicates itself in how regulation is typically conceived, and as David Harvey (2012: 69) demonstrates when he argues that, "in some sense 'hierarchical' forms of organization are needed to address large-scale problems", it advocates for the continuing influence of regulation as a form of social ordering in response to neoliberalism. After being so inspired by Harvey's work in the past, I was profoundly turned off by *Rebel Cities* and its knee-jerk rejection of all things horizontal, rhizomic, and decentralized by assuming that these qualities necessarily lend themselves to a neoliberal modus operandi (see Springer In Review for a critique). Like Mikhail Bakunin (1867), I'm "convinced that liberty without socialism is privilege, injustice; and that socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality".

The truth about the state and its monopoly of violence are by now well known, and yet the lies we are continually fed have been met with a certain sense of ambivalence. The willingness to sacrifice freedom at the altar of security has been building steadily since 9/11, and has now seemingly reached a fever pitch in the United States. If humanity is ever to be collectively set free, we have to recognize with eyes wide open that it is hierarchy, authority, and the very idea of rule itself that shackles us to violence. The notion that some agent or entity can make sovereign decisions for a collective and has the supreme authority to enforce these arbitrary whims through the violent force of law lends itself to the type of exceptionalism that Giorgio Agamben (1998) disavows, and to the blind obedience to institutionalization that Walter Benjamin (1986) railed against. To seek deeper regulation where regulation has failed us is a peculiar invocation that is indeed a 'road to serfdom' (Hayek 1944), not least because it concedes that decision-making and community planning are activities that should not be organized collectively. Yet we need not respond, as Friedrich Hayek did, with the idea that the only path forward is one of market libertarianism, for this ignores the tyranny of capitalism and the

divisive inequality it cultivates. Instead we might find a significant degree of potential in the direct action of anarcho-syndicalism (Rocker 2004), where worker-managed production systems are networked into a stateless socialist society, otherwise known as ‘full communism’. In this regard, I see autogestion and the type of factory occupations we have seen with FaSinPat in Argentina and Vio.Me in Greece as pivotal first steps, and importantly, as ways to avoid the type of tragedy we saw in West, Texas. Worker self-management provides a radical basis of organization that not only loosens the grip of reckless industry practice to ensure safety without regulation on workers’ own terms, but also democratizes the entire structure of operation by doing away with any purported ‘need’ for more rules, bloody rules.

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