NEOLIBERALIZING VIOLENCE: (POST)MARXIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY, POSTSTRUCTURALISM, AND THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE IN ‘POSTCONFLICT’ CAMBODIA

by

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ABSTRACT

In spite of a United Nations sponsored transition to democracy and peace in the early 1990s, violence remains a ubiquitous feature of the Cambodian landscape in the posttransitional era. Contra the commonplace Orientalist renderings that suggest an inherently violent and authoritarian culture underpins Cambodia’s failure to consolidate democracy and its ongoing encounters with violence, this study advances an alternative interpretation. Combining (post)Marxian and poststructural theoretical approaches, this study proceeds as a (post)anarchist critique through a series of distinct yet thematically connected chapters that examine the intersections between neoliberalism and violence, and the (re)productions of space that both result from and contribute to their entanglement. This critical approach reveals how neoliberalization plays a paramount role in the continuation of violent geographies in Cambodia’s contemporary political economy. The first half of this study theorizes the geographies of neoliberalism and violence through an analysis of the discursive procession of neoliberalism and the imaginative geographies that position it as the sole providence of nonviolence. In orienting itself as a ‘civilizing’ project, neoliberalism as discourse actively manufactures the misrecognition of its violences. Struggles over public space are viewed as a necessary reaction against such symbolic violence, allowing us to relate similar constellations of experiences across space as a potential basis for emancipation, and thereby quicken the pace at which neoliberalism recedes into history. The second half of this study examines the violent geographies of neoliberalism in ‘postconflict’ Cambodia, bringing empirical focus to the (re)visualizations, (re)administrations, and (re)materializations of space that have informed the neoliberalization of violence in the country. The pretext of security under which marketization proceeded, the asphyxiation of democratic politics through ordered productions of space, the discursive obfuscations of the ‘culture of violence’ thesis, and Cambodia’s ongoing encounters with primitive accumulation are all revealed to inform the exceptional and exemplary violences of neoliberalization. Ultimately, this study illuminates the multiplicity of ways in which the processes of neoliberalization are suffused with violence. A critical appraisal of neoliberalism’s capacity for violence can open geographical imaginations to the possibility of (re)producing space in ways that make possible a transformative and emancipatory politics.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADHOC – Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

BLDP – Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party

CFF – Cambodian Freedom Fighters

CGDK – Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea

CGM – Consultative Group Meeting

CNPA – Cambodian National Petroleum Authority

CPP – Cambodian People’s Party

ESAFs – Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facilities

FUNCINPEC – National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Co-operative Cambodia

IFIs – International Financial Institutions

IMF – International Monetary Fund

NGOs – Nongovernmental Organizations

NICs – Newly Industrialized Countries

PPA – Paris Peace Agreements

PRGFs – Poverty Reduction and Growth Facilities

RGC – Royal Government of Cambodia

SACs - Structural Adjustment Credits

SAPs – Structural Adjustment Programmes

SOC – State of Cambodia

SRP – Sam Rainsy Party

UN – United Nations

UNTAC – United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
US – United States of America

WTO – World Trade Organization
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For Marni, Solina, and Odin
PART 1: INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Setting the Stage for Understanding Cambodia’s Violent Geographies of Neoliberalization

Democracy don’t rule the world, you’d better get that in your head. This world is ruled by violence, but I guess that’s better left unsaid.

-Bob Dylan, *Union Sundown*

The old embrace dying, the young embrace crying, the evil embrace violence.

-Cambodian Proverb

1.1 Background and Context

The small Southeast Asian country of Cambodia (see Figure 1.1) has had a tumultuous recent history. Thirty years of war during the latter part of the twentieth century has had an enduring effect on the collective memory of Cambodians. The psychological scarring and unspeakable suffering caused by the infamous Khmer Rouge (aka the Communist Party of Kampuchea) and their three-year, eight-month, and twenty-one-day reign of terror in the late 1970s is a national commonality. In a population of seven million at the time, over one and a half million people died as a direct result of Khmer Rouge administration, incompetence, and execution (Banister and Johnson 1993; Heuveline 2001). Less well known to the world, is that the nightmare of Pol Pot’s reign was preceded by another abomination of comparable magnitude. From 4 October 1965 to 15 August 1973, the United States (US) reprehensibly and mercilessly bombed the neutral country in an effort to flush out Viet Cong forces thought to be operating from within Cambodia (Owen and Kiernan 2006). The carpet-bombing literally incinerated the country, leaving an estimated 600,000 Cambodians dead (Herman 1997; Kiljunen 1984), and throwing thousands of young men and women into the waiting arms of the Khmer Rouge, who were promising to end the bloodshed (Kiernan 2004). At the time, few Cambodians could have predicted the carnage Pol Pot would cultivate. A close friend of mine fled Cambodia in 1979, having avoided detection as she walked the length of the country, from Phnom Penh to Poipet, with her husband and two small children at her side. She recalls Saloth Sar as...
a kind and gentle man, someone who fostered in her an enthusiasm for learning that ultimately led her to choose a career as a professor. Before he became known as Brother Number One, having transformed himself into Pol Pot, Saloth Sar was her childhood teacher. Here, in its most startling reveal, we find Hannah Arendt’s (1963) ‘banality of evil’, which views history’s profoundest moments of malevolence not as being executed by fanatics or sociopaths, but by ordinary people who simply accepted the premises of the state, its function as the institutionalization of power, and the erasure this brings to our ability to see the violence it unleashes as at once both exceptional and exemplary.

Figure 1.1: Political Map of Cambodia

*Source:* Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin; Base 802467 (R02153) 12-97, produced by the Central Intelligence Agency.
While the Cambodian holocaust clearly had two distinct stages, the bombing and the autogenocide, which a Finnish government report refers to as ‘the decade of the genocide’ (Kiljunen 1984), these atrocities were followed by further misery. When the Khmer Rouge fell on 7 January 1979, ten long years of silence at the international level followed, as it was Vietnamese communist forces that had brought down the Khmer Rouge regime (Kiernan 1996; Chandler 2008). Throughout the 1980s Cambodia was governed as Hanoi’s client state, and accordingly, with Cold War geopolitics continuing to command the foreign policy agendas of global north governments, Cambodia and its recent holocaust were largely ignored. As the Iron Curtain fell in 1989, the global political climate shifted. Accordingly, the Cambodian question that had been allowed to fester for a decade could finally be answered. Democracy ostensibly came to Cambodia in 1991 under a United Nations (UN) sponsored transition that was intended to provide a final solution to the country’s ongoing civil war. Peace, however, remains a relative term, as politically motivated killings are frequent during election times and often go unpunished. Amnesty International (1997: np) calls Cambodia’s pervasive impunity ‘a cancer at the heart of national life’, while violence in varying capacities and forms has disgraced every single election the country has held since Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia ended in 1989. Inducing sentiments of intense fear and vehement loathing, state-sponsored violence has fostered a political atmosphere in Cambodia that is non-conducive to individual representation and stifling to almost all forms of public political life.

The recent unfolding of events in Cambodia took place against a backdrop of immense change at the global level. The Cold War, a war that Cambodia by way of proxy was all too familiar with, ended following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The breakdown of the Soviet Union was itself precipitated by a massive upheaval of global economics during the 1970s. Between 1973 and 1979 world oil prices rose dramatically, where the impact on the ‘First World’ was a severe economic recession, the ‘Second World’ went into an economic tailspin that eventually led to its disappearance,
and the ‘Third World’ fell into a ‘debt crisis’ that would give rise to a condition of aid dependency that continues to this day. When oil prices began to collapse in late 1985, a major source of revenue for the Soviet Union dried up and its aid programs accordingly fell by the wayside. This had profound effects on recipient states like Vietnam, leading to their eventual withdrawal from Cambodia. Such unprecedented disruptions to the world economy marked the beginning of an economic paradigm shift. Economists and governments in the global north became increasingly disillusioned with the record of state involvement in social and economic life, leading to an unsophisticated and naive belief that the most efficient economic regulator would be to ‘leave things to the market’ (Peck 2001; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Rapley 2004). The involvement of the state in the economy was deemed overly bureaucratic and thus an inefficient and unnecessary drain on public coffers. Hence, although varying in doses among regions, states, and cities, the underlying assumption of neoliberalism envisions naturalized market relations, which includes the following finer points: to remove all obstacles to the operation of free markets; to impede all forms of public expenditure and collective initiative primarily through the imposition of user fees and the privatization of commonly held assets; to position individualism, competitiveness, and economic self-sufficiency as incontestable virtues; to decrease or rescind entirely all forms of social protections and transfer programs; and to actively push the poor and marginalized into a flexible labor market regime of low-wage employment (Peck 2001; Peck and Tickell 2002). This is the essence of neoliberalism, an economic ideology that is fundamentalist in its execution, and seeks to deregulate markets as much as possible to promote ‘free’ trade. Its roots can be traced back to ‘multiple beginnings, in a series of situated, sympathetic critiques of nineteenth-century laissez-faire’ (Peck 2008: 3).

Jim Glassman’s (1999) analysis of the Thai state as a concurrently internationalized and internationalizing agent hints at how our conceptualization of neoliberalism requires an appreciation
for the multifaceted relationship between local and extra-local forces acting within the global political economy (see Peck 2001; Brenner and Theodore 2002). If we choose to focus our attention exclusively on external forces we run the risk of producing over-generalized accounts of a ubiquitous and monolithic neoliberalism. Such an approach is insufficient in accounting for local variability and internal constitution. Likewise, overly introspective analyses of the local do not attend to the significant connections and necessary features of neoliberalism as a global project (Brenner and Theodore 2002). It is in this light that Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell (2002) encourage us to consider neoliberalism not as an end-state, but as protean and processual, where neoliberalization can productively be understood as both an ‘out there’ and ‘in here’ phenomenon with variegated and uneven effects, yet retaining the indication of a pervasive ‘metalogue’ due to its diffusion across space. That is, rather than a singular and fully actualized policy regime, ideological form, or regulatory framework, we should be considering ‘actually existing neoliberalisms’, in the plural, as mutable outcomes of historical specificity, contextually embedded within national, regional, and local process of market-driven socio-spatial transformation (Brenner and Theodore 2002). Through such interpretation, we can see the consequences of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices, and ongoing political struggles as continually redefining neoliberalism.

Thus, it was only over the course of a number of false starts, setbacks, and hiccups, that neoliberalism as a fringe utopian idea (Peck 2008) was able to begin to emerge as an orthodox doctrine that has coagulated as a divergent yet related series of neoliberalizations (Ward and England 2007; Hart 2008). This emergent economic orthodoxy in the global north was exported to the global south via measures to address the debt crisis in the form of development aid, primarily though the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. As such, neoliberal economics is premised on a series of nostrums that once implemented predict that free market forces will lead to a prosperous future for the global south, where all of the world’s peoples will
come to live in a unified and harmonious ‘global village’. While the globalization of the economy is not a new experience for the global south, and has deep historical roots in both Southeast Asia and Cambodia, the intensification of this process is new. Economic globalization has heightened over the last 30 years under the programs of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). These ‘structural adjustment programmes’ (SAPs) have facilitated the spread of a globalized neoliberal economic system dominated by multinational corporations and the governments of the global north, and enforced by the World Trade Organization (WTO). Such intensified process of economic globalization in the global south are ‘especially disturbing to many citizens and most states because there has been a marked decline in their ability to control, plan, and regulate the commanding heights, or revenue generating sectors, of their economies’ (Riddell 2003: 659). The reality of a constricted ability to control economics has very often also translated into a contemporaneous condition of declining local control over social and political conditions. As the Cambodian state is increasingly both neoliberalized and undergoing internationalization (Glassman 1999) in its developmental agenda, planning agencies, decision-making powers, and economic orientation as each becomes increasingly integrated into transnational circuits of capital and expertise (Sneddon 2007), the possibility of democratic control wanes further. What constitutes ‘actually existing’ neoliberalism in Cambodia as distinctly Cambodian is the ways in which local elites have co-opted, transformed, and rearticulated neoliberal reforms through a framework that ‘asset stripped’ foreign resources brought in to support the building of the liberal peace (Richmond and Franks 2007), thereby increasing peoples’ exposure to corruption, coercion, and violence.

Neoliberalism’s relationship with ‘postconflict’ development is an integral one, a point that is becoming well recognized in much of the peacebuilding literature. In seeking to ‘stabilize’ countries having recently experienced civil war, Roland Paris (2002) argues that the practice of international peacebuilding is an experiment in social-engineering that promulgates a particular vision of how
states should organize themselves internally, based on the principles of liberal democracy and market-oriented economics. To Paris (2002) this practice constitutes the transmission of standards for ‘appropriate behaviour’ from the ‘western-liberal’ core to the ‘failed states’ of the periphery, thus updating the colonial-era belief that the European imperial powers had a duty to ‘civilize’ dependent populations and territories. Yet rather than procuring stability or conformity to ‘western’ ideals, the innovative and expanding forms of political economy generated under liberal peacebuilding have actually protracted conditions of instability (Paris 1997; Duffield 1998, 1999). In demonstrating this claim, Mark Duffield (1998, 1999) points to African and Eastern European contexts, where warlords have been able to forge new and viable links with international organizations and global markets, effecting a ‘privatization of violence’ as processes of neoliberalization are embraced on very particular terms. Consequently it is perhaps somewhat unsurprising that despite corruption frequently being reported as a major concern of local populations and foreign aid agencies during transitions to peace, liberalization policies may actually foster corruption (Le Billon 2008). Shalmali Guttall (2005) argues that the hallmark of ‘postconflict’ reconstruction is not the rebuilding of societies after episodes of violent conflict, crisis, and upheaval, but rather the establishment of market-based capitalism, coupled with a political regime that is willing to promote and defend neoliberalization (see also Hanlon 2004). In practice, this reorients the fledgling state’s responsibilities towards facilitating and protecting conditions for wealth creation, the bulk of which is expropriated by private actors from outside the country and/or consolidated by national elites (Guttall 2005), where corruption may figure prominently. Naomi Klein’s (2007) account corroborates this general notion, as she argues that collective world crises and disasters, whether ‘natural’ or constructed through human actions, have been utilized as catalysts to push through unpopular neoliberal reforms on societies too disoriented by the initial ‘shock’ to protect their own interests.
In contrast to these critical approaches, the World Bank has generated a swath of its own ideologically driven literature on the economic dimensions of conflict and ‘postconflict’ violence (see Azam et al. 2001; Moser and McIlwaine 2001; Collier et al. 2003; World Bank 2003; Moser et al. 2005). David Moore (2000) warns that the illusion of peace and ordered government encouraged by this research obliterates the continuum between humanitarianism and neoliberal ‘development’, thus permitting international actors to enter ‘postconflict’ settings under the premise of altruism, while the intention to cultivate individual property rights and other aspects of neoliberalization become inextricable and irreproachable conditions of such assistance. Nonetheless, the main line of argument being advanced in the World Bank’s body of research is that war results from poverty, and poverty from misguided economic policies, so that reducing the incidence of future conflict and diminishing the potential for relapse among ‘postconflict’ states requires an intensification of efforts to promote growth via neoliberal reforms. Martha A. Starr (2006) argues that the conceptual underpinnings of such an argument are deeply flawed on the basis of its overemphasis on individual incentives and its claim that social and economic injustices do not contribute to violent conflicts. In contrast, she argues that attention to social economics provides valuable alternative perspectives on conflict by taking its social dimensions seriously (Starr 2006). Thus, rather than proceeding from the perspective that the ravages of war-torn countries present an unprecedented opportunity to create ‘market friendly’ conditions, research must be vigilant to the issues of social and economic justice, while also being mindful not to downplay the complexity of political economic circumstances in ‘postconflict’ situations (see Le Billon 2000b; Collinson 2003).

In the Cambodian context, liberal peacebuilding has ridden roughshod over any such concerns for social justice. The lack of public control that has occurred with the implementation of SAPs has meant that the poor have had to contend with recurrent economic crises. Private firms have plundered Cambodia’s forests along with numerous public assets (Le Billon 2000a, 2002).
Privatization has served to consolidate the wealth and privilege of the elite while simultaneously placing even more pressure on the limited economic means of the poor (Le Billon and Springer 2007). There have been extensive cuts to public health care and education, and while many private companies have stepped in to fill this lacuna, the poor cannot afford to pay for such services and are accordingly condemned to a life of sickness and ignorance (Bray 1999; Akashi et al. 2004; Hardeman 2004; Jacobs and Price 2004). Civil service downsizing and salary slashing has resulted in both high levels of unemployment and pervasive rent seeking (Hendrickson 2001a; Turner 2002). Footloose capital has caused numerous factory closures, which has translated into severe job insecurity and union breaking tactics by the state (Hall 2000; Kolben 2004; Hughes 2007). The cost of living has risen at an astronomical rate due to IFI economic policies that promote inflation and currency devaluation (Kang 2005; Ear 2007). Rampant land speculation and ongoing primitive accumulation have forced many of the rural poor off their land and into an urban life of squatterdom (Khemro and Payne 2004; Hughes 2008). Finally, as the economic situation for the poor has continued to worsen, many Cambodians have looked to the ‘informal’ economy as the only possible way to make a living (EIC 2005), a condition that has contributed to a human trafficking epidemic across Southeast Asia as young women are forced into prostitution to supplement the incomes of their families, exposing themselves to increased risk of AIDS and to pimps and clients who are often violent (Douglas 2003; Marten 2005). In short, the world has effectively been turned upside-down for the Cambodian poor.

This marked lack of control by the poor over their own lives stands in stark contrast to the language of empowerment that accompanies the neoliberal doctrine. The agenda of ‘governance’ that stands at the forefront of the neoliberal canon, under which democratic empowerment is linked to economic liberalization, and a positive outcome, or ‘good governance’, is only possible if the state adheres to the ideology of the free market. Contradiction runs deep in neoliberal thinking, as a
A predetermined economic model defies the democracy neoliberalism supposedly stands for. A manifestly democratic economic strategy is one that places people in a position of power, allowing them to participate in decisions that affect their economic lives so that neither the state nor the market may dominate (MacEwan 1999). Cambodia’s transition to democracy marks an early example of the implementation of the ‘good governance’ agenda at the global level. The furtherance of free market reforms, which Cambodia had been experimenting with in the late 1980s, was a project simultaneous to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia’s (UNTAC) peacekeeping efforts, and alongside a democratic constitution, a liberalized economy was a mandated outcome of the UN operation (UN 1991). Yet despite the fact that over a decade has now passed since the promulgation of a new constitution that marked the beginning of the country’s new life as a democratic and free market state, conditions of repression, surveillance, intimidation, vote buying, and other behaviours commonly defined as ‘undemocratic’ continue as the prevalent modes of governance in the country. In contrast, neoliberal reforms, although undeniably piecemeal and articulated with the pre-existing political economy, are the most consolidated component of Cambodia’s transition. Nonetheless, the realities of Cambodian political life are far from democratic, open, fair, and just, where not only has neoliberalization done little to change this situation, but as this study will reveal, such political economic reform has actually exacerbated conditions of authoritarianism in Cambodia and strengthened the hold violence has on everyday life.

In seeking answers to why democracy remains unconsolidated and violence continues to be prevalent in Cambodia following the UN’s massive peacekeeping operation of the early 1990s, the predominant explanation to emerge among Cambodia observers is that Khmer culture is ill-equipped to manage conflict in a peaceable manner. Many scholars of Cambodia have published accounts that to varying degrees of lucidity and sophistication identify supposed ‘cultural traits’ of absolutism and violence as being the primary and intractable obstacles to greater democracy and peace in Cambodia.
(see Lizée 1993; Heder 1995; Peang-Meth 1997; Roberts 2001). Yet when placed under close scrutiny, such culturalist interpretations lack sophisticated explanatory power, and bear all the same hallmarks as the racial explanations that suffused ‘development theory’ under colonialism. While the view that Cambodia retains a ‘culture of violence’—as though violence is some sort of inheritance from time immemorial—is utterly pervasive in Cambodian studies (see Meyer 1971; Bit 1991; Peang-Meth 1991; Prasso 1994; Becker 1998; Curtis 1998; Moreau 1998; Faulder 2000; Grove 2000; Kurlantzick 2000; Jenks Clarke 2001; Roberts 2001; McGrew et. al 2004; Sodhy 2004; Verkoren 2005), some scholars have challenged the conventional view of implicating Khmer culture as the source of Cambodia’s democratic woes, and have provided their own non-culturalist accounts as to why Cambodia’s path to democracy has been such a tempestuous ride. For example, Caroline Hughes (2003) identifies a context in Cambodia whereby political empowerment among the average Cambodian has not been forthcoming because democracy came into being as a donor mandate, rather than as an indigenous movement.

Hughes’s (2003) concern with the wisdom of installing democracy in Cambodia in a ‘top-down’ approach is not misplaced, as democracy is said to be a system of government that represents the will of the collective, and as such should be an endeavour that is driven from the ‘bottom-up’. The major argument concerning Cambodia’s transitional political economy advanced by Hughes (2003: 220) is that:

Broadly speaking, co-optation and monopolization of local political economies by the partisan state in the 1990s has led to a substitution of internationalization for democratization in Cambodian society. This is problematic in that [it]… has exacerbated elitism in Cambodian society, and has prompted the emergence of new hierarchies in which those most able to operate in an internationalized sphere are increasingly distanced from the grassroots.

I very much agree with Hughes on this point, and the conclusion I draw from this observation over the course of this dissertation is that neoliberalization in Cambodia has narrowed the potential for
Cambodians to become involved in democratic processes. In contrast, Hughes (2003: 220) argues that:

This conclusion has major implications for the ability to promote short cuts to democracy in an environment of severe material dearth. The experience of Cambodia suggests that the contribution of international resources specifically dedicated to the enabling of political participation does widen opportunities for political participation beyond the narrow sphere of the partisan state.

Hughes (2003: 220) provides the caveat that ‘these opportunities are mostly limited to an internationalized elite, and are much less observable in rural areas’, yet she contends that this is primarily ‘because international intervention has rarely penetrated far into rural Cambodia, where political terrain remains monopolized by partisan state authorities’. The implication of Hughes’s argument is that economic liberalization has not penetrated deeply enough into rural areas for political participation to flower, and furthermore that there is a linear ‘staging’ to democratization, whereby only economic liberalization and growth will overcome the ‘material dearth’ that is said to hinder democracy. Thus rather than challenging neoliberalism’s uneven development, Hughes seems to have internalized the ‘common sense’ of its doctrine.

Many scholars of Cambodia share this de facto pro-neoliberal view (see Ear 1997, St. John 1997; Kao Kim Hourn 1998; Tith 1998; Kevin 2000; Un 2006; Markussen 2008), while very few have offered any kind of challenge (see Peou 2000, 2007; Hendrickson 2001b; Le Billon and Springer 2007; Richmond and Franks 2007). For her part, Hughes (2003) concludes that democracy was premature to Cambodia because of the country’s material dearth, and only the further penetration of the market will provide Cambodians with political empowerment. Thus, while culture is not responsible for Cambodia’s political turmoil in Hughes’ (2003) view, she effectively calls not only for more of the same in terms of neoliberal economic policy, but also an intensification of such economic liberalization. More recently Hughes’s (2007: 835) interpretations have seemingly done a turnaround, and she now argues that ‘it is international organizations promoting neo-liberal approaches to governance, rather than any potentially radical transnational “civil society” networks,
that have determined the new sites and modes of political participation’ in post-UNTAC Cambodia. This seems more tenable, although her apparent understanding of neoliberalism is remarkably unsophisticated, where rather than offering any explanation as to what she might mean by ‘neo-liberal approaches’, she instead treats neoliberalism as an academic buzzword. Such inclusion without explanation ultimately undermines Hughes’s argument, as neoliberalism is simplistically reduced to an agenda that is tantamount to the IFIs. Accordingly, Hughes fails to grasp how Cambodian elites have internalized neoliberal discourse, and further how this discourse circulates through Cambodian society, both informing and being reconstituted by civil society networks and the population at large via governmentality. Such reductionism also serves to replicate the idea of neoliberalism as monolithism, so although the concept is now acknowledged in her work, the potential for emancipatory politics is crippled by her implicit perpetuation of the notion that ‘there is no alternative’.

The arguments presented in this dissertation are removed from, and offer a counter to the reductionist, neoliberalist, and culturalist strains of thought that pervade recent studies of Cambodia’s political situation. I argue against culturalist interpretations based on their proclivity for essentialism, and their tendency to lend credence to the claims of ‘Asian values’ politicians who seek only to legitimize their own hold on power. Such arguments are further viewed as doing a disservice to all Cambodians because of their implication that there is something ‘wrong’ with Cambodian culture and thus a priori Cambodian people themselves. I also dispute the notion that the political turmoil in present day Cambodia is an outcome of the market not having penetrated deeply enough into the fabric of the Cambodian landscape. To the contrary, in contributing to the growing number of studies that identify linkages between neoliberalization, authoritarianism, and violence (see Auyero 2000; Bourgois 2001; Moore 2001; Wacquant 2001; Uvin 2003; Cooper 2004; Escobar 2004; Farmer 2004; Giroux 2004; Marchand 2004; Sandbrook and Romano 2004; Brittain 2005; Canterbury 2005;
Faria 2005; Goldstein 2005; Manalansan 2005; Gillespie 2006; Olivera 2006; Sánchez-Prado 2006; Borras and Ross 2007; Coleman 2007; Martin 2007; Benson et al. 2008), I argue that neoliberalization and the construction of a new political economic order is the source of the Cambodian government’s ongoing tendency towards authoritarianism and its penchant for using violence as its overarching *modus operandi* of governance. I further attend to the reductionist views that treat neoliberalism as a ubiquitous and monolithic force and challenge their consideration that individuals, cities, and states have no choice but to kneel before this new global sovereign. Like Gillian Hart (2002a), I treat such thinking as deeply problematic and disabling to liberationist struggle.

My arguments are mapped out using a ‘manuscript-based’ approach, where ‘each chapter consists of the content of a manuscript which has been published, is in-press, has been submitted for publication, or which is nearly ready to be submitted for publication in a refereed academic journal’ (UBC Faculty of Graduate Studies 2008). I break the included manuscripts into two different sections, where the first half of this study includes papers that are largely theoretical. While the contextual specificities of Cambodia’s particular experiences with violence, neoliberalization, and democratic processes are undoubtedly a major concern, I also understand the violent geographies of neoliberalism as having a relational quality that stretches across multiple sites, having been woven through particular discourses and (re)productions of space (Lefebvre 1991). Thus, the theoretical section of the study has allowed me to expand upon these understandings before attending to the empirical specificities of the Cambodian case in the second half of the dissertation. At this point I want to briefly discuss my methodological approach before moving on to discuss the philosophies that have informed this study, and before offering a more thorough breakdown and description of the constituent chapters that comprise the dissertation.
1.2 Methodological Approach

Disciplinary fragmentation over the causes of violence remains a real problem, as biomedical and psychological approaches confine their analysis to the individual and interpersonal levels, while political science places emphasis on the structural and institutional levels (McIlwaine 1999; Iadicola and Shupe 2003). In this regard, geographical approaches are able to fill important gaps in theorizing about violence as the discipline allows for an approach that links together various ‘scales’ of analysis in order to draw a more complete (although still inherently fragmentary) picture of the phenomenon of violence (see Moser and McIlwaine 2004). Geography provides another advantage insofar as where violence occurs may reveal important information about both the contiguity and variability of violence, which represents a crucial step towards understanding its foundations. Yet geographers must recognize the need to go beyond simply measuring the spatial and ‘scalar’ dynamics of violence. While such mapping exercises alone may illustrate strong correlations, they reveal little about the conditions individuals face in their daily lives. In this regard, the intention of this study is to engage in a different kind of mapping exercise, a ‘global ethnography’ of sorts. Following Burawoy (2000: 31), what I mean by ‘global ethnography’ is that I take a methodological approach that sees ‘global forces and global connections as [being] constituted imaginatively, inspiring social movements to seize control over their immediate but also their more distant worlds, challenging the mythology of an inexorable, runaway world’, in this case the focus being on critiquing neoliberalism seen as monolithism. In particular then, within the global ethnographic model I focus in on the idea of ‘global imaginations’, which according to Burawoy (2000: 31) ‘demystifies globalization [or neoliberalization] as something given, natural, and eternal’ and points to the production of space and the dissemination of different imaginative geographies, and how they might inspire resistance. In short, ‘Global imaginations reconfigure what is possible, turning globalization [or neoliberalization] from an inexorable force into a resource that opens up new vistas’ (Burawoy 2000: 32).
Ethnography of course literally means to write about culture, and because culture both informs and is enmeshed within a critical political economy perspective (Peet 2000; Sayer 2001; Hart 2002b), this study offers theoretical interpretations of culture, place, space, discourse, neoliberalism, and violence as part of a global ethnography in which individual Cambodians’ understandings and experiences of violence are addressed and related to the discourses employed in their country’s neoliberalizing process. This has allowed me to bring forward Cambodian views on inequality, poverty, and their individual engagements with and perceptions of neoliberalization and democratic processes. This approach to research is cognizant of both the central importance of social theory (Gregory 1993), and the idea that fieldwork is a critical component of an engaged geographical endeavour (Katz 1994; Kobayashi 1994). Thus, as indicated, the first half of the dissertation is largely theoretical, while the second half includes chapters where I have relied more heavily upon my empirical findings in exploring the ‘particularities’ of the research participants’ understandings (Abu-Lughod 1991). Theoretically based chapters have allowed me to explore more thoroughly how I might make sense of my empirical findings, while the ethnographic methods I have utilized have afford practical advantages in allowing an understanding of Cambodians’ perceptions and experiences of violence, democracy, and neoliberalization more sensitively than could other approaches. Yet this dissertation is anything but a typical ethnographic enquiry that offers a fine-grained empirical analysis. Instead, it proceeds as a series of theoretical dialogues on neoliberalism and violence in both the Cambodian context and beyond, where I purposefully leave many lose ends open and reject the idea that these can all ever be neatly tied off. In this regard I follow Paul Feyerabend (1998: 9, 13), who offers a powerful deconstructive critique that argues for ‘theoretical anarchism’ and provides an ‘outline of an anarchistic methodology’ in place of the disciplining effects of disciplinary methodologies. Anarchism is said to be ‘excellent medicine for epistemology’ precisely
because history and geography are full of accidents, conjectures, and juxtapositions of events, immersed in the complexity of proteanism and unpredictability:

Are we really to believe that the naïve and simple-minded rules which methodologists take as their guide are capable of accounting for such a maze of interactions? And is it not clear that successful participation in a process of this kind is only possible for a ruthless opportunist who is not tied to any particular philosophy and who adopts whatever procedure seems to fit the occasion?’. (Feyerabend 1988: 9).

My approach then is an anarchistic global ethnography in that my methodological agenda is a sort of Dadaist (anti)program. What I mean by this is that ‘the more seriously a method takes itself – the more it claims to supersede other approaches through invocations of ‘truth’ or ‘objectivity’ – the more that method must be suspect of impeding understanding rather than advancing it’ (Ferrell 2008: 74). Accordingly, I maintain an intellectual unwillingness to toe the line, where in opposition to received technique the essence of inquiry becomes understood as ongoing critique. Stanley Cohen (1988: 109) argues that “the unfinished” is a program based on that which does not yet exist’, which emerges as a practical and political strategy for negotiating the next moment of understanding. In this sense, the more tidy one’s research becomes, the more the vim and vigor is drained from it as ‘methodological closure and intellectual fastidiousness suggest stasis and stagnation’, while ‘raggedy methods, methods not fully conceptualized or completed, suggest intellectual life and disciplinary vitality’ (Ferrell 2008: 74).

Whenever I am asked about what a geographer does by a non-geographer, I have always maintained a sense of pride in replying ‘whatever a geographer wants to do’. This of course is not the whole truth. Would-be ‘gatekeepers’ exist in all kinds of different capacities throughout the whole of the academy, to which human geography is certainly not immune. So when I present human geography as the anti-disciplinary discipline, I am imagining it in a sense that I would like to see geography theorized and in the way that I want to practice it, not as it actually exists for all geographers in either theory or practice. My take on human geography has always been to do things
on my own terms and in my own time, which is largely a carry over from my philosophy on life. In this sense, I emphasize creative interaction between my ontological and epistemological understandings and my own evolving personal ideology, not on the basis of how I can contort my thinking to fit into some preformed foundations. This is precisely what positions my approach in this dissertation as a global imaginations version of global ethnography. Global imaginations is an atypical ethnographic approach inasmuch as its point of departure is not ‘induced’ from the data or discovered ‘de novo’ from the ground. Instead, global imaginations as a method concerns itself with the ‘extension of theory’ by constituting ‘the field’ as a challenge to existing theory that is in need of improvement, where some anomalies or absences have been identified. The field is thus seen as ‘interesting’ in terms of its capacity explicate a new or revised social theory. As Burawoy (2000) explains, social scientists are conventionally taught to rid themselves of biases and suspend judgment so that the field can be seen for what it is. Yet researchers cannot see the field without a lens, and this lens can only be improved by experimenting with it in the world. In this way, methodology becomes very personal while also opening an opportunity to offer counter discourses to those that have become entrenched. The risk of course is that any given lens may itself in turn become normalized, where a researcher’s own view might as such straitjacket the world under study, ‘disciplining it so that it conforms to the framework through which we observe it’ (Burawoy 2000: 28). However, through vigilant reflexivity and openness to proteanism, which involves an ongoing energetic interplay between theoretical lenses and the field, we can temper this problematic and stave off the discursive effects of power that Said (1978/2003) warns about in his thesis on Orientalism.

Two primary motivations guided the ethnographic aspect of my approach. First, I felt it would provide a forum for collaborative, qualitative research between Cambodian individuals and myself, thus allowing the space for participants to reveal their perceptions and experiences of violence, neoliberalization, and democratic processes. This was actually in most instances a three-way
dialogue because although I am relatively competent and confident in my ability to speak the Khmer language, I am not entirely fluent, and I thus relied on an interpreter to pick up on some of the nuances I might have otherwise missed. Nonetheless, the idea was to attempt to overcome some of the silencing that has been characteristic of Cambodia’s current political situation (Heder and Ledgerwood 1996; Peou 2000, 2007; Hughes 2003; Human Rights Watch 2003) and to contribute towards effecting social justice in the country. This highlights the influence that feminist methodological critiques have had on my research practice, as the linkages between research and the need for social justice/change are intrinsic to feminist thought. As Pamela Moss (1993: 49) explains, ‘Feminism as a method is not just women’s liberation and freedom from sexism; feminism as method expresses irrevocable challenges to existing ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, and techniques of social geographic research. Contemplation of a feminist method is the realization of the necessity for change’ (see also Bondi 2002). Madge et al. (1997: 88) recognizes this critique of positivism as one of feminism’s greatest contributions, as it demonstrates that ‘the world [i]s not orderly and rational but full of contradictions and complexities’.

Although these challenges are paramount to my research practice, I do not want to characterize my approach as feminist, and instead want to emphasize this research as my own personal journey, ephemerally grounded in my own shifting positionality. My methodological approach is necessarily anarchistic, where I see methodology as a process that is constantly under revision, critical reflection, and introspective scrutiny. If political philosophy is, as Todd May (1994: 7) suggests, the ‘shifting space between what is and what ought to be’, then the arena of methodologies has traditionally been understood as the tools used in accounting for the ‘what is’, leaving aside the question of ‘what ought to be’ from its analytical focus. Anarchism as methodology changes the playing field. As a political philosophy, anarchism is both a radical indictment of the assumptions that underpin the existing ‘what is’, and a vision for replacing these assumptions with
the ethics of ‘what ought to be’. Methodologically then, an anarchist approach recognizes orthodox conceptualizations of methods and their sole concern for ‘what is’ as not doing enough. An anarchistic methodological approach is thus most concerned with provoking the ‘what out to be’, aligning its interests always to the service of social justice.

From a methodological standpoint, my emphasis on social justice is in accordance with my desire to keep the ‘human’ component of human geography as the main focus of my scholarship. Here again, feminist methodologies have served as an inspiration by emphasizing the human experience through embracing subjectivity, where ‘positioned subjectivity’, or positionality, replaces positivist conceptions of objectivity (see England 1994; Gilbert 1994; Valentine 2001). As Damaris Rose (1993: 59) explains, ‘by insisting on the interaction of empirical information with theoretically grounded interpretations of context, feminists hope to draw closer together what social science has traditionally seen as “objectivity” and what it has regarded as “subjective bias”’. Although my dissertation is theoretically driven through an anarchistic global imaginaries approach, it is still ethnographically grounded in that it is immersed in a certain sense of emotional subjectivity, which is an ethics of the particular that finds its foundations in the many friendships I have built over the years with Cambodians from all walks of life. Without this emotional content and context, researchers may elicit information, but it risks becoming a bald and empty empiricism without intention, leaving researchers with little sense of what to do with the information gathered and making it particularly vulnerable to being manipulated in the service of imperialist objectives. Thus insofar as my dissertation may be regarded as ‘polemic’, I take this not as an insult that demonstrates some sort of intellectual deficiency or poor judgment on my part, but as an indication of my methodological approach in the sense that I am trying to provoke some kind of emotional response, which breathes the fresh air of passion into the noxious fumes of indifference that characterize notions of assumed objectivity Such subjective positionality actually corresponds with the
ethnographic model of ‘analytic realism’, whereby ‘the social world is an interpreted world, not a literal word’ (Altheide and Johnson 2000: 284), and as such researchers must reveal their personal biases and perspectives in order for the ‘audience’ to know where the researcher is ‘coming from’ and to be able to interpret their findings (Altheide and Johnson 2000). In answering this shared call of feminism, analytic realism, I give an indication of my philosophical positionality as ‘(post) anarchist’ in the following section.

Positionality of course has implications for interpreting the validity of a study, as positivists contend validity is interpreted as the ‘reliability of results’, where personal bias is seen as destroying reliability. Yet validity can take many forms including validity-as-culture, validity-as-ideology, validity-as-gender, validity-as-language/text, validity-as-relevance/advocacy, and validity-as-standards. Rather than presenting one particular view of validity as correct, Altheide and Johnson (2000: 290) acknowledge ‘interpretive validity’, which suggests that ‘validity should be relevant and serviceable for some application of knowledge, asking the questions “Is it useful?” [and most importantly] “Does it… liberate, or empower?”’, which corresponds with my anarchistic approach. Thus, a second motivation for this research was concerned with theorizing ways to minimize the scope and potential of violence, while simultaneously empowering those subjected to it. I should, however, make it very clear that this study offers no concretized proposals of any sort, as this was never my project or concern (a point I return to below in identifying my philosophical positionality). Instead, I simply want to insist that the origins, meaning, and implications of violence in Cambodia (and elsewhere) cannot be known without research (Jenks Clarke 2001). As Marie Smyth (2001: 4) suggests, ‘sound research carried out in violently divided societies may, if effectively communicated to the appropriate actors, eventually lead to an improved response to the management of conflicts’. My goal with this study is to contribute to the discourse of non-violence and the furtherance of emancipatory politics, not to appeal to the institutionalized channels of the status quo in putting
forward policy proposals. A solid understanding of the prevalence and perseverance of violence is crucial to conceiving a more egalitarian society, and thus regardless of its potential policy implications, research is imperative to the work of considering how a social fabric torn apart by violence may be repaired (Stanko and Lee 2003).

Employing qualitative methodologies has allowed for the ‘democratization’ of my research project by facilitating dialogue between myself and participants, which is a necessary approach since I share Lynn Staehele and Victoria Lawson’s (1994) view that speaking ‘for’ other people is ethically contentious. Helen Jenks Clarke (2001: 92) argues, ‘it is important for Cambodians to be involved in research in order to regain knowledge that has been lost and to empower them for the future’. Accordingly, I had an ethical responsibility to listen to the voices of participants and I planned for a certain degree of flexibility in my research project so that it was ‘democratic’ and inclusive of the goals and wishes of the Cambodians represented in the study. While it is perhaps impossible to overcome the ‘un-get-roundable fact that all ethnographic descriptions are homemade, that they are the describer’s descriptions, not those of the described’ (Geertz 1988: 144), by employing a persistent, scrutinizing, and self-conscious critical reflexivity throughout the research process, and by utilizing sensitive, collaborative, qualitative methods I believe I have ensured a high degree of honesty about the nature of the subjectivity that shapes my analysis. Rather than striving to generalize my research findings, which only serves to obfuscate the differences across space and among individual Cambodians, the particularities of participants’ experiences in space, place, and time are highlighted to understand their ‘meaning-making’ with respect to violence (Brink 1993). This does not undermine my concern for the relational geographies of neoliberalism and violence, as the goal of this research project was never generalization, but rather validity, which I interpret as the integrity and value of the research that is ‘achieved through accountability both to the participants and those who will be affected by the outcome’ (Ristock and Pennel 1996: 50). In this sense, my aim
has been to produce a theoretically driven global imaginations version of global ethnography in which Cambodian participants felt empowered by the study. My ultimate hope is that this dissertation and the papers it has assembled will contribute, in whatever humble capacity, to a critical discourse that encourages Cambodians to rethink and/or struggle against the trajectory of their country’s ‘development’, thus helping to open a space for transformative and emancipatory politics in Cambodia.

Empirical findings were derived from three qualitative methodological tools: 1) participant observation; 2) a content analysis of newspaper articles pertaining to neoliberalism, violence, democracy and public space, collected from a local English-language newspaper, *The Cambodia Daily*, over a one year time period (from June 1, 2004 to June 1, 2005), which are presented as headlines collected in tables throughout chapter seven; and 3) in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews with one-hundred and sixteen individuals covering a wide range of Cambodian political actors, cutting across political, generational, gender, urban/rural, and economic divides (see Appendix G). *The Cambodia Daily* was chosen in favour of other newspapers as at the time it represented the only local daily English-language newspaper in Cambodia. The only other English-language newspaper available in the country, the *Phnom Penh Post*, has until recently only been available on a bi-weekly basis. An English language newspaper was chosen not on the basis of an assumed superior ‘objectivity’ of English-language media compared to Cambodian outlets, but for mere practicality stemming from my inability to read Khmer. These headlines collected for this study can be further criticized on the basis of their potential for reductionism and sensationalism stemming from the positionality of the newspaper and its journalists; however, these headlines are not intended to be exhaustive on Cambodia’s political issues. Instead, they have been purposefully selected to illustrate Cambodia’s marked contestation of public space, ongoing processes of neoliberalization, protracted violent geographies, and finally to corroborate the anger and distress voiced by
participants. Moreover, I chose to utilize semi-structured interviews to ensure a high level of flexibility (see Appendixes A, B, and C), so that themes and issues that were important to the research participants would be able to come to the fore, thus making for a more casual procedure where participants felt more comfortable in ‘opening up’.

The participant exclusion and inclusion criteria used in this study were multiple. To understand the plurality of voice in Cambodian society, interviews were conducted with interest groups that comprised both ‘non-expert’ and ‘expert’ participants. In the case of ‘non-expert’ interviews, participants had to be Cambodian nationals, as the purpose was to ascertain a diversity of Cambodian perceptions and experiences of violence, neoliberalization, and democracy in their transitioning society. ‘Non-expert’ participants were selected using various forms of purposeful sampling in order to achieve inclusion of a variety of interest groups, including among others, university students, teachers, market stall owners, garment factory workers, trade union leaders, street sweepers, craftspeople, journalists, homemakers, motorbike taxi drivers, nurses, monks, waitresses, farmers, lawyers, sex workers, homeless individuals, community spokespeople, security guards, and civil service workers (see Appendix D and Appendix E). The selection criteria for ‘expert’ interviews was such that participants were initially approached via email, and chosen based on their capacity to act as both producers and intermediaries of key circulating discourses in Cambodian society, including most particularly neoliberalism, violence, and Orientalism. Most of the selected ‘expert’ participants worked within the realm of human rights advocacy, and are thus directly related to the promotion of nonviolence. However, all of the civil society members I interviewed suggested that their organization was in some capacity working on issues relating either directly or indirectly to the promotion of nonviolence, a situation that comes as no surprise given Cambodia’s historical and contemporary violent geographies. Participants were comprised of individuals (both
foreign and Cambodian) working within IFIs, as well as directors of Cambodian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and politicians (see Appendix F).

Participants came from three geographical settings, Sihanoukville, Phnom Penh, and Pursat to represent the voices of both ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ dwellers. The first of these three sites was chosen based on a particularly violent eviction that occurred on 20 April 2007, where I wanted to connect with community members to discuss their experiences during the violent expropriation of their land at the hands of armed police and military forces, and to explore their impressions of the living conditions they have been subjected to since the eviction. The remaining two locations were chosen as study sites based on previous experience in each. In Phnom Penh and Pursat I was able to select participants from a group of people with whom I had already established a high level of mutual trust and rapport, thus significantly reducing the potential dangers and risks of this study. The relationships I had already established with potential research participants made it significantly easier to identify additional participants using the snowball sampling method. Although snowball sampling can be criticized on the basis that it is unlikely to result in a wide-ranging sample, because of my previous experience in the locations of study, and most importantly through NGO contacts, I was able to achieve a wide-ranging sample of participants. My experience in Cambodia dates back to 2002, when I spent the month of July working in the country as a volunteer with a Canadian-based international development agency. In 2004, I conducted research in Cambodia and studied the Khmer language for seven months during my visit. In 2007, I spent nine months in Cambodia, studying the language and researching for this project. Through my cumulative experiences, I was able to spend the necessary time to establish trusting relationships with the ‘non-expert’ individuals who participated in this project, and identify important ‘expert’ participants through my contacts within the ‘development’ community.
Although there are recognized difficulties in conducting qualitative studies on violence (see Robben and Nordstrom 1995; Lykes 1997; Lee-Treweek and Linkogle 2000; Nolin Hanlon and Shankar 2000; Hays-Mitchel 2001; Stanko and Lee 2003; Nordstrom 2004), the enduring tendency to quantify violence (see Hibbs 1973; Zimmerman 1983; Klitgaard and Fedderke 1995; Auvinen 1997; Franklin 1997; Horowitz and Reiter 2001; Neumayer 2004; Owen and Benini 2004) is arguably even more problematic. In this regard, I follow Benedikt Korf’s (2006) critique of quantitative ‘scientific approaches’ (namely econometric methods and rational choice models) to violent conflict summarized by the following two propositions: 1) positivism may be regarded as a ‘cargo cult’ science—the cult being universal law–like causalities underpinning social phenomena; and 2) much of the empirical research in this tradition is based on questionable statistics enriched with anecdotal evidence rather than by empirical field work. Hence, Korf (2006) contends that rationalist scholars’ research on violence often entails ‘armchair empiricism’ rather than immersing themselves in the complexities of social mechanisms in a specific space-time context.

1.3 Philosophical Positionality

Although the arguments I present in this dissertation are inspired by Marxian ideas, and I frame much of my thinking within the realm of Marxian political economy, I am not enthusiastic about Karl Marx’s own enthusiasm for capitalism. Marx and the classical political economists saw capitalism through a similar celebratory lens; only Marx tempered his view by suggesting that it was a necessary phase to pass through on the way to communism, and not a glorious end-state as with the liberal project of Adam Smith. Writing a century later, Bill Warren (1980: 136) picked up on this tenor of Marx’s work, arguing that ‘Imperialism was the means through which the techniques, culture and institutions that had evolved in Western Europe over several centuries—the culture of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution—sowed their
revolutionary seeds in the rest of the world’. He correctly interpreted the integral relationship between capitalism and imperialism, but painted imperialism as a ‘necessary evil’ on the path towards some greater good. The banality of Warren’s depiction of imperialism ensured that his detractors were many, but he was really revisiting Marxism proper, as although Marx condemned the violence of primitive accumulation, he nonetheless retained a ‘view of this violent expropriation as necessary for the furthering of human possibilities’ (Glassman 2006: 610). Thus in spite of finding capitalism morally repugnant, when compared to the feudal mode of production that preceded it, Marx (1867/1976) recognized capitalism as having a number of virtues, acknowledging it as amazingly productive, sparking human creativity, bringing about awesome technological change, and ushering in potentially democratic forms of government. It is this optimistic side of Marx that Warren (1980) followed in his own work, arguing that at an early stage, capitalism’s exploration and inhabitation of new territories was carried out through the guise of colonialism and imperialism, and that while this form of capitalism had some drawbacks for those territories that were occupied, it had some important benefits as well. Education levels are said to have improved, life expectancy is thought to have increased, and the form of political control was considered arguably more democratic than that which existed before colonialism.

If all of this sounds familiar, it is essentially the same set of discursive principles that guide neoliberalization today. The refrain is that people have been made better off, and although imperfect in its execution (which neoliberals largely blame on the continuing ‘interference’ of the state in markets), eventually the ‘trickle down effect’ will bear fruit and the utopia we have all been promised will materialize. Rather than wait for the market to sort things out on its own schedule, the difference with Marx is that he wants to quicken the pace at which an egalitarian social contract is arrived upon through revolution. I take a (post)Marxian stance because I reject the violence of imperialism and capitalism outright, and I am unimpressed with the utilitarian strain of Marxian thought. The means
of capitalism and its exceptional and exemplary violences do not justify the eventual end-state of communism, nor does this end justify such means. I view this particular resonance of Marxian thought as a mirror image to contemporary neoliberalization, where although the utopian end-state is conceptualized differently, the penultimate means to achieving the ‘final product’ is virtually the same. The exceptional, exemplary, and banal violences of neoliberalization explored in this study position such an approach to politics as indefensible, where the empirical and spatio-temporal realities of capitalism collapse these utopian fantasies into dystopian realities. I thus refuse the notion of an ‘end-state’, and instead I want to suggest that the Marxian drive to revolution should be reformulated as a resistance that is permanent, a ‘means without end’ (Agamben 2000).

I further take (post)Marxism to mean more than simply moving beyond some of the essentialisms of orthodox Marxism and its central focus on class. I agree with those postMarxists who want to foreground gender, sex, ethnicity, race, and other ostensibly ‘non-capitalist’ categories as equality important lines of differentiation that mark the hierarchies, inequalities, and violences of our contemporary world under neoliberalism (Wright 2006), but I want to go further and reject the substantive violence that is imbricated within and implicitly accepted by Marx’s linear approach to history based on ‘stages of development’. As my thinking has developed over the course of my graduate studies, my unease with the utilitarianism of Marxian thought has led me increasingly towards an interest in poststructuralist critique, its focus on the complexity and heterogeneity of our contemporary world, and its similar refusal of totalizing theories through a rejection of ‘facts’ and absolute ‘truths’. The intersection of (post)Marxian political economy and poststructuralism has taken my critical approach to violence in a direction that has left me with a complete distrust for, and hence a repudiation of the entire idea of the social contract. Accordingly, I see the purpose of resistance as not only being the need to bring about an end to capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, militarism, classism, racism, ethnocentrism, Orientalism, sexism, ageism, ableism, speciesism,
homophobia, and transphobia, but to sovereignty and the state itself. My position has thus increasingly become what can be defined as ‘(post)anarchist’, not in the sense of wanting to move ‘past’ anarchy, but to signify a melding of an anarchistic current within both poststructuralist and (post)Marxian critiques (see May 1994; Newman 2001; Call 2002; Day 2005; Franks 2007). In this merger, what we are able to transcend is the essentialism found in the works of both ‘classical’ anarchists and Marx. Far from the caricatural depiction of anarchism representing the promotion of violence, I have arrived at (post)anarchism through my rejection of violence in all its forms. I find violence antithetical to anarchy precisely because all violence involves a form of hierarchy, authority, or system of rule over other individuals, and therefore violence is a disavowal of freedom, not its promotion.

Through this renunciation of all forms of ‘archy’ (systems of rule), I hope to show over the course of the papers that comprise this dissertation how radical democracy can be conceived as a basis for emancipation. In its radicalized sense, democracy is understood not as a system of rule, but as a particular a mode of power. The etymology of democracy (demos—the people; kratia—power) exposes how its institutionalization changes it into something entirely different, into ‘polyarchy’—a system of rule by multiplicity (Dahl 1971), and only ostensibly by the people, so that we might more appropriately re-label the oxymoron ‘representative democracy’ as ‘electoral authoritarianism’. In the passage that opens this introduction, I understand Bob Dylan to be fundamentally correct in suggesting that democracy doesn’t rule the world, and I would add that nor does it ever seek to. Rule is the goal of authority, and any form of rule is premised upon either explicit or implicit violence, meaning as Dylan also intuitively recognizes, that violence rules the world. In these terms, (post)anarchism is not so much about reinventing democracy as it is about radicalizing it, that is, returning democracy to its fundamental nature as simply the empowerment of the people, free from all forms of systematized rule. I also aim to demonstrate how particular discourses reinforce the
hegemony of capitalism in its current incarnation as neoliberalism, and how institutionalization through the mechanisms of both state and market make possible a vast array of ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ violent geographies. In this ocular analogy, I mean to follow Louis Althusser (1970/1997: 26), who explained:

In the development of a theory, the invisible of a visible field is not generally anything whatever outside and foreign to the visible defined by that field. The invisible is defined by the visible as its invisible, its forbidden vision: the invisible is not therefore simply what is outside the visible (to return to the spatial metaphor), the outer darkness of exclusion—but the inner darkness of exclusion, inside the visible itself.

(Post)anarchism then is understood not just as a critique of the discourses and institutionalization of authority, but also of the institutionalization and authority of particular discourses, and in particular their ability to shroud violence in obscurity and mystique.

1.4 Dissertation Breakdown

The manuscript-based approach I have utilized, whereby the dissertation is not a unified single text from start to finish but a series of related ‘stand alone’ papers, comes with certain limitations that inevitably leave some tension between chapters. Many of the included chapters are already published, and UBC Faculty of Graduate Studies (2008) stipulates that ‘Other than minor formatting changes, [included chapters] must not be significantly altered from the published or intended-to-be-published version’. Thus, it is only in the final chapter before the conclusion that I directly relate my philosophies to (post)anarchism, which in a sense speaks to the development of my own thinking over the course of writing the series of papers that comprise this dissertation and the order in which they were written. However, while (post)anarchism is explicitly absent in most of the chapters, it is implicitly present, and thus in combining (post)Marxian and poststructural theoretical approaches, this dissertation proceeds as a (post)anarchist critique through its series of distinct yet thematically connected chapters that examine the intersections between neoliberalism and violence, and the
(re)visualizations, (re)materializations, and (re)administrations that both result from and contribute to their entanglement. Making such a connection is a decidedly geographical endeavor, as my central concerns throughout these chapters is with interpreting violence and neoliberalism through what Henri Lefebvre (1991) refers to as the ‘production of space’, and via Edward Said’s (1978/2003) complementary notion of ‘imaginative geographies’. Such a critical and necessarily geographical approach reveals my central working hypothesis: that neoliberalization plays a paramount role in the continuation of violent geographies in Cambodia’s contemporary political economy.

The first half of this study theorizes the geographies of neoliberalism and violence through an analysis of the discursive procession of neoliberalism and the imaginative geographies that position it as the sole providence of nonviolence. In orienting itself as a ‘civilizing’ project, neoliberalism as discourse actively manufactures the misrecognition of its violences. Struggles over public space are viewed as a necessary reaction against such symbolic violence, allowing us to relate similar constellations of experiences across space as a potential basis for emancipation, and thereby quicken the pace at which neoliberalism recedes into history. The second half of this study examines the violent geographies of neoliberalism in ‘postconflict’ Cambodia, bringing a more empirical focus to the (re)productions of space that have informed the neoliberalization of violence in the country. The pretext of security under which marketization proceeded, the asphyxiation of democratic politics through ordered productions of space, the discursive obfuscations of the ‘culture of violence’ thesis, and Cambodia’s ongoing encounters with primitive accumulation are all revealed to inform the exceptional and exemplary violences of neoliberalization.

Following this introduction, chapter two, ‘The Nonillusory Effects of Neoliberalization: Linking Geographies of Poverty, Inequality, and Violence’, steps into recent debates concerning the (f)utility of neoliberalism as an ‘actually existing’ concept by reminding the reader that without a (post)Marxian political economy approach, one that specifically includes neoliberalization as part of its theoretical
edifice, we run the risk of obfuscating the reality of capitalism’s festering poverty, rising inequality, and ongoing geographies of violence as something unknowable and ‘out there’. By failing to acknowledge such nonillusory effects of neoliberalization and in refusing the explanatory power that neoliberalism holds in relating similar constellations of experiences across space as a potential basis for emancipation, I argue that we precipitously ensure the prospect of a violent future. This chapter appeared in *Geoforum* as a ‘critical review’ piece, and is thus not exhaustive in its treatment of the existing literature. Nonetheless, I have included it here as an opening foray because it highlights some of the relationships between neoliberalization and violence, and points towards the ongoing importance of examining neoliberalism as an ‘actually existing’ phenomenon.

Chapter three is entitled ‘Public Space as Emancipation: Critical Reflections on Democratic Development, Neoliberalism, and Violence in the Global South’, and here I establish a framework for public space as a vision for development and democracy, appreciating how geography itself can become the basis of emancipation. Public space is presented as an opportunity to move beyond the technocratic elitism that often characterizes both civil societies and the neoliberal approach to development, and is further recognized as the battlefield on which the conflicting interests of the global south’s rich and poor are set. Understanding the contested process of public space better positions us to appreciate the current struggle for democracy in the global south—and its associated violence—as fundamentally a clash between the machinations of global capital and the attempts of the poor and marginalized to insert their voices into the development policies that are adversely affecting their lives.

I have given the title ‘Neoliberalism as Discourse: On the Contours of Subjectivation, Good Governance, and Symbolic Violence’ to chapter four, which explores how the expansion of neoliberalism into a field of academic inquiry has been meteoric, yet in concert with this amplification, definitional consensus about what is meant by ‘neoliberalism’ has waned. Neoliberalism has been variously understood as
an ideological hegemonic project, as policy and program, as state form, and as governmentality. While reconciling such divergent theorizations is difficult, I argue that the supposed disjuncture between them is not insurmountable. Conceptualizing neoliberalism as discourse enables an effective merger of political economy and poststructuralist approaches to neoliberalism by recognizing the importance of both critical perspectives without privileging either. The productive power of neoliberal ideology constitutes and constrains, but does not determine. Instead, neoliberal subjectivation works on individuals who are rendered as subjects and subjected to relations of power through discourse. It is neoliberal discourse, and particularly the ‘commonsense’ of good governance, conceived as a discursive frontline in the creation of consent for neoliberalism, that facilitate penetration at the level of the subject. Thus, neoliberal subjectivation is the process whereby one memorizes the truth claims that one has heard and converts them into rules of conduct, thereby effectively locking in the rights of capital. As disciplinary rationalities, strategies, technologies, and techniques coagulate under neoliberal subjectivation, the structural inequalities of capital are increasingly misrecognized. This constitutes symbolic violence, which is wielded precisely inasmuch as one does not perceive it as such. Ultimately, how we interpret the fluidity between those who produce and those constrained by neoliberal discourse is paramount if we are to counter problematic notions of neoliberalism as monolithic and begin to recognize the systemic violent geographies neoliberalism (re)produces.

The theoretical section of the dissertation is rounded out by chapter five, entitled ‘Violence Sits in Places? Cultural Practice, Neoliberal Rationalism, and Virulent Imaginative Geographies’, which examines the imaginative geographies that erase the interconnectedness of the places where violence occurs, and challenges the notion of violence as ‘irrational’ insofar as its marks particular cultures as ‘other’. I argue that 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 salvationary to putatively ‘irrational’ and ‘violent’ peoples. This theology of neoliberalism produces a discourse that binds violence in place. But while violence is experienced through the ontological priority of place, any seemingly specific experiences are inseparable from the relational characteristic of space as an indivisible whole.

The first of the more empirically based chapters of this study, where the contextual focus shifts specifically to Cambodia, is chapter six, ‘The Neoliberalization of Security and Violence in Cambodia’s Transition’. Here I seek to deconstruct the implications of shifting security’s frame of reference from the state to the individual, and the potential for this scalar adjustment to be colonized by the purely economic goal of market preservation. These concerns are placed in the empirical context of Cambodia’s UN sponsored transition in the early 1990s, which effectively served as the pilot programme of the emerging human security agenda. The UN’s orchestration of the Cambodian ‘peace process’ is argued to have allowed the organization to formalize the newly minted human security doctrine during a self-congratulatory fervor that followed in the wake of what was presumed to be a successful transition to peace. However, the violence that swelled both during and after the transition reveals the human security discourse as deceptive, having very little to do with the prevention of violence other than in a rhetorical sense. Rather, the (in)actions of the international community in response to extrajudicial murders, threats of secession, electoral fraud, and coup d'état suggest that human security can be read as a pretext that effectively translates into the acceptance and promotion of the political status quo, as secured hegemony for the reigning political party means a secured marketplace open to foreign interests.

Chapter seven offers an empirical grounding to the theoretical argument advanced in chapter three and has been titled ‘Violence, Democracy, and the Neoliberal “Order”: The Contestation of Public Space in Posttransitional Cambodia’. Here I argue that neoliberal policies explain why authoritarianism and violence remain the principal modes of governance among many ruling elites in posttransitional
settings. Using Cambodia as an empirical case to illustrate the neoliberalizing process, the promotion of intense marketization is revealed as a foremost causal factor in a country’s inability to consolidate democracy following political transition. Neoliberalization effectively acts to suffocate an indigenous burgeoning of democratic politics, and I argue that such asphyxiation is brought to bear under the neoliberal rhetoric of order and stability, which can be read through the (re)production of public space. The preoccupation with order and stability serves the interests of capital at the global level and political elites at the level of the nation-state. I argue that citizens themselves may fiercely contest these particular interests in a quest for a more radical democracy, which is evidenced by the burgeoning geographies of protest that have emerged in Cambodian public spaces in the posttransition era.

In chapter eight, entitled ‘Culture of Violence or Violent Orientalism? Neoliberalization and Imagining the ‘Savage Other’ in Posttransitional Cambodia’, I bring an empirical basis to some of the theoretical arguments presented in chapter five. I argue that because violence and authoritarianism continue to resonate in Cambodia’s posttransitional landscape, many scholars, journalists, international donors, and nongovernmental organizations alike have posited a ‘culture of violence’ as responsible for the country’s democratic deficit and enduring violence. In contrast to this understanding, I interpret the culture of violence thesis as a sweeping caricature shot through with Orientalist imaginaries, and a problematic discourse that underwrites the process of neoliberalization. The culture of violence argument is considered to invoke particular imaginative geographies that problematically erase the contingency, fluidity, and interconnectedness of the places in which violence occurs. While violence is certainly mediated through both culture and place, following Doreen Massey’s (2005) re-conceptualization of space and place, this chapter understands place not as a confined and isolated unit, but as a relational constellation within the wider experiences of space. This reflection allows us to recognize that any seemingly local, direct, or cultural expression of violence is necessarily
imbricated in the wider, structural patterns of violence, which in the current moment of political economic orthodoxy increasingly suggests a relationship to neoliberalism. Through the adoption of the culture of violence discourse, neoliberalization is argued to proceed in the Cambodian context as a ‘civilizing’ enterprise, where Cambodians are subsequently imagined as ‘savage others’.

In chapter nine, ‘Violent Accumulation: A (Post)anarchist Critique of Property, Dispossession, and the State of Exception in Neoliberalizing Cambodia’, I examine the dialectics of capital/primitive accumulation, law/violence, and civilization/savagery, which I argue exist in a mutually reinforcing triad. Within this ‘trilateral of logics’, civilization is conceived precisely insofar as society operates in the service of capital, where both are seen as rationalizing agents, bound under the codes and contracts of the juridical order as law. The violences of ongoing primitive accumulation are rendered legal by positing the people it subjugates as ‘savage others’, thereby encouraging us not to think of this process as violence at all. Law and civilization are argued to legitimize capitalism’s violent accumulation and wherever the trilateral of logics is enacted the ‘state of exception’ is called into being, exposing us all as potential *homo sacer* (life that does not count). In Cambodia, the preoccupation with strengthening the legal system should thus be read, not as an altruistic development for the betterment of society, but as an imposition that serves to legitimize the violences of property. In this chapter my (post)anarchist stance is finally laid bare, as I seek to decipher the symbolic impressions of the trilateral of logics, offering a radical (re)appraisal of capitalism, its legal process, and civilizing effects, which together serve to mask the originary and ongoing violences of primitive accumulation and the property system.

In the conclusion I offer an analysis of the dissertation in light of current research and provide some discussion in relating the manuscript chapters to each other and to the overall field of study. I provide comments on strengths and weaknesses of the research that went into this dissertation, and I discuss its novelty, significance, and major contributions. Finally, I attempt to
show how this study has contributed to illuminating the multiplicity of ways in which the processes of neoliberalization are suffused with both exceptional and exemplary violence, and how a critical appraisal of neoliberalism’s capacity for violence opens our geographical imaginations to the possibility of (re)producing space in ways that make possible a transformative and emancipatory politics. In this ‘age of resurgent imperialism’ (Hart 2006), recognition for and a desire to repeal the violent geographies of neoliberalism is an urgent appeal that cannot be ignored. We must be ever vigilant to the exclusions, inequalities, and dispossessions of neoliberalization, so that humanity as a whole does not come to represent the ‘banality of evil’ by embracing the violence of neoliberalism.

1.5 Notes

1 Thirty-two of these interviews were conducted in 2004, undertaken while I was an MA student in the Department of Geography at Queen’s University at Kingston. Only chapter seven relies on 2004 interviews and newspaper headlines. The chapter itself was written while a PhD student at UBC, and is thus included in this dissertation.

2 My use of scare quotes around these two categories follows Timothy Mitchell (2002), where in particular I want to problematize the hierarchy and authority imbued in the notion of ‘expert’.

3 Glassman (2006: 610) actually refers to Marx’s view as ‘unstinting’, but here he is referring to Marx’s take on the historically progressive results of primitive accumulation. When Marx considered primitive accumulation analytically and dialectically, Glassman (2006) recognizes his criticisms of bourgeois hypocrisy and his acknowledgment of the violence methods of primitive accumulation, which Marx (1867/1976: 874) refers to as ‘anything but idyllic’, showing at least some measure of restraint. Thus, what is unstinting about Marx's view, is that he thinks it better that older social relations are broken apart—even if by violence—than that they be retained.
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PART 2: THEORIZING THE GEOGRAPHIES OF NEOLIBERALISM AND VIOLENCE
CHAPTER 2

The Nonillusory Effects of Neoliberalization: Linking Geographies of Poverty, Inequality, and Violence

“[S]imply trying to wish away the structural power of capital is a curious theoretical and political strategy for those on the Left – and one that is doomed from the outset as the basis for a radical and emancipatory politics. And as long as it remains the case that we are grappling with the economic (and other) geographies of capitalism, we . . . have a deep and enduring need for Marxian political economy.” (Hudson, 2006: 389)

It is these ‘other’ geographies of capitalism, namely those of impoverishment, socioeconomic disparity, and in particular violence, that form the basis of concern in this critical review. In identifying how poverty and inequality can be understood in relation to violence, I am convinced a Marxian political economy is a necessary precursor insofar as it positions us in such a way that allows us to recognize the inherent violences of capital. Indeed, Marxism proceeds from a position that sees capitalism as the central social institution of the modern world (Palan 2000: 10), and as Duménil and Lévy (2004: 269) contend, the “basic function of economic ‘violence’ remains a core feature of capitalism.” Notwithstanding the recent criticisms of Amin and Thrift (2005), who ask “what’s Left?” about a Marxian political economy, and the parallel position of Gibson-Graham’s (1996) project to move beyond Marxism for what they view as its discursive fetishization of capital, following Hudson (2006) I believe our world remains to a considerable extent produced – in a Lefebvreian sense (Lefebvre 1991) – and driven by the logic of capital and capital accumulation. In light of the successful expansion of the neoliberal project that currently envelops the globe, it would seem that Marx has been proven correct in his view that the logic of capital maintains a self-expanding value that reproduces itself across time and space, penetrating and creating new and distant markets (Harvey 2003, 2005; Palan 2000). It is in this sense rather disheartening that some have seemingly and perhaps inadvertently done such paralyzing damage to a Marxian approach, and

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its concern for structure, right at a time when it has the potential to be most critical and elucidating. I am thinking in particular of Castree’s (2006) recent lament (compare Castree, 1999), following Barnett (2005), about the (f)utility of the term ‘neoliberalism’ in a political economy approach to understanding our current situation.

I do appreciate Barnett (2005) and Castree’s (2006) shared concern that neoliberalism has become such a pervasive academic buzzword as to lend it the appearance of monolithic (the very critique that Gibson-Graham (1996) articulate with respect to capitalism), and accordingly I welcome the recognition of multiplicity, complexity, and variegation found in recent accounts such as Brenner and Theodore (2002) and Peck (2001). I am equally concerned by the emerging claims (see Farrands 2002) that the Left must seek to replicate the Right in articulating an alternative to neoliberalism that mirrors its breadth and scope of think tank networks and institutional connections (Plehwe and Walpen 2006; Carroll and Carson 2006; Weller and Singleton 2006). Indeed, such a totalizing vision is a detrimental recapitulation that brings us no closer to the notion of human ‘emancipation’ than we are today. Following Mitchell (2002), we should rightly question why ‘experts’ should remake the world rather than the collective world remaking itself on its own terms. Nonetheless, Barnett’s (2005) post-structuralist critique that ‘there is no such thing as neoliberalism’, a claim Castree (2006) approaches from a critical realist perspective in deeming neoliberalism a ‘necessary illusion’, are both potentially wanton in the face of the contemporary prevalence of poverty and inequality, and the resultant violence that such divisions of wealth, status, and power so often entail. Castree no doubt remains committed to a Marxism of ensembles, where ‘neoliberalism’ is replaced by a set of connected and differential neoliberalizations. He also recognizes full well that there are very real effects to come to terms with, but I fear that he leaves the question of ‘where do we go from here’ dangerously wide open. Barnett is less apologetic, contending ‘neoliberalism’s’ ascription as a singular ‘hegemonic’ project reduces our understandings of social relations to that of residual effects by
disregarding the proactive role sociocultural processes play in changing policy, regulations, and governance modes. The contrasting reality, Barnett avers, is that market liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation have actually been impelled from the bottom-up, primarily via the populist ethos of left-leaning citizens movements seeking greater autonomy, equality, and participation. This critique may have some resonance in many global north settings, but in making this argument, other than to question academics’ alliances with various actors ‘out there’, Barnett completely ignores global south contexts where such reforms have largely been foisted from the top-down through the coercive auspices of aid conditionality, International Financial Institution lending practices, and occasionally even overt militarism as is currently seen in Iraq. Likewise, he fails to consider the resultant violent outcomes these impositions so frequently have (see Uvin 1999, 2003).

While it may be true in some specific instances (let’s not suddenly forget plurality!) that “academic critics are made to feel important if the object of their animus appears to be hegemonic, global, and powerful: something that demands urgent critical scrutiny. It is far less glamorous and ‘sexy’ to have constantly to describe one’s objects of analysis as multiple, complex, and varied through time and space” (Castree 2006: 5). Yet it could also be argued that the ‘sexiest’ position of all is that which seeks to secure a space and establish the framework for the next major ‘post’ in academia. By leading the ‘post-neoliberalism’ charge, Barnett and Castree will almost certainly make waves, which is not to attribute shallow careerism to either scholar, but to question the potentially unreflective allure such a new position might have among geographers and within the wider academy. My sense is the ‘post-neoliberalism’ sentiment reveals more about the sociology of critical human geography and its constant appeal to novelty than it does about the world outside. Nonetheless, while Castree’s (2006) commentary is aimed at pale imitations of neoliberalization arguments by raising questions about how case study research is operationalized and envisaged using a neoliberal-ism-as-monolithism interpretation (see also Castree 2005), I suspect these subtleties may
be lost on many observers. Thus, the point I want to make is that should an injudicious ‘post-neoliberalism’ position pick up steam among leftist scholars, this may be at the expense of giving those on the academic Right even more room to manoeuvre as they continue to define their own terms of reference in linear and modally uncomplicated ways. This is not to say that the Left should follow suit in such over simplification. However, if leftist scholars are content to ruminate endlessly about slight differences in definition, scalar applicability, and the usefulness of a ‘both/and’ agenda vis-à-vis neoliberalism without ever getting around to the vital work of thinking about how we might link ‘local’ expressions of violence to a bigger conversation concerning impoverishment and socioeconomic disparity, a discussion which Castree (2006: 6) quite surprisingly informs us is only “apparently important”,¹ I worry that the Left’s position in academia and its ability to influence policy will wane even further than it already has in the years since 11 September 2001. By relating our ‘local’ accounts into ‘larger’ political and economic strategies such as neoliberalism/neoliberalization, scholars are offered a potential way forward in identifying and understanding the nonillusory ‘local’ and ‘everyday’ effects, which need to be explored more thoroughly, particularly as regards violence. In doing so we offer counter to the vengeful Orientalism of Huntington’s (1996) ‘Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order’, Kaplan’s (2000) ‘The Coming Anarchy’, and similar rightist treatises, which posit violence as little more than the aberrance of backward cultures while failing to consider how ‘global’ conditions often exacerbate the circumstances that give rise to ‘local’ expressions of violence. By omitting political and economic interests and contexts—however hybrid, variegated, and amorphous they may be—when describing violence, and in presenting violence as exclusively a result of traits embedded in local cultures, such Orientalist imaginaries feed into hegemonic stratagems that legitimize continuous (neo)colonial projects (Tuastad 2003).

A Marxian approach acknowledges inequality and poverty by virtue of its recognition of the uneven geography (Harvey 2003, 2005) and originary violences of property that any capitalist system
entails (Blomley 2000, 2003). In particular, a Marxist perspective draws our attention to the defining feature of capitalism as a mode of production occurring through an exchange between workers and capitalists: the valorization of capital by commodified labour (Colas 2003; Harvey 2003). Colas (2003) recognizes how this exceptional achievement of capitalism was effected historically through the forceful and violent dispossession of direct producers from their means of subsistence, a process that Marx called ‘primitive’ or ‘original’ accumulation. However, because this is actually an ongoing process of capitalism, Harvey (2003) instead refers to this as ‘accumulation by dispossession’, which in concert with the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations, also includes:

- the conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive property rights. . . suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of labour power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources); monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; the slave trade (which continues particularly in the sex industry); and usury, the national debt and, most devastating of all, the use of the credit system as a radical means of accumulation by dispossession. (Harvey, 2005: 159)

In concert with capital accumulation by dispossession, the picture of inequality and poverty becomes even clearer when we recognize the concomitant imperative of the capitalist to pay wages that are as low as possible to his/her employees to maximize one’s own profits (Dunford 2000). The search for profits entails an obvious spatial (increasingly international) aspect, which accounts for the imperialist features of the leading capitalist countries, and their rivalry and domination over the periphery (Duménil and Lévy 2004). This highlights the centrality of the law of uneven development (Harvey 2003, 2005) so that imperialist expansion and monopolistic developments breathe new life into the capital system, thus temporally diffusing the time of its saturation. In ensuring higher profit margins, Palan (2000: 12) suggests the ideal of global market equilibrium is delayed and ‘sabotaged’, and through this observation he suggests that a Marxian approach places issues of hierarchy and power front and centre in the analysis of the world economy, by incorporating “into the core of its
theoretical edifice precisely those elements that economics treats as ‘exogenous’ or contingent” thus merging the political to the economic, hence political-economy. The current ‘sabotage’ is at odds with the notion of development that posits ‘a rising tide raises all boats’, the supposed imperative behind neoliberalism.

Indeed, Harvey (2005) avers that the primary substantive achievement of neoliberalization has been the ability to distribute, rather than to generate, wealth and income, or the very continuation of accumulation by dispossession. His skepticism in this regard has led him to view neoliberalism as a project driven primarily by transnational elites, who are fundamentally concerned with the reconstitution of class power where it exists, and its creation where such class power is currently absent. This is a view increasingly shared by a number of critical scholars (see Berger 2006; Carroll and Carson 2006; Cox 2002; Duménil and Lévy 2004; McMichael 2000; Overbeek 2000; Plehwe et al. 2006; Rapley 2004; Sparke 2004; Watson 2002). In comparison, Amoore and Langley (2002) view neoliberalism as a practice of the elite, but place it closer to Foucauldian notions of governmentality. Such expository potential is patronizingly dismissed by Barnett (2005), who contends neoliberalism-as-governmentality is a denigratory language that treats individualism as an ideological ploy by the Right, inviting us to take consolation in a perception of collective decision-making as a normatively straightforward process. Of course in making the same sort of caricatural sweeps of leftist scholars that he argues those very scholars are guilty of with respect to neoliberalism, Barnett (2005) never gives pause to consider how democratic procedures are indeed problematised by the Left, yet still seen as preferable to the dictates of a class-based elite minority. In defending his position on neoliberalism as (re)constructed class power, Harvey (2005) points to the importunate rise in social inequality under neoliberalism, which he regards as structural to the entire project of neoliberalism, a claim that is given a significant amount of credibility with Wade’s (2004) quantitative analysis and criticisms of global statistics.
Furthermore, if conditions among the lower classes deteriorate under neoliberalism, this failure is implied to be a product of personal irresponsibility or cultural inferiority (Harvey 2005), an argument epitomized by Harrison and Huntington’s (2000) rightist call to arms ‘Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress’. More subtly, neoliberal ideology’s suspicion of the poor as morally suspect turns the social suffering wrought by neoliberal capitalism into a ‘public secret’ (Taussig 1992; see also Watts 2000), allowing ‘symbolic violence’—or that violence which accomplishes itself through misrecognition thus enabling violence to go unperceived as such—to prevail (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004), so that the poor are blamed, and indeed blame themselves for their ongoing poverty (Bourgois, 2004). Accumulation by dispossession operates in much the same capacity insofar as the erasure of the originary and ongoing ‘violences of property’ (Blomley 2003) serves to legitimize the exclusionary claims of the landowning elite. The property system entails violent ‘acts’ of dispossession at its founding moment, as well as enduring violent ‘deeds’—which need not be physicalized to be operative, as self policing becomes reflexive—that (re)enforce the exclusionary basis of private property (Blomley 2000). Working in concert, these ‘acts’ and ‘deeds’ purposefully disregard the violence to which the poor have been subjected, while resistance and subsequent attempts at reclamation are typically treated as both proscribed and manifestly violent. It is in this way that these decidedly nonillusory effects of neoliberalization can be seen as deliberately ‘choking the south’ (Wade 2006) or ‘attacking the poor’ (Cammack 2002), where we can view Polanyi’s contention that the dominance of market rationality was a fundamental cause of the savagery characteristic of the first half of the twentieth century (Dunford 2000) as being carried forward into a new context.

Neoliberals are quick to point out how absolute poverty has declined under the global neoliberal regime, a claim that may or may not actually be tenable (Wade, 2004). Regardless of this assertion, following Rapley (2004) we can view the global neoliberal regime as inherently unstable
because it assumes that absolute rather than relative prosperity is the key to contentment, and while absolute poverty may have declined under neoliberalism, relative inequality has risen (Uvin 2003). Building on this notion, Rapley (2004) suggests the events of 11 September 2001 were a symbolic moment of crisis, where those on the ‘losing end’ of the neoliberal regime’s unequal distribution made their discontent with systemic poverty and glaring inequality emphatically clear (see also Tetreault 2003; Uvin 1999, who suggest similar expressions of resentment ultimately led to the Rwandan genocide). The response in the wake of this tragedy has been escalated violence under the auspice of what Harvey (2003) calls the ‘New Imperialism’ led by the current Bush administration. Contra Larner’s (2003) claim that this new military might is anything but neoliberal in character, the rhetorical ‘war on terror’ currently being waged by the Bush regime uses militarism to enforce the neoliberal order most overtly in those spaces where the geostrategic imperative for oil converge with the failure of Wall Street-Treasury-IMF complex (Wade 1998) economic prescriptions, namely in Afghanistan and Iraq (Gregory 2004; Harvey 2003). United States military power thus serves as a bulwark for enforcement of an American concept of ‘new world order’ (i.e. neoliberalism-cum-Pax Americana) which as a renewed strategy of accumulation by dispossession is shared to varying degrees by other governments, particularly members of the G8 (Cox 2002).

The precedent set by the New Imperialism has seen many global south states, informed by the rhetoric of their own war on terror, using violence more readily as a tool of control (Canterbury 2005). While such repression is not entirely new, as Glassman and Samatar (1997) point to it as a commonplace feature of the ‘post’-colonial era, novelty rests in the case of its legitimation via the discourse of ‘security’ (Springer 2009). Indeed, such neo-authoritarianism is readily extended under neoliberalism as both a means to maintain the social order necessary for the extraction of economic surplus from those countries recently incorporated into the global capitalist system (Canterbury 2005), and as a response to the supposedly inherent violent tendencies of the lower classes, who now
faced with mounting unemployment, slashed wages, forced evictions, and all the other associated hallmarks of accumulation by dispossession, must resort to other means of survival, being ultimately forced into the underground economy as a street vendor, or worse, prostitution and drug trafficking. Thus, the neoliberal imperative for the inalienable right of the individual and his/her property, trumps any social democratic concern for an open public space, equality, and social solidarity (Harvey 2005). Yet one is left to wonder whether Barnett (2005) would extend his argument to consider such attempts at collective empowerment and redistribution as mere ideological ploys by the Left, inviting us to take solace in an image of individualism as practically and normatively unproblematic? The parody here should be apparent.

Finally, by relegating Marxian political economy perspectives to the intellectual dustbin as Hudson (2006) contends Amin and Thrift (2005) have done, and in suggesting that neoliberalism is a ‘necessary illusion’ or that ‘there is no such thing’ as Castree (2006) and Barnett (2005) respectively do, albeit from two very different theoretical perspectives, is to run the perilous risk of obviating ourselves from the contemporary reality of structural violence (Bourgois 2001; Farmer 2004; Uvin 2003). Without theorizing capital as a class project and neoliberalism as an ‘actually existing’ circumstance (Brenner and Theodore, 2002), structural violence, and the associated, if not often resultant direct violence (Galtung, 1990), becomes something ‘out there’ and far away in either spatial proximity or class distance, so that it is unusual, unfamiliar, and unknown to the point of obscurity and extraordinarity. Arming ourselves with a Marxian political economy approach, and a theoretical toolkit that includes neoliberalism, allows us to bring global capitalism’s geographies of violence into sharp focus, alerting us to the realities of poverty and inequality as largely outcomes of an uneven capitalist geography, and furthermore to recognize the ways in which the ‘out there’ of violence has occurred and continues to proliferate and be (re)produced in a plentitude of spaces, including ‘in here’. It is only through recognition of such symbolic violence that human emancipation may be
offered, and without such acknowledgement, what’s left? Just a future of ensuing violence.

2.1 Notes

1 Castree’s (2006: 6) full statement reads: “The habit of naming and evaluating the unnameable—the grand phenomenon that is supposedly expressed through diverse spatiotemporal particulars—dies hard. This is why I suspect ‘neoliberalism’ will remain a necessary illusion for those on the geographical left: something we know does not exist as such, but the idea of whose existence allows our ‘local’ research finding[s] to connect to a much bigger and apparently important conversation”.
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CHAPTER 3

Public Space as Emancipation: Critical Reflections on Democratic Development, Neoliberalism, and Violence in the Global South*

3.1 Introduction

This article recognizes how geography can form the basis of emancipation by establishing a theoretical framework for understanding public space as a vision for democracy and development from below in the global south. I present public space as an opportunity to surmount the technocratic elitism of the top-down perspective that characterizes the neoliberal approach to development and problematizes civil societies. A move toward development from below in the form of democracy as public space is recognized as an affront to the interests of both indigenous elites and global capital, and accordingly I examine the contested process of public space. Public space is recognized as the battlefield on which the conflicting interests of the global south’s rich and poor are set, as well as the object of contestation itself. Within public space the materialization of violence is acknowledged as both an outcome of attempts to impose an ‘ordered’ view of democracy originating from above, and as an act of resistance and liberation from below by those seeking radical democratic spaces of ‘unscripted’ interaction. This violence reveals the paradox of democracy, because although premised on the notion of non-violent mitigation of conflict, democracy is never free from the threat or manifestation of violence.

While some readers might object to the theoretical application of public space to the global south, as the existing literature focuses predominantly on the experiences of global north cities, the need for a single urban discourse is overdue (Dick and Rimmer 1998). This is not to deny that global south cities have particular distinctive elements, such as expansive slum housing and important

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informal economies. Rather, it is the recognition that since the late colonial period global south cities were already becoming more like ‘western’ cities, a convergence that has intensified under neoliberalism. Applying a southern perspective to public space does not reinvent our theorizations or require us to necessarily rethink the entire project. The processes of neoliberalization that are deleteriously affecting the very notion of the public are being challenged in a diverse range of contexts that encompass all areas of the globe. By taking radical notions of public space south, we may improve our understanding of the relational geographies of neoliberalism, where each ‘local’ contestation of public space can be read as a nodal point of interconnection in socially produced space (Massey 1994). Through this, Hart (2008: 684) argues, we may ‘grasp the complex back-and-forth processes of contestation and acquiescence through which multiple, interconnected arenas in state and civil society have been remaking one another—and to the slippages, openings, contradictions, and possibilities for alliances’ that exist across space. As such, in focusing on the global south, my purpose is to acknowledge these relational geographies, wherein incidents like the series of struggles over the privatization of water in Cochabamba, Bolivia during 2000 (Kohl 2002, 2006), must be considered as events tied to the broader assemblage of global contestations over ‘the right to the city’ and alternative urban futures (Purcell 2008), which are also occurring in the global north, such as the ‘battle for Seattle’ during the World Trade Organization meetings of 1999.

The primary difference, however, is that much like the very process of development, where the global north’s experiences have been protracted over several centuries, in the global south, development and the contestation of public space that coincides with this ‘rationalizing’ project have been much more acute (Escobar 2004), making such contestation in the global south potentially more violent as societies attempt to cope with the rapidity of this change. This potential for violence is not a reflection of global south peoples as Orientalist renderings like Harrison and Huntington (2000) would have us believe. An analysis of the contestation of public space allows us to move beyond
such essentialist accusations of ‘undemocratic’ and ‘violent’ cultures as responsible for ongoing authoritarianism and conflict in the global south. Instead, the potential for violence is a reflection of colonial legacies (past and present) and intensive International Financial Institution (IFI) monitoring and conditionality, which sets the backdrop not only for violence in public space, but for multiple forms of strife in the global south that encompasses the entire spectrum between direct and structural violence, including open warfare, coup d'état, assassination, resource conflict, gender discrimination, antagonistic party politics, extrajudicial murders, guerilla and mercenary involvement, rural-urban disparity, poverty, inequality, ethnic enmity, mass murder, and genocide. Ultimately, an examination of the controversy of public space allows us to see the structural constraints placed on governments by the neoliberal doctrine, positioning us to understand the current struggle for democracy in the global south, as well as its associated violence, as fundamentally a clash between the machinations of global capitalism, and the attempts of the poor and propertyless to insert their voices into the development policies and practices that adversely affect their lives.

This article is separated into two major themes. The first establishes a framework for overcoming top-down approaches to development by arguing in favor of democracy as public space. I begin by examining democracy’s intersection with notions of civil society, which are presently inadequate as a means of providing indigenous ownership over the simultaneous project of development and democracy, offering limited opportunity for the development agenda to be set by those most directly impacted by it. As a re-imagining of civil societies by insisting on their spatialization, public space is argued to provide the opportunity for a more radical democracy to emerge. This potential is established in the following section, where I recognize the space of appearance as vital to democratic representation. I draw distinction between public space and the public sphere, the latter of which is comparable to civil society inasmuch as both lack the dimension of physicality, an essential requirement for citizens to exert pressure in demanding answers to issues
of public importance. I also confront the ongoing exclusions of public space, as marginalized groups often find themselves subjected to prohibitions of access. Their struggles for presence in public space reveal that its democratic potential is never entirely lost.

Building on this notion of perpetual struggle, in the second major theme I examine public space as a domain of contestation. I begin by recognizing public space as the site where political actors, both rich and poor, and the stratagem of neoliberalized capital continually stake their claims. The inherently contested character of public space reveals that is never free from the risk of disorder, an observation that places democracy in conflict with the need for ‘order’ so that capital should flow smoothly. The following section examines the interface between public space, democracy, and violence. Public space, while having democratic potential, is often also a space of violence. A disquieting nexus exists between violence and democracy, as the two are not incompatible as is often thought. Violence that originates from below and is driven by a demand for equality is often the only endeavor that can democratize a political system, while violence from above intends to preserve the status quo of the established order. In the conclusion I contend democracy as public space is a defensible development process offering emancipatory potential to the global south. Democratic struggle grounded in public space offers a chance for those most oppressed by neoliberalism to demand social justice now, and thus the potential to repeal the notion of the ‘trickle down effect’ that has had them waiting decades for this dubious promise to bear fruit.

Although I do offer occasional empirical signposts throughout the paper, my approach here is largely theoretical. My decision to employ an unabashed theoretical argument is three fold. First, because the literature is rich with accounts of contestation to neoliberalization both in the global south (see North and Huber 2004; Hart 2006; Kohl 2006; Perreault 2006; Swanson 2007; Grimson 2008; Wright 2008) and the global north (see Keil 2002; Mudu 2004; Brand and Wissen 2005; Del Casino and Jocoy 2008), the empirical application of this theoretical argument should by now be
relatively obvious to critical human geographers. Second, I have published a detailed empirical application of this theoretical edifice elsewhere (Springer 2009), and I want to explore the theoretical implications more thoroughly without sacrificing space for empirical concerns. Finally, although protest movements necessarily occur in terrains that always exceed neoliberalism (Hart 2008; see Leitner et al. 2007 for an extended discussion of this), I think it is important to think through how a rising tide of contestation can be interpreted as meaningful because of a shared sense of betrayal with what can be broadly defined as ‘neoliberal policy goals’. In going beyond the ‘facts’ of neoliberalization, I hope to contribute to the increasing recognition among critical social scientists that the procurement of transnational solidarity is inseparable from ‘local’ resistance, and must be built upon an understanding of neoliberalism’s geographies of protest, resistance, and violence as relational (see Brand and Hirsch 2004; Seoane 2004; Featherstone 2005; Sundberg 2007; Hart 2008; Wainwright and Kim 2008). This article contributes to this discussion by arguing that the realization of the democratic ideal of public space in the global south is of primary importance to the achievement of any emancipatory goal that seeks to transform neoliberalism’s violent geographies of exclusion, inequality, and poverty, but cautions that this process of transformation itself may lamentably not be free from violence.

3.2 Democracy as Public Space

3.2.1 Beyond Civil Society?

The contested nature of democracy compels us to recognize it as an incomplete project, always in a process of becoming (Dahl 1971). A processual interpretation allows a return to democracy’s radical roots, the joining of demos (the people) with kratia (power), which offers better opportunities to pursue such goals as economic equality and social justice through the mechanism of participation (Mouffe 2006). The political engagement of civil society is frequently thought of as a way to promote
democratization through pressure from below, simultaneously representing a goal to strive for, a means to achieve it, and a framework for engagement over ends and means (Edwards 2004). From both a conceptual and empirical perspective, civil society possesses a tremendous amount of internal heterogeneity and is accordingly a contentious concept with a myriad of meanings imbricated in scalar contexts ranging from the local to the global (McIlwaine 2007). The concept is more appropriately considered in the plural than the singular, yet despite a proclivity to homogenize important lines of differentiation (Mercer 2002), the development literature nonetheless contains extensive writing, both in terms of concrete examples and on the different theoretical approaches to understanding civil societies, especially in relation to democracy building.¹ Some studies are beginning to identify a dialectic between civil societies and states (Glassman and Samatar 1997; Mercer 2002), making depictions that conceptualize civil societies as ‘outside’ the state, encompassing the entire non-state (market-regulated, privately controlled, or voluntary organized) realm (Haynes 1997) increasingly problematic. Civil societies are more appropriately conceived as a public sphere of interaction between state and market, a conduit for ‘captured polity’, being at once both mediated by and a mediator of the political and the economic. Nonetheless, only a concept of civil societies properly differentiated from the economy (and thus the bourgeois) can form the basis of a critical sociopolitical theory where the market has already or is in the process of developing its own autonomous logic. Otherwise, the undifferentiated version of civil society embedded in the slogan ‘society versus the state’ would lose its critical potential (Cohen and Arato 1992). In other words, for civil societies to retain their dramatic oppositional role (particularly under authoritarianism and democratic transitions), a three-part model distinguishing civil society from both state and economy is required. Yet while such differentiation is a theoretical possibility, the pragmatism of praxis is not as forthcoming.
In transitions from authoritarianism, the emergence of a civil society is often viewed as the turning point from fear to public action in the struggle for democracy. The reason for the emergence or persistence of authoritarian rule in the first place is because powerful elements of society, typically landowners, bankers, and industrialists accept or collaborate with it, and according to Diamond (1992), civil society turns these powerful actors against the state. This alludes to the notion that civil societies can and should replace the most oppressed class or the vanguard party as the agent of historical change (Lummis 1996). The difference, however, is that unlike what a subjugated class or an intrepid party might do, civil societies do not rise up and seize the power of the state for the people. Rather, by rising up a civil society empowers itself, so that landowners, bankers, and industrialists (the bourgeois) may marginalize and come to control the state itself. This brings us back to where we started: capital in control of the state and orientating it in an authoritarian arrangement to effect its exacting logic. This vicious circle is perhaps expected in light of the unremitting theoretical misconception that the state and capital are distinct spheres, rather than integral parts of the totality of capitalism (Yeung 1998). Anderson’s (1991) magisterial account of imagined communities lends credence to the conceptual fusion of capital and the state. In this view, the nation—and its subsequent expression as statehood—is founded upon the decidedly capitalist enterprise of colonialism. Although local expressions of capitalism were present prior to the colonial encounter, the historical experience of colonialism intensified and internalized capitalist relations in the colonies through the very processes of imagining communities. In other words, because civil societies are often simultaneously enmeshed in processes of capitalist usurpation and notions of statehood, an interlocking of three thematic nuclei (Slater 1989), they may also be viewed as colonial transplants. This matter is important because Habermasian ideas concerning civil society (and indeed public space) are the product of ‘western’ thought, which I am attempting to bring to bear as a vehicle for understanding ‘non-western’ contexts. Through colonial occupations we can discern a
coalescence of this foreign character of civil societies around indigenous elites, who are at once both those groups to whom Habermas (1989) attributes the capacity to commandeer the state, and the class that assimilated and came to embody the logic of capital. Thus, indigenous elites represent the pivots for making the translation of civil societies across cultures. Yet, as Glassman’s (1999) conception of the internationalization of the state recognizes, distinctions between so-called ‘local’ and ‘global’ elites have become increasingly blurred as their interests and character converge under globalized neoliberalism. What we are left with is a transnational capitalist class (Carroll and Carson 2006).

Given the apparent interface between capitalism, the state, and a civil society, the latter is not only easy prey for corporatism (Wiarda 2003); rather corporatism is to at least some degree constitutive of civil societies. This certainly falls in line with the qualitative hollowing-out process of state restructuring espoused by the neoliberal agenda where the state becomes differently powerful as emphasis on markets takes on primary importance (Peck 2001), but it does little to address inequality and certainly does not empower existing marginalized groups. On the other hand, neoliberal prescriptions and their resultant renewed commitment to authoritarianism in the global south (Canterbury 2005; Springer 2009), and increasingly the global north (Giroux 2004), may lead to a different fate for civil societies. For example, the technocracies of East Asia have spawned civil societies notable for their extent of state regulation, affording little opportunity for the development of a critical public realm as the state functions as gatekeeper to civil discourse and debate (Jones et al. 1995). Hughes (2003) describes this situation in the Cambodian context, where the predominant conception of civil society is nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which work closely with government, subjecting them to licensing and surveillance. Although NGOs are a commonplace proxy for civil societies, acknowledging that ‘NGOization’ conditions civil societies does not mean that they are equivalent concepts (Yacobi 2007). Nonetheless, Cambodian civil society suffers from
being highly professionalized, legalistic, technocratic, and extremely hierarchical with authoritarian style internal governance, where the top often represents an international patron, tendentially linking it to neoliberalism (Beckman 1993). Mohan (2002) describes similar disappointments with Ghanaian civil society. Such civil societies offer another variation of the top-down perspective, where the agenda is set either by government (making the designation ‘nongovernmental’ oxymoronic), an international patron (bilateral donors), or the IFIs, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Thus, although many civil societies embrace (at least outwardly) a democratic ethos, which makes them part of the struggle to found a democratic public space, often they not only fail to challenge the status quo of the government, but in line with Harvey’s (2005) contention that NGOs can be the ‘Trojan Horses’ of neoliberalism, some civil societies may a fortiori work to reinforce the hegemony of a neoliberal order.

Hadenius and Uggla, (1996: 1621) advocate a definition of civil society that ‘denotes a certain area of society which is dominated by interactions of a certain kind. The area in question is the public space between the state and the individual citizen’. Spatialized notions of civil societies such as this are becoming increasingly common (see Lewis 2002; McIlwaine 2007), an understanding I follow up on not to circumvent the concept altogether, but to infuse it with some precision in bringing civil societies closer to the emancipatory potential they are frequently used to envisage. Ideally civil societies would not seek to force the state to establish liberty; rather they would struggle to found democratic space on their own (Lummis 1996). It is in the making and taking of space and place that allows us to move toward a more radical model of democracy:

If… place and self are mutually constitutive, then the means of creating the ideal self for sustaining the project of democracy have parallels in place-making. In constructing places we seek to have them match our projects and ideals, both individual and collective. In democracies such ideals include the desire to build places that promote social justice, tolerance, and inclusion and that offer public gathering spaces or places reflecting collective values about community… Viewed as a form of life and as a process, democracy involves in part the making, unmaking, and remaking of places (Entrikin 2002: 107-108)
Since democracy is meant to be inclusive, it is specifically those spaces and places that are public that are of primary importance. Thus, public space can be understood as the very practice of democracy, including democratic ideals, civic responsibilities, and the necessary social compact that forms the core of civil societies (Banerjee 2001), but potentially without the hierarchy, technocracy, international patrons, government appropriation, and co-optation of the modern aristocracy that problematize some civil societies.

Only a conception of civil society rooted in public space is sufficient for a participatory vision of democracy, recognizing that ‘voice to the voiceless’ is not something to be handed to people by NGOs, governments, markets, or IFIs. Rather, it is something to be taken for themselves. Thus, the relationship between democracy and space is crucial, since democracy requires spaces not only where people can gather to discuss the issues of the day and work on solving problems (Staeheli and Thompson 1997), but also places where rights and ideas can be contested.³ A democratic society, regardless of political ideals or partisan leanings, values public space as a forum for all social groups, where there should be no structural deterrents prohibiting the ability of individuals to participate in public affairs. Public space is the site where collective rights to performance and speech are entrenched (Goheen 1998), the crucible of participatory democracy, and the medium through which identities are created and disputed (Ruddick 1996).

3.2.2 The Space of Appearance

The notion that public space is important for identity formation is well recognized in human geography (Cope 1996; Lees 1994; Massey 1994). This creative process works both ways, as identity is important in forming the contours of public space.⁴ While public space allows individuals to join collaborative efforts and still maintain distinct voices, representation, whether of oneself or a group, demands a physical space so that individuals and groups may make their needs known and show
themselves as legitimate claimants to public considerations (Mitchell 2003b). The right to representation, however, is not always recognized, and accordingly public space can also refer to the extent of social and political interaction available to a person. Arendt (1958) calls this the ‘space of appearance’, or the space within the world that people need to be seen. Action and speech require visibility because for democratic politics to occur, it is not enough for a group of private individuals to vote separately and anonymously. Instead, because belonging to any public requires at least minimal participation, individuals must physically come together and occupy a common space where their similarities and differences can emerge (Howell 1993). While visibility is central to the functioning of public space, theatricality is also required because wherever people gather together, the space of appearance is not just ‘there,’ but is something that is actively (re)produced through recurring performances (Valentine 1996).

Notions of theatricality recognize that space is produced, an idea made popular by Lefebvre (1991), who draws a distinction between the visualization and administration of space on the one hand, and its materialization on the other. In Lefebvre’s (1991) terms, public space that is controlled by government or other institutions, or whose use is regulated, is referred to as ‘representation of space’, whereas public space as it is actually accessed and used by various social groups is called ‘representational space’. This distinction is important because it draws attention to the difference between the ‘official’ status of a space, and the ability of various individuals and groups to use it (Arefi and Meyers 2003). The power to deem particular spaces and places ‘official’ runs concomitant to the power to exclude certain groups from such sites on the basis of this very ascription. When can we ever be certain that any particular space or place is ‘official’ except when told so by the already powerful? Lefebvre’s dichotomy also hints at the underlying contestation of public space by acknowledging its social constructedness. The idea that space is both constructed by and the medium
of social processes captures the concept of ‘spatiality’, recognizing society and space as inseparable (Massey 1994, 2005). Thus, representation not only demands space, but also creates it.

A further benefit of Lefebvre’s theorization is his avowal of the significance of bodily representations, or lived experiences of space (McCann 1999). This addresses the fundamental difference between public space and the public sphere, which are often conflated but do not map correspondingly onto one another. The public sphere, which is analogous to civil society in that in its original Habermasian sense it is effectively silent on space (Howell 1993), can be defined as the abstract domain of our social life, ideally separate from the coercion of state power, where public opinion is formed (Habermas 1989). In contrast, public space must be taken literally as a physical space precisely because this dimension gives a powerful visibility to political action (Goheen 1998). Even representative democracies bear witness to protests launched on the ground in material spaces providing non-electoral feedback into the public sphere when democracy is no longer direct. The media cannot enable visibility to a public political claim without that claim first being enacted in public space. Without this initial physical dimension claims may be audible or textual to become discursive within the public sphere, but they will still lack a space of appearance. Thus, because public space cannot be established in the abstract, newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet are part of the public sphere and not public space. Moreover, public space is not to be conflated with the street itself. Courts and legislatures, for example, also offer visibility to public claims, and although problematic in that they are ‘official’, these sites are still (at least ideally) public spaces with the potential for representation.

The circulation of images, arguments, and ideas through various global and local media, including individual actions carried out in private space, but gaining access to a wider public through the public sphere, can have important and powerful effects that may open or even close opportunities for political action. For example, although the public was rarely provided with a
complete and unedited version, the political impact of Osama Bin Laden releasing videotaped messages from a secret hideout has been unquestionably massive. Yet despite the power of such communications to rally both support and opposition through public broadcast, both Al-Qaeda and the United States’ (US) ‘war on terror’ recognize the importance of grounding their political objectives in physical space, hence the horrifying events of 11 September 2001 (hereinafter 9/11), and the equally appalling invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. All groups, whether subaltern or dominant, cannot constitute themselves unless they produce a space. Ideas, values, or representations that fail to make their mark in space ‘lose all pith and become mere signs, resolve themselves into abstract descriptions, or mutate into fantasies’ (Lefebvre 1991: 416-417).

The exclusion of some groups from democratic processes via their failures to attain recognition in public space underlines the critical importance of physical space. Although many scholars recognize the democratic character of public space (Fraser 1990; Habermas 1989; Howell 1993), this idea is contested, as public space has paradoxically also long been a site of exploitation, oppression, and prohibition for women (Bondi 1996; Massey 1994; Moghadam 2002), ethnic minorities (McCann 1999; Ruddick 1996), gays and lesbians (Duncan 1996; Hubbard 2001), the elderly and young (O’Neil 2002; Valentine 1996), the homeless (Del Casino and Jocoy 2008; Mitchell 2003b), and people with disabilities (Butler and Bowlby 1997; Freund 2001). Feminist scholars further contest the idea of public space because the public/private dichotomy relates problematically to social constructions of gender and sex (Bondi 1996). In contrast, Fraser (1990) contends that many feminists refer to public space as everything outside the domestic sphere and thus conflate three analytically distinct spheres: the state, the official-economy of paid employment, and arenas of public discourse. Aside from their apparent malleability, notions of private and public are further complicated in that their meaning and usage are embedded within local specificities of time and place, differing from one cultural context to another (Drummond 2000). This is not to advocate a
position of cultural relativism, and we should reject any suggestion that participation, and hence public space, is a distinctive ‘cultural value’. A desire to participate in the affairs of one’s community is an intrinsic component of the human animal as a social being, where recognizing specific contexts of public space requires understanding that any social order is the outcome of local social practice (Mitchell 2003b). The applicability of public space to ‘non-western’ settings is conveyed in a number of recent works (Arefi and Meyers 2003; Avritzer 2002; Drummond 2000; Hee and Ooi 2003; Springer 2009). Yet while many global south studies recognize democratic potential, theoretically public space is approached primarily as a cultural practice and built legacy. In contrast, here I attempt to initiate the theoretical ground for future global south studies to view public space as a democratic political ideal.

In negotiating the private/public dichotomy Henaff and Strong (2001) look to the criteria that must be met for one to enter a particular space. A space is said to be private when a given individual or group is recognized by others as having the right to establish entrance criteria, and meaning is imbued by way of acknowledged ownership. A space is public by contrast, precisely because whereas there are criteria that control admission, the right to enforce those criteria is always in question. Public space is open to those who meet the criteria, but it is not controlled in the sense of being owned and is thus always a contestation over the legitimacy of inclusion and exclusion. The primary importance of public space rests in its potential to be a site of political participation. Although, he argues against the idea of democracy as public space, Miles (2002: 256) inadvertently lends his support when he asks, ‘when was public space ever a site of mass democracy, except when crowds… took matters into their own hands?’. While public space may be exclusionary to certain social groups, whereby some groups may even struggle to gain access in ways that impede its usage by others, public space remains the only site where public claims can be made visible and contested. If at different times spaces may change in their role for accommodating different social groups
(Atkinson 2003), surely contesting one’s exclusion and taking public space can potentially secure such accommodation and change. To demand inclusion in a space often means forcibly occupying the space of exclusion, reinforcing the idea that public space has never been guaranteed, and by its very definition must be contested.

3.3 The Contestation of Public Space

3.3.1 Capitalist Machinations

Democracy is a messy process with an inherent uncertainty reflecting the openness of public discussion concerning community principles, and the possibility of sudden changes in collective goals. The spaces and places of democratic societies must always be in process, constructions to be maintained and repaired as the collective interest is defined, and consequently public space lays at the heart of democracy (Entrikin 2002). Of course the existence of any collective is always predicated on that of a constitutive ‘other’, which has implications for exclusion. This, however, speaks to the very processual nature of public space, which in turn also explains why public space is the subject of continuous contestation, spanning a fluid spectrum between debate, protest, and lamentably violence. Accordingly, it is paramount to view public space as a medium that allows for the contestation of power, focusing on issues of ‘access’ ranging from basic use to more complicated matters, including territoriality, representation, control, and symbolic ownership (Atkinson 2003). Public space, like its counterpart in democracy, is never a complete project, but is instead both the product and the site of conflict between the competing political ideologies of ‘order’ and ‘unscripted’ interaction (Mitchell 2003b). These two competing approaches do not result in dichotomous public spaces. Rather, emphasis must be placed on the processual and fluidic character of public space, where any recognizable ‘outcome’ from either the ordered or the unscripted approach is always and necessarily temporary.
Although claiming to advocate supportive and democratic public space, Carr et al. (1992: xi) exemplify the ordered approach by suggesting that public space is ‘the setting for activities that threaten communities, such as crime and protest’. The right to protest is what makes public space supportive and democratic as it provides those without institutionalized power the opportunity to change the status quo. Crime, for its part, is most often conceived in terms of property rights, and accordingly the poor and propertyless are recast as transgressors of public space. Yet this typical conception of crime should be juxtaposed against the violences of property, where the erasure of the originary violence of private property serves to legitimize the exclusionary claims of the landowning elite (Blomley 2003). The protection of propertied interests is after all the primary purpose of the modern police force (Tilly 2003). Hee and Ooi (2003) take a different approach to the ordered view, contending that the public spaces of colonial and post-colonial cities are constructions of the ruling elite. Certainly, colonial administrators and incumbent regimes attempt to enforce their representations of space, but this ignores the element of contestation and the prospect of spaces for representation to emerge. Beijing’s Tiananmen Square offers a case in point, as the people took this state controlled space, and although recaptured by the state, it remains ideologically contested, continuing to fire the imagination of social movements in China and beyond (Lees 1994). Thus, the values embedded in public space are those with which the general citizenry endows it (Goheen 1998), not simply the visualizations and administrations of the reigning elite.

Corporate state planners and the IFIs may challenge collectively endowed values and espouse the ordered view because they seek to shape public space in ways that limit the threat of democratic power to dominant socioeconomic interests (Harvey 2000). Although they can never achieve total control over public space, they do attempt to regulate it by keeping it relatively free of passion (Duncan 1996). To remove the passion from public space, corporate state planners attempt to create spaces based on a desire for security more than interaction and for entertainment more than
democratic politics (Goss 1996). Sorkin (1992) refers to this as ‘the end of public space’, a process cities throughout the global south are increasingly subjected to, including Phnom Penh, where a strict neoliberal ‘order’ has effectively criminalized the public activities of the poor through the pretext of beautifying the city (Springer 2009). Under the ordered view of public space, premised on a need for surveillance and control over behavior, representations of space come to dominate representational spaces. The processes of increasing surveillance, commodification, and private usage have become known in the literature as the disneyfication of space, where the urban future looms as a ‘sanitized, ersatz architecture devoid of geographic specificity’, drawing citizens away from democratic public space ‘into plastic temples of consumption’ (Lees 1994: 446).

In this light, the struggle for democracy is inseparable from public space, as it is often not what is said that is at stake, but rather where it is said. Phnom Penh offers empirical grounding, where a proposed law seeks to create ‘freedom parks’ as the only sites where demonstrations may legally be held without advance permission from the Ministry of Interior (Kvasager 2006). The proposed locations are on the outskirts of the city, and if enforced, the law would effectively sever the element of spontaneity and the visibility offered by current popular protest sites like Democracy Square and Hun Sen Park, both centrally located near the National Assembly. Thus, shielding oneself from political provocation is easily achieved when all the important public gathering places in a city have become highly policed public space, or its corollary, private property (Mitchell 2003a). The need to relentlessly confront the arrogation of public space is imperative, because the entrenched power of capital can only be repealed by a restoration of political participation whereby a multiplicity of subject positions may be formed though a democratic matrix finding loci in the spaces of the public (Mouffe 2006).

While public protests may initially appear to be limited in scope, they are often manifest expressions of latent dissatisfactions, which in today’s existing and emerging democracies, are related
primarily to the strains of capitalism. The neoliberal assault on all things public is unabashed in the contemporary city (Brenner and Theodore 2002), where control of public space represents a central strategy (Smith and Low 2006). In a world of widespread (neo)liberal democracy, the contestation of public space, although filtered through cultural, religious, national, ethnic, and gender issues, has come to be predominantly about contesting the machinations of capitalism (Brand and Wissen 2005). So while opportunities for taking space are steadily diminishing as new forms of surveillance, revanchism, and control are implemented, in contrast to the death knell rung by Sorkin (1992) and others, the disneyfication of public space is fiercely contested on a global scale, from Quebec City to Cancun and Seattle to Genoa (Wood 2004).

Occasionally the reclamation of public space is so fierce that it can actually bring down a government, as happened in Ecuador when violent protests against the ruling neoliberal order swept through the streets of Quito and Guayaquil in 2005. On the heels of a number of earlier protests and vicious crackdowns following the 2003 signing of an IMF letter of intent enforcing a brutal austerity program, and in direct response to an assassination attempt on their leader, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) appealed to the public in February 2004. Nationwide mobilizations ensued, with blockades being erected along major transportation routes to paralyze the country’s economic life (Fertl 2004). These tactics intensified until 26 January 2005, when over 100,000 Ecuadorians marched in Guayaquil demanding an end to rampant corruption and crime, improved social services, and the reinstatement of the Supreme Court, which was unceremoniously sacked by the Ecuadorian Congress in December 2004. On 16 February 2005, the call for an end to nepotism was reaffirmed when approximately 200,000 people took to the streets of Quito, timed to coincide with the visit of IMF managing director, Rodrigo de Rato (Municio 2005). At the same time CONAIE called for renewed mobilizations against a proposed free trade agreement with the U.S., an end to neoliberal policies and U.S. military ties, the overthrow of
Ecuadorian President, Lucio Gutiérrez, and for the people to fight in the streets everyday until a ‘true democracy’ was achieved (Fertl 2005a).

The uprising came to a head two months later, when following days of prodigious protest and worker strikes, Gutiérrez declared a state of emergency in Quito on 15 April 2005, suspending civil liberties including the right to freedom of expression, association and movement, and the inviolability of the home (Amnesty International 2005). In spite of this attempt to reproduce both public and private space in the interests of the entrenched regime, the demonstrations continued until 20 April 2005, when in a last-ditch attempt to regain control, violence from above was unleashed in the form of thousands of riot police, armored vehicles, and attack dogs to disperse the 30,000 strong protesters calling for Gutiérrez’s resignation. Over a hundred people were wounded, and paid assassins shot two students dead near the Ministry of Social Welfare. The protesters responded with violence from below, clashing with police as they sought the gunmen before eventually torching the ministry building. The contestation of public space became so intense that Ecuador’s Congress cracked under the pressure, holding an emergency meeting where they voted to dismiss Gutiérrez from office (Fertl 2005b).

While the ordered view attempts to dominate space, resistance from the unscripted vision of public space will always be there to meet it. Just as hegemony is never fully achieved (Scott 1990), space is imbued with symbolism and power, representing a complex lattice of subordination and domination, solidarity and dispute (Massey 2005). As the struggle for democracy emerges, the weapons of the weak will inevitably become more manifest once the visible battle for space begins to take shape, transforming from covert hidden transcripts into overt protests, rallies, marches, and other spatially defined arts of resistance (Scott 1990) as evidenced by the Ecuadorian example. Furthermore, whatever rights to public space have been won, people willing to break existing laws by exposing them to be oppressive in their geography, have often only achieved them through forceful
struggle. In this sense, public space is always a dialectical engagement between its means and its end (Mitchell 2003a).

3.3.2 The Disquieting Nexus

The preceding interpretations highlight one central theme: public space is ideally a medium that allows for embodied self-representation. When public space is deprived, individuals cannot situate themselves in the existential realm. Consequently, as contestation becomes impermissible, self-representation is disembodied. Public space is in constant flux between those who seek to deprive it, and those who seek to expand it, and where the ordered view comes to dominate, the resulting deprivation of public space has two apparent consequences: (1) the erosion of individual volition resulting in an acquiescent population, presumably the desired effect by those seeking to undermine public space; or (2) violent outbursts against those who suppress public space, representing a rebellion against an oppressive dominant-subordinate relationship, and the undesired effect of the ordered view. Through the privation of public space an individual ‘acquires an eerie sense of unreality, as happens in a mass society and under tyranny when isolated individuals, thrown back on themselves, live a “shadowy” existence and search for reality in intense private sensations or acts of violence’ (Parekh 1981: 95). In this search for reality, the expression of violence becomes the only practicable form of public self-representation, and in this sense can be a liberating process for those who participate (Arendt 1958).

Agency becomes limited through the constriction of public space, resulting in conditions that facilitate expressions of violence (Taylor 1991). Outbursts of violence can be thought of as violence from below, frequently referred to as political violence, which serves to counteract violence from above, often called state violence. Since both the dominant and subordinate pole can engage in violence, and both sides may be politically motivated, each source of origin is appropriately thought
of as political violence. Likewise, the internationalized and internationalizing character of the contemporary state (Glassman 1999) alerts us to the complexity and ambiguity that underpins contemporary expressions of state violence, rendering this term equally problematic. Violence from above refers to the methods, including both acute and structural violence, used by the established socioeconomic and political order to safeguard their privileges. An acute example is the deployment of military forces against any potential challengers to the sovereignty of the existing order, while a structural example is the prevailing hierarchical political-economic system itself. In contrast, violence from below refers to the frustration, anger, and resentment felt by the general population towards the structures of the existing political economy. Although violence occurs in a diverse range of both public and private spaces, may be categorized in myriad ways reflecting the pursuit and exercise of power, and the chosen dualism is not able to capture all conceivable expressions and intents of violence, it nonetheless heuristically points to where within the existing local-cum-global socioeconomic hierarchy violence is being impelled. It also hints at the underlying values that are being promoted or defended in relation to the furtherance or hindrance of democracy.

For outbursts of violence from below to have meaning to both the deprived and the deprivers, they must necessarily occur in public spaces, and are thus reassertions of the perpetual contestation of public space. It is often only through means or threat of violence that excluded groups have gained access to public space (McCann 1999). This is the paradox of democracy, because without competition and conflict, there cannot be a democratic polity. Yet, any society that sanctions political conflict runs the risk of it becoming too intense, producing discordance that may jeopardize civil peace. Keane (2004) has argued that violence is anathema to the spirit and substance of democracy, representing its greatest enemy. Democracy on the one hand is predicated upon the idea of non-violent management and resolution of conflicts, while on the other hand, many democracies are born in the violence of revolution (Rapoport and Weinberg 2001). This hints at the
emancipatory potential of violence, where despite misgivings from those who seek to protect the status quo, violence from below may generate reallocations of wealth and open alternative paths to political empowerment (Iadicola and Shupe 2003).

A recent example of how violence from below has been used in an attempt to reinvigorate democracy comes from Bangladesh. In November 2006, Dhaka saw four days of violent protest, when hundreds were injured and 28 people were killed, including three politicians linked to the outgoing Bangladesh National Party (BNP) led government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. The violence ignited when KM Hasan, a retired Chief Justice with ties to BNP, was invited to head an interim administration to organize Parliamentary elections for January 2007. The opposition alliance refused to accept Hasan as caretaker chief, saying he once belonged to Zia’s party and was therefore not impartial as required under the constitution (Bhatti 2006). Following violent clashes in cities throughout the country, Hasan stepped down to try to bring an end to the protests. Violence from below continued when angry protesters smashed and burned Zia’s party offices in Dhaka. Riot police responded with violence from above, firing tear gas, rubber bullets, and warning shots to disperse thousands of stone-throwing protesters (BBC 2007b). As the demonstrations waned on day four, a new crisis developed when the main parties failed to agree on an interim government and President Iajuddin Ahmed, backed by the military, took power, sparking new waves of violent protest. On 11 January 2007, Ahmed responded to the ongoing violence by imposing emergency rule, canceling scheduled elections, outlawing demonstrations, curtailing press freedom, limiting other civil liberties, and then promptly stepped down in an attempt to calm the situation (Ramesh 2007). These ordered proscriptions worked for a time, however, violence from below swelled again in August 2007, when students demanding an end to emergency rule and the restoration of democracy spilled into the streets of Dhaka, setting cars ablaze and clashing with baton wielding police, prompting the government to impose an indefinite curfew (BBC 2007a). As is so often the case, violence from
above is there to meet violence from below in an attempt to deepen or preserve the privileges of the entrenched already powerful.

While violence and democracy are often considered antithetical, what constitutes violence, much like crime, is often defined from above (Blomley 2003). That is, violence is defined as legitimate or illegitimate depending on whether it furthers or threatens the social order of a society. Violence from above is often labeled as ‘defensive’ or ‘peacekeeping’, allowing the already powerful greater ability to commit violence, and the violence they commit more likely to be defined as legitimate (Escobar 2004; Iadicola and Shupe 2003). Consequently, the exclusion of violence from below in public space is frequently the exclusion of the ‘disobedient’—those who are a priori defined as illegitimate and thus threatening to the existing order (Mitchell 1996). For this reason Tilly (2003) purposefully omits the terms ‘riot’ and ‘terrorism’ from his typology of violence because they represent political judgments rather than analytical distinctions. Moreover, the existing order increasingly means the economic order, as there is a intensifying corporate imprint on the monopoly on violence (Atkinson 2003). In the contemporary context of global capital flows, the corollary of the corporatization of violence is neoliberalism.

The unscripted vision of public space and its understanding of the very ‘publicness’ of space as something inherently good is increasingly threatened everywhere neoliberal ideology spreads its wings. The biggest threat to public space comes not from the ‘disorderly’ behaviors of the homeless and poor as neoliberal discourse suggests, but from the ongoing erosion of the principle of the collective, and the use of corporate control as a apparent solution to social problems (Mitchell 2003b). Amid widespread privatization, cuts to public expenditure, and reduced social transfer programs, all of which run concomitant to IFI prescriptions, violence has become both a conduit of societal bigotry and an attempt by beleaguered states to regain their footing (Ungar 2002). Violence from above comes attendant to both ‘roll-back’ neoliberalism, where regulatory transformation sees
the state narrowly concerned with mobilizing and expanding markets to the peril of social provisions, and ‘roll-out’ neoliberalism which concentrates on bellicose regulation, disciplining, and containment of those dispossessed or marginalized by earlier stages of neoliberalization (Peck and Tickell 2002). Accordingly, the prevalence of violence in much of the global south results from changes in state power. Specifically, weak states, or those lacking capacity to meet the rights and demands of citizens and to improve the living conditions for the majority of the populace have contributed to high death tolls (Welsh 2002). States that lack capacity exacerbate conflict by perpetuating inequality and resorting to repression to protect their power. In contrast, strong states, or those with capacity, accountability, adherence to democratic ideals, and are ‘developmental’ insofar as they are geared toward the promotion of public welfare, deter violence.

If development produces negative consequences, it is virtually certain that violence will continue. Thus, insofar as neoliberalization has increased the gap between rich and poor, as long as modern development continues on the reckless premise of unlimited growth and the universalization of the market, not only will new landscapes of coping be required to assuage the damage done (Riddell 2003), but the prospect and probability is that violence will escalate (Springer 2008). Under neoliberalism, proponents like Dollar and Kraay (2002) argue that absolute poverty levels have been on the decline since the early 1980s. However, the reliability of such global statistics has come under fire (Wade 2003). Poverty reduction statistics do not recognize spatial and temporal variations in inflation. What a dollar buys in year and/or place ‘A’ is not the same as what a dollar buys in year and/or place ‘B’. The World Bank uses US data when computing inflation, which is a ‘lowball’ estimate for most global south countries, and if China is excluded, the 1990s actually show an increase in global poverty (UNDP 2002). Nevertheless, violence explodes most frequently out of a sociopolitical atmosphere where identifiable programs of modifying change have been implemented, particularly when the social, economic, or political position of the subordinate group has been
improved (Bill 1973). Thus, even if we accept the validity of IFI statistics, the potential for violence is not abated, as neoliberalism ignores the ‘paradox of prosperity’ in assuming that absolute rather than relative affluence is the key to contentment, making the global neoliberal regime inherently unstable (Rapley 2004). Socioeconomic inequality is on the rise (UNDP 2002; Wade 2003), and has been so marked under neoliberalism that Harvey (2005) contends it is structural to the entire project. Accordingly, as the egalitarian dreams that fuel democracy are continually broken under the spell of neoliberalism, violence is an inevitable outcome. It is not poverty that provides an impetus for violence, a problematic assertion not least because poverty is violence effected at the structural level (Iadicola and Shupe 2003). Rather, it is relative inequality—and the awareness of such disparity resulting in humiliation—that often sparks resentment and impels violence from below, which may also proliferate where participation in organized violence opens avenues to political and economic power (Tilly 2003).

Attempts to achieve the ordered view of public space through prohibition of assembly may reduce the frequency and scale of protests in the short-term, but on an extended timeline such practice will only alienate the population, increase the likelihood of clashes between police and activists, and spawn more violence (Tilly 2003). This is why any distortion in access to public space can be so ominous, leading people to feel powerless and frustrated. Violence begets violence, which counteracts the goal of realizing a non-violent society. The relationship between democracy and violence is a disquieting nexus because even under the best circumstances, violence is morally ambiguous. Violence can be an act of liberation that serves to include the excluded. Yet at the same time it is also vile, abhorrent, and dehumanizing. The brutality of violence desecrates not only those directly affected; it also tears the social fabric by subverting the level of trust, interconnectedness, and the very publicness necessary for societies to function. Public space ideally allows for embodiment of the self, but the publicity of violence ‘brings one to experience one’s own embodiment in a totalizing
way that language fails. Violence turns a speaking body dumb’ (Bar On 2002: 14). The conception of democracy as a process is fitting in this context, as there is always the threat (either latent or manifest) that the public violence inherent to democracy will ultimately tear it apart. To break this cycle of violence a democracy must recognize the right to protest, which paradoxically is often only ever achieved through violence (Mitchell 1996).

3.4 Conclusion

In acknowledging the disquieting nexus between violence and democracy we can rightly ask if democracy is a worthwhile project. Democracy is still defensible as a form of government on at least two levels. First, when democracy is radicalized and conceived of as public space, it has the potential to counteract the technocratic elitism that currently informs the development discourse, because agency and voice are generated from the bottom-up. Second, the violence democracy kindles is far less damaging than the violence generated under authoritarianism. Recent history clearly illustrates that the most extreme cases of mass human mortality have occurred under authoritarian regimes, not democratic ones (Keane 2004). But when democracy is radicalized, this comparison of regime types is really neither here nor there, as the basis of change is not in favor of a new regime with a slightly modified mode of power, but an end to systematized rule of any sort. Radical democracy as such has the potential to repeal the remarkable violence engendered through the institutionalization of power by dispersing it more evenly across the entirety of the social body.

It is unsurprising to find that powerful elites, both indigenous and extraneous to the global south, finding coalescence of vision as a transnational capitalist class (Carroll and Carson 2006; Harvey 2005), will fervently try to impede any move towards a participatory vision of development and democracy, as it diminishes their hold on power. But such is the nature of democracy, ever a process, ever a contestation. Democracy is not achieved through a hidden process of socioeconomic
development bringing a country to a point where it has the necessary ‘prerequisites’ or economic conditions. Nor is democracy the outcome of an ‘inherent’ or ‘habituated’ culture. Democracy is born of struggle and the contested politics of the street, and it is in this exertion that a path to social justice may be opened. If violence is more likely to occur in the context of hierarchical structures (Iadicola and Shupe 2003), then a democracy founded on egalitarian principles and social justice, one that accepts social and economic rights as having equal importance to political rights, offers a lasting preventive measure against violence. In order to reduce violence, there needs to be a move toward conditions that promote strong developmental states, not in the ‘Asian-way’, but in terms of increasing social equality through attention to a broad distribution of resources. We must resist naturalizing market relations, as doing so constrains the policy environment for states and consequently denigrates their capacities (Peck 2001). Clearly, there is a need for a vision of public space that extends beyond the market to communicate and establish alternatives to neoliberal hegemony.

As neoliberalization continues to exacerbate the concentration of wealth, reshape political sovereignty, and reorganize economies, the need to establish democratic public spaces becomes evermore intensified. This sentiment applies as much to the global north as it does to the global south, as it is the very same recognition of neoliberalism’s geographies of poverty, inequality, and violence as intertwined across a multiplicity of sites, that impels us to view its geographies of protest, resistance, and contestation in the same light. It may be the case that effective transnational solidarity can only be built upon an emancipatory agenda lodged in such a relational understanding of space. The struggles that occur in the public spaces of diverse cities across the globe, although informed by their own contextually specific struggles over the meanings of inclusion and liberation, can also be recognized as expressions of profound betrayal with similar ‘actually existing’ circumstances of neoliberalization (Brenner and Theodore 2002). The challenge, to paraphrase Hart (2008), is in
coming to grips with how such resistance and contestation to neoliberal projects and practices operates on terrains that always exceed neoliberalism, yet nonetheless still very much extend beyond ‘local’ grievances.

Public space offers a spatial medium to the frustrations subalterns feel with regard to systems of hierarchy, neoliberal or otherwise. It allows them to locate their anger in a material sense, thereby opening public space to new visualizations, which may bring about new administrations. If those on the bottom perceive those on the top as unwilling to listen, evidenced through a denial of public space, then tensions will mount and may boil into violence. The contestation of public space is paramount because while elite challenges may be fierce, they are never insurmountable. When fractures appear in the semblance of incessant repression, violence from below can tear an oppressive rampart to the ground. Dahl’s (1971: 15) axiom which states, ‘[t]he likelihood that a government will tolerate an opposition increases as the expected costs of suppression increase’, illustrates that violence from below may not always be necessary, and simply the threat of civil disobedience may be enough to democratize a repressive regime. Nonetheless, pressure for democratization still demands the continual assertion of physical presence in public space if dissidents are ever to be seen and heard (Mitchell 1996).

The predominance of neoliberalism means the ordered vision of public space has become the primary model available to both the global south (and increasingly the global north) insofar as it represents the interests of capital. The implication of this, an assertion corroborated by Canterbury (2005), is that the answer to why there is a continuing proclivity for authoritarian rule in the global south is not to be found in culture, but rather in the contextual embeddedness of neoliberal reforms and the resultant unequal political-economic arrangements of neoliberalization. The corollary is that the increasingly authoritarian tendencies in the global north may also find their origin in this same neoliberal logic (Giroux 2004). Yet in spite of such adverse conditions, through the struggle for
social justice and democracy, even a people that has been oppressed or mystified into believing that the power of government is a monarchial attribute, a divine punishment, a colonial inheritance, a market commodity, an IFI provision, or something that grows from the barrel of a gun, may still make the discovery that the real source of power is themselves (Lummis 1996). It is in spaces of the public that the discovery of both power and self is made, and it is in the contestation of public space that democracy lives.

3.5 Notes

1 At present, to accept the following characterizations of civil societies, despite being a matter of concern, means that there is not a diversion from the article’s major thesis. Alleviating all anxiety concerning civil society is impossible without enlarging the article beyond a reasonable length. For comprehensive accounts of civil society’s origins and contested meanings see Cohen and Arato 1992; Edwards 2004; Mercer 2002; Wiarda 2003.

2 Despite variance in doses among regions, states, and cities, neoliberal policy goals are underpinned by a vision of naturalized market relations seeking to: eradicate interference with markets; stifle collective initiative and public expenditure primarily via privatization of common assets and imposition of user fees; advocate individualism, competitiveness, and economic self-sufficiency as fundamental virtues; attenuate or nullify social protections and transfer programs; and actively ‘recruit’ the poor and marginalized into a flexible labour regime of precarious work and low-wage employment (Peck 2001; Peck and Tickell 2002).

3 The elision between space and place is purposeful. Held within the discourses they deploy, 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. Massey (2005: 6) asks what if we refuse this distinction, ‘between place (as meaningful, lived and everyday) and space (as what? the outside? the abstract? the meaningless)?’. She encourages us to view space as simultaneity of stories-so-far, and place as collections of these stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space.

4 Identity formation also occurs in semi-public and private spaces, as well as subaltern counterpublic spaces, where subordinated groups formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities by circulating counter discourses (Fraser 1990).

5 The notion that public space might ever be unscripted is chimerical. All spaces are socially regulated, if not by explicit rules then by competitive regulation. This, however, does not mean that the utopian ideal of unscripted space should not be aspired to (Harvey 2000), because while unscripted public space is fantasy, it is precisely because of the chaos, openness, and uncertainty embodied in space and place that makes them potentially democratic crucibles. The challenge is to treat them this way, as instituting democratic spaces requires that exclusions be foregrounded and made visible so that they can be contested (Massey 2005). This re-conceptualization contributes to our understanding of neoliberalism’s relational geometries, where any seemingly ‘local’ contestation in place is in fact tied to the wider assemblage of space. The reverse implication is that any seemingly ‘global’ imperative like ‘neoliberalism-in-general’ is always contextually specific, combining with place-based experiences in a myriad of particular and hybrid ways (Peck 2004).
6 It is imperative to recognize the violent legal geographies of property rights that constitute private space. The property system entails violent ‘acts’ of dispossession at its founding moment, as well as enduring violent ‘deeds’ - which need not be physicalized to be operative, as self policing becomes reflexive - that (re)enforce the exclusionary basis of private property (Blomley 2000).

7 See for example Brass 1997, on the close linkages between state-perpetrated violence, violence from below, and the circulation of ideas about (un)justifiable conduct in India.

8 In the political fallout since 9/11, the tendency to confuse explanation with advocation has unfortunately become commonplace. Should my unease with the relationship between democracy and violence not be clear by my chosen terminology (the disquieting nexus), I will make it explicit by stating that I do not condone a pro-violence position. My purpose is to acknowledge how subordinate groups will at times use violence in their attempts at democratization, where my personal stance is such that any use of violence in a liberationist movement is ultimately self-defeating. Violence is an act of domination, and its use aligns an emancipatory agenda to the nomos of the oppressor.

9 The nexus between capital and state proposed by Yeung (1998) alerts us to the idea that violence may have a corporate logic is actually nothing new. The very notion that violence may be ‘monopolized’ reveals a capitalist character.
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CHAPTER 4

Neoliberalism as Discourse: On the Contours of Subjectivation, Good Governance, and Symbolic Violence

4.1 Introduction

International political economy and economic geography have undergone a ‘cultural turn’ in recent years. The emphasis on cultural approaches to understanding economies and their geographies, or what Sayer (2001) has called a ‘cultural economy’, envisions ‘culture’ as a bottom-up method of analysis, augmenting the more traditional top-down approach of political economy (Hudson 2006). This shift in focus recognizes the meanings that social practices and relations have for those situated within them, and further that economic agents do not merely submit to the abstract category of ‘market’. Rather, their economic world is infused with contestation over what constitutes the market/state, and the rules and conventions according to which actors should operate. Equally, it also presumes a degree of reflexivity among political economists, recognizing that their theories are (re)produced in specific space-time contexts as situated knowledges (Hudson 2006). Thus, a culturally informed critical political economy has a major role to play in developing politically enabling understandings of the entanglements of power (Sharp et al. 2000) in an increasingly interdependent neoliberal world.

Implicit in these notions of a culturally informed political economy is an appreciation of poststructural critique, which renowned political economist Robert W. Cox (2002) makes explicit by adopting poststructuralism’s classic critique that all power/knowledge is for someone, serving some purpose, and any notion of disinterested objectivity is illusory (see Butler 1993, 1997a; Derrida 2002; Foucault 1978, 1990). The current power of neoliberalism offers no exception to this idea, and through such understanding we can begin to see how poststructuralism is able to accommodate the

* A version of this chapter has been submitted for publication. Springer S Neoliberalism as discourse: on the contours of subjectivation, good governance, and symbolic violence
political economy appraisal that neoliberalism is an elite project concerned with the (re)constitution of class power (Duménil and Lévy 2004; McMichael 2000; Harvey 2005; Plehwe et al. 2006). In building consensus, neoliberalism has constructed a vast network of neoliberal knowledge production and diffusion, through deeply entrenched intellectuals and think tanks (Plehwe and Walpen 2006). The rise and ‘rule of experts’ is not only a central part of the history of modernity (Farrands 2002; Mitchell 2002), but it further helps to explain the current dominance (Sparke 2004) and governance (Sparke 2006) of neoliberalism. The special role of intellectuals and ‘experts’ is what Bourdieu (1989) would call symbolic power, and is inscribed in social relations as a fundamental form of power, analogous to the power ascribed to discourse by Foucault (1990).

Discourse, however, goes beyond the capacity of experts to construct knowledge and thereby implement power exclusively ‘from above’. Foucault (1988, 1991) places equal consideration on processes of subjectivation, whereby individuals function as transistors (and resistors) in the circuits of knowledge via the ‘from below’ productive power of governmentality. Through the enacted ‘scripts’ of the everyday, the performativity of discourse recognizes the relationship between constituted subjects and productive power. To Foucault (1982: 212), “This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him [sic] by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power, which makes individuals subjects”. However, as Butler (1993) argues, the subject must be performatively constituted in order to ‘make sense’ as a subject, so while subjects appear to precede their designation at the everyday level of ‘commonsense’, the apparently pre-existing subject is an artifact of its performative constitution. Thus, discourse affords an understanding of neoliberalism that recognizes a simultaneously top-down and bottom-up (re)production through continually (re)articulated citational chains refracted both from discourse to subject, and subject to discourse.
In recognition of the cultural turn, and informed by both political economy and poststructuralist critiques, in this article I set out to argue in favor of understanding neoliberalism as discourse. I argue that conceptualizing neoliberalism as discourse enables an effective merger of political economy and poststructuralist approaches by recognizing the importance of both critical perspectives without privileging either. How we understand the translation of global capital across various spaces and cultural contexts, and in particular how we interpret the fluidity between those who produce (‘captors’) and those constrained by (‘captives’) neoliberal discourse is a paramount consideration if we are to counter problematic notions of neoliberalism as a monolithic and unstoppable force. In tracing the contours of neoliberalism as discourse, I begin with a discussion that attempts to reconcile the lack of consensus in defining neoliberalism that has contributed to misunderstanding between scholars. I then focus my analysis on the good governance agenda, which is considered as a discursive frontline in the creation of consent for neoliberalism. Good governance is conceptualized as forming a key component of the neoliberal development paradigm, where the Orientalist and commonsense discourses it invokes attempt to preclude challenges to the prevailing economic orthodoxy. Finally, I acknowledge how the commonsense appeal of neoliberalism proceeds as symbolic violence, which involves both misrecognition of neoliberalism’s violent (re)productions of space and a lack of awareness, or ‘a-where-ness’ (Osborne 2001), for the geographies of poverty and inequality that occur under neoliberalism.

Although the primary purpose of this article is to contribute to theorizations that might enable forceful critiques to the power of neoliberalism, I do offer some empirical signposts drawn from twenty-six interviews conducted in 2007 with key members of Cambodian civil society. Cambodia is a site where the development community has been very active in promoting good governance and hence (re)producing neoliberal commonsense. Similarly, Cambodia offers an opportunity to recognize and interpret neoliberalism’s symbolic violence, because while processes of
neoliberalization have demonstrably contributed to violence in the country (Springer 2009b, 2009c), neoliberalism is nonetheless promoted as a ‘rationalizing’ force for Cambodia’s ongoing violence, which is viewed as ‘aberrant’ through neoliberalism’s Orientalizing gaze (Springer 2009a). Participants were purposefully selected because of their capacity to act as both key producers and intermediaries of neoliberal discourse in the Cambodian context, and include individuals working within International Financial Institutions (IFIs), as well as directors of Cambodian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). On every occasion interviews took place at the offices of the participant, and interviewees were initially contacted with an interview request via email. In spite of the asymmetrical power behind all social science research (Katz 1994; Kobayashi 1994), interview dynamics were always friendly with no discernable sense of hierarchy in either direction. My proficiency in the Khmer language helped to establish rapport with Cambodian participants; however, all interviews were conducted in English, where grammatical errors have been largely retained.

4.2 Towards a Neoliberal Discourse: Ideological Hegemonic Project, Policy and Program, State Form, and Governmentality

From initial explorations concerned with the implications for state reform, the expansion of neoliberalism into a field of academic inquiry has been meteoric. Scholars are now examining the relationships between neoliberalism and everything from cities to citizenship, sexuality to subjectivity, and development to discourse to name but a few. Concomitant to such theoretical expansion, definitional consensus about what is meant by ‘neoliberalism’ has waned. Consequently, some commentators are so deeply troubled by the ‘larger conversation’ that many scholars seem keen to participate in, or so disillusioned by the potential explanatory power of the concept, that there now exists a willingness to proclaim neoliberalism a ‘necessary illusion’ (Castree 2006) or simply that ‘there is no such thing’ (Barnett 2005). Drawing on Gibson-Graham’s (1996) anxieties
over the discursive fetishization of capital, these misgivings are centered on the pervasiveness of neoliberalism in academia and a concern that by constituting neoliberalism as a powerful, expansive, dynamic, and self-reproducing logic, we lend it the appearance of monolithic and beyond reproach. Certainly there is much to be gained from such critiques, as it is imperative to contest the neoliberalism as monolithism argument for relying on spatial fallacies and temporal confusions in its failure to recognize the mercurial horizons of space-time as open and always becoming (Springer 2009a). Likewise, in focusing exclusively on an external and ostensibly ubiquitous neoliberalism, we overlook local variability, internal constitution and the role that ‘the social’ and individual agency play in (re)producing, circulating, and facilitating neoliberalism. Such thinking has prompted a growing tendency in the literature to move away from discussions of neoliberalism and towards a new language of ‘neoliberalization’, which recognizes contextual specificity, multiplicity, complexity, and variegation. As a protean process, neoliberalization is considered to ‘materialize’ quite differently as mutated and hybrid forms of neoliberalism, depending on and influenced by geographical landscapes, historical contexts, institutional legacies, and embodied subjectivities.

On the other hand, some have called for a moment of pause, suggesting that we should be wary of overly concrete or introspective analyses of the local, as such accounts inadequately attend to the necessary features and significant connections of neoliberalism as a global project (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002). The ‘larger conversation’ of neoliberalism is considered important in relating similar constellations of experiences across space as a potential basis for emancipation. Springer (2008) has argued that should we ignore such possibility (and responsibility) in our engagement with other scholars and research participants, we may in fact precipitously ensure the prospect of a violent future. The concept of neoliberalism allows poverty and inequality experienced across multiple sites to find a point of similitude, whereas disarticulation paralyzes attempts at building and sustaining solidarity beyond the micro-politics of the local. Accordingly,
conceptualizing neoliberalism requires an appreciation of the elaborate and fluctuating exchange between local and extralocal forces operating within the global political economy (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Peck 2001; Brenner and Theodore 2002). In this light, Peck and Tickell (2002, 383) propose “a processual conception of neoliberalization as both an ‘out there’ and ‘in here’ phenomenon whose effects are necessarily variegated and uneven, but the incidence and diffusion of which may present clues to a pervasive ‘metalogic’. Like globalization, neoliberalization should be understood as a process, not an end-state.” Thus, neoliberalism-cum-neoliberalization can be viewed as a plural set of ideas emanating from both everywhere and nowhere within diffused loci of power (Plehwe and Walpen 2006). The inability to straightforwardly align neoliberalism to particular individuals, organizations, or states, and the further recognition that there is no ‘pure’ or paradigmatic version of neoliberalism, but rather a series of geopolitically distinct and institutionally effected hybrids (Peck 2004), contributes significantly to the difficulty of achieving consensus on a conceptual definition of ‘neoliberalism-in-general’. Neoliberalism, it would seem is simply too amorphous to pin down.

Nonetheless, within the existing literature we can identify four different understandings of neoliberalism: 1) neoliberalism as an ideological hegemonic project (McMichael 2000; Cox 2002; Duménil and Lévy 2004; Sparke 2004; Harvey 2005; Plehwe et al. 2006); 2) neoliberalism as policy and program (Martinez and Garcia 2000; Klepeis and Vance 2003); 3) neoliberalism as state form (Peck 2001; Peck and Tickell 2002); and 4) neoliberalism as governmentality (Barry et al. 1996; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Lemke 2002). Each of these definitions has been widely utilized and adopted on their own. Less frequently, but becoming increasingly common are attempts to link together two or more of these conceptions (Larner 2003; Peck 2004). Concatenating such divergent theorizations is no small task, as it is one that necessarily involves reconciling Marxian political economy with poststructuralism. For Barnett (2005) the potential of such an exercise is entirely
unconvincing as the two approaches imply different models of the nature of explanatory concepts, of causality and determination, of social relations and agency, and different normative understandings of political power. Thus, he argues, “We should not finesse these differences away by presuming that the two approaches converge around a common real-world referent” (Barnett 2005: 8). Similarly, Castree (2006: 3) disavows what he calls the ‘both/and agenda’ for its “intractable inability to ‘fix’ [neoliberalism’s] meanings with real-world referents” stemming from the use of multiple definitions where “the real world’ can only partly function as a ‘court of appeal’ to resolve competing claims as to what is (or is not) neoliberal in degree or kind”. Castree (2006: 3) uses the analogy of water to illustrate his point, taking its meaning from positivist scientism as having liquid, gas, and solid forms, yet always remaining water “wherever and whenever it is”. This comparison, however, fails to consider how different languages, cultures, and individuals may have very different meanings for and understandings of ‘water-in-general’. The idea that Inuit peoples have hundreds of words for the English language equivalent of ‘snow’ is an anthropological myth (Martin 1986), but it is nonetheless instructive of how ‘the real world’ can be viewed as little more than a semiotic construction, where even something as seemingly universal as water may be reduced to competing claims as to what it is (or is not) in degree or kind.

England and Ward (2007: 251) are far more sympathetic, where the trick in reconciling a political economy approach with poststructuralist perspectives is “to acknowledge the power of neoliberalism without reinscribing it as a unitary hegemonic project”. But while England and Ward acknowledge that an assemblage of ideas generally fall under the category of ‘neoliberal’, they seem to overlook the possibility of understanding hegemony in the Gramscian sense as neither unitary or monolithic, but itself rife with contingencies, ruptures, and contradictions. Indeed, such variegated hegemonies play themselves out as neoliberalizations in myriad situated contexts. Such recognition of the hegemony of neoliberalism (or more appropriately the hegemonies of neoliberalizations) is not
at all inconsistent with governmentality as Barnett (2005) argues. Rather, the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Foucault 1991) is part of how neoliberal hegemonic constellations have assembled themselves, particularly through networks of think tanks, whose embodied participants can be broadly conceived of as a transnational capitalist class (Plehwe et al. 2006). These situated actors face various forms of incorporation and resistance dependent upon context, and thus mutate their approaches to neoliberal governance accordingly. As such, the notion of hegemony is not diametrically opposed to a more nuanced understanding of neoliberalization, nor is there an insurmountable disjuncture between the four forms of neoliberalism. These theoretical strands are reconcilable insofar as the hegemonic project has particular policy goals that re-shape state formations, making them ‘differently powerful’ (Peck 2001). Simultaneously, principles from different systems of thought are combined into one coherent ideology (Laclau and Mouffe 2001), which becomes commonsense allowing governance at a distance to operate. In turn, the circle is closed (and thrown back on itself) by individual subjects who reconstitute hegemony through the coalescence of circumstances of their everyday lives. Thus, the productive power of neoliberal ideology constitutes and constrains, but does not determine. Instead, as a process of becoming through which one simultaneously obtains the constitution of a subject(ivity) (Foucault 1988) and undergoes subjection (Butler 1997b), neoliberal subjectivation works on individuals who are rendered as subjects and subjected to relations of power through discourse (Foucault 1982). Accordingly, as Figure 4.1 indicates, neoliberalism is perhaps best understood as a circulating discourse.
From a poststructuralist perspective this model of neoliberalism as discourse can be criticized for assuming a Marxian political economy inspired structure insofar as it still recognizes the hierarchy behind and involved in the construction of neoliberalism as an ideological hegemonic project. But when is poststructuralism ever actually ‘beyond structure’ in that regard? There is no single definition of poststructuralism, no agreed upon methodological or theoretical imperatives. Instead, it refers to conceptual signposts collected from a diverse set of ideas based on the writings of authors like Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Jacques Derrida. Indeed, it is inconsistent with poststructural concepts to codify itself in any concretized manner (Harrison 2006). Poststructuralism begins from the position of destabilizing hierarchies of meanings, labels, knowledges, ideas, categories, and
classifications, where the purpose is to challenge entrenched assumptions (Belsey 2002). Derrida’s notion of deconstruction affirms that any social text, whether spoken or written, contains implicit hierarchies, through which an order is imposed on ‘reality’ exercising a subtle repression, as these hierarchies exclude, subordinate, and hide various other potential meanings (Lamont 1987). This in itself, however, is the recognition of the existence of certain structures through the distinctions we make, even if they are not given as natural material realities reflecting a ‘real world’ and only exist as abstractions produced by the systems of symbolization we learn (Lacan 1998). Furthermore, poststructuralism welcomes a variety of perspectives to create multifaceted interpretations, even if these interpretations conflict with one another. In this sense, and notwithstanding the epistemological and ontological differences Barnett (2005) identifies, Marxian political economy and poststructuralism are not necessarily incommensurable at all.

In different geographical and institutional contexts neoliberal discourse will circulate and function in variegated ways that intersect with the local culture and political economic circumstances to continually (re)constitute ‘the social’. This is not to “treat ‘the social’ as a residual effect of hegemonic projects and/or governmental rationalities” (Barnett 2005: 7), as neither ‘the social’ nor hegemonic projects ever amount to a material reality. If neoliberalism is to be understood as a discourse, ‘the real world’ both Castree and Barnett suppose neoliberalism is premised upon is an impossible contradiction of the symbolic and imaginary connotations of language (Lacan 1977). Of course Barnett and Castree take this notion of a ‘real world’ from the literature on neoliberalism, but they never contest its existence or problematize its application. Instead, they seem to replicate its possibility, and focus their critiques on how their versions of a ‘real word’ differ from those of Jamie Peck, Wendy Larner, and other scholars concerned with neoliberalism/neoliberalization. Thus, the structure of hegemony that neoliberalism as discourse seemingly invokes is only possible through
language, or the discourse of neoliberalism itself. There is no ‘before’ discourse, and accordingly Figure 1 shows no point of entry.

By suggesting that there is no entry point is not meant to imply an absence of historical origin to the idea of neoliberalism. While Peck’s (2008) account of the ‘prehistories’ of ‘protoneoliberalism’ argues that there is a historical lineage to the development of neoliberalism, the lack of entry point here refers to the slow processes of discursive circulation that allowed a fringe utopian idea to congeal as a hegemonic imperative (see Plehwe et al. 2006). Although there is clearly a history, in line with Peck’s (2008: 4) rejection of an ‘immaculate ideational flashpoint’, the circuitous paths of neoliberalism have no precise discernable beginning because it is impossible to disentangle them from previous ideologies. Similarly, neoliberalism will accordingly have no tangible end. Neoliberalism as discourse operates in a dimension in which ‘its’ constitutive elements have no positive existence (although its effects are nonetheless very much ‘nonillusory’) (Springer 2008). In this sense ‘neoliberalism-in-general’ is simply a semiotic sign of neoliberalization, as it is necessarily “something that stands for something else, to someone in some capacity” (Danesi and Perron 1999: 366). For its part, ‘the social’ is always a figment of ‘the self’, which is not a coherent entity but a constitution of conflicting tensions and knowledge claims (Derrida 2002; Lacan 2006). In short, ‘the social’ and ‘the self’ are mutually constituted through discourse. What we are left with are re-articulations and re-presentations of neoliberal discourse in the form of particular discourses of neoliberalization, where individual actors take a proactive role in reshaping the formal practices of politics, policy, and administration that comprise the dynamics and rhythms of socio-cultural change.

There is no presentation or constitution, only re-presentation and re-constitution, because as we produce social texts we create meanings. Such ‘discursive performativity’, Butler (1993: 107) argues, “appears to produce that which it names, to enact its own referent, to name and to do, to name and to make. ... [g]enerally speaking, a performative functions to produce that which it
declares”. Hence, the issue is not about a purported reality of scientific truths, where neoliberalism is seen as an end, but the interpretation of cultural constructs (Duncan and Ley 1993), where neoliberalism becomes a means. The implications for the current neoliberal moment is that it is just that, a transitory moment on its way to becoming something else. And while there will be no perceptible line in the sands of history where neoliberalism categorically ends, the patterns of contextually specific discourses of neoliberalization will eventually and inevitably mutate into something that no longer has any resemblance to ‘neoliberalism-in-general’. The question then, provoked by Barnett (2005) and Castree (2006), is does ‘neoliberalism-in-general’ ever exist? The answer I would venture is yes, but like anything we can name, and even things we can touch like water, they are always and only understood as representations through the performative repercussions of discourse. Far from negating the need for resistance to neoliberalism, recognizing neoliberalism as representation still requires social struggle. Moreover, and notwithstanding Gibson-Graham’s (1996) criticism, the building of transnational solidarity through a ‘larger conversation’ is also needed, as such activity hastens the pace at which neoliberalism may recede into historical obscurity to be replaced with a new discourse, a new representation that we can hope produces a more egalitarian social condition. Contestation actively works towards and opens pathways to achieving this goal (Purcell 2008; Springer 2009c), and while discourse may for a time reinscribe the power of particular logics, Foucault (1990) insists that no discourse is guaranteed, so while particular discourses prevail in some spaces, the potential for meanings to shift or for subaltern discourses to unsettle the orthodoxy remains.

Although the monolithism argument is untenable, recognition of neoliberalism, representation, and ‘the social’ as being mutually constituted does not require a rejection of the notion of neoliberalism as subjugation or subjection. To Butler (1997b: 84, original emphasis), subjection is,
“the making of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced. Such subjection is a kind of power that not only unilaterally acts on a given individual as a form of domination, but also activates or forms the subject. Hence, subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction in production”.

Consequently, the question of how much local elites buy into the process of neoliberalization for their own benefits is paramount, because if neoliberal reforms such as privatization and deregulation are accepted as an opportunity for enrichment by local elites in conditions that are already authoritarian, the tensions of neoliberal subjectivation may be minimal among the upper classes as neoliberalization becomes a useful part of the existing order (Springer 2009c). On the other hand, for the lower classes the process of subjection will be much more persistent and ‘shocking’ (Klein 2007) as the benefits of neoliberalization are not as forthcoming, making neoliberal subjectivation quite tenuous in this case. It appears that this is precisely why America orchestrated a coup during the ‘other 9/11’, when in 1973 an iron fist was required to replace the elected socialist government in Chile for what is widely understood as the first state-level neoliberal experiment (Taylor 2002; Plehwe et al. 2006). Resistance to neoliberalism may actually provoke a more despotic outlook as a state moves to ensure that its reforms are pushed through (Canterbury 2005), particularly if the changes are rapid and a valorizing discourse for neoliberalization has not already become widely circulated. Pinochet’s ascension can be seen as preemptive in this regard. This is why effective subjectivation and the production, functioning, and circulation of a legitimizing discourse become a determinant to the degree of authoritarianism needed under neoliberalization.

Neoliberal penetration at the level of governmentality must be convincing because if the social body does not come to accept the ‘wisdom’ of neoliberalism, tensions will erupt and potentially boil over into violence. Yet the possibility of full acceptance is chimerical in two respects. First, not all members of a society are ever going to agree wholeheartedly with the prevailing discourse, and second, ‘the social’ never sits still. Notions of spatial uniformity and temporal stasis pervade media accounts of a fully integrated ‘global village’, but they rely on problematic notions of
inevitability, as though space-time has only one possible trajectory (Massey 2005). There is little acknowledgment of the discursive work that goes into the (re)production and distribution of neoliberal ideas in a diverse range of contexts (Plehwe et al. 2006). One such prominent strategy is the good governance agenda, which sits at the discursive frontlines of promoting neoliberalism.

4.3 Dissecting a Neoliberal Agenda: The Rationalities, Strategies, Technologies, and Techniques of Good Governance

Recognition of the transformative practices through which capitalist expansion became tied to legitimating discourses is essential to understanding the power of neoliberalism (Gill 1995). As 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), neoliberalism has delineated a discursive field in which the exercise of power is ‘rationalized’ (Lemke 2002), thereby encouraging both institutions and individuals to conform to the norms of the market. As Overbeek (2000) argues, dominant social groups formulate and disseminate neoliberal intellectual and moral ideas, transforming them into ‘universal’ ones that bind subordinate groups to the existing social order. The language of ‘good governance’ is key to this process as it “rhetorically advances ‘commonsense’ notions of governance by promoting sectional interests as commonly held and by appearing to be reasonable and beyond reproach, whilst actually covertly advancing liberalization” (Taylor 2004: 133-134; see also Brown and Cloke 2004; Demmers et al. 2004). Good governance thus represents a principal site of neoliberalism’s cultural/spatial translation, as intellectual mediators in such locations as NGOs (Dunford 2000), have internalized this discourse of ‘practical neoliberalism’, helping to convert it to an ‘actually existing’ circumstance of neoliberalization (Brenner and Theodore 2002). As a Program Officer with the Asian Development Bank in Cambodia told me during a 2007 interview,

If you liberalize the economy, you cannot fully, but partly improve the governance. But the governance itself, it has to be from the system themselves [sic], and the system has to be from the people, from the top and the bottom. So even if you try to liberalize the economy, if the system
doesn’t change, you will see only very slowly any changes in good governance. Governance helps this move, but the real change would be the system itself, both for the people, and those who have the power. If [you] just change the top, and don’t change the bottom, you couldn’t do much because if… I’ll just give an example, like the Khmer Rouge, they try to kill those on the top because they’re corrupt. They set up an army of rural poor to lead the country, and it’s a disaster. So it has to be a combination of both grassroots level and the top (Interview, Anonymous Cambodian, Program Officer, Asian Development Bank, 3 August 2007, Phnom Penh).

This quote captures the notion of neoliberal subjectivation that has occurred via the seemingly ‘grassroots’ development of commonsense, which is shaped by the polychromatic and often contradictory experiences of everyday life (Keil 2002). Good governance and liberalization are interpreted as mutually reinforcing, but the ‘real change’ is required in the ‘system itself’, which is used to refer to revised notions of subjectivity. All classes must embrace neoliberalism; otherwise, the interviewee quite intuitively recognizes, a failure to accomplish this process of subjectivation could result in violence or revolution.

It is at the level of commonsense that the situated social positions pertaining to material interests, expectations, and life chances of individuals in the general (re)production of neoliberalism’s political-economic arrangement are remarkably pertinent. In this respect, “it seems to be appropriate to speak of ‘everyday neoliberalism’, which although influenced by intellectual discourses, is rooted also in the concrete experiences and expectations of different social groups and classes” (Bieling 2006: 219-220). Everyday life encompasses the ‘normative’ and the ‘unexceptional’, which lends it the appearance of insignificant. In Lefebvre’s (1984: 24) terms, “The quotidian is what is humble and solid, what is taken for granted and that of which all the parts follow each other in such a regular, unvarying succession that those concerned have no call to question their sequence”. This taken for granted sequencing ensures that the ‘everyday’ is the space in which neoliberalism is reproduced, through routines that are frequently oppressive, yet nonetheless often go unquestioned. In this sense, everyday life as it is mediated through the continual (re)production of space (Lefebvre 1991), is also the terrain in which power is reified, manipulated, and contested (Cohen and Taylor 1992).
Accordingly, neoliberalism operates in a dynamic relation with ‘the social’, helping to invoke and stabilize but also to alter and unsettle the parameters of agency, or the feelings, perceptions, identities, consciousnesses, and embodied conduct of individuals (de Certeau 1998).

Through this (re)production of the everyday, good governance stands at the forefront of the neoliberal canon, maintaining a large constituency, including IFIs, intellectuals, multilateral and bilateral donors, and international NGOs within the global north, as well as government reformers, civil society organizations, and concerned citizens in the global south (Grindle 2004). The concept of good governance is overwhelmingly long in content, and exceptionally hazy, including notions of reducing corruption and poverty, while also promoting growth, sustainable development, empowerment of the poor, and participatory development. Yet beyond the rhetoric, Abrahamsen (2000) argues that the crux of the concept is that democratic empowerment is inextricably linked to economic liberalisation, and a positive outcome, or ‘good governance’, is only possible if the state adheres to a free market ideology. The promotion of good governance, as it is advanced by the IFIs, namely the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), is a powerful example of how the contours of ‘everyday neoliberalism’ are formed. During the 1990s, the IFIs refashioned their worn-out discourse on the productive effects of the free market, replacing the forcefulness of this language with a new and arguably more easily digested emphasis on poverty reduction, transparent governance, and given the proliferation of ‘Asian Values’ debates, the slightly more problematic notions of human rights and democracy (Demmers et al. 2004). It is in this sense that commonsense notions of governance came to the fore while secretly advancing a liberalization agenda. Indeed, the notion of good governance is frequently used tautologically, “when things are going well, there must be good governance; otherwise, presumably, things would not be going well” (Jomo 2003: 4).

Abrahamsen (2000: 56) argues that the good governance agenda serves to construct economic liberalism as a force for democracy, using this simple equation: “coercive power is
perceived to reside exclusively in the state and public institutions, and any reduction in the size or reach of the state is therefore regarded as conducive to democratisation”. As the leader of a prominent human rights organization in Cambodia informed me,

“Both things have to go together, free market economy without good governance is anarchic. I don't think you can have good governance without a free market economy because socialist economy, they pretend to be transparent, but no democracy. With the socialist country they are always hiding behind large bureaucracy, lying to the people about what is going on in the public management level (Interview, Thun Saray, President, ADHOC, 5 July 2007, Phnom Penh).

A large bureaucracy is considered the antithesis of both transparency and a free market economy, and similarly transparency is conflated with democracy. Of course, the development of a market economy does not automatically produce democracy, nor is democracy reducible to transparency, so good governance relies on an implicitly culturalist argument to support its primary contention. That is, a market economy free from government interference allows investors and entrepreneurs to pursue their own self-interest and thereby energize and grow the entire economy, and with this growth comes a sense of well-being that fosters greater interpersonal trust and competence in people, which in turn fosters the necessary ‘cultural traits’ for democratic citizens (Neher and Marlay 1995). In this way, good governance can be read as a discourse pursued by the global north in an attempt to define the global south in its own image. While ultimately seeking to co-opt and assimilate elites in the global south into a broader transnational historic bloc, so that they come to share the assumptions and class interests of the dominant fractions centered in the core (Taylor 2004), good governance is nonetheless advanced through an ‘everyday’ passive revolution type transformation. This rendering conforms to Harvey’s (2005) view that neoliberalism is a class-based project that sees a transnational elite (re)constituting its power, yet it also recognizes that enacting good governance is not simply a top-down activity that strips global south elites of their agency.

The actual circumstances of neoliberalization often serve the interest of entrenched elites and their local and international class interests (Springer 2009c), where good governance positions
neoliberalism in such a way that it may be criticized based on the failures of the adopters, while the ideology itself remains firmly insulated from censure (North 2007). A Cambodian economist with the IMF’s Phnom Penh office demonstrated this notion to me in an interview,

I think [inequality] is natural for a country such as Cambodia transitioning from a planned economy to a free market economy. Not everyone has the same access to income, access to employment etcetera. However, I think the area of concern is [that] inequality in Cambodia is more significant compared to other countries, which were in similar states of transition. … I think that its because of the government in Cambodia, because some people have more privilege and access to resources, and some have more lucrative business deals with the government than others would have access to. Both the rule of law, and the governance could have been better. I don’t know what we could do with this failure, but it seems to be the experience of a country when you liberalize the economy. The extent of the inequality depends on how you manage the process of liberalizing the economy. But for the case of Cambodia I think inequality, [the reason why] the gap is significant, is because of the governance (Interview, Anonymous Cambodian, Economist, IMF, 10 August 2007, Phnom Penh).

Inequality is initially considered a ‘natural’ outcome of liberalization, but as the interviewee continues talking he begins to recognize how social and political factors are entwined with economics through ‘privilege’, ‘access’, and ‘business deals’ with government officials, which distorts the neoliberal notion of markets proceeding in a lacunae space. Ultimately though, ‘bad governance’ is to blame, good governance is repositioned as a panacea, and the neoliberal doctrine goes unchallenged despite its recognizable apolitical, asocial, and aspatial fallacies. The perceived failure of adopters to achieve good governance legitimizes the further promotion of neoliberal policy objectives and the continued administration of IFIs. Through discursive appeals to normativity based on ideological notions of proper conduct and personhood (Kingfisher 2007), good governance furthers subjectivation and neoliberalism’s penetration of the everyday. Thus, good governance “provides a new tool-kit, an instrument of control, an additional conditionality for the time when the traditional blame-the-victim defense again becomes necessary. It further offers the opportunity both to instill Western political values in borrowing countries and to fault them if things go wrong” (George and Sabelli 1994: 142).

In this way, good governance has effectively normalized the right of the global north to intervene, control, and reshape the practices and ways of life in the global south (Abrahamsen 2000). Good governance as such can be viewed as simply the most recent manifestation of Orientalism in a long
line of ‘projects’ including colonialism, modernization, and development (Crush 1995; Escobar 1995; Rist 1997), whereby the progress of the global south ‘other’ is gauged against the norm of the global north ‘self’ (Said 2003).

An overt example of such Orientalism is found in the wake of the 1997 ‘Asian Crisis’, where phrases like ‘crony capitalism’, ‘rent seeking’, and ‘moral hazard’ sprung up like a groundswell (Masina 2002b). Andersson and Gunnarsson (2003: 6) suggest that in the months following the Asian Crisis, “a multitude of seemingly rational and logical explanations for the crisis had come forth. … The obituaries of the Asian model became legion”. And while the state was deemed to have been the root of the problem, it was the ‘peculiarities’ of the so-called ‘Asian way’ that were most suspect to mainstream analysts in the global north. Such admonishments were a shocking reversal of the triumphalism expressed by these very same critics on the eve of the crisis, where a World Bank (1993) report entitled *The East Asian Miracle* best exemplifies the pre-crisis celebratory mood vis-à-vis East Asia. The close government–business relations that pre-crisis had been argued to have “facilitated a virtuous process of equitable growth, now became ‘corrupt’ regimes that encouraged inefficient state intervention, bred structural deficiencies and brought about their own downfall” (Beeson and Islam 2005: 204). The reversal from an ‘East Asian Miracle’, to within a year of the crisis being labeled ‘crony capitalism’ is mystifying as very little had changed in East Asia’s economic fundamentals (Xing et al. 2002).

The term ‘cronyism’ generally refers to ‘cozy’ relationships between the agents of capital and politicians (Dixon 2002). Yet, we can rightly ask when in any capitalist system have the leading agents of capital not been intimately connected with politicians? This character is a hallmark of capitalism that is obfuscated by the orthodox neoclassical view that posits a distinct separation between the economy and politics (Robison 2002), and thus misreads (or more accurately ignores) how power is actually operationalized in a capitalist system. In the wake of the crisis, it is the projection of such
‘crony’ relations as existing in East Asia (along with Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa), but not in the ‘West’ that reveals an underlying Orientalism. Nonetheless corruption has been apparent in much of East Asia (see Robison 2002; Sidel 2004), and while the formal and informal linkages between business and the agencies of many East Asian states can be labeled as ‘cronyism’ (Dixon 2002), any causal relationship between corruption and economic crisis has not been substantiated. Instead, it should be recognized that the capitalisms of East Asia are simply different in form to American-style capitalism, as the relationships between politicians and businesspeople are more overt in comparison to the clandestinity of the American political economy, and the situation is only deemed ‘bad governance’ because these close social relations have the power to exclude foreign capital, which negates neoliberal logic (Brown and Cloke 2004). It is also worth acknowledging the extent of financial malpractice and corruption in the global north (Dixon 2002), so that we might move beyond Orientalist renderings. Such recognition positions us to understand the language of cronyism as an attempt to avoid the blame for the Asian Crisis being put on excessive liberalization and thus to assist in the dismantling of the developmental state, which was perceived as a threat to neoliberal orthodoxy (Masina 2002a).

In the end, the Asian Crisis has translated into more instrumental power for the IMF, as they crafted the ‘solution’ through so-called ‘letters of intent’ negotiated with crisis-affected economies. The letters essentially called for the re-imposition of core policy proposals pertaining to macroeconomic prudence, deregulated markets, privatization of state sectors, fiscal austerity, and further liberalization (Beeson and Islam 2005). These prescriptions were augmented by a renewed commitment to poverty reduction and wide-ranging institutional reforms aimed at insulating government administrations from outside influences that might impede ‘rational’ policy-making, such as introducing regulation that separates officials from bidders in procurement and contracting. The goal was to empty the state of politics and replace it with the commonsense notion of good
governance (Robison et al. 2005). Effectively the good governance agenda sought to construct rule-based systems of ‘best practice’ that would provide certainty and predictability for investors, while insulating technocratic decision makers from distributional coalitions (Robison 2002). Thus, although the promotion of rule of law appeals as commonsense to citizens and their concerns for human rights, in practice it has more to do with producing a stable business environment where contracts will be enforced.

Good governance has proven to be a discourse that is hard to resist in both political and academic circles, stemming from its presentation as non-political and non-ideological (Demmers et al. 2004). Moreover, this may be due to the observation that tackling issues of corruption, transparency, and mismanagement is obviously not a bad thing in itself. However, conferring the IFIs and global north governments with the ability to determine what constitutes good governance, and the power to implement such prescriptions onto sovereign states is, as Taylor (2004) notes, deeply flawed based on who is advocating it, how it is being advocated, what exactly constitutes good governance, and whose interests it serves. Rather than swallowing this bitter pill as placebo, we need to think critically about how the language of good governance obfuscates our ability to recognize not only a covert agenda to reconfigure states and markets in ways that make them most attractive to international capital, but also, and importantly, the symbolic violence that is bound up in such neoliberal discourse.

4.4 From Good Governance to Symbolic Violence: The Terror (As Usual) of Neoliberalism

Political, economic, and cultural mechanisms alone cannot account for the temporal and spatial staying power of neoliberalized capital and its translation across cultures. There must be psychological rewards that keep the population from revolting against the ‘market civilization’ of neoliberalism (Gill 1995). Desai (2006) looks to cultural nationalism, such as pride in one’s ethnicity,
and the privilege of being mobilized (often with the tacit complicity of the state) for violent demonstrations, as forming the essence of the relationship between the propertied classes and the poor of the ‘dominant’ community. She suggests that, “various degrees and varieties of inclusion in, and othering from the dominant culture are employed to create viable electoral majorities” (Desai 2006: 232), which keep a neoliberal trajectory firmly in place. The deployment of cultural nationalism creates a cauldron of conflict and internecine violence among poor communities (Uvin 2003) as they dredge the bottom of the barrel for what very little social provisions and opportunities may have actually ‘trickled down’. This situation of manifold potential for violence from all sides of the socioeconomic hierarchy illustrates why Rapley (2004) considers neoliberalism an intrinsically unstable political regime.

In contrast, mainstream analyses of conflict theory largely focus on ‘local’ origins of conflict by invoking Huntington’s (1996) ideas of ‘backward’ cultural practices, and ‘primordial’ enmity of ‘static’ cultural groups as the best explanations for violence, while completely rejecting the influence of ideology and economic practice. Neoliberalism is never called into question, and is either explicitly promoted (see Fukuyama 1992) or implicitly accepted (see Sen 1999) as the sine qua non of human development. However, as the preceding discussion of neoliberalism as discourse illustrates, there is ample room for analyses that bring together the agency of individual actors and the structure of political economic systems without reducing either to deterministic essentialisms. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (2004: 272) argue, “social agents are knowing agents who, even when they are subjected to determinisms, contribute to producing the efficacy of that which determines them insofar as they structure what determines them”. This sentiment aids in understanding how neoliberal subjectivation and ‘everyday neoliberalism’ are sanctioned and constructed, but it equally points to a similar pattern of legitimation that may simultaneously inform our understandings of violence.
Bourdieu (2001) introduced the idea of symbolic violence to account for the tacit and seemingly unconscious modes of sociocultural domination occurring within the social matrix of ‘everyday’ power relations, which is meant to reflect neither a form of complicity nor free adherence. Rather, symbolic violence maintains its efficacy through the misrecognition of violence, which is wielded precisely inasmuch as one does not perceive it as such. For its part, misrecognition is not to be confused with influence, as “It is not a logic of ‘communicative interaction’ where some make propaganda aimed at others that is operative here. It is much more powerful and insidious than that: being born in a social world, we accept a whole range of postulates, axioms, which go without saying and require no inculcating” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004: 273). While the principles of symbolic violence and misrecognition are useful to political economy perspectives on power relations and social inequality inasmuch as they prevent “the generative link between structural forces and individual action from becoming overly mechanical and predictable…. [by] persuad[ing] victims that their own actions are the cause of their own predicament and… the logical outcome of the natural order of things” (Bourgois 2002: 223), the contention that ‘communicative interaction’ is unimportant is misplaced. This may be splitting hairs, as I think Bourdieu and Wacquant’s primary concern is to unsettle any kind of linear progression of ideas from ‘dominant’ to ‘subordinate’, and to disrupt this binary in the process; nonetheless it is worthwhile to be reminded that Foucault has amply demonstrated that all power goes with saying. To Foucault (1980: 89) the exercise of power and the sanction of particular knowledges are coterminous, and further, “power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. …[where] not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power.” Like Bourdieu, Foucault recognizes the fallibility of dichotomous understandings of power, but his interpretations also explicitly acknowledge the power of discourse to influence the affairs of human beings by altering the terms of
their self-understanding. The mechanisms through which this self-understanding is accomplished consists of what Foucault (1978: 304) called “normalizing power”, which is continually (re)produced by the “omnipresence of the mechanisms of discipline” underpinning society.

It is the discourses of neoliberalism, and particularly the commonsense of good governance that facilitate penetration at the level of the subject. Foucault (1978, 1990) has demonstrated how the subject is subjected to relations of power as s/he is individualized, categorized, classified, hierarchized, normalized, surveilled and provoked to self-surveillance. These are technologies of subjection, which are effected within institutions that improvise, cite, and circulate discursive frames and coterminous technologies that render subjects in relations of power (Youdell 2006). As such, neoliberal subjectivation is the process whereby one memorizes the truth claims that one has heard and converts this into rules of conduct (Foucault 1988). Moreover, such subjectivation has effectively locked in the rights of capital under what Gill (1995) calls ‘disciplinary neoliberalism’, wherein public policy is increasingly premised on the security of property and the minimization of uncertainty for investors by placing individuals, institutions, and governments under constant surveillance. As disciplinary mechanisms coagulate under neoliberalization, the structural inequalities of capital are increasingly misrecognized, even as direct violence is actively practiced by and discursively linked to millions of desperately angry people across the globe. An economist with the IMF’s Cambodian branch demonstrates how good governance is a key discourse in facilitating misrecognition of neoliberal violence,

I think good governance is the center to all the problems that you mentioned, about the Phnom Penh City Hall trying to evict the people, about the land grabbing, about inequality, about lasting peace and stability in Cambodia, all depend on good governance. Bad governance implies bad administration. Bad administration implies bad kind of negative society, and it will breed a lot of undesired consequences like violence. So the question about people to protest, or not protest, these are all to do with good governance. If good governance is used, and everything is rule-based, people won’t want to go and protest you know? (Interview, Anonymous Cambodian, Economist, IMF, 10 August 2007, Phnom Penh).
Neoliberalism is completely erased as a possible explanation for why new forms of violence continue to evolve in ‘post-conflict’ Cambodia. The neoliberal logics of social service roll-back, regulatory reform roll-outs, and in particular the interspatial competition and urban entrepreneurialism that underscores both crackdowns on public protest and evictions in Cambodia (Springer 2009c) are not considered as part of the problem. Despite the construction of Cambodia’s property regime being very much rule-based, rules that actually privilege the rich with ‘proper’ documentation for their land to the determent of the poor who remain uninformed and unconvinced about requiring ‘proof’, it is a ‘lack of rules’ and ‘bad governance’ that are positioned as the principal difficulties. In the final analysis the ideology is unquestionably correct, so the implementation of governance must be exclusively to blame. The structural underpinnings of violence are not considered as part of the picture that contributes to ‘local’ expressions of violence in Cambodia, despite the empirical realities suggesting otherwise (see Springer 2009c). As the new ‘planetary vulgate’, Bourdieu and Waquant (2001: 1) argue that neoliberalism presents itself as monolithic by “universalizing the particularisms bound up with a singular historical experience by making them misrecognized as such and recognized as universal”. But there is a double function at play, as neoliberalism equally particularizes the universalisms bound up within common experiences of violence by making them misrecognized as such and recognized as particular (Springer 2008). In short, neoliberalism is symbolic violence par excellence.

Bourdieu (1989, 2001) has argued that violence is everywhere in social practice, and neoliberalism as both constituted by and constitutive of ‘the social’ does not escape this spatial analogy. To suggest that violence is taking place everywhere, within the social realm is to recognize that the geographies of violence are expansive, stretching across multiple sites to reveal the inherent dynamism of space. Yet symbolic violence functions to obscure this notion by procuring a lack of a-where-ness in society insofar as it obfuscates the spatial clues left by violence in the social landscape.
Symbolic violence is misrecognized precisely because of its familiarity, its ‘everydayness’, which renders it invisible. When such a ‘liminal space of death’ (Taussig 1987) comes into being under the ‘terror of neoliberalism’ (Giroux 2004), it confounds, mystifies, and bewilders everyday life, moving epistemic understandings to a threshold where violence becomes normative by taking on a certain uncertainty (you know it happens, but you do not know how or why it occurs), which intensifies the despotism of neoliberal power. Such ‘terror as usual’ is concealed as a public secret because human beings have an enormous capacity to absorb the vile and hold misery and horror at arm’s length, even when it occurs very close to home (Taussig 1992). That the source of such anomie is continually misrecognized is an omertà of sorts, which should impel us to question at what point neoliberalism as a bystander becomes neoliberalism as a co-conspirator to violence.

It is not surprising that scapegoats are being sought out as conflicts multiply and poverty continues to rise after more than two decades of neoliberal policy fixes (Bendana 2004). In this sense, good governance marks a significant part of the erasure of neoliberalism’s ‘everyday’ geographies of violence, poverty, and inequality by informing us that these structural failings are outcomes of the corrupt practices of local elites and the aberrant manifestations of ‘backward’ cultures. Springer (2009a) has argued that neoliberalism proceeds as a civilizing enterprise, and thus violence and poverty are rendered as the normal conditions of the ‘savage other’. On the other hand, inequality is much more problematic to deal with, as to some degree it is lauded through neoliberalism’s unspoken advocation of social Darwinism. Hierarchy is positioned as the natural order of human existence, underpinned by an individualist dialectic between ‘hard work’ and ‘laziness’. As such, inequality has received little attention outside of the academy, and it is only recently that the issue has been even cursorily addressed by the IFIs.

The World Bank Report 2006: Equity and Development (World Bank 2006) marks the first time the institution has treated inequality as a primary focus for investigation, and perhaps unsurprisingly
then, the report is a considerable source of tension among those working within the Bank. An official with the World Bank’s Cambodia office told me the report was odd in that it marked a different tenor in international thinking,

…what we had with the recent inequality report was a lot of debate, including within the World Bank team about whether it was important in Cambodia. …generally there has been a retreat from the kind of neoliberal, slightly doctrinaire approach of the 1980s. I think the 1990s were a period of adjustment, thinking through, and recognizing what was inadequate and what were failures in those models… and one of those issues… was inequality. … In Cambodia… there were huge divisions in the team about this. I mean my country manager was very confused by it. …we thought [the World Bank Report 2006] gave us a lot of ideas, we could draw on to do a report on Cambodia. But… we saw completely differently on this issue of whether inequality actually mattered here. …we had some really huge arguments, and there were drafts and there were emails sent saying ‘If this goes out I will publicly distance myself from it’, and you know, ‘If that means I have to leave the Bank, so be it’. And my manager was yelling at people saying ‘This can’t come out, this would supply the Cambodia Daily with months worth of embarrassing headlines’ (Interview, Anonymous Foreign, Senior Poverty Specialist, World Bank, 6 August 2007, Phnom Penh).

This quote hints at how in the 1990s SAPs were recast in a more digestible language of good governance as was argued above. Poverty and violence are easy to ‘fix’ under this language, because the problems are easily cast as ‘local’ in origin and therefore do not call for any deeper reflection than the roll-out of more governance. Casting inequality within this same logic of good governance is a much more difficult proposition.

The reflexivity that emerged in the 1990s and led to a rethinking of SAPs, according this World Bank official, acknowledged growing inequality as part of the failures. That such recognition could come so close to the surface of the Bank’s official public discourse has evidently caused some considerable concern for embarrassment within the institution. This fear is likely because a ‘suitable’ discourse has not yet been found to account for inequality outside of the unspoken advocacy of a highly inegalitarian social order. It is hard to suggest inequality is a preserve of local contexts and cultures when the spatiality of inequality is so easily recognizable as functioning not only within, but also between countries. As such the 2006 World Bank Report offers a whitewash couched in technocratic jargon that obscures inequality’s potential for violence and conflict,
…where the World Bank Report [2006] is good is it has a very techy, economic, microeconomic manner, demonstrating that that means that capital flows to suboptimum producers, so somebody who hasn’t got a good idea, but who is richer or has connections or whatever, gets the reward. So it’s actually showing that high levels of inequality are economically inefficient (Interview, Anonymous Foreign, Senior Poverty Specialist, World Bank, 6 August 2007, Phnom Penh).

In the World Bank Report 2006, inequality is blamed on either the ‘bad ideas’ or the ‘connections’ of individuals, where the overarching concern is not for improved social conditions but for the efficiency of markets. On the other hand, Sharing Growth: Equity and Development in Cambodia (World Bank 2007), produced by the Cambodian office of the World Bank is admitted to be an unintelligible hodgepodge,

…if you read it carefully it shows a degree of incoherence. I think it looks like a camel, it looks like a horse that has been designed by a committee. The weight we put on it switches a lot between chapters and we each sort of tried sprinkling caveats into each others chapters (Interview, Anonymous Foreign, Senior Poverty Specialist, World Bank, 6 August 2007, Phnom Penh).

The Bank’s apparent suspension of reflexivity is symptomatic of the process of neoliberal subjectivation, which constitutes the wider patterns of neoliberalism as symbolic violence. In place of reflexivity (knowing better), symbolic violence represents a continuum between anti-reflexivity (not wanting to know) and reflexive anti-reflexivity (knowing better, but deciding not to know). The Human Development Report (UNDP 2002) admitted that during the 1990s income per head fell in 54 developing countries and the gap between rich and poor widened significantly as result. The years in question are also those that saw extensive neoliberal reforms pushed through under the auspices of the then newly minted good governance agenda. Reflexivity would impel us to posit that perhaps one had something to do with the other. But to the IFI’s such a question has not been forthcoming, as the problem was not the reforms but rather ‘institutional factors’ (Bendana 2004). Thus, even when it appears as though neoliberalism is at the very least, partially to blame for deteriorating social conditions, reflexive anti-reflexivity steps in the way and the mantra for further good governance is chanted, summoning forth new rationalities for collaboration between civil society and business sectors, new strategies to create atmospheres conducive to investment, new technologies and
mathematical formulas to reconcile growth with uneven distribution, and new *techniques* for improved management.

### 4.5 Conclusion

Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 21-22) argue that there is a “need to understand violence as encompassing all forms of ‘controlling processes’ that assault basic human freedoms and individual or collective survival. Our task is to recognize these gray zones of violence which are, by definition, not obvious”. In other words, we must endeavor to overcome symbolic violence by fleshing out its geographies and thereby reinscribe the social landscape with a sense of *a-where*-ness. Good governance is a key discourse in procuring the misrecognition of neoliberalism’s violent geographies, yet its commonsense appeal and nebulous quality make good governance a difficult target for critique. Good governance deserves our suspicion because the rationalities, strategies, technologies, and techniques it employs attempt to refuse *a-where*-ness by promoting Orientalism and formulating violence as a ‘barbarian’ practice that happens ‘out there’. Yet violence is never an isolated phenomenon. As an ontological and epistemic expression that gives meaning to the world, violence is imbricated in the production of space (Bourdieu 1989; Springer 2009a), where space, for its part, is a kaleidoscopic, protean, and relational assemblage of innumerable sites both ‘out there’ and ‘in here’ (Massey 2005). Thus, the patterns of violence are irreducible to linear modalities of cause and effect, and instead constitute and are constituted by the complex and protean entanglements of political, economic, and cultural landscapes that together comprise the social-spatial world. Nonetheless, violence often readily takes on conventions, becoming stylized and meaningful in its perpetration (Malkki 1995). The commonsense of good governance is one such stylized convention, and it is for this very reason that symbolic violence is always informed by a particular epistemology that Foucault (1996) can claim violence as always being rational, even if it is misrecognized as such. The symbolic
violence of neoliberalism thus serves a particular rational project insofar as it performs a reconstitution of class power through discourse.

Yet performative politics are never the exclusive preserve of hegemonic imperatives. Accordingly performativity offers significant promise for a poststructural politics of change, which to Butler (1997a: 100) involves “The possibility of decontextualizing and recontextualizing... terms through radical acts of public misappropriation [which] constitutes the basis of an ironic hopefulness that the conventional relation between [interpretation and meaning] might become tenuous and even broken over time”. Through such practices, the fixed meanings of prevailing discourses might be unsettled and reinscribed; subaltern, repudiated, or silenced discourses might be deployed and made meaningful in spaces they have previously been prohibited; and challenges to enduring subjectivities might be consciously deployed through newly realized discursive practices of subjects (Youdell 2006). So while the notion that the potential to disrupt and overcome neoliberalism can not be taken for granted as automatic is undoubtedly appropriate (Gibson-Graham 1996), neoliberalism as discourse will nonetheless continue to circulate until an indiscernible point in the unpredictable horizons of space-time when its performative constitution begins to break down, and neoliberal subjectivation no longer ‘makes sense’ in the everyday ‘conduct of conduct’ (Foucault 1991). Such ‘discursive agency’, which Butler (1993, 1997a) calls the capacity to name and thereby constitute what results from subjectivation, marks a disruption in the circuitous pathways of discursive reproduction. By thinking of agency as discursive, as the product of being inaugurated in and by discourse and so able to join or disentangle its citational chains, Butler (1997a) moves beyond an understanding of agency and intent that is the property of an a priori, rational, self-aware subject, but retains a subject who can nonetheless act with intent.

Discourse and its effects ultimately surpass the free will of an agent, but similar to Foucault’s (1988) ‘technologies of the self’, “the performatively constituted subject can still deploy discursive
performatives that have the potential to be constitutive” (Youdell 2006: 512). Thus, the effects of neoliberalism as discourse will eventually reach a saturation point wherein the incantations of violence, inequality, and poverty that neoliberalism has conjured can no longer be mystified as symbolic violence. As this cauldron of tribulation approaches its boiling point, neoliberal modalities will slowly become recognizable and undesirable in the everyday lives of individuals, invoking new discursive performatives that provoke a chain reaction of awakening from the spell of the prevailing commonsense. This process may not occur on a rational and self-aware level for many, but this is of little consequence. As the mutations of new subjectivities contort and twist subjectivation away from neoliberalism, a transformed circulating discourse will pick up momentum and begin to usurp the existing orthodoxy. So while there may not be a perceptible moment where we can declare the end of neoliberalism as we knew it, the transitory understandings of discourse advanced by Butler and Foucault, and the protean nature of space and time demonstrate how in understanding neoliberalism as discourse we do not inevitably and always reinscribe its power through fetishization in the way that monolithism arguments do. Instead, by considering neoliberalism as a discourse we can acknowledge the possibility of disestablishing its rationalities, deconstructing its strategies, disassembling its technologies and ultimately destroying its techniques.
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CHAPTER 5

Violence Sits in Places? Cultural Practice, Neoliberal Rationalism, and Virulent Imaginative Geographies*

Imagine all the people
   Living life in peace
   - John Lennon, Imagine

5.1 Introduction

At one level it is apparent that culture is relevant to violence, since violence is part of human activity. Nevertheless, the idea that violence might be integral to cultural practice is much more 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 and 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. 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 (see Springer 2009a). 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 1978/2003: 12). At base, Orientalism is a form of paranoia that

* A version of this chapter has been submitted for publication. Springer S Violence sits in places? Cultural practice, neoliberal rationalism, and virulent imaginative geographies
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 (Hardt and Negri 2000; Joxe 2002). Neoliberalism is on the move, and in the context of the global south, Orientalism is its latitude.  

Informed by an understanding of Orientalism as performative (Said 1978/2003), and power/knowledge as productive (Foucault 1977), throughout this paper my concern is to understand and challenge how particular places, and importantly the peoples and cultures held within them, are (mis)construed as violent. I want to suggest 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, often with horrifying rigor. 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 (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 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 2009b, 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 (Farmer 2004; 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 and Waquant 2001). Thus, when applied to the context of ‘the other’, neoliberalism maintains 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.

Following this introduction, in section two I begin by establishing why an exploration of the discursive contours of Orientalism, neoliberalism, and violence, and their intersections with space and place is necessarily a theoretical exercise. My argument is such that the confounding experience of violence makes it a difficult phenomenon to write about using a direct empirical prose. Section three draws on Doreen 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 section four 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
particular imaginative geographies. Section five 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 not only as the sole providence of nonviolence, and but also as the bearer of ‘reason’ and ‘civilization’ in our world. In the sixth section, I tease out some of the spatial and temporal fallacies that underscore neoliberalism and its intersections with Orientalism. In particular, I examine how these fictions position neoliberalism as though it offers ‘divine’ salvation to ‘backwards’ peoples, thereby obscuring both the structural and ‘mythic’ violence neoliberalism is premised upon. Coming back to the relationship between Orientalism and neoliberalism, in the conclusion I remind the reader that neither presupposes the other. However, because neoliberalism can be understood as the current incarnation of ‘empire’ (Hardt and Negri 2000; Joxe 2002; Escobar 2004), and since Orientalism is at base an imperial endeavor (Said 1993; Gregory 2004), the pairing of the two is somewhat intuitive. My concern for the ways that neoliberalism employs Orientalist discourses to tie violence to specific cultures and particular places is concluded 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.

5.2 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 would 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 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 physicality and invariably begins with the meaning it is afforded by culture (Schepers-Hughes and 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. The mere fact of violence is largely meaningless. It only takes on meaning because of its emotional and cultural content, where violence is felt as meaningful (Nordstrom 2004).

‘To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric’, Theodor W. Adorno (1981: 34) once famously wrote. Confounded by the atrocities that had occurred under the Nazis, Adorno failed to understand how human hands 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 bearing witness to it an unusually mystifying endeavor. For Agamben (1999: 52) ‘the value of testimony lies essentially in what it lacks; at its centre it contains something that cannot be borne witness to and that discharges the survivors of authority’. This is because the remnants of Auschwitz are neither those who died in the gas chambers nor those who survived the camps; rather they are that which remains between them. As such Auschwitz created the figure of the Muselmann, a ‘living dead’ located in a space of indistinction between human and inhuman, and for Agamben (1999), s/he is the true witness of the camps. Testimony becomes an ethics of witnessing the collapse of the human and inhuman, and to Agamben assuming this task in the name of those who cannot speak, the Muselmanner, reveals that witnessing itself is at base a task of bearing witness to the impossibility of witnessing. 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 unrelenting 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 effects. Yet the structural violence resulting from our political and economic systems (Galtung 1969; Iadicola and Shupe 2003; Farmer 2004), and the symbolic violence born of our discourses (Bourdieu 2001; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004), 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). 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 purposefully and necessarily metaphysical. 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 properly captured through empirical analysis. After Auschwitz, after Vietnam, 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; Said 1978/2003; Kong 2001; Cooper 2008).

5.3 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 events, 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; Foucault 2007).

Violence is one of the most profound ongoing stories to influence 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, but 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 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.

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 particular 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.\(^2\) 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 enculturing (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 (see Springer 2009a).

5.4 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 and Bourgois 2004). According to Foucault (1996: 299) all human behaviour 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 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 1978/2003). The power to re-present 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 (1978/2003) 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 two things in qualifying particular imaginative geographies. First, those imaginative geographies that invoke a sense of hostility and malice, which may thereby produce tremendously harmful effects for those individuals cast within them. And 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 ‘common sense’. Virulent imaginative geographies as such, are those geographical imaginations that are premised upon and recapitulate extremely negative and derogatory assumptions, where the notion of a ‘culture of violence’ represents a paradigmatic case in point.

Through the mind’s eye of 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 sin 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, meaning that in a substantial sense, the categories, codes, and conventions of Orientalism produce the effects that they name (Gregory 2004a). Discourse becomes reificatory precisely because ‘power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalizes, professionalizes and rewards its pursuit’
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 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 (Springer 2009a).

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 1978: 55). Places are accordingly transformed through fabrications where narratives, either whispered or roared, inform us of meaning through the inflective topographies of desire, fantasy, and anxiety (Gregory 1995). Thus, whether we recognize a space 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 space, but equally, and indeed wholly for spaces 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 certain place is perhaps the single most influential factor in our pronouncements of space (Pain 1997; Radcliffe 2007), 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. 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 1976: 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, or what Said (1978/2003) termed a ‘tableau of queerness’, 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.

5.5 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 wants, 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, 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 and Walpen 2006). Drawing on classical liberalism’s conception of an immutable desire for pleasure, in ‘Civilization and its Discontents’ Sigmund Freud (1930/1962) identifies 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 the ‘barbarian’ thanatogeographies 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, Friedrich Hayek (1944) and Milton Friedman (1962) 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, hailed as an economic prescription for development, whereby 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 and Theodore 2002; Harvey 2005; Hackworth 2007).

Neoliberalism’s hegemonic rise and current political influence is owed to the significance of the ‘rule of experts’ and technocratic knowledge-elites (Mitchell 2002), which follows from a Foucauldian contention 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 and Groh-Samberg 2006). Neoliberalism-as-ideology gave way to neoliberalism-as-governmentality via the entrenchment of what 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. 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 Parousia. The ‘white man’s burden’ and its salvationary 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 common sense understandings of development (Berger and Beeson 1998).

In keeping with capitalist modernity, the market norms of neoliberalism are premised upon a unifying rationality, which becomes a justification for the centralization of power. The notion of an integrated global marketplace is thus not unlike authoritarian theories, and to Lefebvre (1991: 282) through the production of such an abstract political-economic space, the ‘cumulative sphere’ of globalized capital becomes the ‘space where violence is cloaked in rationality and a rationality of unification is used to justify violence’. As a result, the trend towards homogeneity is conceived through metaphors such as ‘consensus’ to further obfuscate the latent violences of capital and neoliberalism, and under such conditions, ‘exchanges between knowledge and power, and between space and the discourse of power, multiply and are regularized’ (Lefebvre 1991: 282). Of course, as Gregory (1997: 223) recognizes, ‘Lefebvre’s critique is not limited to the construction of a quasi-Foucauldian disciplinary spaces… [or] to the normalization of a space in which nothing escapes surveillance and where the theoretical and everyday practices of ‘reading space’ are implicated in discursive technologies’. These are important matters to Lefebvre, but he does not treat them entirely the same way as Foucault (1978) does in *Discipline and Punish*. Nonetheless, both scholars point toward the inseparability of discourse from space and in recognizing the linkages between rationality, capitalism, space, and violence, both Foucault and Lefebvre also contribute to our growing understanding of neoliberalism as bio/necroopolitics (see Lemke 2001; Mbembe 2003; Allahwala 2006; Sparke 2006; Ong 2007; Peters 2007; Giroux 2008)
5.6 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 (Joxe 2002; Harvey 2003). 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; Ong 2006), 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 and Theodore 2002: 353). Bourdieu (1998) calls neoliberalism a ‘tutelary theory’ of ‘pure mathematical fiction… founded on a formidable abstraction. For, in the name of a narrow and strict conception of rationality as individual rationality, it brackets the economic and social conditions of rational orientations and the economic and social structures that are the condition of their application.’ Equally, it is a spatio-temporal fiction, as 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. In other words, 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’.

Neoliberals assume 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 assumptions are fantasy to be sure, and as such 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 ostensible wisdom of knowledge-elites (Scholler and 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. That violence, inequality, and poverty are wrought by neoliberal reform is never acknowledged by its proponents (Springer 2008), and instead, if conditions in the global south or among the lower classes have deteriorated under neoliberalism, this is said to be an outcome of personal and/or cultural failures to enhance their own human capital (Harvey 2005). Mark Duffield (1996) and Dag Tuastad (2003) have 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
imaginative geographies of neoliberal discourse erase the contingency, fluidity, and interconnectedness of the spaces in which all violent narratives are formed.

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 anarchical, 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; Zizek 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 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 geographical and temporal fictions and the construction of a political, economic, and legal ‘order’ (see Springer 2009a, 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 (Uvin 2003; Springer 2008). This is the ultimate hypocrisy of neoliberalism, and it is a duplicity that will inevitably shatter the neoliberal order’s validity as it is inexorably placed at the merciless threat of divine violence.

5.7 Conclusion
The movement of neoliberalism towards economic orthodoxy, and its eventual capture of such hegemony, was not only achieved through dissemination of its world views geographically, but also by spreading them across various discursive fields (Plehwe and Walpen 2006). Through this merger of discourse and an imperative for spatial diffusion, neoliberalism has constructed virulent imaginative geographies that appeal to common sense rhetorics of freedom, peace, and democracy.
through the destructive principles of Orientalism, and in particular by proposing a 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 and 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 and Theodore 2002) where new violences are created. Thus, the global south has become ‘the theatre 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’ (Hart and Negri 2000), the principles, practices, theories, and attitudes of a metropolitan center maintaining economic control over distant territories remains intact under neoliberalism, so we should not be too surprised to discover that the pernicious discourses that support such a project similarly remain unchanged.

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, market fundamentalism proselytizes to rescind the ostensible irrationality and deviance of ‘the other’. A closely related second reason for evangelism relates to the purported sagacity 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 Brenner and 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 common sense 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 though our emplacement in it, where violence offers no exception to this cardinal rule of embodiment. But there is no predetermined 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. In other words, 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 are the ‘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 and 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 nonviolent engagement in the sites (both material and abstract) that it seeks to subjugate. 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.

5.8 Notes

1 This notion actually also applies to the global north. Kingfisher (2007) for example has identified how ‘othering’ spatializes neoliberalism by articulating notions of ‘proper personhood’, wherein the marginalized shape the material patterns of neoliberal normativity.

2 Nonetheless, the literature is rife with examples where the phrase ‘culture of violence’ has been employed. Most of these studies only engage with the concept in passing (see Nordstrom 1998; Darby and MacGinty 2000; Du Toit, 2001; Roberts 2001; Moser and Winton 2002; Jarman 2004), while others take the notion of a culture of violence as a major focus (see Marks and Anderson 1990; Rupesinghe and Rubio 1994; Elias 1997; Curle 1999; Hamber 1999; Jackson 2004). What these accounts all 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 provide a systematic or empirical attempt to reveal its causes, dynamics, and functions. All that is certain about this confused term is that it is a gross stereotype with little meaning beyond its capacity to qualify certain peoples and places as inherently violent.

3 My use of ‘common sense’ throughout the paper is grounded in the Gramscian notion of ‘the sense held in common’, which typically forms the basis of consent. As Harvey (2005: 39) argues, common sense ‘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. Common sense can, therefore, be profoundly misleading, obfuscating or disguising real problems under cultural prejudices’.

4 This is obviously an oversimplified summary of neoliberalism’s rise to prominence, as there were undoubtedly a number of struggles, setbacks, and bumps along the road 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 dredged even deeper into the recesses of
the past to produce an excellent account of the ‘prehistories’ of ‘protoneoliberalism’, demonstrating that the neoliberal project was never inevitable, but one of ‘[d]issipated efforts, diversions and deadends’.

5 If the preceding passage is Lefebvre resembling Foucault, then Foucault (2007: 166) shows a Lefebvrian flare in the following excerpt which further illuminates both the narrative and imaginative qualities of space as stories-so-far: ‘Such is the power of language: that which is woven of space elicits space, gives itself space through an originary opening and removes space to take it back into language. But again it is devoted to space… the laws and paradoxes of this space so visible that language ordinarily encompasses it without protest… mak[ing] use of all the spaces of language that are subsidiary to the edifice of stones: anterior spaces that language recovers (the sacred texts illustrated by the frescos), spaces immediately and materially superimposed on painted surfaces (inscriptions and legends), ulterior spaces that analyze and describe elements of the Church (commentaries in books and guides), neighbouring and correlative spaces that grasp at us somewhat accidentally, caught up in words (the reflections of watching tourists), nearby spaces whose gazes are turned elsewhere (fragments of dialogues).’
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PART 3: VIOLENT GEOGRAPHIES OF NEOLIBERALISM IN ‘POSTCONFLICT’ CAMBODIA
CHAPTER 6

The Neoliberalization of Security and Violence in Cambodia’s Transition*

6.1 Introduction

Security means freedom from the fear of direct and indirect physical harm, defined in military, criminal, political and economic terms. This chapter differs from these conventional interpretations in adding that it also means more than the preservation of the market, a position reflected in the actions of Cambodia’s donor community, in particular the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). While drawing on poststructuralist concerns for governmentality, the theoretical edifice here is rooted in a Marxian political economy approach1 offering a skeptical perspective on calls for security from the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and powerful bilateral donors. In examining the political economy of Cambodia’s recent triple transition—from war to peace, from command economy to free market economics, and from authoritarianism to democracy—I argue that donor-promoted notions of security have been rhetorical in terms of concern for humanitarianism. Instead, Cambodia’s donor community has focused on security as it relates to the preservation of market principles.

In this chapter I offer an opportunity for critical reflection on the theory and praxis of the human security agenda. In particular, for collaborative action to retain the emancipatory potential of a freedom-from-violence agenda in pushing the human security doctrine forward, a cynical vigilance is required of both the actors involved, and their degree of involvement in any collaborative effort. As the discourse of human security has been inundated by the neoliberal fervor of governments, IFIs, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) alike, it has been rendered nearly hollow by the inherent tensions of neoliberal ideology. Cutting to the crux of the security discourse promoted by

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Cambodia’s donor community reveals it as deceptive, having little to do with the prevention of violence, a defining feature of human security. Rather, what I have termed the ‘security pretext’ effectively translates into acceptance and promotion of the political status quo, as secured hegemony for the reigning political party means a stabilized marketplace. Members of the international community, including donors, are viewed as somewhat complacent to state violence in transitional settings, so long as the state remains committed to a type of governmentality based on market reforms.

The authoritarian actions of transitional governments can be understood as resulting from their inability to respond to the demands of the citizenry in meaningful ways, a position fostered by prescribed ‘rollbacks’ that remove the state from the workings of the economy. The rolling back of the state is a rationale of neoliberal governance, not an informed choice of the autonomous agents that comprise the nation. Thus, we find those marginalized by neoliberal reform in continuous struggle to have their voices heard, which is frequently met with state violence when expressed as dissent. As inequality sharpens under neoliberalism, citizens are more likely to express dismay with particular characteristics of neoliberalization, most prominently the privatization of essential social provisions such as education and healthcare. Recourse to violence thus becomes one of the few available options to governments weakened by neoliberal reform as they attempt to retain legitimacy. Approval of such violence is never given explicitly by international donors, yet violence is implicitly accepted as necessary for maintaining the ‘hollowed-out’ shell of the neoliberalized state, which in turn preserves the market (Peck and Tickell 2002). I challenge this dominant discourse of security, recognizing unscripted and embodied individual representation—something the security pretext seeks to marginalize when manifested in a form other than ‘consumer’—as essential for empowering the people, furthering democratization and enhancing human security.

The chapter begins with a critical examination of the human security discourse, illuminating
the potential danger involved in sharing some theoretical imperatives with neoliberalism. I emphasize collaboration as having more than one context, and if inattentive to the question of who is actually collaborating, the potential for collaborative action may be subsumed by neoliberal orthodoxy becoming partiality-based, leaving the honourable cause and fundamental elements of human security unaddressed. I then turn to the empirical experience of Cambodia’s transitional political economy, where I explain authoritarian tendencies in Cambodia as a reality of maintaining both domestic and international political motivations. Domestically, security is premised on maintaining the hegemony of the incumbent regime, a concern that shapes the extraneous imperative, which has a stake in preserving such hegemony inasmuch as maintaining security is crucial for the free flow of capital and a functioning market economy.

I make no allusions to the enormous and politically complex tasks of identifying concrete alternatives to neoliberalism and Cambodia’s current predicament of aid dependency, as each is beyond the scope of a single chapter. My main purpose instead is to question the potential of neoliberalism to ensnare the human security discourse. The task of (re)imagining and (re)constructing Cambodian society should rightfully be an ongoing, protean and democratic process, enacted through collective will and empowered by the unanimity of Cambodians themselves. It is this type of solidarity-based collaborative action, founded on struggle and protest, that may open pathways toward change that will be meaningful, and hence lasting, for Cambodians. Such a positive incarnation of collaboration as grassroots, radical democracy has the potential to undo Cambodia’s ‘actually existing’ version of neoliberalism-as-kleptocracy.²

6.2 Neoliberalizing Human Security

The human security doctrine has emerged as a response to the problems presented by failed states, where the United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) 1994 Human Development Report is
credited with introducing the term into the vernacular of academic and policy discourses (UNDP 1994). The basic argument presented by the report is that human emancipation is concomitant to international security, whereby ensuring the protection of the individual requires mitigating the inequalities and social tensions that might later erupt into conflict. The Commission on Human Security (CHS) has adopted a similar definition (Commission on Human Security 2003).

The concept of human security embraces an expansive agenda, one that William Bain contends ‘enlarges significantly the scope and substance of the word security – that includes issues such as environmental degradation, human rights, equity, human potential, health, children, labour standards, narcotic trafficking, organised crime, small arms proliferation, religion, ethnicity, gender, identity, governance, civil society, and internal conflict’ (Bain 2001: 283). Compiling a list of this sort provides a useful initial step, but may be criticized for not providing a conceptual definition, failing to offer a method of evaluating the components of the list, and attempting to do too much (King et al. 2002). In spite of such critiques, and in accepting a conceptual definition of human security as broadly concerned with reducing the potential for conflict and existing inequalities—social, political and, importantly, economic—we need to allow for a significant degree of flexibility. Human security represents a complex picture, one that is as protean as the human experience itself, and consequently it can be assured only through the adaptability and continuous negotiation of democratic means. Democracy is the crux of human security.

While disagreements about the meaning of human security are frequent, questions of timing have not been problematized to the same degree. Advocates point to the post-Cold War security environment, where the deepening of globalization has been said to produce ‘new information networks and media capacity, which have exacerbated the problems faced by failed and failing states, and which have produced new forces for democratisation’ (King et al. 2002: 264). What such accounts fail to identify is the potential for globalization in the form of neoliberal economics to
aggravate the difficulties facing states in terms of their ability to respond to the demands of the
citizenry due to privatization, deregulation and withdrawal from most areas of social provision. Such
prescribed rollbacks undermine human security, as neoliberalism’s much touted assumption of the
‘trickle-down effect’—which holds that poverty can be eliminated through secured free markets and
free trade—has failed to materialize. According to the UNDP, ‘the income gap between the fifth of
the world’s people living in the richest countries and the fifth in the poorest was 74 to 1 in 1997, up
from 60 to 1 in 1990 and 30 to 1 in 1960’ (UNDP 1999: 3). Importunate inequality is such a
persistent feature of neoliberalization as to be regarded as structural to the whole project. Thus
neoliberalism is a doctrine concerned with the restoration of class power where it exists, and its
creation where it does not (Harvey 2005).

In some ways, the timing of the emergent human security agenda is not surprising in that it
coincides with the post-Cold War global ‘triumph’ of capitalism and the associated drive toward its
current neoliberal incarnation. This is because neoliberalism’s exacerbation of inequality runs counter
to the notion of human security ascribed to it here, where only a society free from extreme
socioeconomic and political hierarchy, guaranteeing a decent livelihood and living standard for all,
can ensure sustained human security. How the agenda is operationalized is still very questionable
given its related interests with neoliberalism over reconfiguring the relationship between state and
citizen, the associated push for individualism, and the shared potential for atomization. Invoking
political slogans to mask specific strategies beneath vague rhetorical devices is commonplace
realpolitik, and thus ‘[a]ny political movement that holds individual freedoms to be sacrosanct is
vulnerable to incorporation into the neoliberal fold’ (Harvey 2005: 41). This is the precarious
position the human security doctrine now finds itself in, as questionable global initiatives are
increasingly justified by the ethics of human security (Bain 2001). Submergence to the neoliberal tide
is made clear in the World Bank’s working paper that links human security to poverty levels in four
Asian countries, including Cambodia, where continued structural adjustment is the order of the day (Michel 2005). Neoliberal pragmatism is also evident in the CHS manifesto, which states, ‘Markets and trade are basic to economic growth and ... use of markets will be required to generate the kinds of growth and human security measures that an expanding human population needs’ (Commission on Human Security 2003: 75).

The human security doctrine underscores how the state has marginalized and oppressed many groups, thus allowing its proponents to bring greater force to arguments about the need to lessen the influence of entrenched state elites in the processes of development (Lizée 2002). Herein rests a potentially problematic feature of human security, insofar as ‘it raises the moral claims of individual human beings above those of the communities in which they live’ (Bain 2001: 285). This is precisely why human security is emerging as a rallying cry for neoliberals everywhere, because neoliberalism rests on the idea of rejecting both direct state control and all forms of social solidarity. Through freedom in the marketplace, each individual is held responsible for her or his own actions and wellbeing, leaving little room for shared aims and the collectivism required by democracy. In this sense, human security and neoliberalism both pose questions of governmentality, and both envision a similar solution as they make the same fundamental arguments regarding the role the state should play in guaranteeing freedom and development.

While much of the existing literature tends to interpret neoliberal orthodoxy as a political and economic philosophy, there is relatively little understanding of neoliberalism as a political–economic practice relying on a new construction of citizen-subjects (Hay 2003). Thus we must come to grips with the tension between neoliberalism as a theory and the actual pragmatics of neoliberalization (Harvey 2005). Following Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality offers considerable insight in this regard, as power is de-centered and the rationalities of governance take place at a distance where ‘the conduct of conduct’ is not dependent on juridical or administrative apparatuses of the
state (Foucault 1991). Instead, the ‘art of governance’ takes place at numerous sites, through an array of ‘techniques of power’ designed to observe, shape and control the behavior of individuals situated in a range of institutional domains such as the prison, factory or school (Gordon 1991). Accordingly, neoliberalism is governmentality *par excellence*, as the shift from government (state power on its own) to governance (a broader configuration of state and central elements of civil society) has been marked under neoliberalism (Harvey 2005).

In the neoliberal art of governance, it is the newly atomized and now fiercely individualistic citizen-subjects to whom the theory must pander in order to allow governance at a distance to continue to operate. The rhetorical employment of the human security discourse by entrenched powerful state actors and international institutions works hard to accomplish the task, as few would question the benevolence of an agenda that espouses freedom from want, freedom from fear, and freedom to take action on one’s own behalf as its primary tenets (Commission on Human Security 2003), especially in a post-Cold War context where leviathan fears continue to show much resilience. Neoliberalism is, by definition, a global governmentality, and it is therefore unsurprising that the UN represents the originator and primary practitioner of the human security discourse. Given the ever-increasing cries for help born of exponentially growing inequality, the UN has actively sought collaboration on human security with the World Bank and IMF, as well as national governments, NGOs and regional institutions (Alagappa 1997).

In East Asia, few governments or scholars showed immediate interest in human security, concluding that the agenda and its premises were inconsistent with the region’s strong notions of government (as opposed to governance) where states continued to be viewed as the best providers of security, and absolute sovereignty and non-interference are ferociously guarded principles (Evans 2004). In contrast, civil society has been quick to respond to this call, as the human security agenda provides a powerful argument against the state-centered model of development that has dominated
Amid such calls for a new division of responsibility between state and non-state actors in political and economic development are arguments for more international accountability in procuring human security, whether or not individual states agree with this situation (Lizée 2002). The potential for new modes of imperialist intervention is apparent. While typically collaboration is referred to as the notion of working jointly with others, the term has another, more sinister context. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* provides the following two alternative definitions for collaboration: 1) ‘to cooperate with or willingly assist an enemy of one’s country and especially an occupying force’; and 2) ‘to cooperate with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected’ (Mish 2003: 243). These connotations make perfect sense in the context of how the human security discourse is currently deployed in feeding into a neoliberal mode of governance.

Accordingly, we can identify two visions of collaborative action. The first is a solidarity-based version, which is a grassroots attempt to radicalize democracy through visible struggles and protests launched in public space. Such an approach implies a significant amount of uncertainty, and there will inevitably be innumerable mistakes, hiccups and setbacks along the way to improving human security, but the frame of democracy advocated here – a radicalized and processual one, where democracy is a grassroots and incomplete project, always in a process of becoming – sees this as the only legitimate form of democratic action inasmuch as all other forms remove those most affected, through representation or otherwise, from direct ownership of the democratic process. My position, following critical scholars such as Chantal Mouffe (1992) and C. Douglas Lummis (1996), is that if we really believe in democracy – the gateway to lasting human security – then the merging of *demos* (the people) and *kratia* (power), or radical democracy, is the only genuine incarnation. The underlying concern of solidarity-based collaborative action is empowerment, emancipation from tyranny (whether of the state or the market), and improved human security through tangible democratic
means. This is the collective establishing their own terms, on their own terms.

Contrasting this democratically virtuous conception of collaborative action is a more authoritarian version, where a bias for any actions that will preserve, enhance or deepen the penetration of the market is adopted in a one-size-fits-all-styled prescriptive approach. Neoliberalism is the lynchpin upon which a partiality-based notion of collaborative action turns. In this context, we should rightly ask to what extent the now orthodox neoliberal governmentality and its associated economic reforms have been successful in increasing meaningful employment, distributing resources evenly, and ensuring equal access to fundamental provisions such as healthcare and education, which each lay at the heart of conflict alleviation. The answer is bleak, yet such questioning is mandatory if we are to conceive of human security as the reduction of socioeconomic inequalities and poverty as is commonly understood (Jain 2002).

6.3 Opening for Business and the Renewal of Patron–Client Politics

In response to the *de facto* privatization that crept across Cambodia since the early 1980s, and coinciding with the emerging sea change in global geopolitics, the government in Phnom Penh introduced a number of economic reforms in 1989. These reforms, consisting of changes in land tenure, tax and marketing policies, a new investment law designed to attract foreign capital, and a separation of the state from production through the reduction of subsidies and the privatization of state-owned businesses (Irvin 1993; St John 1997), were not incidental, as the fall of the Soviet Union that same year signaled to Cambodian political elites that the communist era had ended, leaving them with little option but to embrace the free market economics of the West. Such economic liberalization also coincided with renewed interest from state leaders in the West in ending Cambodia’s three decades of civil war after ten years of indifference throughout the 1980s.

Humanitarian intervention is the most arduous aspect of the human security agenda,
suggesting that even when phrased as a ‘responsibility to protect’, the call for states and citizens to intervene in the affairs of neighbors has been poorly received in many parts of the world (Evans 2004). The termination of the Cold War, however, reinvigorated the UN, and the newfound unity of the Security Council gave the organization the moral certitude ‘to act in a relatively large number of conflicts, and in the process raised expectations with regard to its primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security’ (Alagappa 1997: 423). In this respect, although the human security doctrine was yet to be officially defined, the UN intervention in Cambodia can be understood as a litmus test of instituting human security at a global level. Through the dispatch of the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) to settle the ongoing conflict, Cambodia became the proverbial guinea pig to a rejuvenated UN. What is particularly salient here is the association between neoliberalism and what would soon become formally defined as the human security agenda, as the UN mission had as much to do with securing a footing for marketization as it did for bolstering human rights in Cambodia. With foreign capital poised at the door, awaiting conditions that would guarantee security on investments (Um 1990), economic reform became a major factor in the timing of the UN’s attempt to settle Cambodia’s ongoing civil conflict. One of the principal aspects of the proposed UN intervention was the establishment of a (neo)liberal order via Cambodia’s reconnection to the international economy (Ojendal 1996). The demise of the Soviet Union and the 27 September 1989 exit of the Vietnamese client government meant the USA could end its policy of covert subversion in backing the Khmer Rouge, and begin engaging openly with the Phnom Penh government (Roberts 2001). Cambodian markets were now open for business, where logging, fishing, petroleum and tourism ventures were among the many enterprises that stood to profit. Equally, the UN proposal was an opportunity to jettison some of the guilt that surely lingered after the decade of international apathy that followed in the wake of the Khmer Rouge atrocities.4

With at least somewhat dubious motives, in 1991 the UN negotiated a settlement to the long-
running civil war between the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), consisting of Cambodian resistance groups including remnants of the Khmer Rouge, and Vietnam’s former clients, the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) (Brown and Timberman 1998). The signing of the Paris Peace Agreements on 23 October 1991 marked the official beginning of Cambodia’s triple transition, a process initially overseen by UNTAC, which was charged with disarming the warring factions and creating a ‘neutral political environment’ for future ‘free and fair’ elections, laying the groundwork in which a new constitution would be ratified to included human rights and basic freedoms (Doyle 1995). In early 1992, Sophal Ear (1997: 73) suggests Cambodia began ‘normalising relations with the developed world and accepting large amounts of aid in the form of grants and loans from bilateral and multilateral sources ... with the idea of becoming fully reintegrated into the global economy’. Conferring the attribute of ‘normal’ to such a relationship is a problematic rendering, and can only refer to the procurement of the status quo with respect to aid dependency and debt that encumbers much of the global south. The UN’s subsequent articulation of the human security concept immediately following the UNTAC mission in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report is neither inconsequential nor mere coincidence in this regard, as it retroactively provided the necessary language to justify intervention in the Cambodian conflict as an exclusively humanitarian concern, effectively diffusing attention away from the mission’s neoliberal imperative of opening the Cambodian marketplace to global capital.

Despite signing the Paris Peace Agreements, it was not long before Cambodian authorities violated the ‘democratic’ spirit of the agreements when faced with opposition to their newly realized neoliberal mode of governance. On 17 December 1991, for instance, demonstrators consisting of both government employees and students gathered in Phnom Penh to protest privatization and high-level government corruption related to this process (Jones and PoKempner 1993). In an early appearance of the ‘shadow state’ at work, government staff accused their superiors of appropriating
money made from selling or leasing factories and official residences to private foreign entrepreneurs (Hughes 2003). The demonstrations proceeded without incident until 21 December 1991, when police beat two students (Jones and PoKempner 1993). Over the next two days police stepped up their aggression, assaulting protesters with batons and firing their weapons into the crowds (Peou 2000). By 24 December 1991, the demonstrations were dispersed, but not without bloodshed, as eight civilians had been left dead, with another 26 injured. In the days following the protests, the government imposed a curfew in Phnom Penh and passed legislation restricting permission for demonstrations it believed could lead to violence (Peou 2000). This response represents both a temporal and spatial strategy to deny democracy, thus undermining human security, and ultimately functioning to preserve the social, political and economic status quo.

Contrary to the prevailing perceptions of Cambodia’s donor community, the participation of government employees in the demonstrations indicated that the patronage system in the country is in fact not monolithic, and holds its own tensions and contradictions that evidently can cause public condemnation (Hughes 2003). The government response to such discontent, however, conveyed a strong message to Cambodians that it would not budge on its agenda of economic liberalization, presumably because those in high positions quickly realized that, via shadow state politics, they could amass extraordinary wealth whereby their position of political power was guaranteed by their rising economic power as patron–client networks were reinforced. The former communists had recognized the utility of neoliberal governmentality to the maintenance of their own elite status, and the politics of patronage were retooled to accommodate this ideological shift.

For Cambodian economic and political elites, the move to free market economics seemed to offer ‘a matrix of resources that could shore up exclusionary loyalties within the weak state apparatus, and reduce the field of action for resistance in rural villages, as a means to strengthen the state militarily and politically’ (Hughes 2003: 19). In other words, economic liberalization
transformed patron–clientelism, which effectively translated into the attenuation of villagers’ individual and collective freedoms, and in direct contrast to the language of the human security discourse, market principles intensified the oppression and marginalization of poor Cambodians at the hands of elites. Illustrating the contradictions between neoliberal theory and practice, marketization in Cambodia offered increased opportunities for the ruling elites to solidify their economic and political power, where neoliberalism-as-governmentality blinded citizens to the source of their domination as they came to accept the supposed virtues of neoliberal policy.

That many of CPP’s high-ranking officials received education in the economically liberal West should not be overlooked, and the move toward free market economics, and particularly its timing, suggests that Cambodia’s political elites were shrewd planners who intended this transformation as a strategic manoeuvre to ensure their position of power into the future, albeit requiring a new modus operandi. This was to be found in building their personal wealth, and since a Marxian political economy recognizes capitalism as an exploitative system that allows for very few ‘winners’, the newfound embracement of neoliberalism allowed elites to harden their political power vis-à-vis society. Despite rapid economic liberalization after 1991, the benefits were mostly limited to the urban areas and the elite, as Cambodian leaders seized every opportunity to enrich themselves and fortify their power bases (Hendrickson 2001). Such entrenchment was effected principally through their ability to control privatization schemes prescribed by IFIs, where many state-owned enterprises were either purchased by members of the ruling class themselves, or corruption and bribery were used to negotiate the purchase or lease of public land and enterprise. In the context of human security, as elites accumulated ever more of the country’s resources and land for themselves, this lent itself to a future of heightened conflict, where the contemporary situation of rampant land grabbing, numerous land-swap deals, and widespread dispossession of the poor serves as a dire testament (LICADHO 2006).
The ongoing plunder of Cambodian forests provides another example of such rampant corruption and refurbished patronage, as public lands are leased to foreign companies not only with the typical neoliberal practices of allowing tax holidays and renewable leases, but also under circumstances of bribery, where government royalties fail to reflect the value of the timber (Le Billon and Springer 2007). Many private companies have gained access to concessions through hostile takeovers and intimidation of locals through payoffs to local military personnel, and by forming alliances with Cambodian elites enabling them to skirt laws, manipulate judicial processes and influence national legislation (Global Witness 2007). Global Witness, Cambodia’s former official forest-crime monitor, which in 2003 was sacked under dubious circumstances of government intimidation and the complicity with the IFIs (Le Billon and Springer 2007), have argued that Cambodia’s kleptocratic elite generates much of its wealth via the seizure of public assets and natural resources, particularly forests, with the most powerful logging syndicate led by relatives of Prime Minister Hun Sen (Global Witness 2007). The poor, who have become increasingly militant towards such siphoning of public resources into private hands, attempt to erect their own version of solidarity-based collaborative action by frequently mobilizing protests in hope of stemming the activities directly responsible for threatening their human security via a decline in their ability to sustain their own livelihoods. Such wholesale privatization of public resources increases the likelihood of conflict by reducing collective, democratic control, and thus serves as an example of how the partiality-based collaborative action of elites, logging companies, and those donors promoting privatization and deregulation of the economy runs counter to the stated goals of the human security agenda. The only way to reconcile these practices of pillage with the human security discourse is to mask the systemic inequality fostered by an elitist project under a wash of rhetoric stressing benevolence and equal benefit to all.
6.4 Subverting Democracy in the Name of Market Security

The first indication that democratization would not be as smooth as envisioned by the Paris Peace Agreements came when the CGDK’s Khmer Rouge element destroyed the prospect of moving from war to peace soon after UNTAC arrived in Cambodia. Although signatories to the Paris Peace Agreements, the Khmer Rouge ultimately rejected the plan and resumed guerrilla activities from Cambodia’s periphery when they realized that they would be unable to attain political power through democratic means as their support base had all but evaporated following years of abuse (Heder 1996). This withdrawal threatened the entire UNTAC mission by throwing the disarmament proposal into disarray when other factions refused to hand over their weapons as the Khmer Rouge ignored the ceasefire. Failed disarmament subsequently had detrimental effects on the creation of a neutral political environment, as the continued strength of the military, and its control by CPP, made it impossible to disentangle CPP from the state apparatus (Heder 1996). Despite the obvious threats to human security posed by resumed insurgency, the UN mission was successful in terms of the election proceeding in May 1993. Three major parties competed: CPP, headed by Hun Sen; and the two remaining CGDK elements, the Royalist Party National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Co-operative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC), headed by Prince Norodom Ranariddh; and the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP), headed by former Prime Minister Son Sann, who ran independently of each other (Findlay 1995).

Regardless of one’s position on the utility of UNTAC, it is important to recognize that the UN-sponsored transition did not end the violence. The predominant characteristics of the run-up to the 1993 elections were threats, intimidation and bloodshed. Although scholars such as Michael Vickery (2007) and David Roberts (2001) deny any pattern to CPP violence during the elections, both have reputations as CPP apologists. More balanced analyses suggest that CPP acted with extreme brutality, killing more than 100 opposition members, and subjecting the population at large
to arbitrary violence and intimidation (Brown and Zasloff 1998; Peou 2000; Hughes 2003), implicitly informing voters that that democracy was not attainable.

CPP did everything it could to sabotage the attempt to enforce democratic political and judicial norms, reinforcing its grasp on the population by reorienting state administrative structures to party-building tasks (Shawcross 2002). CPP appeared monolithic insofar as it maintained tight control over the bureaucracy, military, police, civil service, media and judiciary (Doyle 1995). While the Paris Peace Agreements stipulated there must be a separation of party and state, in reality the two moved closer together during the UNTAC period, meaning that the UN failed to implement its primary mandate of creating a neutral political environment through disentanglement of CPP and the State of Cambodia (SOC). This failure struck a blow to human security, and on the surface appeared to be detrimental to the larger project of neoliberalization as well. However, in recognizing the contradictions between the declared goals of neoliberal theory – the wellbeing of all – and its actual pragmatics— the consolidation of elite power and the procurement of markets regardless of the social consequences (Harvey 2005), the continued CPP/SOC nexus could provide the necessary hegemony for securing market principles should they win the forthcoming elections. That this entire situation clearly defies the logic of the human security agenda in terms of the freedom-from-violence imperative speaks to the security pretext.

For their part, the Khmer Rouge rebels terrorized the countryside using random violence, arbitrary detention, execution of SOC officials, and propaganda all aimed at preventing the elections from taking place (Heder 1996; Shawcross 2002). The prospect of a neutral political environment was clearly in tatters, and given the potential for political catastrophe and personal danger, voter turnout was remarkable, as UNTAC managed to persuade 95 percent of the population to register to vote, and 90 percent of those registered showed up at the polls (Brown and Zasloff 1998). The turnout sent a clear message to political parties and the world: peace and democracy were
overwhelmingly desired, and violence and intimidation would not be a deterrent to the Cambodian people’s realization of these goals. Yet despite this strong showing at the polls, controversy swirled over the outcome. FUNCINPEC won the election with 45.5 percent of the votes, CPP placed second with 38.2 percent, while the BLDP placed third with 3.8 percent (Gallup 2002), and although UNTAC quickly declared the elections ‘free and fair’, Hun Sen and CPP refused to accept the results. Claiming electoral fraud, CPP threatened secession of all the land to the east of the Mekong River if removed from power, an ultimatum to which UNTAC acquiesced (Um 1994; Shawcross 2002).

The most common explanation for UNTAC’s acceptance of an outcome inconsistent with the 1993 election results was that it was not in a position to confront CPP militarily or to challenge the fundamental power dynamics in Cambodia (Boutros-Ghali 1995; Doyle 1995). This, however, does not answer why then the UN felt it was appropriate to get involved in the first place. Securing a neutral political environment, a key UNTAC mandate, is an objective that is manifestly involved in changing the underlying power arrangement, where UNTAC’s failure to do so speaks to a lack of commitment. A slightly more skeptical view of the UNTAC’s docility to CPP threats suggests that Cambodia was to become the model both for the subsequent articulation of the human security agenda, and for future UN peacekeeping interventions. The Cambodian mission was thus pre-ordained as the organization’s biggest success story to date, and in order to avoid the whole operation blowing up in their face, the UN presided over the creation of an inauspicious coalition between CPP and FUNCINPEC (Shawcross 2002). Given the neoliberal imperative of the UNTAC process, the mission can be interpreted as an exercise in realpolitik, intended to confer legitimacy upon Hun Sen’s regime as CPP offered not only the best prospect for electoral victory, but also, more importantly, for market security. Indeed, the Paris Peace Agreements were not designed to undermine SOC’s hegemonic status. In fact, one could argue that they weakened the resistance
forces and could enhance SOC’s political legitimacy by electoral means’ (Peou 2000: 255). This assessment fits neatly with the neoliberal focus on the prominence of market security, which can be viewed as the primary goal of the Paris Peace Agreements as the UN was looking for options that would bring political stability to Cambodia, regardless of the result of the vote (Lizée 1993). In this respect, the UN took power out of the hands of the Cambodian electorate and gave it to the factional leaders. Reinforcing the powerful position of the CPP/SOC would increase security in the short term, and allow for an immediate influx of foreign companies eager to exploit Cambodia’s natural resources and its newly opened markets following an early international financial institution prescription adopted by SOC, which called for the removal of barriers impeding the establishment of foreign firms (Ear 1997). The electoral victory of FUNCINPEC not only came as a shock to most observers (Chandler 2000; McCargo 2005), but also posed a significant obstacle to the machinations of foreign enterprise insofar as CPP was still firmly in control of the military, and the change of government to a party without military hegemony threatened political and hence economic stability.

Moreover, UNTAC lent implicit support to the ‘iron fist’ of Hun Sen by sitting idle as he forced his way into a renewed position of power, thus complicitly allowing democracy to take a backseat to neoliberal pragmatism. While Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen became co-Prime Ministers, with Ranariddh as the ‘official’ leader of the country, CPP never truly shared power, and dominated the new regime. This was easily predictable because of the continued entanglement of CPP and the state apparatus, the failure of disarmament and, as the following section will illustrate, civil service downsizing prescribed by the IFIs. Thus, from the very beginning of the operation, the UN’s preoccupation with the security pretext over the will of the people undermined the prospect of Cambodian democracy and hence the realization of non-rhetorical human security.

We can either recognize UNTAC as an unmitigated failure; acknowledge that its underlying goal was to deepen the economic stability offered by an entrenched regime that was already
displaying an affinity for a neoliberal policy orientation via privatization schemes, or both. Economic stability would pave the way for neoliberalization, a task that could be accomplished through organizing supposedly democratic elections to confer legitimacy on CPP. The UN clearly has the ability to involve the powerful militaries of many first-world nations when necessary, and thus had the capacity to enforce the election results in Cambodia, which they appropriately should have been committed to after involving themselves at the outset. Instead, they simply lacked the political–economic motivation to do so. Thus, when CPP surprisingly lost an election where the fix was thought to be in, this jeopardized the potential future penetration of foreign capital. FUNCINPEC could not offer the same degree of political-cum-economic stability, and accordingly the will of the Cambodian people was disrespected in favor of an authoritarian regime seen as the best chance of both commitment to, and capacity for, neoliberalizing Cambodia. The repercussions of such a partiality-based version of collaborative action reflected by this decision would later come back to haunt Cambodia. Indeed, as the shocking coup d’état of July 1997 would subsequently illustrate when Hun Sen led a murderous campaign against FUNCINPEC officials, ousting Prince Ranariddh as first Prime Minister during two days of factional warfare in the streets of Phnom Penh\(^7\) human security is born not of submission to the whims of the powerful, but through the collective good of democracy and solidarity-based collaborative action.

6.5 The Neo-authoritarianism of Neoliberalism

Following the elections, a new constitution was promulgated, which reinstated the monarchy and renamed the country the Kingdom of Cambodia. Along with renewed pledges to ensure structural adjustment and continued privatization (St John 1995), Cambodia’s experiment with economic liberalization was also signed into law. Article 56 of the new constitution states ‘The Kingdom of Cambodia shall adopt a market economy system’ (Jennar 1995: 17), which in effect pre-emptively
silences any future democratic debate over the economic arrangement of the country, not that there had been any collective accountability in its choosing to begin with. The signing of a new constitution also officially ended UNTAC’s mandate, and the entire operation left Cambodia before the end of 1993 (Findlay 1995).

Despite the presence of international peacekeepers until September 1993, armed clashes between factional groups lingered for several years (Jeldres 1996; Lizée 1996; Brown and Zasloff 1998), meaning the imposed liberal peace was tenuous at best. Similarly, it was not long before cracks began to show in the new coalition government, attributable to the IFIs’ preoccupation with macroeconomic stabilization and structural adjustment, which undermined the potential of building political consensus and subverted other programs essential to the consolidation of peace, such as addressing humanitarian needs (Hendrickson 2001). Neoliberalism was the order of the day, as immediately following the 1993 election the Ministry of Economy and Finance, under tutelage from the World Bank, IMF and the Asian Development Bank, was already promising that a stringent fiscal plan would be in place by 1995 (Um 1994). Furthermore, Cambodia was locked into a condition of dependency on foreign assistance as nearly half the country’s budgetary allocations were being drawn from foreign aid, translating into a limited ability to challenge donor agendas and timetables (Lizée 1996; Hendrickson 2001). Most technical assistance projects since 1993 have undermined government ownership and capacity in that they have been donor-driven in their identification, implementation and design (Godfrey et al. 2002).

In a statement that appears emblematic of the entire UN operation’s position, given its fixation on economic security, former Secretary-General of the UN for Human Rights in Cambodia Michael Kirby states, ‘I have always made the point that an improvement in the economy, filtering down to the average citizen, is a vitally important step on the path of rebuilding human rights in Cambodia. It helps to give a sense of well-being, purpose and commitment to society’ (Kirby 1995: 31). These
comments echo the neoliberal theory of the trickle-down effect, as the focus is shifted from
democracy to economics as the vehicle providing individuals with a sense of agency and a
participatory stake in society. It is, however, hard to see the efficacy of the trickle-down effect when
the gap between rich and poor has only increased in post-transition Cambodia.\textsuperscript{8}

Even Ronald St John, a scholar who appears inspired by neoliberalism, recognizes that while
‘some disparities existed before liberalization, social and economic inequalities are significantly
greater now’ (St John 1997). Similarly, one has to wonder how those Cambodians whose political,
civil and social liberties have been sacrificed to excesses of ‘anarchic freedom as a consequence of
rampant marketization and the weakening of state authority’ view current conditions of human
security (Hendrickson 2001: 99). The rapid and unreflective transition to a free-market economy
drove a relatively weak state to financial crisis, raised inflation to three-digit levels, and weakened
Cambodia’s social and economic infrastructure, particularly in rural areas (Irvin 1993). The poor,
punished by nearly 15 years of international abandonment, were now forced via Structural
Adjustment Programmes to pay the further costs of reintegration into the international mainstream.

Further neoliberal reforms were ordered in 1994, as donors emphasized downsizing the civil
service—the traditional power base for CPP—in an effort to build administrative capacity. Prioritizing
a reduction in the civil service is one example of ‘rolling back’ the state, and it derives from the IFIs’
preoccupation with controlling public expenditure as a method of achieving macro-economic
stability (Hendrickson 2001). Such a focus is highly problematic in that it contributes to shadow-state
politics by encouraging rent-seeking behavior and hardening patron–client relations, as civil service
members become reliant on alternative means to supplement their incomes. Following the shift to
the free market, many officials began making their living in the speculative underground economy
(van der Kroef 1991). The IFIs approached downsizing as an administrative exercise, while ignoring
the social and political costs, and the negative ramifications this might have for human security.
Furthermore, such a prescription was deleterious to the stability of the fragile power-sharing arrangement in Cambodia, as the new coalition government was originally premised on the integration of large numbers of FUNCINPEC and BLDP functionaries into the CPP-dominated administrative apparatus (Hendrickson 2001). Thus a strengthening, not a weakening, of the Cambodian government’s administrative capacity was required.

In what appears to be a self-interested and calculated response to downsizing efforts, the government enshrined impunity in the law in 1994 by prohibiting civil servants, including police and soldiers, from being charged or arrested without the permission of the relevant minister (Human Rights Watch 1999a). In this instance, CPP used downsizing of the civil service prescribed by the IFIs to its advantage, as this amendment would further entrench its hold on power via the politics of patronage. Thus the so-called ‘culture of impunity’, a frequent Orientalist rendering of Cambodia by the donor community, is not a cultural feature at all. Rather, impunity can be seen as another example of the shadow-state response to neoliberal reforms, again illustrating the contradictions between neoliberal theory and its ‘actually existing’ practice.

CPP’s jovial mood following its commandeering of the 1993 election results, coupled with a renewed position of hegemony and what appears to be a pandering to Cambodia’s new patrons in the West, led Hun Sen to proclaim 1994 as the year of the resurrection of the media (Peou 2000). This honeymoon period was short-lived, and by July 1994 the media were effectively muzzled after the government issued a list of instructions indicating what the press could and could not say (Lizée 1996). Journalists became subject to the whims of the political leadership and confined to expressing the status quo. As a result, 1994 saw several attacks against the press, including the prosecution and imprisonment of several reporters, and the murder of three high-profile journalists who were particularly critical of the new coalition government (Jeldres 1996). In April 1995, action was extended to foreign journalists when the American editor of the Phnom Penh Post, Michael Hayes, was
faced with charges of ‘misinformation’ and ‘incitement’. King Sihanouk stepped in and assured Hayes of an official pardon if convicted, but Cambodian journalists were not so fortunate, as four editors of Khmer-language newspapers were either fined or imprisoned (Lizée 1996).

In light of such developments and an ongoing pattern of repressive violence, long-time Cambodia observer Steve Heder refers to Cambodia’s transition as one to neo-authoritarianism, where ‘In the name of political stability and economic development, as well as in order to fight a lingering and murderous insurgency, the country’s current ‘multiparty’ ruling elite coalition ... has been working to dampen open political contestation and to deliberalize the political atmosphere by co-opting, cowing, or marginalising contesting centers of power’ (Heder 1995: 425). While Heder (1995: 428) recognizes that such restriction of political contestation is done in the name of economic security in order to see the ‘integration of Cambodia into the world capitalist system’, he fails to make the connection that this neo-authoritarian behavior is not only reconcilable with the neoliberal canon (Canterbury 2005), but also appears to be a direct outcome of this doctrine in the Cambodian context (Springer 2009). Although Cambodia’s donor community is very vocal about democracy promotion, it generally accepts the perceived need for ‘order’ and ‘security’ at face value precisely because it shares the same concern with order as necessary for promoting economic liberalism. In contrast, democracy must be open and accommodating to all social groups, including ‘unruly’ elements, so that the public as a whole may define the public interest. Recognizing this may help us to realize that predetermining and enforcing an economic model on a country is not only undemocratic, but also an act of sedition with respect to the emergence of a democratic polity. In line with neoliberalism as a project seeking the (re)creation of class power (Harvey 2005), it is not at all surprising that democracy is suppressed.

Democratic subversion is illuminated in the presupposed purpose that neoliberalism imposes on citizens, where individuals must define their social, political and economic relationships through
the market mechanism. While this is not necessarily effected through juridical means, a market orientation to social relations is paramount to the canon of order, most often produced through governance at a distance, where citizen-subjects ‘freely’ conduct themselves as market agents (consumers, sellers, and workers). It is only when the neoliberal code of conduct breaks down that such ‘freedom’ is revealed as a chimera. Those engaging in solidarity-based collaborative action on human security through protesting privatization, land-grabbing, inflation, poverty, and other outcomes of the state’s adherence to free market principles quickly learn this precept, as they are frequently subjected to authoritarian violence that often enforces the neoliberal line. Here, again, the contradictions of neoliberalism are revealed. In theory the state is to be removed from market interference, yet in practice, if the market comes into question by citizens, the engagement of the state is required to go beyond governmentality to the realm of violence in enforcing the market’s vaunted position.

That a people may freely choose the economic policies and practices that directly affect their lives, and articulate their opinions, concerns, desires and demands freely and openly, appears to be a frightening proposition to neoliberals. Capitalism is premised on inequality, and democracy threatens to reveal this truth by firing the collective imagination so that ordinary individuals without institutionalized power can mobilize to change the status quo, seize power from those refusing to share it, or exercise it justly for the benefit of all (Tan 2002). Such action represents the heart of solidarity-based collaborative action on human security, and is an affront to those who effect its partiality-based version. Thus, within the larger discursive practices of the human security agenda, the authoritarianism of third-world governments is, on the one hand, a symptom of the neoliberal doctrine they often subscribe to and abide by, and on the other, an easy and ideal scapegoat to deflect attention away from the profound socioeconomic injustices of capitalism. In essence, neoliberalism’s partiality-based appropriation of the human security doctrine provides free-market
ideology with the necessary language to veil its inherent hypocrisy, shrouding the frequent need for authoritarian responses behind a humanitarian discourse that supposedly aims to protect from this very circumstance.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter’s account of the human security agenda in the context of Cambodia’s transition has shown the international donor community’s interest to be far from altruistic in terms of genuine concern for grassroots democratic empowerment and its corollary, improved human security. Instead, partiality-based collaborative efforts have been a contradictory exercise in realpolitik. The Cambodian holocaust was followed by a decade of neglect, as those in the outside world turned a blind eye to the misery they had done much to create. The sudden renewed interest in Cambodia following the fall of the Iron Curtain is thus at least somewhat peculiar, insofar as concern expressed for the political, social and economic conditions in Cambodia could hardly be taken at face value as humanitarian. The situation of Cambodia tells a very different story, where most often, extraneous expressions of concern for democracy and human security were mere rhetoric serving an ulterior motive: to pry open the Cambodian economy. Any discussion about the prospects of human security in society is futile when the competitiveness of neoliberal economics leaves problems of poverty and inequality unaddressed (Jain 2002).

In this chapter, I have attempted to peel back the layers of lies that have been heaped on Cambodia’s transition to capitalist democracy. The goals of security and order for the purpose of economic investment have been exposed as taking precedence over both the desire for democracy expressed by the Cambodian electorate, and any conception of human security as freedom from fear and violence. This security pretext was reaffirmed by UNTAC’s failure to create a neutral political environment, and its subsequent haste in deeming the elections free and fair. While the victory of
UNCINPEC was definite, it could have been even more resounding had UNTAC been more
diligent in its attempts to unravel CPP from the state apparatus. Such disentanglement may have
avoided the need for a coalition government, and certainly would not have left CPP in the militarily
strong position that has ultimately allowed the party to continue to intimidate and coerce the
population to this day. UNTAC was not prepared for CPP’s failure at the polls, and Hun Sen was
accordingly allowed to force his way into a co-Prime Ministerial position. It would appear that the
consolidation of CPP hegemony was the goal of the UN mission all along (Lizée 1993). Hun Sen,
given his economic inclinations throughout the late 1980s, was pre-ordained as the ideal candidate to
bring the stability necessary for further economic liberalization in Cambodia. In this capacity,
Cambodia’s ‘strongman’ was more than willing to engage in a partiality- based collaboration with the
global instrumentality of neoliberal reform, as such action would further entrench his socioeconomic
and political position vis-à-vis Cambodian society, a prediction he made in the late 1980s when he
started the liberalization process.

With CPP’s implementation and institutionalization of neoliberal modes of governance, and its
subsequent deeper penetration via governmentality in Cambodia, Hun Sen’s continual subversion of
democracy in the immediate post-UNTAC years was of little consequence to the donor community.
In truth, such authoritarian action was often a feature and/or outcome of instituting neoliberal
reforms, and represented a move toward greater market security in the country. Of course, donors
would quickly call for Cambodia’s political parties to respect the constitution and adhere to the
principles of democracy whenever violence was employed, but such criticism was always little more
than lip service. What donors really wanted was the restoration of the sociopolitical status quo so that
the neoliberal agenda could be implemented and subsequently preserved, thus illustrating all too well
the rhetorical nature of partiality-based collaborative action on human security.
6.7 Notes

1 On the importance of a Marxian political economy approach in understanding contemporary encounters with violence, inequality and poverty, each of which is an important obstacle to human security, see Springer 2008.

2 On 'actually existing neoliberalism' see Brenner and Theodore 2002; for its application in Cambodia see Springer 2009.

3 Despite variance in doses among regions, states and cities, the basic neoliberal policy treatment is underpinned by a vision of naturalized market relations seeking to eradicate obstacles to the operation of markets; stifle collective initiative and public expenditure, primarily via privatization of common assets and imposition of user fees; advocate individualism, competitiveness and economic self-sufficiency as fundamental virtues; attenuate or nullify social protections and transfer programs; and actively 'recruit' the poor and marginalized into a flexible labor regime of precarious work and low-wage employment (Peck and Tickell 2002).

4 The abandonment is attributable to America’s embarrassment with its war effort in Vietnam, as it was Vietnamese troops who had brought down the Khmer Rouge and continued to rule Cambodia as a client state throughout the 1980s. Using Cambodia as the instrument of Vietnam’s punishment, Washington compelled the UN to withhold development aid and bar Cambodia from all international agreements on trade and communications (Roberts 2001).

5 ‘Shadow state politics’ refers to the system through which leaders draw authority from their abilities informally to control markets and material rewards. Rather than oppose the dominant paradigm of neoliberal reform, global south governments often assimilate the interests of the IFIs, reshaping them into instruments of power. The emergence of the shadow state is indicative of the contradictions between neoliberal theory and its actual practice, because it allows elites to amass astonishing wealth obtained through unofficial channels that are pocketed rather than put back into developing the country, thereby reinforcing systems of clientelism and patronage. Thus the neoliberal axiom asserting that if individuals are left to pursue their narrow self-interest, then society as a whole will benefit, is clearly erroneous. Rather, only an elite few along with their circle of patrons benefit, while the much-touted neoliberal assumption of the ‘trickle-down’ effect fails to materialize as the forthcoming developmental rewards promised to those on the bottom’ are swallowed in the vagaries of the shadow state. On shadow state politics see Reno 1995. For its application in the Cambodian context see Le Billon and Springer 2007. On the contradictions of neoliberalism and its practice see Harvey 2005.

6 For example, Minister of Economy and Finance Keat Chhon was educated at the National Institute of Nuclear Science and Technology in Saclay, France (Ministry of Economy and Finance, Kingdom of Cambodia 2006); Minister of International Cooperation and Foreign Affairs Hor Namhong studied at the University of Paris (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Kingdom of Cambodia 2006).

7 For discussions of the 1997 coup see Human Rights Watch 1997; Peou 1998c; Springer 2009.

8 The Gini coefficient is a number between 0 and 100, where 0 corresponds with perfect equality (where everyone has the same income) and 100 corresponds with perfect inequality (where one person has all the income, and everyone else has zero income). Prior to UNTAC in 1990, Cambodia’s Gini coefficient was 41.6. In 2004 it represented the highest recorded value to date at 46.3 (World Bank 2004).

9 For example, in a recent speech former US Ambassador Joseph A. Mussomeli (2006) suggested that the 'culture of impunity that we see throughout Cambodia today is rooted in the irrefutable belief among its people that no crime is so great that it must be punished'.
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CHAPTER 7

Violence, Democracy, and the Neoliberal “Order”: The Contestation of Public Space in Posttransitional Cambodia

7.1 Introduction

The furtherance of free market reforms, which Cambodia experimented with in the late 1980s (Um 1990; St. John 1997), was a project simultaneous with peacekeeping efforts of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) from February 1992 to December 1993. Alongside a democratic constitution, a liberalized economy was a mandated outcome of what was at the time the largest operation in the history of the United Nations (UN). Despite over a decade passing since UNTAC left Cambodia following the promulgation of a new constitution that marked the beginning of the country’s new life as a democratic and free market state, conditions of repression, surveillance, and intimidation continue in the small Southeast Asian country (Human Rights Watch 2003). The realities of Cambodian political life are far from democratic, open, and just.

This article argues that neoliberalization is a foremost causal factor in Cambodia’s inability to consolidate democracy, and further explains why authoritarianism remains the principal mode of governance among the country’s ruling elite, an inclination often elicited as violence. Democracy is widely recognized as the only justifiable system of government, and as such neoliberals pay lip service to democracy in an effort to facilitate the complicity of national populations in allowing the market to reign supreme (Jayasuriya 2000; Rodan and Hewison 2004). Neoliberalism is conceived as effectively acting to suffocate an indigenous burgeoning of democratic politics. Such asphyxiation is brought to bear under the rhetoric of order and stability, a language shared by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), bilateral donors, and indigenous elites alike. This can be read through

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Cambodia’s violent geographies, specifically via the (re)production of the country’s public space. Order and stability preserve an economic system that serves to maintain the power and privilege of indigenous elites at the expense of the poor, which in turn entrenches patron–client relations as neoliberalism positions elites to informally control markets and material rewards.

Conceptualizing neoliberalism requires an understanding of the complex interplay of local and extralocal forces acting within the global political economy (Peck 2001; Brenner and Theodore 2002). Glassman (1999) alerts us to this notion in his analysis of the Thai state as a concurrently internationalized and internationalizing agent. In focusing exclusively on external forces, we risk producing overgeneralized accounts of a monolithic and ubiquitous neoliberalism, which insufficiently accounts for local variability and internal constitution. On the other hand, overly concrete or introspective analyses of the local are inadequately attentive to the significant connections and necessary features of neoliberalism as a global project (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002). Accordingly, Peck and Tickell (2002, 383) propose “a processual conception of neoliberalization as both an ‘out there’ and ‘in here’ phenomenon whose effects are necessarily variegated and uneven, but the incidence and diffusion of which may present clues to a pervasive ‘metalogic.’ Like globalization, neoliberalization should be understood as a process, not an end-state.” Such a comprehensive approach to Cambodia’s neoliberalization is taken up here, as I attend to both macro- and micro-levels of analysis.

Although order and stability may appear as worthwhile goals, we must ask why “order” always seems to benefit the preservation of the status quo and in whose interest our nations and cities are being “stabilized” (Mitchell 2003b). The preoccupation with order and stability in Cambodia is viewed here as serving the interests of capital at the global level, and political elites at the level of the nation, which are reified primarily (although not exclusively) in the spaces of the capital, Phnom Penh, as cities are increasingly recognized as the primary loci of neoliberalization, “central to the
reproduction, mutation, and continual reconstitution of neoliberalism itself” (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 375). These particular interests are fiercely contested by a growing number of Cambodians, where such contestation is strongly evidenced in the burgeoning geographies of protest that have emerged in Cambodian public spaces in the post-UNTAC years. The Cambodian experience is of course not unique, and the findings of this article resonate within a larger, global pattern of increased calls for order and stability vis-à-vis democracy as global marketization intensifies. The violent responses to protest movements challenging neoliberal policies in cities as dispersed as Stockholm, Lilongwe, Seoul, Quebec, Asuncion, Port Moresby, and Istanbul serve as instructive examples of how the unmediated usage of public space and the very practice of democracy have come into conflict with the neoliberal order, and highlight how the macro and micro are mutually imbricated.

Rather than a singular and fully actualized policy regime, ideological form, or regulatory framework, Brenner and Theodore (2002) appropriately encourage us to think in terms of “actually existing neoliberalisms,” where, as protean outcomes of historically specific, internally contradictory, and contextually embedded within national, regional, and local processes of market-driven socio-spatial transformation, neoliberalism is continually redefined by the consequences of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices, and ongoing political struggles. In this sense, and extrapolating from Harvey’s (2005) account of “neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics,” this article contemplates “neoliberalism with Cambodian characteristics” and its associated geographies of violence by weaving together the literature on Cambodia with empirical findings obtained from research undertaken in Cambodia over seven months, from June to December 2004.

In-depth interviews with thirty-two individuals were conducted, where diverse Cambodian perspectives were obtained using purposeful sampling. Various interest groups were recruited including, among others, human rights workers, university students, teachers, market stall owners,
homemakers, motorbike taxi drivers, and civil servants. Interviews provided a forum for collaborative, qualitative research between Cambodian individuals and myself to reveal their perceptions and experiences of violence and democratic processes in an effort to overcome some of the silencing that has been characteristic of Cambodia’s current political situation. Participants came from two geographical settings, Phnom Penh and Pursat, to represent the voices of core and periphery dwellers, respectively. These sites were chosen based on previous experience in each, which enabled participant recruitment from a group of people with whom I had already established a high level of mutual trust and rapport, thus reducing the potential dangers of conducting research in settings where speaking out about violence and government oppression represent a significant threat to both participants and researcher (see Hays-Mitchell 2001; Knox and Monaghan 2003). Existing relationships with potential participants also made it appreciably easier to identify additional research participants using snowball sampling. In every instance, participants determined the time and location of the interview. Finally, in an effort to deepen my understanding of the research locale and facilitate deeper rapport with participants, I spent several months in intensive Khmer language training prior to commencing interviewing.

I begin this article by examining the theoretical terrain of public space and violence, emphasizing that although open and unmediated public space can provide opportunities for a more radical form of democracy to emerge, public space is often also a space of violence, manifested both as violence from above and violence from below. In the empirical sections that follow, I contextualize the theoretical frame of public space, democracy, and violence in posttransitional Cambodia. Through a progressive sharpening of the scalar focus from macrolevel geopolitical stratagems of proxy war, foreign policy doublespeak, and the business of aid, to microlevel programs of interspatial competition, (re)criminalization of the poor, crackdowns on demonstrations, and the resultant contestations of public space, I demonstrate how local elites may come to assimilate global
concerns for neoliberalism in ways that are conducive to authoritarianism.

7.2 Theorizing Public Space and Violence: Placing Order and Stability in the Neoliberal Context

Philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991) draws a distinction between the visualization and administration of space on the one hand and its materialization on the other. In Lefebvre’s terms, public space that is controlled by government or other institutions, or whose use is regulated, is referred to as representation of space, whereas public space as it is actually accessed and used by various social groups is called representational space. This is an important distinction because it draws attention to the difference between the “official” status of a space and the actual ability of various individuals and groups to use it (Arefi and Meyers 2003). Lefebvre’s dichotomy hints at the underlying contestation of all public space insofar as recognizing that space is “not merely an empty container waiting for something to happen, but is both constructed by and the medium of social relations and processes” (Cope 1996, 185, emphasis in original). Representation not only demands space, it also creates it.

Accordingly, public space can be conceived as the product of two competing ideologies (Mitchell 2003b). On the one hand, the ordered view constitutes public space as the site of control and is typically associated with authoritarian tradition where panopticism and repression are used to maintain order and stability. This vision is rivaled by the unmediated view, which conceptualizes public space as the site where the voiceless can make their demands seen and heard, as a medium for the contestation of power, and as the space in which identity is constructed, reified, and contested. In short, the unmediated view envisions public space as the crucible of democracy (Ruddick 1996).

Much like its counterpart in democracy, public space is a process, never a complete project, always in a state of flux between those who seek to deprive it and those who seek to expand it.

Although many scholars recognize the democratic character of public space (Sennett 1978; Habermas 1989; Fraser 1990; Henaff and Strong 2001; Avritzer 2002; Barnett and Low 2004), this
idea itself is very much contested. Miles (2002) argues that public space has long been an exclusionary site, with a tenuous relationship to democracy. There is a vast literature on the exclusion from public space of women (Massey 1994; Bondi and Domosh 1998; McDowell 1999), ethnic minorities (Ruddick 1996; McCann 1999; Tyner 2002), gays and lesbians (Duncan 1996; Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter 1997; Casey 2004), the elderly and young (Valentine 1996; O’Neil 2002; Elsley 2004), those with disabilities and special needs (Butler and Bowlby 1997; Freund 2001; Gleeson 1998), and homeless people (Davis 1992; Daly 1998; Mitchell 1997). Yet where else but in public space can excluded groups make themselves seen and demand their inclusion? If at different times spaces may “change in their role for accommodating different social groups” (Atkinson 2003, 1830), surely contesting one’s exclusion and taking public space forces the very issue and can potentially secure such accommodation and change. Women, minority groups, and the homeless have only achieved entrance to the public through determined social struggle, demanding the right to be seen and heard (Mitchell 1995). Public spaces thus gain political importance when they are taken by marginalized groups and restructured as spaces for representation (Mitchell 2003b). To demand inclusion in a space often means forcibly occupying the space of exclusion, which entails an awareness that the idea of public space has never been guaranteed and by its very definition must be contested through embodied engagement. In contrast to masculinist notions of brute force, this is a question of solidarity, not one of strength. It is precisely the potential for emancipation and collective empowerment that makes an unmediated vision of public space so important and the ordered view so deleterious to vulnerable groups.

Although attempts to control public space are clearly present in the disciplinary arsenals of many types of regimes and economic development strategies, in the current context of widespread neoliberalization, elites, corporate state planners, and IFIs such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank frequently challenge the collectively endowed values that citizens attach to
public space and espouse the ordered view because they seek to shape public space in ways that limit the threat of democratic social power to dominant economic interests and corresponding neoliberal policy goals (Fraser 1990; Harvey 2001). Although the very nature of space as inherently protean ensures that the already powerful can never achieve total political control (Massey 2005), they may attempt to regulate public space by keeping it relatively free of passion (Duncan 1996). To remove the passion from public space, corporate state planners attempt to create spaces based on a desire for security more than interaction and for entertainment more than democratic politics (Goss 1996). This entails a “Disneyfication” of space (Boyer 1992; Davis 1992), whereby processes of heightened surveillance, commodification, and semiprivate usage become increasingly commonplace. In this light, the struggle for democracy is inseparable from public space, as it is not what is said that is at stake, but rather where it is said. Public protest is easily silenced when important gathering places in a city have all become highly policed public space, or its corollary, private property (Mitchell 2003a).

Public space is ideally, in the unmediated view, a medium that allows for embodied self-representation. Thus, when public space is deprived, individuals cannot situate their self-representation existentially. Consequently, contestation is impermissible and self-representation becomes (almost) disembodied in form. When the pendulum swings too far in the direction of the deprivers (i.e., toward the ordered view), the resulting deprivation of public space has two apparent consequences: (1) the erosion of individual volition resulting in a submissive population, presumably the desired effect of the ordered view; or (2) the materialization of “hidden transcripts” and occasional violent outbursts against those who oppress public space, representing a rebellion against a cruel dominant–subordinate relationship (Scott 1990), and the undesired effect of the ordered view. Where marginalization, exclusion, and vulnerability generate fear, violence becomes one of the only practicable forms of public self-representation (Hyndman 2007), and in this sense it can be an invigorating and liberating process for those who participate (Arendt 1958). Often it is only by being
violent that excluded groups have gained access to the public spaces of democracy and acquired what
Lefebvre (1996) refers to as “the right to the city” (Honderich 1980; Mitchell 1996). Deutsche (1996,
278) has convincingly demonstrated that “conflict is not something that befalls an originally, or
potentially, harmonious urban space. Urban space is the product of conflict.” This is the paradox of
democracy, because without competition and conflict, there cannot be a democratic polity. Any
society that sanctions political conflict, however, runs the risk of it becoming too intense, producing
a strife-ridden society where civil peace is jeopardized (Mitchell 1996). Democracy is premised on the
idea of managing conflicts nonviolently or, in other words, the idea of trading bullets for ballot
boxes. Yet a contradiction exists, as many democracies are born in the violence of revolution and
few wish to recognize how intimately related ballots and bullets are (Rapoport and Weinberg 2001).
Indeed, the classic passage by Thomas Jefferson that states “the tree of liberty must be refreshed
from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants” (quoted in Le Vine 2001, 261) suggests that
violence is imperative to democratic renewal. This quote also hints at the emancipatory potential of
violence, where despite arguments from those who seek to protect the status quo in the name of
order and stability, violence from below may generate reallocations of wealth and open paths to
political empowerment (Honderich 1980; Iadicola and Shupe 2003).4

Furthermore, we must remember that what constitutes violence (much like crime) is often
defined from above (McIlwaine 1999). That is, the “legitimacy” of violence in a given society relates
to whether it furthers or threatens the social order. Consequently, the elimination of violence from
below in public space has often been the exclusion of those who are a priori defined as illegitimate
and thus threatening to the existing order (Mitchell 2003b). Moreover, the “existing order”
increasingly means the economic order, as there is “a growing corporate stamp on the monopoly on
violence” (Atkinson 2003, 1834). The corollary of the corporatization of violence is neoliberalism
and, accordingly, it is the victims of capitalism (the poor) and those without property (homeless
people) who are recast as both the transgressors of public space and dangerous perpetrators of violence (Davis 1992; Mitchell 1997).

The question of legitimacy is at bottom one of authority, literally referring to that which is justifiable based on existing laws, which are themselves determined by the already powerful and implemented through means of violence, whether implied or actualized (Blomley 2000, 2003). Thus, contra conventional wisdom, it is violence (and its monopolization and obfuscation through law) that paradoxically determines legitimacy in contemporary societies. So whereas order defines legitimacy in its own terms through either explicit or implicit violence, unmediated public space recognizes democracy by igniting debate about what is legitimate and illegitimate (Deutsche 1996). This is precisely why neoliberalism is so concerned with privatizing space, because the pervasiveness of the contemporary property regime, and its associated violence, places the legitimacy of private space seemingly beyond question (Blomley 2000, 2003). The unmediated vision of public space, a view that understands a collective right to the city, is thus increasingly threatened everywhere that neoliberal ideology has planted its seeds (Mitchell 2003b).

Amid widespread privatization and spending cuts, which are concomitant to the IFIs’ promotion of structural adjustment programs (SAPs), “[explicit] violence has become . . . an attempt by embattled nation-states to regain their footing” (Ungar 2002, 49), meaning that violence from above is often the result of a state that has been transformed by following the neoliberal doctrine. Neoliberalism rhetorically advances the notion that to optimize individual freedom and economic efficiency, all that is needed is for the “interventionist” welfare state to step aside. Yet with paradoxical simultaneity, neoliberalism impels “deregulationist” states to assume markedly officious measures so as to produce or mobilize markets where competitive forces were formerly weak or absent (Peck 2001; Plehwe and Walpen 2006). Thus, neoliberalization has made states differently powerful, where instead of a reduction in the “size” of the national state, the hollowing out process
characteristically involves a coinciding “roll-back” and “roll-out” of state functions (Peck 2001). Moreover, it is not the state per se that is being hollowed out but “a historically and geographical specific institutionalization of the state, which in turn is being replaced, not by fresh air and free markets, but by a reorganized state apparatus” (Peck 2001, 447). Such “hollowing out” undermines the capacity of states to attend adequately to the needs of their citizenry by exacerbating the social circumstances that underscore conflict, namely by perpetuating inequality. Ultimately, repression is frequently used to protect state power and maintain control (Welsh 2002). Accordingly, the reorganized state apparatus is by nature decidedly authoritarian in its character. Neoliberalization is a process that replaces Keynesian-style redistributions such as progressive taxation, income transfer programs, and social service delivery with a regressive regime of market discipline, in which new modes of state intervention either trap the working poor between unemployment and dead-end service jobs or actively enforce their involvement through the (re)criminalization of poverty, large-scale incarceration, social surveillance, and a range of microregulatory interventions that ensure persistent “job readiness” (Peck 2001; Peck and Tickell 2002; Coleman 2004). In Cambodia, this is adequately illustrated by increasingly common acts of regulation, disciplining, and containment of the already marginalized or newly dispossessed poor through crackdowns on unions and forced evictions.

Preventative measures used to realize the ordered view of public space, such as prohibition of assembly, may reduce the frequency and scale of demonstrations in the short term, but they ultimately alienate the population and spawn more violence as they increase the likelihood of clashes between police and activists on an extended timeline (Tilly 2003). This is precisely why Warner (2002, 70) maintains, “any distortion or blockage in access to a public [space] can be so grave, leading people to feel powerless and frustrated.” Violence begets more violence, which counteracts the ultimate goal of a nonviolent society. Recognition and acceptance of the unmediated view of public
space by all interested parties offers the only tenable solution to this vicious cycle. Unfortunately, as this article will demonstrate, democracy as public space is a vision that neoliberalism is unwilling and indeed incapable of accommodating.

7.3 Cambodia’s Geopolitical Struggles: From Cold War Proxy to the Washington Consensus

During the late twentieth century, Cambodia hosted nearly three decades of war, marked most significantly by three appalling atrocities. First, a merciless bombing campaign led by the United States turned neutral Cambodia into a napalm inferno and left approximately 600,000 dead as the Vietnam War spilled across its borders (Kiljunen 1984). Second, there was an autogenocide at the hands of the Khmer Rouge regime, where in a population of seven million at the time, an estimated one and a half million people died as a result of overexertion, malnutrition, disease, and execution (Heuveline 2001). Third, with Cold War geopolitics continuing to command the foreign policy agendas of many global north governments, there was a decade of silence on behalf of the international community following the tragedy of the Pol Pot era, as it was communist Vietnam that had brought down the Khmer Rouge regime and continued to govern Cambodia as a client state throughout the 1980s (Kiernan 1996). As the Iron Curtain fell in 1989, and the global political climate shifted, the Cambodian question that had been allowed to fester for a decade could finally be answered. Democracy came to Cambodia in 1993, following a UN-sponsored transition intended to provide a final solution to the country’s ongoing civil war.

These unfolding events in Cambodia took place during a time of monumental change at the global level. The early 1970s marked the beginning of an economic paradigm shift, as disillusion with the record of state involvement in social and economic life swept over the global north, leading to a new economic orthodoxy that believed the most efficient economic regulator is to “leave things to the market” (Rapley 2004). With this emergent neoliberalism, or what Williamson (1990) once
identified as the Washington Consensus, the involvement of the state in the economy was deemed overly bureaucratic and thus an inefficient and unnecessary drain on public coffers. To address the growing debt crisis, development aid was exported to the global south primarily via the auspices of the World Bank and IMF in the form of SAPs prescribing deregulated markets to promote free trade, streamlined taxation, and the sell off of public enterprises and state-owned corporations.

Throughout the 1980s, SAPs were not part of the platform used to push markets into Cambodia. Instead, the first half of the decade saw de facto privatization creep across the country, and in response to the emerging sea change in global geopolitics, the Cambodian government introduced a number of economic reforms in 1989, consisting of changes to land tenure, tax, and marketing policies; a new investment law designed to attract foreign capital; and a separation of the state from production through the reduction of subsidies and the privatization of state-owned businesses (Um 1990; St. John 1997). These reforms came on the heels of Cambodian leader Hun Sen’s visit with the staunchly capitalist Thai Prime Minister Chatichai, who was vocal in his desire to transform Indochina “from a battlefield to a market place” (Um 1990, 97). The timing of the Cambodian reforms was not incidental, as the fall of the Soviet Union that same year signaled to Cambodian elites that the communist era had ended, leaving autarky or the free market economics of the West as the two most obvious remaining options. With Chatichai’s coaxing, the Cambodian government decided to get on board early, presumably in the hope of securing new international patrons before the rush of other former Soviet satellites came to the same conclusion. Furthermore, the lack of SAPs throughout the 1980s was not due to unsuitability of the economy per se; rather, it was a case of Cambodia still being under Vietnam’s communist wing and the West’s reluctance to get further embroiled in the Indochina quagmire. The UNTAC mission of the early 1990s effectively rectified this problem, where under the banner of “democracy,” a host of neoliberal reforms washed in along with the expediting and expansion of those already started by the ruling Cambodian People’s
Party (CPP) in the late 1980s. Although globalization of the economy is not a new experience for the
global south, and has deep historical roots in both Southeast Asia and Cambodia, the amplification
of this process under SAPs is new. The result has been a constricted ability of most states to
regulate their economies, which often translates into declining local control over social and political
conditions (Riddell 2003).

In line with a fundamentalist orthodoxy that ensures that democracy is only extended to the
realm of the political, as a preordained economic system remains insulated from popular concern
(Abrahamsen 2000), the architects of UNTAC made certain that neoliberalism, an ideology derived
from a very different context in the post-Keynesian west, was a requirement of Cambodia’s
posttransitional government. From this perspective, it is possible to see UNTAC as concerned not
with democracy per se but rather with conferring legitimacy on a regime that had recently emerged
from Vietnamese clientelism and whose leader, Hun Sen, was already proving himself committed to
a neoliberal cause. When immediately following the UNTAC mission CPP lost the 1993 elections to
Prince Norodom Ranariddh and his FUNCINPEC party (a French acronym for National United
Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Co-operative Cambodia), the international
community was effectively stunned. Yet this unexpected turn of events was ultimately of little
consequence, as a blind eye was turned when CPP, still in control of the military (a major failing of
UNTAC to be sure), refused to accept FUNCINPEC’s electoral victory. Threatening secession of all
the land to the east of the Mekong River and the resumption of civil war, Hun Sen was allowed to
force his way into a co-prime ministerial position (Peou 2000). The official explanation for
UNTAC’s acceptance of an outcome inconsistent with the election results is that it was not in a
position to confront CPP militarily (Boutros-Ghali 1995). A skeptical view suggests that Cambodia
was preordained as the UN’s successful peacekeeping model, and to avoid having the whole
operation blow up in its face, the UN agreed to preside over the creation of an inauspicious coalition
between CPP and FUNCINPEC (Roberts 2001). Even more critical would be to posit that if the mockery Cambodian elites made of democracy and peace was so easily disregarded (see later in the discussion of the 1997 coup d’état), then the final aspect of Cambodia’s triple transition from war to peace, authoritarianism to democracy, and command economy to free market was clearly given precedence over the other two.

As the Cambodian state is increasingly both neoliberalized and undergoing internationalization (Glassman 1999) in its developmental agenda, planning agencies, decision-making powers, and economic orientation as each becomes increasingly integrated into transnational circuits of capital and expertise (Sneddon 2007), what makes actually existing neoliberalism in Cambodia distinctly Cambodian is how local elites co-opted, transformed, and rearticulated neoliberal reforms. This has been done in such a way that reinforces existing patron–client relations through a framework that initially “asset stripped” foreign resources brought in to support the building of the liberal peace (Richmond and Franks 2007). Later in the transitional process came the instrumentalization of violence in one major sector of the national economy, where through means of plundering Cambodia’s forests, “shadow state” strategies were used “as coping mechanisms by a political leadership struggling to assert its control over key resources in order to translate its position into effective power, if not comprehensive statehood” (Le Billon and Springer 2007, 19; see also Le Billon 2000).

The phrase shadow state is borrowed from Reno (1995), who uses it in the context of Sierra Leone to refer to a system through which leaders draw authority from their abilities to informally control markets and material rewards. The shadow state response allows elites to amass extraordinary wealth that is pocketed rather than put back into developing the country, as this money is obtained through unofficial channels. Potential rivals are bound to the rulers in exchange for largesse, negating the creation of strong bureaucracies that could potentially heighten independent tendencies among
elites. Such actually existing neoliberalism thereby allows systems of clientelism and patronage to continue. In the Cambodian context, the shadow state response became an answer to the political challenges posed by neoliberal governance, whereby in addition to being a means of allocating goods and services, the market was used as a form of social regulation (Graf 1995). Rather than opposing the dominant neoliberal paradigm, the Cambodian polity, when placed into a transitional phase, had an interest in co-opting its general shell in an effort to reshape it into an instrument of coercive power and subsequently to benefit from the opportunities it presented elites for self-enrichment (Le Billon and Springer 2007). Thus, the popular assertion among Cambodians that mafia governs their country is only partially correct. The term mafia implies criminality, so whereas CPP’s consolidation of wealth has been in some respects illicit, they have primarily used “legitimate” means of accumulation by dispossession (see Harvey 2005; Glassman 2006) through the framework provided to them by the neoliberal model. In addition to violence, whether latent or realized, such legitimation also includes the ability to control the privatization of public assets insofar as ensuring that the members of the ruling party and their inner circle of clients end up with the private rights to ownership.

7.4 Legitimizing a Coup d’état: Donor Apathy and the Business of Foreign Aid

Partisan fighting continues to mar the Cambodian landscape, the most obvious incident being the bloody CPP-led coup of July 1997, which effectively terminated the power-sharing arrangement made following the 1993 elections. Although the coalition government was officially continued, Hun Sen handpicked Ranariddh’s replacement, Ung Huot, who amounted to little more than a CPP puppet. Nevertheless, most multilateral and bilateral donors refused to label the July violence a coup and were largely indifferent to the impact this event had on Cambodian democracy. Prior to the coup, donors emphasized their support was contingent on Cambodia’s continued path toward
democracy. Further democratization, however, was not the primary objective. Instead, “[p]olitical stability for economic development was [the international community’s] top concern” (Peou 2000, 379).

In contrast to the period from 1993 to 1995 when donors attached few conditionalities to their aid, the year 1996 marked the beginning of donor demands, primarily directed at the promotion of ‘stability’, which may have encouraged Hun Sen to justify his coup against Ranariddh (Peou 2000). Thus, although aid was reduced following the coup from the amount of US$475 million, pledged at the Consultative Group Meeting (CGM) just days before the coup on 1–2 July 1997, to US$375.4 million (Peou 1998), the reduction was temporally insignificant as stability was soon restored with Hun Sen at the helm. The amount of aid actually dispersed to a recipient country rarely equals the amount pledged by donors. Cambodia typically receives approximately 60 percent of the amount pledged each year (Marston 2002). In this regard, 1997 may be viewed as a “good” year for Cambodia’s aid business, as the actual disbursement figure was approximately 79 percent of the total pledged amount. Moreover, as early as late July during an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum meeting, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced that Washington was already prepared to wipe the slate clean for Hun Sen (Peou 2000). CPP was only required to denounce the use of force against opposition parties and allow Ranariddh to return to Cambodia to participate in elections scheduled for 1998.

As for multilateral donors, the IMF did not have to respond to the incident, as it had been withholding Cambodia’s SAPs since May 1996 due to its vexation with the scandalous deforestation taking place as a shadow state response to its prescribed forestry concession model (Le Billon 2000; Le Billon and Springer 2007). Although the World Bank did temporarily suspend aid to Cambodia in 1997, this seemed to be an act of solidarity with the IMF rather than disapproval of the July military confrontation, as the announcement was not made until 23 September 1997. The World Bank’s
statement was prepared in conjunction with the IMF, which at that time publicized that it was suspending further assistance to Cambodia, not because of the disdain that was shown for democracy in July, but as a result of the Royal Government of Cambodia’s (RGC) inability to meet its economic conditions (Tith 1998).

China did not try to hide its favoritism of Hun Sen, saying it would not interfere with the will of the Cambodian people (Peou 2000), a position also held by France, which made it known that it viewed Hun Sen as the only guarantor of stability (Bjornlund and Course 1998). Japan, the largest bilateral donor to Cambodia, vowed to maintain its assistance plan and justified this position by contending that Hun Sen had promised to preserve the country’s democratic institutions and coalition government (Lizée 2000). The neoliberal pragmatism of ASEAN was also evident. The group considered CPP’s use of force “unfortunate” and Cambodia’s admission into ASEAN was delayed “until a later date,” but at the same time, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states was reaffirmed and ASEAN investors continued to move in (Peou 2000).

Although the Americans temporarily suspended aid, the deferral only lasted a total of thirty-five days, as humanitarian aid (half of the $35 million pledged) was formally resumed on 8 August 1997 (Human Rights Watch 1997).

The near universal refusal among donors to label the events of July 1997 as a coup implicitly conferred legitimacy on Hun Sen’s violent ascendancy, thereby betraying democratic processes in favor of the stability offered by the entrenched power of Hun Sen’s regime. The insignificant reduction in aid and lukewarm response to the coup are not surprising if we consider that observers like Kevin (2000) and Roberts (2001) view the July upheaval as marking a transition from violence to politics, one that would supposedly bring about increased stability as Hun Sen was able to consolidate his hegemonic position. That the coup itself was a brazen display of violence and, in the long run, by virtue of the apathetic response, irrelevant to most donors is closely related to the very
question of aid. This is a query that is ultimately not about whether aid contributes directly to the development process but one of interests. In contrast to Pronk (2001), who contends that aid should not be selective and instead used as a catalyst for development through conditionalities, Petras and Veltmeyer (2002) argue that aid is more accurately considered a catalyst of regression and an aid to imperialism insofar as a realist approach informs us that it has historically been used by aspiring hegemonic states to conquer markets and promote the interests of their capitalist classes against both other competitors and national socialist opponents (see also Escobar 1995; Leys 1996; Rist 1997). Because the neoliberal model provokes greater inequalities, decreases the share of labor, and increases the share of corporate (especially foreign) wealth in national incomes (Cox 2002; Rapley 2004), foreign aid, whether by selectivity or conditionality, simply hastens the introduction of policies responsible for the maldistribution of national income by promoting and ensuring the adoption of neoliberal reforms. Donors are biased in favor of rewarding pro-market and trade-oriented policies on the part of aid-receiving countries, thus clearly introducing ideological and political elements about the socioeconomic order into a seemingly technocratic discussion about the prerequisites of governance (Hout 2004). Whereas an idealist approach is content to view foreign aid as a disinterested policy, divorced from the interests of a capitalist class and thus geared exclusively toward humanitarian concerns, the historical-structural context demonstrates otherwise, as the social component of foreign aid has little, if any, effect in compensating for the loss of income shares and for the slashing of social allocations in national budgets (Petras and Veltmeyer 2002).

The fact that throughout East Asia brutal authoritarian regimes such as Indonesia under Soeharto and South Korea under Syngman Rhee “were encouraged, so long as they promoted political stability, were anticommunist, and protected the development of economic systems that were broadly capitalist,” confirms that contra the rhetoric of western modernization, it was the threat to capitalism, not democracy, that was the principal driver of foreign policy in the region (Rodan and
Hewison 2004, 386). In the end, like his East Asian counterparts, Hun Sen was not required to act democratically; all that mattered was that his government remained committed to further neoliberalization. Had the speculative notion of a Ranariddh “counter-coup” materialized (Kevin 2000; Roberts 2001), whether FUNCINPEC committed themselves to democratization or otherwise, this also would have been inconsequential, so long as a neoliberal outlook was maintained.

The trampling of democratic norms, although publicly described as regrettable, is given implicit support as long as such subversions run parallel to the projects of stability and order. The periodic lamentations of donors represent a convenient political tool, as they encourage us to focus our view inward on Cambodia’s democratic shortcomings. Yet this is a priori an Orientalizing gaze (Said 2003), as we are never encouraged to pull the lens back to examine how donors themselves place economics before and separate from politics. Rather than recognizing the politically constructed character of all economic relations, neoliberal economics posits a distinct separation between the economy and politics, as though states and markets are diametrically opposed principles of social organization (Robison 2004). To interpret neoliberalism as nothing more than an economic reform agenda overlooks a critical element of its strength. It is also a political doctrine that prescribes a preferred social and political order, whereby the depoliticization of policymaking that neoliberalism envisages is a specific conception of how power should operate, and who should be exercising it (Rodan and Hewison 2004). This helps to explain why many Cambodian scholars, still preoccupied with the country’s communist past, have been slow to recognize the neoliberalization of the contemporary Cambodian state. Moreover, such partitioning misreads (or more accurately ignores) how power is actually operationalized in a capitalist system. Accordingly, the Cambodian government is frequently accused of cronyism in reference to the cozy relationships between politicians and the agents of capital (Dixon 2002). Yet, we can rightly ask when in any capitalist system have the agents of capital not been intimately connected with politicians? Indeed, it is this very hallmark of capitalism
whose character is obfuscated by the orthodox neoliberal view.

Speaking of the Cambodian context, Peang-Meth (1997, 290–91) comments on the pious meaning of democracy in U.S. foreign policy and the precedence order is given in contemporary geopolitics:

Non-western states have continued to embrace stability and order as a first priority, but the west, notably the United States, which has preached individual rights, freedom and democracy, has declined to intervene in conflicts where order has been preserved at the expense of human rights and freedom. The United States has, by inference, sanctioned an international norm of conduct that prizes stability and preservation of the status quo when these would be threatened by aggressive advocacy and individual rights and freedom.

Thus, instead of coming from democratic consolidation, a long-term project for which the juggernaut of global capitalism is not prepared to wait, stability in Cambodia came in the form of Hun Sen consolidating his grip on power. Even as the country’s transition to democracy lay in shambles by the end of 1997, the transition to free market economics was in fine form as the neoliberal agenda was preserved by a government committed to its three basic tenets: privatization, liberalization, and deregulation.

7.5 Taking Space for Representation: The Democracy Square Movement and the Neoliberal Response

With Ranariddh’s return in March 1998 after nine months in exile, Cambodia’s political leaders agreed to hold parliamentary elections again in July 1998 (Hughes 2003b). The donor community had focused foreign policy responses to the 1997 coup on the need for the 1998 elections to be “free and fair”; however, Ranariddh’s presence did little to improve the prospects of such conditions as the campaign was once again marred by intimidation and CPP domination of the media (Downie 2000). While coercion undoubtedly facilitated CPP’s electoral victory, the party failed to capture enough of the popular vote to form a majority government. Although a political stalemate ensued, the postelection period saw something remarkable occur. In a strong showing of solidarity,
Cambodians began gathering by the thousands in Democracy Square on 24 August 1998 to protest the results of the election (Eckardt and Chea Sotheacheath 1998).\(^8\)

Denying the from below spirit of the movement, the opposition parties claimed responsibility for the demonstrations that followed and many foreign diplomats uncritically accepted this claim (Grainger and Chaumeau 1998). Cambodia observer Caroline Hughes (2003b), who was on hand during the demonstrations and conducted numerous interviews with participants, suggests this was a spontaneous uprising as many of the demonstrators were refugees from the provinces who fled following rumors of retaliation against those who failed to vote for CPP. Rural surveillance was effected pre-election primarily via the politics of gift giving, whereby villagers were inducted into the party at public ceremonies in exchange for token gifts or cash. Refusal to participate marked one as an outsider, making party loyalties well known in the community and increasing the likelihood of post-election retributive violence against those who declined gifts. Local authorities organized largesse, and those who did not partake could expect any current or future livelihood assistance to be curtailed. Although poll-watching agencies assured voters that party membership did not require one to vote for that particular party, during gift receiving ceremonies villagers were often required to swear Buddhist oaths of loyalty, placing traditional notions of merit and honor at stake. Widespread rumors that polling stations were monitored by satellite and that voting card numbers were being entered into computers that could track each vote further intensified villagers’ notions of CPP omniscience (Hughes 2006). The urban protest environment provided a sense of empowerment and solidarity, where the gaze of the international community and media was a virtual sanctuary in comparison to the panoptic conditions of the rural village where individuals were required to keep their views secret if they valued their physical and economic well-being.

Hughes (2003b) suggests that many protesters came to express both dissatisfaction with the election results and dismay with the social and economic marginalization they faced in their daily
existence. This finding places Willner’s (1972, 353) assertion that public protests are often “manifest expressions of deeper, broader, latent dissatisfactions” in the Cambodian context, where the disaffections expressed by participants were derived from the “sacrifices” made for development under the prescriptions of the neoliberal order; that is, the grinding poverty, pronounced inequality, and harrowing socioeconomic insecurity of their daily lives. In this context, Democracy Square became a liberatory space of self-discovery and self-exposure in which those normally subjected to the panoptic surveillance of the village could situate their embodiment by actively taking the spaces of the capital for public unmediated use.

The protests continued for three weeks before taking a violent turn on 7 September 1998, when Hun Sen found pretext to move against the demonstrations following a grenade explosion near his home in Phnom Penh (Moorthy and Samreth Sopha 1998). The Prime Minister called for the arrest of opposition leaders, dispatching hundreds of riot police to destroy the protesters’ encampment and quell the movement. Although violence from below was minimal, violence from above was apparent as the crowds were broken up by armed forces using rifle butts and clubs to beat protesters into submission, resulting in one civilian death (“Democracy Square flattened” 1998). When this failed to clear out the park, the police returned two days later, this time using electric cattle prods, gunfire, and a bulldozer (“Democracy Square Flattened” 1998). Two monks were killed in the skirmishes with police, provoking public outrage (Pok Sokundara and Moorthy 1998). Hun Sen quickly moved to forbid monks from taking part in protests and then banned demonstrations altogether. Many Cambodians defied the ban, and the following day approximately 8,000 people again took to the streets in a march led by monks (Chea Sotheacheath and Eckardt 1998). Responding to the specter of violence from above, some of the protesters reacted with the threat of violence from below, as several marchers armed themselves with sticks, stones, and guns (Peou 2000). The totalitarian armor of Cambodia’s deprivers of public space was starting to crack as their
control over the public domain had become too intense. This dominance resulted not in the continued submissiveness of the population but from the perspective of those in power, the undesired effect of violent outbursts from below against the oppression of an exploitative social order. The government crackdown continued and eventually the protests subsided. During the demonstrations, twenty-six lives were lost (Peou 2000), and in the days following the crackdown another eighteen bodies were discovered lying in irrigation ditches, ponds, and rivers around Phnom Penh (Bou Saroeun 1998). As for the political deadlock, it was finally settled on 25 November 1998, when Ranariddh struck a deal with Hun Sen to form a new coalition government (Hayes 1998).

The pandemonium that swelled in the postelection period can be viewed as consequential to a lack of what Taylor (1991, 167) calls “independence of action,” a situation that becomes acutely manifest during election periods in Cambodia given the predominance of voter intimidation. Such lack of freedom results from violence from above creating a virtual absence of public space, which “enable[s] and facilitate[s] the expression of extremes of violence [from below]” (Taylor 1991, 167). In this sense, the mobilization of the populace and the occasional manifestation of violence from below were insurrectionary acts against those in power. By contesting RGC’s visualizations and administrations of public spaces and remaking them as spaces for representation, Cambodians were actively rediscovering that the strongest source of power stems from their own solidarity. RGC’s use of violence from above and the crackdown on the demonstrations, although successful in the immediate sense, can only have alienated large segments of the population. Accordingly, this suggests a crisis of legitimacy for RGC, which, as a state made differently powerful via neoliberalization, cannot adequately address the demands of citizens to improve their living standards. This explains why Hughes (2003b) found that so many of the demonstrators she interviewed expressed other latent dissatisfactions. Constrained by neoliberal policy objectives, the violent response of RGC is akin to a caged animal, where “showing teeth” is but a last-ditch effort to maintain authority.
Strong states have appropriate capacity and can legitimize themselves without recourse to explicit violence by listening to and addressing citizens’ demands; that is, through the very practice of democracy (Welsh 2002). In contrast, as a weak state with a policy orientation that lacks interest in meeting the needs of the populace, RGC predictably takes an authoritarian stance, resorting to violence to regain its footing when citizens begin to make their demands known in the spaces of the public. In Migdal’s (1988) rendering, there are two facets to a weak state. The first concerns the relative distribution of power between state and society, in particular between the state and dominant interests in the private sector of the economy, thus the question of “state autonomy.” The second facet can be defined as “state capacity,” which draws heavily on the Weberian dichotomy of patrimonial and rational-bureaucratic polities. On this basis, Hutchison (2001, 56) contends that “a weak state is one in which relatively little distinction is made between the personal interests and official duties of decision-makers in the executive, legislature, and/or bureaucracy and, therefore, is one in which the policy-making process is constantly stymied by particularistic demands.” If we accept that neoliberalization is an elite-driven project as it so clearly seems to be, then neoliberalism appears more appropriate to the conditions that underline weak states, as the desires of the capitalist class coincide with, and indeed come to dominate the policy orientation, making “particularistic demands” a hallmark of the neoliberalized state. The striking similarities to Cambodia’s shadow state response outlined earlier should not go unnoticed here. Moreover, in contrast to the common misconception that authoritarian regimes constitute strong states, Jomo (2003) suggests that authoritarianism is actually indicative of weak states in the sense that they are unable to secure legitimacy among the population, thus requiring overtly repressive measures to maintain order. The lack of consultation with the general population as to the economic character of the state, coupled with reduced access to social provisions for the poor—who continue to constitute an overwhelming majority in most states of the global south—means that accountability has a lacunate quality in the
neoliberal state. This ultimately works to further adhere neoliberalism to an authoritarian disposition as it seeks to fill the legitimacy vacuum with blatant violence, rather than its dormant implication (Canterbury 2005). Such a repressive pattern is observable in The Cambodia Daily headlines presented in Table 7.1, where violence from above is seen as a persistent feature of RGC’s attempt to govern the nation. Therefore, from the perspective of a weak government seeking to retain power, the attempt to create and enforce an orderly public space takes precedence over the allowance of democracy as public space. Weak governments fear unmediated public spaces, as penetrating criticisms will inevitably arise to an extent unseen in strong, accountable, democratic regimes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7.1: Symptoms of A Weak State</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Rights Group Reports Rise in Political Slayings&quot;</td>
<td>18/06/2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Union Leader Found Gagged, Unconscious&quot;</td>
<td>25/06/2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Groups Say Police Beat Protesting Villagers&quot;</td>
<td>10/08/2004</td>
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<td>&quot;Police Accused of Violence at Poipet Eviction&quot;</td>
<td>15/09/2004</td>
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<td>&quot;Garment Workers Report Death Threats&quot;</td>
<td>08/10/2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Minister Condemns Stripping, Beating of Striking Policemen&quot;</td>
<td>02/12/2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Factory Protest Broken Up by Tear Gas, Force&quot;</td>
<td>23/02/2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Police Kill 5 Poipet Protesters&quot;</td>
<td>22/03/2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Sam Rainsy Activist Beaten to Death&quot;</td>
<td>04/04/2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Soldiers Disperse Factory Strike With Gunfire&quot;</td>
<td>06/04/2005</td>
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Source: Compiled from The Cambodia Daily.

In spite of the massive resistance that followed the 1998 election, a movement that reflected a burgeoning of democratic empowerment from below, the international community was quick to declare the elections free and fair so that it could return to business as usual with the Cambodian government. This position represents an affront to the will of the Cambodian people, clearly illustrating the willingness of donors to lend support to an unpopular and authoritarian leader in the name of order and stability (read business interests and capital) over the potential for genuine democratic awakening. To some Cambodians, the donor community’s espousal of democracy now appeared as little more than a boldfaced lie:
Some people in the international community just come to do business, and play with the prostitutes, so I don’t have any confidence in them. And also in 1998, a lot of Cambodian people [were] doing the demonstration about the election results in Phnom Penh, but the international community still recognize and support the election results. . . . I also want the international country stop betray[ing] the Cambodia people because I think that when they donate the aid to Cambodia, I think some countries also have their own interests [in mind]. (Interview, small business owner, male, age 47, 23 September 2004, Phnom Penh)

7.6 Secured Hegemony or Forced Retreat? Demonstrations, Denial, and Democratic Awakening

Between 1999 and 2002, the Hun Sen–led RGC began to ease up on its overt domination of Cambodian public space, as authorities repeatedly turned a blind eye to most demonstrations held during these years (Hughes 2003b). This retreat from public space coincided with the modified public persona of Hun Sen, who no longer portrayed himself as Cambodia’s strongman (Osborne 2000). Although Hun Sen’s withdrawal may appear to suggest that CPP was beginning to comply with international pressure to respect the country’s constitutional freedoms of expression and assembly given their position of aid dependency, the reality is much different. In the first instance, international pressure to conform to democratic norms was hardly acute, as illustrated earlier in the discussion of donor responses to the 1997 coup. Peou’s (2000) analysis provides an alternative interpretation, suggesting that CPP’s new approach is better explained in terms of the party’s renewed confidence following its 1998 electoral victory. The new coalition government was very much a one-sided affair, as FUNCINPEC was an internally divided party due to both its near breakup in the wake of the 1997 coup and the poor leadership skills of Prince Ranariddh, who many donors perceived as lazy, incompetent, and corrupt (Roberts 2001). The problem that the Khmer Rouge insurgency posed for the ruling party, which resumed in 1992 following their abrupt withdrawal from the UN peace process, had also evaporated after the defection of several high-ranking soldiers in 1997 and 1998 (Peou 1998). The guerrilla group disintegrated altogether following the death of Pol Pot in April 1998 (Sainsbury 1998). This all appears to suggest that the hegemony of
CPP was relatively stable. With elections not set to occur again until 2003, public opinion and particularly demonstrations appeared, at least outwardly, to be of little consequence to the dominant party. The International Crisis Group (2000, 15) accordingly observed a marked decline in violence directed toward opposition members in 1999 but also warned that “this should not lead observers to conclude the government or the CPP has qualitatively changed its ways. Rather, the reverse is true: with one party clearly in charge of the country–and in possession of most of the weapons–few are willing to mount challenges.” Overt violence against opposition elements may have decreased, but the notion that few were willing to mount challenges is erroneous.

Phnom Penh has seen a significant increase in the number of public protests since the 1998 election. In reference to this emergent trend of social mobilization in the public spaces of the capital, Hughes (2003b, 183) comments that, “the upsurge in protest over the past few years appears to be linked to the perception, on the part of a range of discontented groups in the city, that a space for public expression has emerged.” It would seem that in contrast to the secured hegemony thesis, through the threat of violence from below, or at least what from above is a priori defined as illegitimate and threatening, RGC was pushed back on its heels and into the realization that it could no longer continue with such an overt strategy of spatial control. This was a forced retreat, and for the time being, Lefebvre’s notion of the right to the city had been won in what was clearly a profound victory for the ongoing process of democracy.

The lapse of overt CPP control over public space was, from the standpoint of absolute control, tactically risky for those in power. As the increasing frequency of demonstrations in Phnom Penh following the 1998 elections suggests, this relaxation by CPP allowed the democratic awakening fostered by the Democracy Square movement to grow considerably in the hearts and minds of Cambodians. Thus, although the Democracy Square movement may be viewed as unsuccessful inasmuch as authorities eventually dispersed it, the emerging protest trend is in fact
indicative of the movement’s success. Cambodians clearly learned a number of valuable lessons from this movement. Most important, the public spectacle of this massive show of solidarity allowed Cambodians to take the space necessary to rediscover themselves as both individuals and as an empowered collective:

I think [demonstrations] are a good way for Cambodian democracy because it can help people to speak their voice, to speak their ideas, yet before they don’t have these kind of rights to say about what they want, what they [are] feeling, but right now [during demonstrations], we can say, so that is good. (Interview, garment factory worker, female, age 24, 18 September 2004, Phnom Penh)

[When] the people discuss [with] each other or gather in the public space, it means they can speak about their ideas. It means, sometimes they can give advice to the government, and sometimes the government can tell about the problems that they have . . . it means we can show the experience of the people to the government, and the government to the people. So I think it is very good for demonstrations to make a meeting at the public spaces and . . . to discuss about politics in the public spaces. (Interview, monk, male, age 27, 3 November 2004, Pursat, conducted in English)

It is very important for democracy [for people to be able to protest in public space] because the democracy means they need the many idea of the people, and [when people demonstrate] they think about the people as bigger than the government . . . and because the people can say everything, can speak altogether no problem. (Interview, high school teacher, male, age 25, 6 November 2004, Pursat)

The government’s response to this democratic awakening has been to deny its existence. RGC has publicly ignored demonstrations to the best of its ability, retreating from view when encountered by protesters and denying their calls for government accountability by simply not responding (Hughes 2003b). Thus, although it may have initially appeared as though public expression no longer mattered to a firmly entrenched party, the reality was that CPP surely realized, by virtue of the groundswell of protest that emerged in the immediate post-election context, just how tenuous was its electoral victory. Feeling threatened by potential upheaval, the ruling party did not want to push its luck by cracking down on an angry and mobilized population. Instead, they withdrew from view, ignoring the situation until it eventually lost some steam.

7.7 Beautification and the War on Terror: Covert (Re)Productions of Space as CPP’s New Mode of Control

The new public positioning of RGC betrays a covert strategy to (re)produce Phnom Penh’s public
spaces, visually, administratively, and materially. The envisaged (re)production of space involves the expulsion of “unruly” elements of the population from the city and the replacement of unregulated squatter areas with both monuments to CPP authority (Hughes 2003a), and symbols of wealth, power, and modernity such as office buildings, high-rise apartments, and shopping complexes (Berthiaume and Nhem Chea Bunly 2005). Neoliberalism has produced conditions of globalized urban entrepreneurialism from which Phnom Penh is clearly not exempt. The (re)production of cultural spectacles, enterprise zones, waterfront development, and privatized forms of local governance reflects the powerful disciplinary effects of interurban competition as cities aggressively engage in mutually destructive place-marketing policies (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002). Through such promotion, cities actively facilitate and subsidize the very geographic mobility that initially rendered them vulnerable, also validating and reproducing extraneous rule systems as “capital is permitted to opt out from supporting local social production, and . . . the power of urban citizens to influence basic conditions of their everyday lives is increasingly undermined . . . [resulting in a] grim scenario of neoliberalized urban authoritarianism” (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 376; see also Peck and Tickell 2002).

As the vanguards of both after-welfarist statecraft and organized resistance to neoliberalization, cities represent key sites of governance failure, economic conflict, and social turmoil. For example, “Regressive welfare reforms and labor-market polarization . . . are leading to the (re)urbanization of (working and non-working) poverty, positioning cities at the bleeding edge of processes of punitive institution building, social surveillance, and authoritarian governance” (Peck and Tickell 2002, 395). Accordingly, as the newspaper headlines presented in Table 7.2 illustrate, it is no surprise that forced evictions, although contested, have become a common lived experience for the Cambodian poor. Former CPP municipal governor Chea Sophara, who in 1999 launched a beautification plan for Phnom Penh, spearheaded the city’s transformation (Hughes 2003a; Sodhy 2004). In Chea Sophara’s
view, squatter settlements are detrimental to Phnom Penh’s social order, and their replacement with “parks full of flowers” marks “the turning of a new page towards a culture of peace and promotion of social morality,” free from the “violence . . . that has created insecurity and turmoil in Cambodia for three decades” (Pen Khon 2000, 60). He also comments that squatter areas “are difficult to control and get access to. The area is like a barrier preventing fresh air from blowing into the city, instead of a foul stink,” and they “badly damage the beauty and well-managed social order of the capital” (Pen Khon 2000, 62–63). That Chea Sophara was popular among the propertied class of Phnom Penh is unsurprising. His actions increased their land value while simultaneously, in a long tradition of capitalist exclusions, pushing the “unsightly” and supposedly “violence prone” poor from public view.13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7.2: Forced Evictions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Squatters Try to Fend Off Relocation&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Villagers Would Rather Die Than Give Up Land&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Apsara Authority Moves to Evict Hundreds of Squatters&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;People Evicted from Floating Community&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Police Bulldoze Homes to Enforce Court Order&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Villagers Facing Eviction Appeal to Annan&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Police Bulldoze Tents of Evicted S'ville Families&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;200 Protest Evictions In Banteay Meanchey&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Families Facing Eviction Told Development Requires Sacrifices&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Villagers' Homes Razed While at Land Protest&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from The Cambodia Daily.

Sodhy (2004, 170), an apparent champion of the ordered vision of public space, has a favorable view of the beautification scheme, calling Chea Sophara “a force for modernity in Cambodia.” Indeed, Sodhy’s assertion is correct insofar as the beautification scheme cuts to the heart of modernization theory itself. Chea Sophara’s visualization and administration of space is representative of a colonial-inspired attitude that seeks to re-create so-called “backward” people into “properly” behaved citizens, which is nothing short of an erosion of the ability of the poor to define...
and take care of their own lives.\textsuperscript{14} Beautification is often a top-down approach to further the neoliberal agenda, effected in the name of aesthetics and profit, where “political activity is replaced in spaces like the mall, festival market-place, or redesigned park . . . by a highly commodified spectacle designed to sell either goods or the city as a whole” (Mitchell 2003b, 138–39; see also Boyer 1992; Goss 1996). The overarching goal of neoliberal policy experiments such as beautification is “to mobilize city space as an arena both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices” (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 368). Thus, far from being concerned with the corporeal well-being of the citizenry, the beautification of Phnom Penh is little more than a sales pitch to potential investors.

Beautification itself is neither necessarily conducive nor unfavorable to an open and democratic space; rather, it is the way in which beautification is implemented that makes it problematic. Speaking to “neoliberalism with Cambodian characteristics,” beautification has been used as a tool of exclusion. In RGC’s view, the beautification of Cambodia’s cities has as much to do with the removal of the poor and the homeless as it does the planting of shrubs and grass. This (re)criminalization of the poor and the homeless represents a defilement of the logic of representation, which must form the basis of any democratic system (Mitchell 2003b). Public space must allow unique individuals to join in collaborative efforts and still maintain their distinct voices (Staeheli and Thompson 1997), so that representation itself, whether of oneself or a group, may demand a physical space (Mitchell 2003b). The logic of representation concentrates on the right of individuals and groups to make their desires and needs known and represent themselves as legitimate claimants to public considerations. Beautification, although popular among the property-holding class in Cambodia, actually tramples over the concerns of the poor by failing to consider them as rightful petitioners to public interests and through negating their ownership of long-held possessions because they lack the “proper” (read Western-style) documentation that confers legitimacy on
property. This amounts to accumulation by dispossession and is at base a violent endeavor, made quite clear in the Cambodian context by the use of military force to buttress beautification’s ongoing removal of “criminal” squatter camps.

Such a typical conception of poverty as crime, used by Phnom Penh elites to sell their agenda to the population, should be juxtaposed against the “violences of property” (Blomley 2000, 2003), where the erasure of the originary violence on which property is based (the original moment of accumulation by dispossession, or “primitive accumulation”) serves to legitimize the exclusionary claims of the landowning elite vis-à-vis the homeless. Thus, it is imperative to recognize the violent legal geographies of property rights that entail violent “acts” of dispossession at the founding moment, as well as enduring violent “deeds” (which need not be physicalized to be operative, as self-policing becomes reflexive) that (re)enforce the exclusionary basis of private property (Blomley 2000, 2003). It is in this way that beautification can be viewed as a problematic enterprise, entangled in the violences of capital, where the rapid urbanization that precipitated the numerous squatter settlements of Phnom Penh’s perimeter represents one of the many undesired effects of free market economics. Thus, although CPP’s violent response to this problem is typically read as the manifestation of a supposed cultural proclivity for authoritarianism (see Peang-Meth 1991; Roberts 2001), such accounts fail to tell the whole story. Instead, a culturally sensitive critical political economy alerts us to the power geometries at play (Hart 2002), so that although violent expulsions may be culturally informed, they are equally enmeshed in the machinery of capital to ensure the enforcement of property regimes in toeing the neoliberal line (Canterbury 2005).

The relationship between RGC’s authoritarian behavior and the neoliberal concern with order is clearly illustrated by the routine roundup and exile of the homeless from Phnom Penh (Botumroath Lebun 2004; Kuch Naren and Pyne 2004) and the tourist mecca of Siem Reap, home to Angkor Wat (Thet Sambath 2004). Although the practice is denied by authorities, homeless people
and orphaned children are regularly gathered up by the military and shipped by truck out to the provinces, where they are dumped and told not to return to the city (Botumroath Lebun 2004; Kuch Naren and Pyne 2004). RGC’s roundup practice is ongoing, as most of the “disposables” eventually make their way back to Phnom Penh, indicating that the poor are willing to mount challenges to authorities’ (re)productions of public spaces and demand their right to the city. This resistance does not go unnoticed by RGC, and the (re)criminalization of the poor is increasingly seen in Cambodia, where street people often complain of being arbitrarily arrested and beaten by police for loitering (Reynolds and Yun Samean 2004). The homeless have no sanctuary to return to at the end of the day, and accordingly overt violence from above has become yet another facet of the many injustices that street people must negotiate in their daily lives. Ultimately, because city-level neoliberalism is premised on competitive interspatial place-marketing to attract potential tourism and investment, and the doctrine of neoliberalism itself hinges on the illusion of widespread prosperity, the visible presence of poor and homeless people in urban public space is seen as unwelcome and promotionally disadvantageous inasmuch as they reveal such utopianism to be false (Coleman 2004; Hubbard 2004).

The contestation of public space between those who have been relegated to a life of abject poverty by way of their state’s adherence to market ideology and the manifestation of authoritarian government responses concomitant to such neoliberal preoccupation can be seen in the newspaper headlines collected in Table 7.3. The government’s unspoken policy of dealing with the homeless was also evident both during and in the days leading up to the weeklong Inter-Parliamentarian ASEAN summit held in Phnom Penh from 13 to 19 September 2004. Along with banishing the homeless from the capital’s streets, RGC imposed a strict social order during the day of the meeting by forcing the removal of all visible signs of informal economic activity, such as street-stall vendors and impromptu roadside gas stations. Presumably, RGC took these measures to project to ASEAN
delegates an image of Cambodia as a modern, ordered society, and hence an economically vigorous one. At the same time, a car bomb attack on the Australian Embassy in Jakarta just days earlier served as an ideal pretext for removing the marginalized from public space, as RGC cited “security precautions” to effectively silence those critical of their ordered approach (Lor Chandara 2004).

Table 7.3: The Battle of Homelessness and Poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Authorities Round Up, Detox Street Children&quot;</td>
<td>10/07/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;NGOs Chastise City for Mass Arrest of Addicts&quot;</td>
<td>12/07/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Street Children Shipped to Banteay Meanchey&quot;</td>
<td>13/07/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Detentions are Common, Street Children Say&quot;</td>
<td>15/07/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Spiriting Away The Homeless&quot;</td>
<td>07/08/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Hungry Farmers Stage March Through City&quot;</td>
<td>10/09/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Police Remove Beggars from Siem Reap Streets&quot;</td>
<td>20/09/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Rights Groups Protest Illegal Round-Ups of City Homeless&quot;</td>
<td>22/11/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Gov't says Begging Villagers Should Go Home&quot;</td>
<td>29/11/2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Hungry Villagers Travel to Capital Despite Ban&quot;</td>
<td>10/12/2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from The Cambodia Daily.

RGC’s tendency to suggest a concern with security as both a rationale and excuse for its own authoritarian behaviors has become commonplace in recent years. This strategy appeals to the notion of securing market principles, while also taking advantage of the growing tolerance and support of authoritarian regimes by the United States in its global war on terror (Rodan and Hewison 2004). Un and Ledgerwood (2002, 102) warn that there is “widespread concern that the government is using the global fear of terrorism, in the aftermath of the attacks on the United States, as a pretext to silence opposition parties.” This concern became particularly manifest following a string of some sixty arrests after 9/11, when CPP began accusing members of the Sam Rainsy Party and FUNCINPEC of belonging to the Cambodian Freedom Fighters (CFF), an insurgent group led by Khmer-Americans based out of California (Sodhy 2004). The group had vowed to take down the Hun Sen government, and in November 2000, Cambodia witnessed a rare showing of marked violence from below when the heavily armed CFF attacked government buildings in Phnom Penh.
Although labeled as terrorists by RGC, CFF maintains it is a lawful group with 50,000 supporters in Cambodia (Sodhy 2004). Many Cambodians are unconvinced, but far from siding with the government, they believe CPP staged the CFF attack to smoke out opposition to Hun Sen (Marston 2002). Langran (2001, 156) suggests that the insurgency serves as “a reminder of the recent and fragile nature of Cambodia’s democracy.” If CFF is in fact a genuine opposition group and not a CPP ruse, the counterpoint to Langran could also be argued. The attack could be viewed as evidence of democracy’s functioning, as the paradox of democracy identified by Le Vine (2001) demonstrates that violence from below is often necessary for democratic renewal. Nevertheless, the fact that accusations of terrorism can now be extended at will toward any political movement that may challenge CPP authority, and can be further deployed against official opposition parties, has detrimental implications for Cambodian public space. Such use of subterfuge is a blatant attempt to restrict Mitchell’s (1995, 115) notion of public space as “an unconstrained space within which political movements can organize and expand into wider arenas.”

As if RGC’s calls for an orderly and stable public space were not justified enough in the eyes of neoliberal donors, as “[w]ithout order [and stability], the argument goes, liberty is simply impossible. And that order must be explicitly geographic, it centers on the control of the streets and the question of just who has the right to the city” (Mitchell 2003b, 17, emphasis in original), even cynics within the donor community would now be prone to accepting such claims in the post–9/11 world. Hence, order and stability conceived as such represent veritable threats to the democratic ideal of public space.

7.8 Undermining the Public Trust: The Anti-Thai Riots and RGC’s Renewed Crackdown on Demonstrations

CPP’s overt control of public space returned in 2003, as the year began with mob chaos in the streets of Phnom Penh. The violence erupted on 29 January 2003, when rumors began to circulate that
Suvanan Kongying, a Thai actress popular in Cambodia, had allegedly claimed on Thai radio that Angkor Wat rightfully belonged to Thailand and should be repatriated (Hinton 2006). Some Cambodians responded by protesting in front of the Thai Embassy, which they subsequently burned to the ground, while others looted several Thai-owned businesses located in the capital (“Mobs Go Berserk” 2003). Although law enforcement was conspicuously absent for hours as the protest raged (Tin Maung Maung Than 2004), the government response since has been to crack down on virtually all demonstrations in the name of order and stability (ADHOC 2004). The Ministry of Interior, responsible for granting licenses to hold public demonstrations, responded to the ban in a letter dated 8 April 2005, where spokesperson Khieu Sopheak directly addressed union leaders and human rights groups who complain that RGC has refused to grant permits for all demonstrations held since the anti-Thai riots and has used violence against those that do arise:

> Organisers did not fill out forms or abide by the Law in Demonstrations, and some demonstrations did not notify the authorities. . . . Participants always caused serious impacts to security and public order, which create opportunity for gangs, and other offenders to steal, snatch or commit other acts which cause damage to public and private property. (Pin Sisovann 2005, 12)

Khieu Sopheak continued by blasting human rights workers and the critical reports they have written in response to the government ban, stating, “[They] earn for their boss only, not for the interests of the Cambodian people. Their job is to criticize . . . if they do not write such reports their work would be finished” (Pin Sisovann 2005, 12). RGC’s response appears to be little more than a ploy to strip people of their constitutional rights, most prominently freedom of assembly, via denying access to public space. Indeed, if “Cambodian people are the masters of their own country” and “[a]ll powers belong to the people,” as Article 51 of the Cambodian constitution states (Jennar 1995, 16), then RGC’s banning of public protests—an activity that manifests people’s empowerment—is emphatically a denial of such rights.

There is some evidence that the anti-Thai riots may have been fomented by CPP elements as a stratagem for RGC’s renewed crackdown on public space. The unsubstantiated rumors concerning
Suvanan Kongying’s supposed accusations first surfaced in the pro-CPP newspaper Rasmei Angkor on 18 January 2003 (Hinton 2006). Hun Sen appears to have inflamed the incident by declaring the Thai television star to be “not even worth a clump of grass at Angkor Wat” during the inauguration of a new school in Kompong Cham province just two days before the riot in Phnom Penh erupted (quoted in Tin Maung Maung Than 2004, 82). Finally, the Pagoda Boys, a pro-Hun Sen group of former monks often used to “counterattack” public demonstrations, were identified by a confidential U.S. State Department report as the leaders of the anti-Thai riots (Vong Sokheng 2003). Speculation aside, the revived clampdown on public space has been tenacious. The newspaper headlines shown in Table 7.4 illustrate a protracted campaign by RGC to deny freedom of assembly and subvert the potential of spaces for representation to emerge. Many Cambodians I interviewed expressed disdain for both the government and the armed forces for stopping demonstrations:

I am worried that when they [are] doing the demonstrations, and the policeman and the security they come to do, to use political violence on the demonstrators, and for me, I want the policemen to help the demonstrators instead of using political violence toward the demonstrator. (Interview, cook, female, age 33, 17 September 2004, Phnom Penh)

For me I feel very painful and angry to the police and the armed forces who do something that only serve their leader. They are not afraid to fight or kill the demonstrators. They’re not serving the people, they’re serving their leader, their group leader. (Interview, market stall owner, female, age 29, 20 September 2004, Phnom Penh)

I think they are wrong, they should not do like this [stop demonstrations] because their duty is [to provide] security to demonstrators . . . if they disperse demonstrators, that may lead to violence, some people may get killed, some people may get angry. (Interview, monk, male, age 33, 28 September 2004, Phnom Penh)

I think about this and get very angry at the police that disperse the demonstrators . . . because the people, they want to get something to go down [like the gas prices, and] to have the democracy, so when the police stop like this, [it’s] not good, it’s very unfair. (Interview, vegetable seller, female, age 30, 3 November 2004, Pursat)

It's not suitable for the police to come to disperse, to hit, [and] to break up the demonstrations and protests. Difficult, because when the people do like this, they need to complain to solve the problem, [so they] make the demonstration. It’s not good for the police to come to disperse, or stop, or break up the demonstration. (Interview, market stall owner, female, age 49, 7 November 2004, Pursat)

I feel angry at the police because the police hit the people, some people they don't know anything [about their rights], so the police they hit, [and] use violence against the people. It’s the police duty to protect the people or don’t use violence [against] the people, only protect the people and allow the
These sentiments indicate that among some Cambodians, there is an unwillingness to accept the rhetoric of the ordered view and a desire for the freedom of expression and open dialogue that a democratic public space may offer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7.4: Freedom of Assembly under Fire</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Students to Sue Governor for Stopping Protest&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Protesters Defy Ban, Deliver Royal Petition&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Police Stall Gas Protest by Detaining Leader&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Groups Say Police Beat Protesting Villagers&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;NGO Leader Plans Protest Despite Police Presence&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Officials Go Too Far, Violate Right of Peaceful Assembly&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Law Curtailing Public Demonstrations Upheld&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Top Monk Bans NGO Meetings in Pagodas&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Police Break Up Opposition Meeting&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;City Denies Student Group Permission to Stage Rally&quot;</td>
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Source: Compiled from The Cambodia Daily.

7.9 Conclusion

By drawing the scalar focus progressively inward from the macro down to the micro, this article has demonstrated how the promotion of neoliberalism at the global scale may be internalized by local elites and reified in ways that are more conducive to authoritarianism than they are to democracy. In the Cambodian context this has played itself out geographically, where an analysis of Phnom Penh's public space has exposed the rhetoric of order and stability, commonly presumed as worthwhile goals that serve the interest of the populace, as in fact subversive to democratic interests. On the one hand, donors insist on order and stability to maintain a viable market economy; on the other, when states have been transformed by donor-imposed reforms such as SAPs, order and stability can only be achieved through the rollout of violence from above. In Cambodia, as the neoliberalizing state is engaged in an ongoing roll-back from the workings of the economy, it effectively undermines its own institutional capacity to respond to the demands of the citizenry in meaningful and nonviolent
Neoliberalism is premised on heightened exposure to economic insecurity by engaging in short-term forms of interspatial competition, place-marketing projects such as beautification, and regulatory undercutting to attract investments and jobs. Accordingly, long-term notions of stability that democracy may foster are overlooked (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Jayasuriya 2000). Stability in the neoliberal sense is not at all concerned with the well-being of the general citizenry. Instead, it has everything to do with ensuring market discipline and dominance through a variety of regulatory, surveillance, and policing mechanisms whereby neoliberal reforms are instituted and “locked in,” despite what the population might desire (Gill 1995; Sparke 2004). Such a disciplinary regime entails an obvious erosion of democratic control and accountability, as through a variety of legal and constitutional devices, and violence from above, the economic model is insulated from popular scrutiny and demands (Overbeek 2000; Canterbury 2005). This ordered vision of public space takes precedence over the method used to enforce such an order, explaining why authoritarian governments, as long as they adhere to free market economics, are so complacently accepted by donors who subscribe to a neoliberal agenda.

Empowering the people entails the simultaneous disempowerment of those who currently occupy a privileged position in society and, as such, powerful elites will try to impede any movement toward a from below vision of democracy and development, a view that is captured by and made possible through the unmediated conception of public space. The neoliberal order pivots around the extraction of economic surplus from countries incorporated into the global capitalist system and necessitates local authoritarian regimes to ensure its functionality (Canterbury 2005). Elections are held to confer a semblance of legitimacy, but democratic empowerment through processes such as policy orientation and decision making in the allocation of resources is never advanced. Unlike the long-term vision of social stability that democracy as public space offers by allowing endless popular
(re)vision, (re)conceptualization, and (re)materialization, the neoliberals have no such agenda in mind. Instead, neoliberalism creates opportunities for elite groups with strong commercial interest to influence political development away from democracy (Jönsson 2002), as indigenous elites endorse neoliberalization as an opportunity to rapidly line their own pockets through shadow state mechanisms that enable informal control over the privatization process (Reno 1995; Le Billon and Springer 2007). Meanwhile, extraneous capitalists concern themselves only with the economic bottom line or the assurance that natural resources and cheap goods continue to flow regardless of the localized environmental damage and repressive labor conditions, which are treated econometrically as mere externalities. This explains why RGC’s crackdown on public space, which this article has shown to be a predominant feature of Cambodia’s transitional period, has not received lasting scorn from bilateral and multilateral donors. Firmly entrenched in the neoliberal camp, albeit in complicated and contradictory ways, the donor community views authoritarian action taken by Hun Sen and the ruling CPP as conducive to maintaining their own interests, although this remains unspoken and hidden behind rhetorical appeals for greater democracy.

Although protest is at times accompanied by violence from below, as those who champion the ordered view of public space are quick to point out, this is certainly not always or necessarily the case. When a state shows a clear and defiant position of not listening to the demands of the people it is meant to represent, or maintains a policy orientation that is unsuited to respond to such demands (i.e., it exhibits all the telltale characteristics of a state made differently powerful through neoliberalization), then violence from below is certain to erupt as the frustrations of the general populace will assuredly boil over. Violent repression that eventually begets the destabilization of a local regime is of course an inconvenience (the price of doing business perhaps), but ultimately of little consequence to globalized neoliberalism. Capital accumulation can temporarily be focused elsewhere while conflict ensues in one location, only to return at a later date once the policy
conditions are reconfigured along favorable lines, as happened in Cambodia under UNTAC. In any event, as the adage “when there is blood on the streets, buy property” reminds us, such creative destruction of political-economic space is the very lifeblood of capitalism (Harvey 2007).

The resultant contestation represents a move toward the collective empowerment of the people themselves and such destabilization, apart from a lamentable propensity for violence, is to be welcomed. If there were continual stability, Derrida (1996, 84) argues, “there would be no need for politics, and it is to the extent that stability is not natural essential, or substantial that politics exists and ethics is possible. Chaos is at once a risk and a chance.” It is precisely because neoliberalism presents itself as the only alternative, an inexorable process, and thus outside of the political, that its corollary has become stability. The neoliberal vision does not acknowledge the possibility and promise of chance, the mercurial horizons of space-to-come, thus contradicting both the very logic of space–time itself, and such values as randomness, messiness, and openness that constitute democracy. It is precisely because public space embodies the elements of chaos, proteanism, and uncertainty that it is potentially a creative crucible for democracy, and calls for order should always be treated with deep skepticism (Massey 2005). Through the contestation of public space, a public may begin to carve out and establish new alternative kinds of stability and order, built not on the fears of the rich, “but on the needs of the poorest and most marginalized residents” (Mitchell 2003b, 9). It is this (re)conceptualization of order and stability that this article has shown some Cambodians to be deeply committed to, and it is this vision that they will continue to struggle toward as their own democracy as public space:

Even though every time when we do the demonstration we are hit, [RGC] crackdown, and we are killed by the army. . . . our people still do the demonstration. That is our hope, that in the future we will win, we will get our demands. (Interview, small business owner, male, age 47, 23 September 2004, Phnom Penh)
7.10 Notes

1 As a plural set of ideas emanating from both everywhere and nowhere within diffused loci of power (Plehwe and Walpen 2006), neoliberalism is a notoriously difficult concept to define. In spite of variance in doses among regions, states, and cities, the basic neoliberal policy treatment is underpinned by a vision of naturalized market relations that seeks to eradicate obstacles to the operation of free markets; hold back all forms of collective initiative and public expenditure primarily via the privatization of common assets and the imposition of user fees; advocate individualism, competitiveness, and economic self-sufficiency as fundamental virtues; attenuate or nullify social protections and transfer programs; and actively “recruit” the poor and marginalized into a flexible labor market regime of precarious work and low-wage employment (Peck 2001; Peck and Tickell 2002).

2 Some readers may question the theoretical application of public space to the context of global south, and particularly Cambodian cities, as the existing literature focuses primarily on the experiences of the global north (for some notable exceptions see Low 1996; Yeoh and Huang 1998; Drummond 2000; Avritzer 2002; Moghadam 2002; Arefi and Meyers 2003). There should, however, now be a single urban discourse, which is not to deny that global south cities have particular distinctive elements, such as expansive slum housing and a more recognizable informal economy. Rather, it is the acknowledgment that since the late colonial period global south cities were already becoming more like Western cities, a process of convergence that has intensified since the early 1980s under neoliberalism (Dick and Rimmer 1998).

3 I refer to violence as originating from “below” and “above” in favor of the terms “political violence” and “state violence,” respectively, as all violence can be conceived of as having a political dimension, and the internationalized and internationalizing character of the contemporary state (Glassman 1999) should alert us to the complexity and ambiguity that underpins contemporary expressions of so-called state-sponsored violence. In short, the chosen terms more accurately reflect where violence is impelled from within the local-cum-global socioeconomic hierarchy.

4 In the political fallout since 11 September 2001 (hereinafter 9/11), the tendency to confuse explanation with advocation has unfortunately become more frequent. Likewise, the reader would be mistaken to interpret my arguments as a celebration of violence or its sanction when expressed in certain forms or under particular circumstances. All violence is deplorable. I simply wish to acknowledge how subordinate groups will at times use violence in their attempts at democratic empowerment. Accordingly, democratization should not to be viewed as a social or political panacea. Democracy still comes with its own frailties, where the occasional tendency for violence, just as lamentable when expressed from below as it is in all its forms, can be understood as one such weakness.

5 The ideology behind the Cambodian autogenocide can be largely summed up with the xenophobic Khmer Rouge maxim “Khmer bodies with Vietnamese minds” (Kiernan 1996). The systematic social distrust that arose in the madness of the Pol Pot time is an ongoing affliction infecting Cambodia’s contemporary social fabric. This had implications for my fieldwork encounter, as my “outsider” status enabled participants to express themselves openly and without fear of persecution, a view repeatedly confirmed by participants. My experience in this regard follows closely to that which is described by Tuhiwai Smith (1999), who suggests that informants may fear that “insider” researchers have hidden agendas or are more likely to reveal confidences within their own communities. Likewise, participants viewed my Cambodian interpreters as unthreatening because of their association with myself as a visible foreigner. Nonetheless, my “otherness” visibly revealed the asymmetrical power that underpins all social science research (Katz 1994). Although “we cannot escape the unfortunate irony that political action meant to shift the social balance begins from a position of differential power” (Kobayashi 1994, 76), I have nonetheless employed a persistent, scrutinizing, and self-conscious critical reflexivity throughout the research process to avoid “colonizing the field” (Rose 1997).

6 Since UNTAC, Cambodia has been subjected to a number of enhanced structural adjustment facilities
(ESAFs) under the auspices of the IMF and structural adjustment credits (SACs) from the World Bank. ESAFs, with disbursement beginning in 1992 to coincide with UNTAC, continued right up to 1999, when the IMF changed the language of SAPs to Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF; IMF 2007). Because the imperatives of privatization, liberalization, and deregulation remain unchanged, PRGFs are quite simply SAPs under a new name. The IMF has continued to employ PRGFs as a primary component of its funding to Cambodia, announcing in May 2006 that a new PRGF worth US$70 million had been approved conditional on the Cambodian government rescheduling its outstanding debts (McLaren 2006). The World Bank has implemented SACs under various names since 1993, with a recent dispersal of US$36.25 million approved on 26 July 2007 in the form of a “Rural Investment and Local Governance Additional Financing” project (World Bank 2008).

7 Ung Huot was an illegitimate replacement on the basis of his recent dismissal from FUNCINPEC by Ranariddh, who had the right to do so as party president under Provision 36 of party by-laws, and also because those FUNCINPEC members who voted for Ung Huot lacked a quorum and thus the authority to nominate him (Peou 2000).

8 Democracy Square is a park adjacent to the old National Assembly. It was given its moniker by opposition leader Sam Rainsy following a bloody grenade attack on a demonstration he led against judicial bias on 17 March 1997. The assault was meant to take his life but instead claimed those of sixteen protesters and seriously injured more than 100 others. Although significant evidence exists to indicate that Prime Minister Hun Sen was behind the bloodshed, including—because of the injuries sustained by an American citizen—a classified FBI report that was leaked to the press, no one has ever been arrested in connection with the incident (Hayman 2007).

9 On the importance of recognizing poverty and inequality, along with their parallel geographies of violence, as outcomes of neoliberalization, see Springer (2008).

10 Harvey (2005) contends that neoliberalization’s foremost substantive achievement has been the ability to distribute, rather than to generate, wealth and income, or the very continuation of accumulation by dispossession. His skepticism compels him to view neoliberalism as a project driven primarily by transnational elites, who are above all concerned with the reconstitution of class power where it exists and its creation where currently absent. This view is increasingly held by a number of critical scholars (Overbeek 2000; Cox 2002; Riddell 2003; Duménil and Lévy 2004; Rapke 2004; Sparke 2004; Plehwe and Walpen 2006; compare Amoore and Langley 2002, who view neoliberalism as a practice of the elite, but closer to a Foucauldian notion of governmentality). In defending his position, Harvey (2005) points to the persistent rise in social inequality under neoliberalism, which he regards as structural to the entire project, a claim lent significant credibility by Wade’s (2004) critical quantitative analysis of global statistics.

11 The Cambodia Daily was chosen over other newspapers because it represents the only local daily English-language newspaper in Cambodia. The only other English-language newspaper, the Phnom Penh Post, is available on a biweekly basis. The newspaper headlines collected for this study are not intended to be exhaustive on Cambodia’s political issues. Instead, they have been purposefully selected to illustrate Cambodia’s marked contestation of public space, ongoing processes of neoliberalization, protracted geographies of violence, and finally to corroborate the anger and distress voiced by participants.

12 Any claim that CPP is “popular” should immediately be dismissed as fanciful. Straining his credibility, Roberts (2001, 187) alleges, “The external perception of the CPP and Hun Sen was that they were unpopular. This is clearly at odds with the vote outcome.” The reality was that CPP had not won a majority of the votes, but rather 42.4 percent. Furthermore, the findings of a Canadian assessment mission to Cambodia, dispatched prior to the 1998 elections, indicated that that Hun Sen’s lack of popularity was apparent (Bosley, Owen, and Armstrong 1997), a position the subsequent protests clearly confirm.
The fact that Chea Sophara was fired following the anti-Thai riots of 2003 (discussed later) does not negate the general thesis forwarded here, as Phnom Penh’s beautification plan continued in spite of him losing his job.

For overviews of the history and application of modernization theory, see Escobar (1995), Leys (1996), and Rist (1997). Briefly, modernization is premised on Orientalism-cum-paternalism, where so-called backward peoples, conceived as having no agency, must be cared for by the West. Under such trusteeship, which comes largely in the form of foreign aid, backward peoples will modernize to become like “us,” and thus development and democracy will follow, as “they” are re-created in “our” image.


Elsewhere I have argued that security itself, in both conceptualization and implementation, has been neoliberalized in the Cambodian context. Specifically, notions of human security have been assimilated by neoliberal objectives and transformed into rhetorical pretext for the acceptance and promotion of the political-economic status quo (Springer 2009).

The “security” card is played repeatedly by RGC. For example, in November 2005, they likened their silencing and imprisonment of public figures critical of the signing of a border resolution with Vietnam to the United States’s passing of the Patriot Act (Lor Chandara and Wasson 2005).

The violence that erupted in Phnom Penh can be understood in terms of the profound role Angkor Wat plays in contemporary Cambodian identity, through Cambodia’s historical geography of vulnerability stemming from centuries of conflict with hostile neighbors and foreign aggressors since the decline of the Angkorean era, and via the discursive construction of Thai “otherness” (Hinton 2006).
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CHAPTER 8

Culture of Violence or Violent Orientalism? Neoliberalization and Imagining the ‘Savage Other’ in Posttransitional Cambodia*

8.1 Introduction

Violence was the primary selling point for Cambodia’s neoliberalization. The 1991 Paris Peace Accords (PPA) instituted this through the establishment of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), whereby an end to Cambodian violence would ensue via this purported final solution to nearly 30 years of war. Cambodia’s nightmare began with an American bombing campaign from 4 October 1965 to 15 August 1973 (Owen and Kiernan 2006), which ensnared the neutral country as a proxy in Cold War geopolitics and claimed the lives of an estimated 600,000 people (Kiljunen 1984). The horrors climaxed with the Khmer Rouge regime, who after seizing power on 17 April 1975, administered policies of forced labour, overexertion, and outright execution that saw one and a half million people perish in a population of seven million at the time (Heuveline 2001). The Khmer Rouge were finally overthrown by Vietnamese forces on 7 January 1979, but Cambodian misery festered in the form of a guerrilla insurgency, as Pol Pot’s army continued to terrorize the population and assail the new government in Phnom Penh throughout the 1980s (Kiernan 1996, Gottesman 2003). Meanwhile, the international community turned their backs on Cambodia during this time, largely due to the embarrassment America sustained with its war effort in Vietnam, as the Vietnamese ran Cambodia as a client state after capturing Phnom Penh. Accordingly, Cambodia became the instrument of Vietnam’s punishment, as Washington compelled the United Nations (UN) to withhold development aid and bar Cambodia from all international agreements on communications and trade (Roberts 2001).

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The demise of the Soviet Union and subsequent exit of the Vietnamese from Cambodia saw the newly independent Phnom Penh government change gears, as it began to recognize the need to secure new international patrons (Um 1990). With foreign capital awaiting conditions that would guarantee security on investments, economic reform became a major factor in both the timing of and the reasoning behind the UN’s attempt to settle Cambodia’s civil conflict (Springer 2009b). Peace in Cambodia was to be achieved through democratization and the organization of ‘free and fair’ elections. This mandate, however, included a third principle that was rhetorically linked to the possibility of achieving the former two. Insulated from democratic choice, Cambodia was to adopt a free market economy via the construction of a policy environment in which foreign investment and a private property regime could emerge (Peou 2000; Hendrickson 2001; Springer 2009a, 2009b). In particular, this transformation was to be built on the back of international, regional, and bilateral assistance, which the architects of the PPA argued would enhance markets, and thus somehow secure democracy and peace (UN 1991). Implicit in this framework was the notion that marketization would bring rationality to ‘anomalous’ Cambodian actors, quelling their supposed penchant for ‘irrational’ violence.

Out of this Cold War geopolitical malaise, violence and authoritarianism continue to resonate with ruinous effects in Cambodia’s ‘postconflict’ landscape. These historical and contemporary violent geographies, coupled with enduring authoritarianism, have led many scholars, journalists, international donors, and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) alike to posit a ‘culture of violence’ as responsible for both the ongoing democratic deficit and sustained interpersonal violence in Cambodia’s posttransitional phase (see Bit 1991; Lizée 1993; Curtis 1998; Faulder 2000; Kurlantzick 2000; Roberts 2001; Sodhy 2004; Verkoren 2005). This article explores the imaginative geographies that produce such an Orientalizing discourse concerning violence, and seeks to illuminate its relationship with neoliberalism. Certainly violence can be a cultural performance that is
shaped by its specific context, but the culture of violence thesis simplistically reduces this to a linear relationship where ‘culture’ alone is viewed as the basis for violence in Cambodian society. These accounts also ignore how a new political order constructed on the principles of neoliberalism contributes to the Cambodian government’s ongoing authoritarianism and penchant for violence (see Springer 2009a, 2009b). The method of critique employed here is necessarily a geographical one, where the imaginative geographies invoked by the culture of violence thesis are seen as attempting to frame violence as entirely context specific, related exclusively to particular places, and having no relationship to the global political economy. As such, I argue that the culture of violence thesis is both a sweeping caricature shot through with Orientalist imaginaries, and a problematic discourse that underwrites the process of neoliberalization. Recent studies have shown how violence and authoritarianism figure prominently in neoliberal practice (Giroux 2004; Rapley 2004; Canterbury 2005; Springer 2009b), and building on these concerns, I argue that through the culture of violence discourse, authoritarianism and violence are configured as ‘barbarian’ principles that only the ‘civilizing’ logic of neoliberalism may conquer. This discourse gives license to neoliberal reforms insofar as it presents neoliberalization as a ‘rationalizing’ enterprise in the face of what is considered ‘irrational’ violence. Colonial style racism and the ‘Great Dichotomy’ of modernization theory are renewed, where the humanitarian expertise of a ‘civilized’ west is once again called upon to tame the ‘savagery’ of the Asian ‘other’.

I begin the article with a theoretical assessment of violence, its relational geographies, and its connections to culture before moving on to consider how the culture of violence discourse has been applied in the Cambodian context. Empirically, I draw upon twenty-six interviews conducted in 2007 with key members of Cambodian civil society, including directors of high profile Cambodian NGOs and individuals working within International Financial Institutions (IFIs). Because neoliberalism, Orientalism, and the culture of violence thesis all resonate within society through the circulation of
discourse, research participants were purposefully selected based on their capacity to act as both producers and intermediaries of such discourses. Civil society institutions are accordingly conceived as the gatekeepers of society, whose ideas are filtered down to the general population through community outreach activities. Most of the selected participants work within the realm of human rights advocacy, and are thus directly related to the promotion of nonviolence. However, because Cambodia is a country with a violent recent history, all of the civil society members I interviewed suggested that in some capacity their organization was working on issues relating either directly or indirectly to the promotion of nonviolence. Many NGOs in Cambodia have adopted a neoliberal mandate, mainly to attract donors, but also because the rhetoric of a free market economy as the bastion of peace is problematically taken at face value. In this regard, the notion of redressing a culture of violence has been utilized in published materials (see Human Rights Watch 1999; LICADHO 2007), or in some instances as an organization’s primary objective (see Working Group for Weapons Reduction 2008). To a significant extent then, the discourses that Cambodian civil society has circulated have been overly introspective about the underlying factors that have contributed to violence in both Cambodia’s past and present. Nonetheless, when confronted with questions about the culture of violence thesis, interviewees universally recognized the problematics of this discourse, and most participants were quick to admonish its implications. Potential participants were initially contacted with an interview request via email and on all occasions interviews took place at the office of the interviewee. Despite the fact that an asymmetrical power underpins all social science research (Katz 1994), the dynamics were always amicable, with no notable sense of hierarchy. While my ability to speak Khmer helped to establish rapport, all interviews were conducted in English.
8.2 Violent Narratives and the Fictions of Neoliberalism

Although space and place receive a great deal of attention among human geographers, Massey (2005) has persuasively argued that there is a widespread theoretical misconception concerning space and place, which are typically considered to counterpose each other. There exists an implicit imagination of different theoretical ‘levels’: space as the abstract versus the everydayness of place. But place 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 a universal and absolute global space (Escobar 2001). As such, Massey (2005) encourages us to view space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far, and place as collections of these stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space. Violence is one of the most profound ongoing stories to influence the (re)production of space, and it may be useful to begin to think about violent narratives, which should not be taken to simply mean a story about violence. Rather, analogous to violent geographies, violent narratives should be considered as a spatial metaphor for the phenomenon of violence in direct reference to Massey’s re-theorization of space and place. Out of Massey’s re-conceptualization, violent narratives can be understood as being woven out of an expansive spatial logic, which at times may become acute, forming constellations that associate violence with place. Yet we must also remember that violence is only one narrative, a single geography of the multiple contours of place. So while violence bites down on our lived experiences by affixing itself to everyday geographies, violence—much like culture—is by no means restricted to place. All embodied geographies of experience (including violence) that exist in one place stretch their accounts out through other places, linking together a matrix of narratives in forming the changing landscapes of human existence (Tilley 1994). Thus, violence is not produced by ‘savage’ or ‘pathological’ minds, and instead comes from cultural performances derived from local sociocultural histories, and importantly, from the relational geographies of the locale. In other words, any seemingly ‘local’ experience of violence is always also ‘extralocal’.
If violence has a culturally informed logic, then it thereby follows that because culture sits in places (Basso 1996; Escobar 2001), so too does violence. Yet Massey’s re-theorization of space and place reveals that the grounds on which some discourses insist on bounding violence so firmly to particular places, such as the culture of violence argument, are inherently unstable. Any human activity, including violence, which occurs within a given place is not isolated, exclusive, or separate from the wider geometries of space, but is instead intimately bound up in this expansive assemblage. It is only through a geographical imagination constructed on a parochial agenda and dislocated from the dynamic material underpinnings of place as forever protean and always relational, that entire cultures can be caricatured as violent. So while violence is informed by culture, it is never an exclusive preserve of a particular culture. Any discourse that suggests violence can only be read as contextually specific, as though it is bound so tightly to particular places that a culture of violence is formed, should therefore be treated with deep skepticism. Furthermore, there is a need to acknowledge the implications of such place-based ideas concerning violence, as they have an uneasy tendency to implicate certain peoples, primarily in ‘non-western’ spaces, as ‘backward’ or ‘savage others’. Thus, while violence is certainly read through and related to place, following Massey (2005), there is an urgent need to recognize places not as confined and contained units, but as relational constellations of the wider experience of space, particularly with respect to phenomena such as violence. This re-theorization of space and place enables us to understand that any seemingly ‘local’, direct, or cultural expression of violence is irrevocably tied to, and completely inseparable from the wider social, political, and economic patterns of violence, otherwise known as structural violence (Galtung 1969; Iadicola and Shupe 2003), which increasingly has a neoliberal character (see Bourgois 2001; Farmer 2004; Uvin 2003; Springer 2008). So while understanding any act, violent or otherwise, begins with the meaning it is afforded by culture (Stanko 2003; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004), the relational dynamics of space and place alert us to the idea that violence conceived as fundamental
to particular cultural groups is much more difficult to accept.

It is perhaps unsurprising that part of the appeal of the culture of violence thesis appears to be its striking lack of clarity. In spite of its astonishing prevalence in the Cambodia literature (see Peang-Meth 1991; Moreau 1998; Grove 2000; Jenks Clarke 2001; Roberts 2001; McGrew et. al 2004), its usage is never explicitly defined, and I was unable to elicit a suitable explanation of what the phrase ‘culture of violence’ might mean in the Cambodian context during my fieldwork. Most studies beyond the Cambodian context only engage with the concept in passing (see Nordstrom 1998; Darby and MacGinty 2000; Du Toit, 2001; Moser and Winton 2002; Jarman 2004), and while others do take the notion of a culture of violence as a major focus (Marks and Anderson 1990; Elias 1997; Curle 1999; Hamber 1999; Jackson 2004), they never offer a systematic or empirical attempt to reveal its causes, dynamics, and functions. Steenkamp (2005) recognizes that the culture of violence thesis has not been convincingly established and attempts to pick up the pieces, but her argument evolves with the same limited results. She identifies how violence can be interpreted as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that becomes normalized through social, economic, political, and indeed cultural processes, but fails to explain how these correlations can ever be considered as tantamount to an entire cultural group being defined as violent like the culture of violence thesis implies. Even Rupesinghe and Rubio’s (1994) edited volume entitled The Culture of Violence refuses to offer a definition, suggesting that both the concept itself and the lack of consensus on significance do not allow for one. What is clear, however, is that the term is a gross stereotype that has little meaning beyond its capacity to qualify certain peoples and places as inherently violent, thus contributing greatly to the imagining of Cambodians as ‘savage others’.

Cambodia is of course not alone in such disparaging depictions of its culture, as in keeping with geopolitical hegemony, and increasingly so in the context of the ‘war on terror’, ‘African’, ‘Asian’, or ‘Islamic’ cultures are said to be inherently violent. Thus it is not the call for violence to be
understood as a social process informed by culture that is problematic, but the potential to colonize this observation in such a way that enables particular geostrategic aims to gain validity. The principal method of distortion is Orientalism, which is a form of paranoia that feeds on cartographies of fear by producing ‘our’ own world negatively through the construction of a perverse ‘other’. Such imaginative geographies are constructions that fuse distance and difference together through a series of spatializations that not only mark particular people as ‘other’, but configure ‘our’ space of the familiar as separate and distinct from ‘their’ unfamiliar space that lies beyond (Said 1978/2003; Gregory 2004). This is precisely the discourse that colonialism mobilized to construct its authority in the past, and in the current context of the global south, Orientalism is neoliberalism’s latitude. Such linking of neoliberalism and Orientalism may seem somewhat counter intuitive, since the neoliberal doctrine conceives itself as upholding a liberal internationalism based on visions of a single human race peacefully united by a common code of conduct featuring deregulated markets, free trade, shared legal norms, and states that feature civic liberties, electoral processes, and representative institutions (Gowen 2001). Yet among social scientists there is growing recognition of the mounting inequality, ongoing poverty, tendency for authoritarianism, and a litany of other social ills related to neoliberalization in a variety of contexts (see Gill 1995; Bourdieu 1998; MacEwan 1999; Bourgois 2001; Cammak 2002; Peet 2002; Uvin 2003; Duménil and Lévy 2004; Giroux 2004; Rapley 2004; Sparke 2004; Wade 2004; Canterbury 2005; Harvey 2005; Desai 2006; Perreault 2006; North 2007; Springer 2009b). These criticisms should make us more attentive to the idea that neoliberalism is not necessarily conducive to peace and may actually reinscribe violence (Springer 2008). Of course violence is clearly not reducible to the simple suggestion that neoliberalism is exclusively to blame. This is as much of a caricature as is the suggestion that violence is reducible to culture. It is impossible to talk about direct cause and effect with regards to violence. Such an approach is exceedingly linear for a phenomenon whose complexity has confounded humanity for millennia.
However, in much the same way that cultural practices and ideas can contribute to particular forms of violence, as a political economic agenda with a global ‘Empire’ in mind (Hardt and Negri 2000), we need to at least open ourselves to the possibility that neoliberalism may foster conditions that are conducive to the further manifestation of violence.

Brenner and Theodore (2002: 353) argue that neoliberalism is premised on a ‘one size fits all’ model of policy implementation, which problematically assumes ‘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’. This is a spatio-temporal fiction, one that produces a unified vision of history, which in the context of the global south relegates ‘others’ to a traditional past, where inherited structures either yield to or resist the new, but can never produce it themselves. Neoliberalism presumes that with the conferment of reason via the supposedly iron grip of ‘modernity’, markets will quiet the ostensible irrationality of ‘Oriental’ cultures of violence. Through the fetishism of place, the mobilization of popular geographical prejudices, and this supposed provision of rationality in the face of ‘irrational’ violence, neoliberalism is given license to (re)direct public policy. If conditions in the global south or among the lower classes have deteriorated under neoliberalism, this is said to be an outcome of personal and/or cultural failures (Harvey 2005). 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. Neoliberalism adopts the culture of violence thesis in some contexts in an effort to disassociate itself from any clear relationship to violence. By doing so, the neoliberal doctrine attempts to forestall critical reflection on its effects and thereby position itself as being beyond reproach. As such, by suggesting that violence is never the sole preserve of the local, and in maintaining that any contextually specificity we can locate with respect to violence is in fact always
also dislocated, we challenge the assumptions of neoliberal discourse. Massey’s (2005) re-theorization of space and place as indistinct, where the former is considered as stories-so-far, and the latter as constellations of those stories, compels us to recognize that any and all violent narratives, as spatial phenomena, are part of a global matrix that extends beyond the local, encompassing the totality of space. From this understanding, we are obliged to look beyond explanations for violence that posit culture alone, and must begin to consider violence as multi-dimensional. Any holistic understanding of violence must obviously incorporate notions of culture, but it must equally take into account the social, political, economic, and gendered continuum that informs all violence (McIlwaine 1999; Moser 2001; Iadicola and Shupe 2003; Cockburn 2004).

I want to now turn our attention towards the Cambodian context in demonstrating how the culture of violence thesis has been applied during the country’s transitional period, and how this discourse has been mobilized to legitimize Cambodia’s neoliberalization. I have traced the specificities and scalar patterns of neoliberalization in Cambodia elsewhere (see Springer 2009b), and space constraints do not permit a partial retelling of this story. For the purposes of this argument it is more important to understand that the reification of local violence to the obfuscation of extralocal constraints (Springer 2008) continually (re)produces Cambodian spaces and places along a violent axis, one that echoes through both material and discursive space. It is in this light that I want to focus on some of the voices that have participated in the construction of the culture of violence discourse in Cambodia, and importantly give airing to the critical voices that have arisen to challenge them.

8.3 Imagining Savagery: Discourses of Denigration and the (Neo)Liberal Peace

As an opportunity to jettison some of the lingering guilt following over a decade (1979-1991) of international apathy and abandonment in the wake of the Khmer Rouge atrocities, and to further
obscure the machinations of extralocal actors in Pol Pot’s rise (Kiernan 2004), the culture of violence thesis was used to secure the necessary discursive space in which Cambodia’s transitional process would proceed. To the authors of the PPA, the Cambodian capacity for violence was amply demonstrated by their ‘policies and practices of the past’, a euphemistic reference to genocide articulated in the accords (UN 1991), and one that tellingly ignores the direct relationship between the carpet bombing orchestrated by the United States and the resultant anger that radicalized the population and precipitated the Khmer Rouge’s ascendancy (Kiernan 2004). Likewise, this passage neglects the inability to separate the deaths due to malnutrition and disease under Pol Pot from the desolate conditions created after American bombardiers turned Cambodia into napalm inferno (Heuveline 2001). One Cambodian NGO administrator I interviewed was acutely aware of the discursive demonization of Cambodians to the neglect of extralocal transgressions to Cambodian peace,

Our culture… represents the people for a long time, not just now, so it is unfair to say we have a culture of violence. The… foreigner just comes to Cambodia, sees violence, takes notes and then they write a book about culture of violence without really knowing the real culture and they blame the Cambodian. …they just look at the time when [Pol Pot] killed people, and because he is Cambodian they just write down about the killing and don’t take the time to find out what truly happened to all the people, like when America drop bombs. …foreign countries were part of the problem too, like China, Vietnam, Thailand, and America. And the Cambodians who joined Pol Pot, they did not have a high level of education, so they were confused about joining the Khmer Rouge, they didn’t know that Pol Pot would kill people, they just wanted to make peace in Cambodia (Interview, Lim Mony, Head of Women’s Section, ADHOC, 29 June 2007, Phnom Penh).

In contrast to such recognition, former Australian Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kathy Sullivan (1998, np), views contemporary expressions of violence in Cambodia as a consequence of an inherited culture spawned exclusively by Pol Pot’s reign, whereby the ‘destruction of social, political and economic institutions left a terrible legacy, and entrenched a culture of violence that still permeates life in Cambodia’. Such a view is unsurprising given that the peace process was strictly concerned with Cambodian ‘policies and practices of the past’, making no room for admission of the continual supply of arms to all sides in the conflict by the Chinese, or the
American bombing campaign (Kiljunen 1984; Kiernan 2004). American intransigence continues in this regard, as former US Ambassador to Cambodia, Joseph Mussomeli (2006: np), recently glossed over the United States’ role in Cambodia’s undoing, stating that his nation’s promotion of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law

will significantly contribute to the development of Cambodia during this time of transition from a fragile, nascent democracy. After decades of war and conflict, Cambodia retains a culture of violence, lawlessness and impunity, with women and children at greatest risk. This culture is pervasive in everyday life and is an enormous challenge to overcome.

The implication is that contemporary violent narratives are so deeply a Cambodian preserve, that only external intervention will ameliorate the issue. Lending his support to pronounced external intervention, longtime Cambodia observer Craig Etcheson (1998: 8) argues that the international community must remain involved in Cambodia’s rehabilitation, which ‘entails reviving a sense of moral integrity in Cambodian society’ as its ‘ethical underpinnings… were ruthlessly torn asunder by the Khmer Rouge, replaced by a culture of violence and impunity’. This sentiment, which echoes Etounga-Manguelle’s (2000) dubious call for cultural adjustment as a complement to structural adjustment in Africa, was repeated to me during an interview with a Cambodian economist at the International Monetary Fund,

Look at the issue of the rich and the poor, the gap that leads to violence especially in the provinces… the people living in the province who have education tend to have less violence. …look at Siem Reap, people receive a lot of foreigner, tourism, they learn how to act, how not to be violent to each other and then they discuss, its just a learning process (Interview, Anonymous, Economist, IMF, 10 August 2007, Phnom Penh).

In other words, the morality of the Cambodian people is said to come not from within, but from encounters with extralocal actors, whereby ‘they’ are expected to model themselves and their behaviours after ‘us’ to achieve nonviolence.

The Paris Peace Accords’ myopic framework for understanding the violent narratives Cambodia has experienced over the last forty years set a precedent, one that allows baleful commentators like Prasso (1994: 71) to suggest that it ‘should come as no surprise to those who
know Cambodia’s brutal history’ that the country ‘produced one of the most vicious, despotic
dictators of the twentieth century’, as ‘Khmers blame their most raw, embarrassing foibles on
foreigners… never resolving the reasons behind them or trying to find solutions from within’. The
brutal history that Cambodians are saddled with, Prasso (1994: 71) claims, is one of ‘fratricide,
medieval-style torture, summary justice, banditry, decapitation, and human liver eating’, which instills
in Cambodians ‘the capacity to turn from seeming passivity to passionate rage in seconds with little
reflection on the consequences’. Lest we think that such ‘irrational’ behavior has begun to heed to
reason, or that such ‘savage’ peoples are capable of humanity, we are reminded that all of these
violent practices continue in the present. As a conciliatory gesture to those made uneasy by her
inflammatory arguments, Prasso (1994: 71) concedes that this violence is not unique to Cambodians,
as ‘such practices are documented in many other Asian and Middle Eastern societies’, only
‘Cambodia has few socially acceptable outlets for the release of tension and anger and thus… finds it
more difficult to reconcile its heritage of violence’. Although all human societies have shown and
continue to demonstrate such capacity for cruelty, the ‘tableau of queerness’ (Said 1978/2003)
constructed here has a particular geographic imperative as it is applied only to ‘Oriental’ cultures,
stemming from a presumed inescapable primitivism, where Cambodian culture is represented as
savagery’s apogee. This sentiment was profoundly offensive to many of the Cambodian NGO
directors I interviewed, several of whom presented their own alternative explanations for sustained
violence following UNTAC,

I don’t think that we have a culture of violence. Yes, during peace we know that the people still use
guns… But, I don’t want to say that it is our culture, because if you say culture it means that
everybody is like that. It can’t be culture because the society, we don’t want that ok? We don’t
consider that a man beating his wife is good in society… So the violence that happens in Cambodia, it
is not because of culture, I say that it is because the implementation of law is limited and corrupt at
times (Interview, Sok Sam Oeun, Executive Director, Cambodia Defenders Project, 27 June 2007,
Phnom Penh).

I don’t think that violence is the culture, because people in the past, its not like today. …it’s a
consequence from the war, from the social injustice that the government today create. During the
1960s, our people was very high and well, like Europe. …a lot of people respect us… because of our
economy, because of our culture, or the well education, the reputation of our people is that they behave like Europe, because we have similar French education. I don’t believe that we have a culture of violence, that is insult to the Cambodian people (Interview, Thun Saray, President, ADHOC, 5 July 2007, Phnom Penh).

Although rejecting the Orientalism of the culture of violence thesis, Thun Saray nonetheless demonstrates the continuing salience of the discourse by appealing to European similarity and colonial legacy to lend credence to his account of a non-violent Cambodian culture. Other Cambodian NGO leaders gave the culture of violence argument a little more consideration before recognizing its inherent potential for denigration,

I think probably it is a new emerging culture… its not a kind of Cambodian culture. But I think the way social change, the way people experience trauma, this make this emerging culture come. And the unsuccessful peace, it is kind of a consequence of the legacy of the war, of the genocide, and that… make this new kind of culture appear. Because it is so frequent… because it seem to be contagious, I guess maybe they use the term culture of violence properly. Some people disagree with that, because they say we are living in a peaceful society, a loving country… so its unfair to say culture of violence. What they may want to say [is] that because of the past terrible experience, this kind of traditional Cambodian culture has been disintegrated and has been replaced by this culture of violence. Probably somehow they[‘re] correct, but… calling it as our culture is a little bit offensive… the violence, the trauma, [they] become part of life… rather than culture (Interview, Sotheara Chhim, Managing Director, Transcultural Psychosocial Organization, 23 July 2007, Phnom Penh).

I am still asking this question because… the attitude of people change, and before the war we [did] not use [violence] like this… But it can be that when people are use to living in such a difficult period… the attitude of the people change. …maybe because of the past experience that Cambodian people had encountered, that’s also a reason why violence happens today. I think it’s about the impact of history, because we [do] not have a culture of violence. What is repeating before all of Cambodia is a people who always smile, who always peaceful… but not now, everyone has to be concerned with how they are going to earn a living, what they are going to do to live because of low salary, because the function of being a developing country… so all of these things can be an answer for [why] violence continues. It is very astonishing for us to hear this term ‘culture of violence’ (Interview, Dina Nay, Executive Director, Khmer Institute for Democracy, 2 July 2007, Phnom Penh).

These responses indicate an awareness of the relationship between violence and culture, but the embedded ontological geographies of the individual participants oblige them to refuse the imaginative geographies of the culture of violence thesis and its caricatural epistemology. Accordingly, the depiction of Cambodia’s entire culture as being defined, understood, and mediated through violence is rejected.
8.4 **Neoliberalizing Peace: The Taming of Cambodia’s ‘Warrior Heritage’**

Violence is anathema to the principles of Theravada Buddhism. Nonetheless, scholars such as Bit (1991: 66) construct Cambodia’s socio-religious framework as an antecedent to violence by suggesting ‘the belief system effectively inhibits reactions to frustration by confining it to an issue in moral development to be resolved through Buddhist precepts’ (see also Peang-Meth 1991). Set alone this statement seems innocuous enough, however, Bit (1991: 31) is frustrated by his own static and obedient visions of Cambodian culture, which he believes should be advancing in the interest of ‘progress’, by asserting that the ‘cultural norm to endorse harmony and accept the status quo as the proper code of conduct… does not encourage support for the creative urge to develop innovations which might move the culture forward’. Thus, the ‘status quo of passive compliance and self-protection operates to quiet any voices of dissent or acts of civil disobedience’, and as a consequence Cambodia is said to have ‘developed in ways which thwart the opportunities for incremental social change and has also developed a model of warrior qualities which orients its public life’ (Bit 1991: 66, 106). Allegedly spawned from time immemorial, Cambodia’s ‘warrior heritage’ is purported to display a ‘clear preference for the use of force in resolving conflicts [which] has precluded the development of other means of resolution’, and is claimed to be immutable insofar as it remains ‘largely unchanged at a deeper psychological level by the influence of events in the modern age’ (Bit 1991: 7, 68). Violence, in other words, is considered as forming the very core of the Cambodian psyche. Bit’s arguments are especially troubling considering that he is Cambodian, which reveals the depth at which Orientalism may actually penetrate.

In a retelling of neoliberalism’s appeal to individual responsibility, Bit (1991: 138) links his Orientalist tropes about Khmer culture to what he views as a need for massive economic reform, arguing that ‘Prospects for security and prosperity require a change in basic attitudes and approaches towards economic activity from one of passive indifference to economic opportunities and the
ensuing dependency it creates to one of proactive involvement'. Cultural adjustment-cum-structural adjustment is the lynchpin of his argument, and with his book’s publication the same year as the signing of the PPA, Bit contributed to an emerging discourse that positioned neoliberalization as underwriting the future success of Cambodia’s transition to peace. To counter the supposedly innate ‘warrior heritage’, Bit established a prescriptive neoliberal overview of what Cambodians should do to bring themselves in line with the global economic orthodoxy, including taking calculated economic risks, adopting an analytic approach to economic development, initiating investment strategies, promoting individual initiative, and appealing to overseas Cambodians with western educations to take the lead in Cambodia’s reconstruction. Marketization must precede democratization in Bit’s (1991: 140) view, because only ‘as progress is made in the economic marketplace, [can] new goals of democratic and economic freedom… be pursued’. During an interview, a Cambodian Program Officer with the Asian Development Bank offered a similar recapitulation of this standard ‘Asian Values’ argument, where economics must precede democracy:

…almost all the factions in Cambodia use the word ‘democracy’, but in practice… it is just a word… our culture is very top down, always the top decides… it [will] never be grassroots. So importing democracy to Cambodia, it would take a longer time to take root. … You cannot have democracy without liberalization, and you can’t have liberalization without peace, and I think before 1989, before Cambodia begin to open up… Vietnam stop[ped] giving any assistance to Cambodia, so at that time, this government… had no choice and they had to liberalize. They allow the private ownership since then… Without this, how can they survive? …it’s not possible to manage the economy the same before Cambodia start opening up, particularly for democratic process to happen. Without democracy, you won’t have peace (Interview, Anonymous, Program Officer, Asian Development Bank, 3 August 2007, Phnom Penh).

In addition to reiterating the neoliberal mantra ‘there is no alternative’, this comment also sufficiently illustrates the rationality that neoliberalism assumes: peace is premised on democracy, which is premised on a liberalized economy. Neoliberalism is accordingly configured as the bearer of peace, where only further liberalization will transform the ‘absolutism’ of Cambodian culture to instill democracy and thus end violence. One Cambodian NGO leader I spoke with challenged the
application of ‘Asian Values’ to Cambodia and was extremely upset by the culture of violence thesis, understanding full well how such a discourse serves to undermine the agency of Cambodian actors,

Usually this phrase [culture of violence] has been mentioned by the critics… who use the ‘Asian Values’ card and that’s just stupid. Democracy doesn’t mean different things to different people, it means the people rule and make decisions, and people can make decisions anywhere in the world… As a Buddhist society it’s hollow of the expert to say that Cambodia has a culture of violence. …unfortunately lots of these experts and these so-called leaders who are working in Cambodian NGOs and civil society, they tend to discount the difficulty they are facing with some of the accusations they make themselves, and that’s terrible that most of these phrases come from people like that. …some of the so-called scholars are closed minded, and they don’t truly understand or know the Cambodian people. …it’s really degrading… If you have that kind of preconceived notion of people, you are not going to be able to work with them, you can’t expect them to do things on their own, you cannot empower them because you don’t believe that they can be empowered (Interview, Ou Virak, President, Cambodian Center for Human Rights, 4 July 2007, Phnom Penh).

Another Cambodian NGO director related his frustrations with the culture of violence discourse to his vexation with the neoliberalizing process itself,

I think we are a culture of friendship, rather than a culture of violence. …but you know the violence can happen because of the other factor influencing, like economics, and power, and balancing, like that is causing people’s violence. … I think one of the cause of violence is the gap between the rich and poor, and that is the weakness of capitalism, you know, free market economies. So that’s why the communists tried to balance things, but I don’t support either way, I support somewhere in the middle. …the Khmer Rouge they wanted to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, so that people do not live in the city, all of them had to move to the countryside… but I think it’s a crazy idea. We could mixing you know, balancing between the two ways of doing it, by ensuring that the poor and vulnerable people could get benefit from the rapid economic development in Cambodia (Interview, Chhith Sam Ath, Executive Director, NGO Forum on Cambodia, 3 July 2007, Phnom Penh).

What is particularly problematic about Cambodia’s neoliberalization has been its proclivity to promote inequality (Springer 2009a, 2009b). The redistribution of wealth between classes, rather than its actual creation, is neoliberalism’s primary substantive achievement (Harvey 2005), which Chhith Sam Ath ultimately views as a more tenable explanation for contemporary expressions of violence than the conjuring of imaginative geographies that view Cambodian culture as being defined by violence.
8.5 The Angkorian Present? Temporal Confusions, Spatial Fallacies, and Genetic Mutations

A predominant explanation to emerge among Cambodia observers is that Khmer culture is ill-equipped to manage political conflict in a peaceable manner. Scholars such as Vickery (1985), Peang-Meth (1991), Lizée (1993), Heder (1995), Becker (1998), and Roberts (2001) have all published works that identify a supposed cultural trait of absolutism as being the primary and intractable obstacle to greater democracy in Cambodia. Some extend the lineage of violence to the dawn of Angkor, using imaginative historical geographies to summon an unchanged ancestral past in constructing the authority of their Orientalist claims. In perpetuating the ‘Great Dichotomy’ of modernization theory, Roberts (2001: 53-54), for example, labels Cambodian culture ‘traditional’, wherein a ‘tradition of absolutism’ is said to find its origins in Angkorian times and thus, [violent] behavior can be connected to Cambodian cultural heritage… in Khmer relationships there is no mechanism or system for managing disputes. Furthermore, the intolerance of others’ opinions characteristic of political, as well as social, culture aggravates the likelihood of confrontation… The absence of institutions to resolve conflicts that derive from intolerance of ‘other’ views leads to their settlement in more violent ways.

The endeavour to sew together violence throughout the ages by entangling its threads in a Gordian knot is tenuous at best. This is not for lack of trying in the literature though. Curtis (1998: 130) for example asserts that ‘If both bas reliefs at Angkor Wat and the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum provide testament to Cambodia’s long familiarity with violence, the Phnom Penh Post’s ‘Police Blotter’ feature [gives] ample evidence of the further development of a “culture of violence”’. Sodhy (2004: 169) makes much the same argument, suggesting that crimes involving violence and murder ‘abound in Cambodia’ and ‘There appears to be a culture of violence in the country going back to olden times, with cannibalism still being practiced in some places’. She continues by providing a list of violent acts, such as ‘random acts of violence against foreign tourists; calculated attacks against opposition politicians; and the throwing of acid in crimes of passion’ (Sodhy 2004: 169), which supposedly have some sort of connection to time immemorial in Cambodia, although an explanation as to how or
why this might be the case is never forthcoming. Such invocations of the past are instead fashioned as moments of revelation, where through the swiftness of analytic movement from past to present, we are encouraged to overlook the preposterous contortion of space-time. Cambodia now is configured as Cambodia then, and the Angkorian present is called into being through the suspension of temporality.

Essentialist notions are equally pronounced in the work of Peang-Meath (1991: 447-449), where Cambodian people are generalized as ‘intransigent’, ‘corrupt’, ‘passive’, and prone to laziness due to their supposed inclination for taking ‘action in spurts’, while Cambodian political leadership is said to be ‘obsess[ed] with total control and absolute power’. This is contradicted by Neou and Gallup (1997: 291) who maintain that ‘democratic elements [can be found] in indigenous Cambodian traditions that predate the modern era’. Nonetheless, out of overt contempt for the United States, Roberts (2001) argues that democracy is a ‘western’ imposition ill-suited to Cambodia’s cultural economy, and accordingly the patron-client system, which he claims is the ‘traditional’ political orientation of the country, is implicitly accepted. Yet such a culturalist position cannot adequately account for the sociocultural disarticulation wrought by 30 years of civil war, American bombing, and autogenocide. Under these conditions, how could Cambodians cling to a ‘traditional’ sociopolitical organization in spite of the profound violence and upheaval of their lives? Chandler (2008) paints a picture of hierarchy and violence in the Angkorian era, but he also recognizes that the Khmer Rouge regime served as a historical disconnect from earlier eras of Cambodian history. It was not a complete erasure of the past and return to ‘Year Zero’ as Pol Pot claimed, but given the mayhem of the time, how could the Khmer Rouge era be anything but a disjuncture? The very social, political, and economic fabric of Cambodian life was torn apart by a murderous revolution that found its logic not in the grandeur of Angkorian kings, but in a geopolitical malaise of extreme paranoia, distorted egalitarianism, and American bombs (Kiernan 2004).
Moreover, Cambodian culture underwent profound changes through the processes and associated violences of French colonization (Osborne 1997), and thus regardless of the upheaval of the Khmer Rouge period, it is absurd to suggest that Cambodian political culture has passed through 1200 years of history virtually unchanged. This shows a remarkably unsophisticated view of culture, presenting it as a static concept, when the anthropological work of the last two decades has made great gains in illustrating that if there is one ‘true’ thing to be said about culture, it is its dynamic character (Clifford 1988; Gupta and Ferguson 1997). As such, Peang-Meth makes a profound mistake in connecting his generalizations back to the Devarajas (god-kings) of Angkor when he writes, ‘The Khmer carry with them an ingrained memory of their early leadership in the Southeast Asian region, their capability, even invincibility’ thanks to their Angkorian heritage (Peang-Meth 1991: 447). If the severance from traditional modes of thought that occurred under the Khmer Rouge regime is not adequately convincing of a historical disconnection to the epoch of Angkor’s Devarajas, then the notion that such ‘ingrained memory’ is a re-appropriation of sorts should suffice in debunking such claims. This component of Cambodian identity was long forgotten by the Khmer themselves and only revived under French colonial rule following the west’s ‘discovery’ of Angkor Wat, when ‘Cambodians were informed that their ancestors had built “Angkor” (as they indeed had) and that at one time Cambodia dominated a large part of mainland Southeast Asia’ (Chandler 1998: 37). Nevertheless, falling prey to the same folie de grandeur to which many of Cambodia’s leaders have succumbed in their appeals to divine lineage, Peang-Meth (1991: 448) argues that contemporary Khmer people continue to ‘respect the social order of the Deva raja’s universe, which has no place for complacency, accommodation, or conciliation’.

The imaginative geographies that have been deployed to explain Cambodia’s encounters with violence bear all the same hallmarks as the racial explanations that suffused the colonial era. These culturalist arguments actually contribute to a discourse that, whether purposefully or inadvertently,
absolves extralocal forces from any involvement or culpability in Cambodia’s geopolitical quandaries of both past and present. Diatribes against ‘the west’ do not clear the way for an independent Cambodia as Roberts (2001) surely expects. Instead, the Orientalist character of their theme, namely that Khmer culture, and thus through a ‘thick description’ of culture (Geertz 1973), Cambodians themselves are to blame for systemic violence and the democratic deficit, opens a Pandora’s Box of insidiousness. Cultural arguments can easily be mobilized to divert attention away from the failings of neoliberal rationality. In the Cambodian context, this deflection is made possible through the construction, articulation, and recapitulation of the culture of violence discourse. In blaming so-called local cultures as ‘absolutist’, ‘corrupt’, ‘hierarchical’, and/or ‘violent’, the neoliberal order is able to mask its own espousal and perpetuation of these very features it seeks to vilify as quintessentially Cambodian (or ‘African’, ‘Asian’, or ‘Islamic’). The culture of violence discourse can similarly be invoked as a rationale for the further penetration of neoliberalization. We see this expressed in city-level interspatial competition, whereby modernization and a particular ordering of space is called upon as a remedy to Cambodian violence (Springer 2009b). Thus, former Phnom Penh municipal governor, Chea Sophara, is able to suggest that his beautification scheme launched in 1999, would mark ‘the turning of a new page towards a culture of peace and promotion of social morality’, free from the ‘violence… that has created insecurity and turmoil in Cambodia for three decades’ (quoted in Pen Khon 2000; 60, 62). Such practices are legitimized through cartographies of fear–squatter sites as dangerous, geographies of homelessness as violent–and if Cambodians can be made to learn the order and logic of their Occidental ‘others’ through market principles, then allegedly this violence will be swept away.

Spatial fallacy informs the Orientalist imagination, as the matrix of space itself–wherein Cambodia’s particular constellations of experiences are nested–is rendered invisible. As such, violence is considered to sit exclusively in place, surrounded by a virtual vacuum wherein the
convergence and coalescence of the wider stories-so-far of space are completely ignored. In other words, instead of understanding how experiences of place-based violence are always related to the broader patterns of space, Cambodian actors are essentialized as though despotism, patronage, and violence are somehow part of their biology. Former Director of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Cambodia, Rita Reddy, understood this to be emphatically the case. In a March 2000 interview with the Phnom Penh Post she suggested, ‘There has been a bloody history in Cambodia—maybe it has become incorporated into their genes’ (quoted in Sainsbury 2000). Reddy’s comments ignited a firestorm in the Cambodian press, and although she claims to have been misquoted, an accusation the journalist vehemently denied, she was consequently removed from her post. One Cambodian NGO leader I spoke with was sympathetic to her plight,

It might be wrong to use such a term as it was used by one of the previous UN Center for Human Rights [sic] director. She was removed for saying that Cambodia has a culture of violence. … I think to be fair to her… she see this human rights violence happening, and she did not clarify her statement properly and she was… led to this explanation which is correct, we don’t want violence and all humans have violence… But I think it’s a matter of… this is a post conflict country [and] it is… easy to politicize, so I think we need a dialogue, rather than act aggressively or passively to what she said. … I think [in] her case I push for a dialogue, but instead they remove her (Interview, Youk Chang, Director, Documentation Center of Cambodia, 18 July 2007, Phnom Penh).

It was not the suggestion of a culture of violence that saw Reddy removed from her position, as by then this notion was a well-established discourse in Cambodia. Reddy was engaging in an ongoing dialogue, and her comments simply contributed to an existing discourse that continues to hold a powerful position in representing Cambodia’s violent geographies as inherent and irrational. It would seem that to essentialize Cambodian culture is quite permissible, but to summon biology using the same Orientalist rhetoric evidently provokes a much stronger reaction. By this slight refashioning of the discourse through which the aberrance of the ‘other’ is proclaimed, suddenly many people are no longer beguiled by the racism that underscores it. Public outrage and Reddy’s subsequent firing appear to stem not so much from what she actually said, but from the manner in which she phrased it. Although Reddy was castigated, the implied content of meaning behind her comments remains
unchanged from the popular circulating discourse: ‘Behind the Khmer smile’, whether determined by biology or culture, lurks timeless ferocity (Meyer 1971).

8.6 Conclusion

There is nothing quintessentially ‘neoliberal’ about Orientalism. The entanglement of neoliberalism and Orientalism is dependent upon the context in which neoliberalization occurs. Said (1993: 9) argued that Orientalism is entwined with the project of imperialism, ‘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’. As the latest incarnation of ‘Empire’ (Hart and Negri 2000), the principles, practices, theories, and attitudes of imperialism remain intact under neoliberalism, so we should not be surprised to discover that the discourses that support such a project similarly remain unchanged. Applied to the global south, like colonialism and modernization theory before it, neoliberalization proceeds as a ‘civilizing’ enterprise; it is the confirmation of reason on ‘barbarians’ who dwell beyond. Accordingly, the implications of this paper go far beyond the Cambodian context. They speak to a ‘colonial present’ (Gregory 2004), wherein Enlightenment-based ideologies such as neoliberalism allow the global north to continue to regard the peoples, places, and cultures of the global south as inherently violent.

Neoliberalism maintains this haughty sense of rationalism precisely because it looks to reason rather than experience as the foundation of certainty in knowledge, a notion captured by Brenner and Theodore (2002: 353) when they argue that ‘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 rising inequality and ongoing poverty (or structural violence) of neoliberalization are ignored (Springer 2008), and in their place a ‘common
sense’ utopianism is fabricated. In the ‘actually existing’ circumstances of neoliberalism in Cambodia, the outcome of such myopic idealism, as one Cambodian NGO administrator recognized, is that the Cambodian people are victimized three times. One is the danger from society violence like through rape, robbery, and killing. The second is the governor who doesn’t do anything and ignores about the people and inequality. And the third is through the international community’s speech, when they say that Cambodia has a culture of violence (Interview, Lim Mony, Head of Women’s Section, ADHOC, 29 June 2007, Phnom Penh).

Yet the certainty of the culture of violence thesis and the absolutist vision of space and time that underscores it are in every respect a fantasy. Space and time are always becoming and invariably under construction. There are always new stories yet to be told, new connections yet to be made, and new imaginings yet to blossom. Neoliberals attempt to negate this notion by employing analyses that suggest violence is an exclusive preserve of the local. This idea, however, is a dead letter from the outset, as it defies what Massey (2005) identifies as the relational character of space and place, wherein any place-based phenomena, including violence, is comprised from and informed by the wider narratives of space.

By employing discourses like the culture of violence thesis, neoliberals obscure the relational quality of space and place, and accordingly attempt to distract us from the notion that any ‘local’ expression of violence is always and invariably connected to broader imperatives. We must consider the wider structural conditions that potentially contribute to any act of violence, including factors such as high unemployment rates, vast social and economic inequalities, prevailing poverty, poor education levels, livelihood and human (in)security, colonial legacies, (post)traumatic stress following civil conflict, gender discrimination and patriarchy, institutionalized racism, and ethnic or religious enmity (McIlwaine 1999; Iadicola and Shupe 2003; Moser and McIlwaine 2004; Moser and McIlwaine 2006).

Of course this broader context is not always necessarily neoliberalism; however, as the political and economic orthodoxy of our time, it is shortsighted to not at least consider the implications of neoliberalism with respect to violence. In particular, it is important to recognize and challenge the
capacity of neoliberalism to mobilize rhetorics that potentially obscure its relationship to violence, however seemingly tenuous these connections might be. Certainly to recognize that there is a relationship between neoliberalism and violence is not to assume that violence is attributable to one single factor called ‘neoliberalism’. Yet the same caution should be applied to our understanding of the relationship between violence and culture. Massey’s (2005) re-conceptualization of space as stories-so-far, and their collections as place, allows for an understanding of ‘local’ violent geographies as always vagrant assemblages compiled from an ‘extra-local’ power-geometry. From this insight grows the recognition that while violence is mediated through cultural factors in a particular place, this never equates to an entire culture being characterized by or reducible to violence. To suggest otherwise is nothing less than a form of violent Orientalism.
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CHAPTER 9

Violent Accumulation: A (Post)anarchist Critique of Property, Dispossession, and the State of Exception in Neoliberalizing Cambodia*

Primitive accumulation plays approximately the same role in political economy as original sin does in theology. Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race. Its origin is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote about the past. Long, long ago there were two sorts of people; one, the diligent, intelligent and above all frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living. … Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the later sort finally had nothing to sell except their own skins. And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority who, despite all their labour, have up to now, nothing to sell but themselves, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly, although they have long ceased to work. Such insipid childishness is everyday preached to us in the defence of property.


Law we sometimes call the wisdom of our ancestors. But this is a strange imposition. It was as frequently the dictate of their passion, of timidity, jealousy, a monopolizing spirit, and a lust of power that knew no bounds. Are we not obliged perpetually to revise and remodel this misnamed wisdom of our ancestors? To correct it by a detection of their ignorance, and a censure of their intolerance?


The role of history will, then, be to show that laws deceive, that kings wear masks, that power creates illusions, and that historians tell lies. This will not, then, be a history of continuity, but a history of deciphering, the detection of the secret, the outwitting of the ruse, and the reappropriation of a knowledge that has been distorted or buried. It will decipher a truth that has been sealed.


9.1 Introduction

The dawn of capitalism was a sordid episode characterized by conquest, extirpation, plunder, enslavement, and bloodshed. When of this cosmology Marx (1867/1976: 915) writes ‘[t]hese idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation’, you can almost taste the bitter sarcasm dripping from his pen. But Marx was not the only thinker of the nineteenth century to recognize the series of violent dispossessions between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries that allowed capital to become concentrated into fewer and fewer hands in western Europe. The malevolence of these processes were well recognized by a number of ‘classical’ anarchists including

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Michael Bakunin, William Godwin, Peter Kropotkin, Albert Parsons, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Élisée Reclus, and although never identifying himself as such, the renowned novelist Leo Tolstoy. ‘History shows that property in land did not arise from any wish to make the cultivator’s tenure more secure’, Tolstoy (1900/2004: 30, 32) writes, ‘but resulted from the seizure of communal lands by conquerors and its distribution to those who served the conqueror… the fruit of their toil is unjustly and violently taken from the workers, and then the law steps in, and these very articles which have been taken from the workmen unjustly and by violence are declared to be the absolute property of those who have taken them’. Such is the methodology of primitive accumulation, which Marx (1867/1976: 874) knew well to be anything but a halcyon process. Yet rather than a pre-capitalist point of departure, Luxemburg (1913/1951), Arendt (1968), Perelman (2000), and more recently geographers Harvey (2003), Glassman (2006; 2007), and Hart (2006) contend that the miasmic processes of primitive accumulation must be understood as ongoing features of a capitalist mode of production, ingrained within its very logic. It is probable that upon further reflection Marx would actually agree with this view, as he seemed to recognize that the originary character is merely ostensible inasmuch as he added the descriptor ‘so-called’ to primitive accumulation in what appears to be distaste for Adam Smith’s euphemistic referral to ‘previous accumulation’ (see De Angelis 2004). But Marx never systematically explored primitive accumulation, and Harvey (2003) recognizes that his account in Capital was more of a sketch than a rigorous examination. Nonetheless, Marx does actually begin to point towards the continuing implications of primitive accumulation when he argues that hard on its heels ‘follows the commercial war of European nations, which has the globe as its battlefield’ (Marx 1867/1976: 915). Although Marx was referring to the dispossessions of the colonial project, his words resonate within the current moment of capitalism as neoliberalism, the moment for which Harvey has renamed primitive accumulation as ‘accumulation by dispossession’ to better capture the continuity of capitalism’s most enduring feature: violence.
Scholarly attention has recently focused on the more abstract characteristics of ongoing primitive accumulation, such as the commodification of nature (Prudham 2007), the privatization of natural resources (Sneddon 2005; Swyngedouw 2005; Spronk and Webber 2007), the social and economic exploitation of women’s bodies (Federici 2004), commodity fetishism (Bonefeld 2001), drug trafficking and urban segregation (Rodgers 2005) and quota systems as a form of property (Mansfield 2007), but it is nonetheless important to remember the crux of Marx’s concern, namely the dispossession of land. In contemporary Cambodia, land speculation has run amok in recent years, where dubious land title procurements, land swap deals, and in particular forced evictions are emblematic of the country’s tumultuous neoliberalization and the violence that has characterized this process. Although the tenor of accumulation by dispossession is shot through the various projects and processes of neoliberalization that Cambodia has implemented under international tutelage since the United Nations sponsored transition of the early 1990s (Springer 2009c), ongoing primitive accumulation in Cambodia nonetheless maintains a spatial logic that is decidedly concentrated on land. Dispossessions proceed through both legal and ‘extra-legal’ means, backed in all instances by organized impunity for Cambodia’s modern aristocracy, comprised of Prime Minister Hun Sen and his inner circle of clients, most of whom are linked through familial relations (Global Witness 2007). While violent evictions in Cambodia are often simultaneously both permitted and forbidden by law, they are always seen as legitimate within the logic of capital, which in contemporary practice, and via historical example, has trumped all other concerns both in Cambodia, and on the larger world stage. As such, the preoccupation with strengthening the legal system in Cambodia is not a benevolent act for the betterment of Cambodian society and the life of the poor. Rather, its primary function is the imposition of a ‘grid’ of property rights (Blomley 2003) that serves to legitimize the violences of property, and thus reinforce a ‘trilateral of logics’.
What I mean by a trilateral of logics is that the logic of capital is never singular, but always exists in a mutually reinforcing triad that also includes the logics of law and ‘civilization’. Each component of the trilateral of capitalism, law, and civilization relies upon the other three parts, and importantly, their respective ‘exceptions’ (primitive accumulation, violence, and ‘savagery’), where none can exist where one is absent. The implication is that the trilateral is really a sextet; only at any given moment, three parts of the system (the exceptions) are represented much in the same manner as the dark matter of physics. Thus, I rely on a dialectical approach that sees fusion between supposed opposites, which clarifies a veiled integral relationship between two antipodes that are normally held apart and considered distinct (see Hegel 1967). As Agamben (1998: 14) explains, an exception ‘does not limit itself to distinguishing what is inside from what is outside but instead traces a threshold (the state of exception) between the two, on the basis of which outside and inside, the normal situation and chaos, enter into those complex topological relations that make the validity of the juridical order possible’. The intersection of the convergent topologies between the trilateral of logics and its exceptions is what Gregory (2007), following Agamben’s (1998: 7) account of ‘a hidden point of intersection between juridical institutional and the bio-political models of power’, calls a ‘vanishing point’, that is, the space where sovereign power and biopower coincide and bare life—‘life exposed to death’—is produced. Accordingly, it is within the vanishing point that the trilateral of logics coalesces into a state of exception and thereby declares itself the sovereign, having the legal power to suspend the validity of the law, by legally placing itself outside the law (Agamben 1998).

Through legal means then, capitalism and its civilizing-cum-valorizing projects (colonialism, modernization, and now development) are elevated to a position that always exceeds law; they are positioned as being beyond reproach. As Gregory (2007: 211) recognizes, ‘colonialism frequently operates under the imprimatur of law, both in the past and the present, and its violent assaults on land, liberty and life are regularly authorized and articulated through legal formularies. The legislative
and interpretive fields, the actions of rulers and judges, are thus suffused with violence’. Understanding this to be the case, and inspired by the anarchical strain of poststructuralist thought, my argument proceeds as a (post)anarchist critique of capitalism, law, civilization, and the state.

Given the atrocities perpetrated under Pol Pot’s rule, and in particular the entire population’s forced resettlement to the countryside (Tyner 2008), Cambodia may appear to be a particularly problematic location to make arguments for the nullification of law and property. Yet my arguments are in favor, not of a reconfiguration of hierarchy through reinterpretations of the state, law, and property, as was the project of Angkar; the clandestine organization behind the Khmer Rouge, but to rescind hierarchy entirely, where emancipation means anarchy. My direct use of the word ‘anarchy’ will undoubtedly be viewed as polemic and offensive in some quarters, which certainly opens me to a particular type of straw man argument constructed by those who, whether knowingly or not, stoke the funeral pyre of emancipatory politics by refusing to liberate their own political imagination from the prison (the camp?) of state-based politics. The typical variation of this will be to focus on anarchism as the advocation of violence, a position that I find antithetical to anarchism precisely because, following the anarcho-pacifism of Tolstoy, all violence involves a form of authority over another individual and is thus a disavowal of freedom, not its advocation. The suffix ‘archy’ is from the Greek, and denotes a system of rule, leadership, or government (i.e., monarchy – rule by a head of state, patriarchy – rule by men). An-archy then, in its most basic form, is a negation of any and all authority, the rule by none. I adopt a (post)anarchist stance, not in the sense of wanting to move ‘past’ anarchy, but to signify a melding of anarchist thought with poststructuralist critique (see May 1994; Franks 2007). In this merger, what we are able to transcend is the essentialism found in the work of ‘classical’ anarchists (Newman 2001), and in particular their appeals to science as having preeminence over all other interpretations of life. (Post)anarchism then is a critique not only of the
discourses and institutionalization of authority, but also of the institutionalization and authority of particular discourses.

Methodologically, I draw from a program of eighty-four interviews conducted during 2007 in Cambodia, where the central research focus revolved around understanding perceptions and experiences of violence in ‘postconflict’ Cambodian society. My selection criteria for the inclusion of quotes in this paper was guided by the sentiments expressed by the participants themselves, but I pay particular attention to those individuals connected in various ways to the production of civilization/savagery, law/violence, and capitalism/primitive accumulation, which in the Cambodian context necessarily means those individuals closely tied to the processes of ‘development’, either as advocates or as subjects of its cause. Included interviews were conducted in Phnom Penh with key members of civil society including nongovernmental organization (NGO) directors, the leader of the opposition party, Sam Rainsy, a representative for a community under threat of eviction, and Cambodian staff members of International Financial Institutions operating in the country. I have also included sentiments expressed by individuals from Mittapheap District, Sihanoukville, who on 20 April 2007 were the victims of a particularly violent eviction as a group of some 150 Royal Cambodian Armed Forces personnel, military police, and civilian police armed with guns, electric batons, shields, tear gas, and a bulldozer forcibly removed 105 families.

My approach, although signposted by empirical concerns, is explanatory and diagnostic. This paper is not intended as a comprehensive overview of the historical geographies of Cambodia’s property regime, nor do I make a detailed proposal as to the ‘final product’ of the (post)anarchist project’s (re)visions of social organization in Cambodia. Following Call (2002), I see (post)anarchism as having no definitive end-state, and resistance should instead be considered a permanent ‘means without end’ (Agamben 2000a). I am cognizant of Marx’s (1888/1994: 101, original emphasis) criticism that ‘the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change
it’, but precisely because ‘changing the world presupposes changing the *representation* of the world, and a representation of the world can only be obtained when one has sufficiently *interpreted* it’ (Heidegger 1971: 35, quoted in Castree 2006: 253), the focus of my argument is explanation, not implementation. As is the classic poststructuralist critique, we should not underestimate the power of transformative discourse. Knowledge never merely represents, but instead serves some purpose, intervening in the constitution of the world it seeks to describe (see Butler 1997; Derrida 2002; Foucault 1976/1990). So while this article is effectively silent on how a (post)anarchical alternative society might be constructed, this does not undermine the essence of its critique as it allows us to further decipher the symbolic impressions of capitalism, law, civilization, and the state, and thereby dispute their shared rationality. (Post)anarchism, when carefully considered without resorting to terse ideological dictum, offers a radical (re)appraisal of capitalism, its legal process, and civilizing effects, which serve to mask the originary and ongoing violence of primitive accumulation and the property system.

9.2 Blood, Fire, and the Zombification of Capital

In recounting capitalism’s origins, Marx recognized that the capitalist societies of western Europe had grown out of the economic structure of feudal society, wherein the dissolution of the latter emancipated the elements of the former. Yet far from the idealized picture painted by the originators of classical political economy on the essential rightness of capitalism (Perelman 2000), Marx revealed how the immediate producers and workers could only sell their labour after ceasing to be slaves or serfs and escaping from the regime of the guilds and their restrictive labour regulations:

> Hence the historical movement, which changes producers into wage-labourers appears, on the one hand, as their emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds… But on the other hand, these newly free men became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of their own means of production, and all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements. And this history of their expropriation, is written in the annals of [hu]mankind in letters of blood and fire” (Marx 1867/1976: 875).
While feudalistic systems were profuse outside of Europe at the time when capitalism began to adopt its colonial bent, in Cambodia the monarchy was not easily constructed as an enemy from which capitalism could offer liberation. Cambodia's monarchical tradition was initially founded on the principles of the Devaraja, the cult of the divine god-king (Chandler 2000a), meaning the monarch was revered as celestial, and any maintenance of authority in land or otherwise was seen as inheritance of this divinity (Ricklefs 1967). Thus capitalism’s discourse of ‘emancipation’ was much more difficult to instill, as there was no clear archvillain to pit the invented necessity of capitalism against. In the context of Cambodia, the use of violence as such would necessarily have to be much more overt if the capitalist crusade was to be won.

Colonialism was of course only an early chapter in the continuing story of capitalism’s geographical diffusion across the globe, but to Marx (1867/1976: 916) it was nonetheless a process that was unmistakably built upon ‘brute force’, a condition that ominously foreshadows its contemporary incarnation as neoliberalism. Luxemburg (1913/1951: 365) demonstrates the rationality behind such brutality, arguing that the accumulation of capital ‘depends in all respects on non-capitalist strata and social organisations existing side by side with [capitalism]’, and that this character has a particular spatial and expansionary logic insofar as capitalism eventually requires the means of production and the labour power of the entire globe for unfettered accumulation. The rise of colonialism under capitalism, in her view, was inevitable due to the overwhelming majority of resources and labour power still existing within ‘the orbit of pre-capitalist production—this being the historical milieu of accumulation’, which according to capitalism’s own logic, required it to ‘go all out to obtain ascendancy over these territories and social organizations’ (Luxemburg 1913/1951: 365). Furthermore, she viewed particular places and their economies as always combining capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production, and accordingly Luxemburg (1913/1951: 365 argued that capitalism is able to seek out new strata for conquest, wherein those places with higher degrees of
non-capitalist production will see higher degrees of violence as accumulation proceeds, precisely because ‘primitive conditions allow of a greater drive and of far more ruthless measures than could be tolerated under purely capitalist social conditions’. Thus, Vickery’s (1986; see also Forest 1993) suggestion that the colonialism of French Indochina was somehow less cruel because the Cambodian monarch had appealed to France to establish a protectorate in 1863, thereby saving the country from dissolution at the hands of aggressive neighbours, is a disreputable erasure of the violence that went into French colonial rule, and in particular its construction of a cadastral property system (see Lamant 1989). As an example of imperial violence and early primitive accumulation in the country, we can look to 17 June 1884, when France changed the terms of the protectorate forcing King Norodom to accept administrative, judicial, financial, and commercial reform, and to hand direct control of the Khmer kingdom over to France, whereby Article IX of this convention indicates that ‘the land of the Kingdom, up to that day the exclusive property of the Crown, will cease to be inalienable. The French and Cambodian authorities will proceed to establish private property in Cambodia’ (quoted in Thion 1992: 29). Yet this new property system did not entirely transform traditional land holding practice as Cambodians continued to clear forested land for cultivation irregardless of title, and occupation for use became roughly the equivalent of western notions of ‘ownership’ (Thion 1992; Russell 1997), suggesting an articulation of modes of production had occurred.

PostMarxian scholars like Rey (1973) and Laclau (1971) adopted this notion of articulation of modes of production, and took the dependency theory of Gunder Frank (1969) to task for considering the whole world capitalist from the moment Europe embarked on its colonial path. Articulation put a whole new spin on the academy’s (in)ability to explain the ‘underdevelopment’ of the global south (see Foster-Carter 1978; Wolpe 1980). Harvey (2003) contends that the disadvantage of this post-dependency approach is that it views accumulation as being somehow ‘outside’ of
capitalism as a closed system, yet he still finds relevance in Luxemburg’s theorization of capital stabilizing itself through its externalities, and draws a parallel to Hegel’s (1967) inner dialectic of capitalism. In poststructuralist terms, ‘we might say that capitalism always creates its own “other”’, Harvey (2003: 141-142) muses, where ‘capitalism can either make use of some pre-existing outside (non-capitalist social formations or some sector within capitalism… that has not yet been proletarianized) or it can actively manufacture it’. Such understanding reveals the extent to which the historical geography of capitalism was shaped by the ‘organic relation’ between expanded reproduction and violent processes of dispossession, and from this, says Harvey (2003), dialectics allows us to further appreciate that market liberalization will not result in a state of harmony wherein everyone is better off. Instead, it will produce ever greater levels of social inequality, as has been demonstrated over the last thirty years under neoliberalism (Wade 2004; Harvey 2005). It will also, as Marx (1867/1976) predicted and Harvey (2003) corroborates, produce a series of growing instabilities culminating in the chronic crisis of overaccumulation. Kropotkin (1891/2005: 55-56), writing around the same time as Marx, thought in much the same terms, and in understanding that the only aim of capitalism’s mode of production is to increase the benefits of the capitalist, he was troubled by

the crisis periodically coming nearly every ten years, and throwing out of employment several hundred thousand men who are brought to complete misery, whose children grow up in the gutter, ready to become inmates of the prison and workhouse. The workmen being unable to purchase with their wages the riches they are producing, industry must search for markets elsewhere, amidst the middle classes of other nations. It must find markets, in the East, in Africa, anywhere; it must increase by trade, the number of its serfs in Egypt, in India, in the Congo. But everywhere it finds competitors in other nations, which rapidly enter into the same line of industrial development. And wars, continuous wars, must be fought for the supremacy on the world market—wars for the possession of the East, wars for getting possession of the seas, wars for having the right of imposing heavy duties on foreign merchandise.

Kropotkin was clearly well aware not only of the cyclical crisis of overaccumulation and its role in producing social anomie and unrest, but also of the interaction between imperialist and territorial

If the dialectics of capital saw it prey upon its ‘other’ under colonialism, then what we are witnessing today in the aftermath of two world wars and the subsequent unraveling of Keynesian economics can be read as simply another chapter, written once more in the very same ‘letters of blood and fire’. Analogous to the idea that neoliberalism represents the frontline in class power’s (re)constitution (Duménil and Lévy 2004; Harvey 2005; Carroll and Carson 2006), De Angelis (2004) views neoliberalism as a form of ‘new enclosures’ designed to strip apart the social commons created during the immediate post-war period. Thus, the logic of primitive accumulation feeding off of non-capitalist strata remains intact, but even more so, the ‘other’ of capital is actively produced as accumulation by dispossession. All of the following, which Harvey (2003: 145) identifies as the primary components of accumulation by dispossession, are unmistakably evident in contemporary Cambodia:

- the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations;
- the conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive property rights;
- the suppression of rights to the commons;
- commodification of labour power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption;
- colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources);
- monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land;
- the slave trade (which continues particularly in the sex industry);
- and usury, the national debt and, most devastating of all, the use of the credit system as a radical means of accumulation by dispossession.

The specter of primitive accumulation has materialized under neoliberalism as accumulation by dispossession, and although neoliberal rhetoric would have us believe its reinvigorated project is not unlike the resurrection of Christ, offering salvation for all members of society, the empirical realities of Cambodia make no mistake that neoliberalization is a vindictive and soulless corpse (see Springer 2009b, 2009c). In short, neoliberalization represents a zombification of capital, characterized by an insatiable appetite for the most rudimentary and obstinate characteristic of capitalism, namely violent accumulation, and making no apologies for the flesh it devours in its pernicious reign of ‘terror’
(Giroux 2004). In feeding off its externalities, largely by drawing the global south deeper into its dialectical logic, this new regime of accumulation by dispossession is occurring in contexts, like Cambodia, where the feudal stage had been usurped by colonialism. Yet the historio-geographical legacies of colonialism may explain why we are so clearly able to recognize primitive accumulation and its violences in transitional contexts for what they are, because as Marx (1867/1976: 916) noted, ‘[f]orce is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power’. Awareness for the historical processes of violent dispossession under colonial authority may also explain why in many diverse locations throughout the global south, groups such as the Zapatista have so resoundingly rejected the ‘emancipatory’ rhetorics of free market economics, and are actively organizing against its violent delivery (see Morton 2002; Postero 2005).

9.3 Illuminating the Dark Matter of Sovereignty

The extent to which anarchist thought informs biopolitics is revealing. When Foucault (1976/1990, 1979/2008) began contemplating the application of political power on all aspects of human life, including the right of death, although never cited, it seems clear that French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s (1851/2007: 294) philosophy on governance served as inspiration:

To be governed is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under the pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolized, extorted, squeezed, mystified, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, despised, harassed, tracked, abused, clubbed, disarmed, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and, to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, outraged, dishonored. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality.

From this appraisal, one might say that biopolitics was always and everywhere the stuff of modern states, and that the space where sovereign power coincides with biopower and bare life is produced, what Gregory (2007) calls a vanishing point, signals the state’s dark matter. As it is theorized in physics, dark matter is not incidental, accounting for the vast majority of the mass in the observable
universe. Represented in modern states by primitive accumulation, violence, and the discursive production of savagery, dark matter is not inconsequential to sovereignty either. Within what Foucault called the rationalities, strategies, technologies, and techniques of governance (Barry et al. 1996), dark matter accounts for much more of the mass of the state than its ‘visible’ component.

That the majority of the modern state’s functioning appears ‘invisible’ can be understood as the very locus of its power, which Foucault hints at when he defines government as the ‘conduct of conduct’, or governmentality (Lemke 2001). It is the condition of being constantly under surveillance by the state’s ‘technologies of power’ that ensures capitulation to government, not because of the sovereign’s threat of death as in traditional modes of power, but as Foucault (1982, 1988) recognized, because the processes of subjectivation ensure that individuals memorize particular ‘truth’ claims (i.e., the ‘rightness’ of law, civilization, and capitalism—the visible spectrum of sovereignty) and convert them into rules of conduct. Applying this to the violent expulsions on which property is premised, Blomley (2000: 90) argues violence no longer needs to be meted out to for the property regime to be operative, as ‘the violences of regulation are increasingly internalized in modern society… the policing of the self becomes a reflexive act’. Government constitutes itself in this reflexive processing of ‘truth’, emphasizing that ‘society must be defended’ against its internal enemies (Foucault 1976/2008) via the regulation of the body (Foucault 1990) and by way of political technologies such as agencies, procedures, institutions, and legal forms (Lemke 2001), which foster the internalization of a particular political rationality (the trilateral of logics), thereby enabling people to be governed as subjects (Foucault 1988).

As disciplinary rationalities, strategies, technologies, and techniques coalesce through the processes of subjectivation, wherein subjects become a construction of discourse through their continual performance of the state (Foucault 1982, 1988; Butler 1997), the trilateral of logics is increasingly submerged in the dark matter of states and its violences become ever more
‘misrecognized’ (Bourdieu 2001). Such submersion is precisely how Adam Smith’s version of capitalism allowed accumulation by dispossession to be banished to the annals of time immemorial as ‘previous accumulation’ (Perelman 2000). That a significant number of economists, politicians, and the general citizenry of contemporary states are once again so enamored with Smith’s teachings speaks to classical economics’ erasures of capitalism’s nefarious underbelly. The revival of classical economics further suggests that subjectivation to the rationality of biopolitics has only been intensifying under neoliberalism (see Barry et al. 1996; Lemke 2001; Ferguson and Gupta 2002), allowing what was once a fringe utopian idea (Peck 2008) to coagulate as a divergent yet related series of neoliberalizations (Ward and England 2007; Hart 2008; Springer 2008). But Smith’s abandonment of primitive accumulation, when considered through the lens of Agamben is arresting. The relation of ban is a relation of exception, and as Agamben (1998: 21) avers, ‘[s/h]e who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather abandoned by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable. It is literally not possible to say whether the one who has been banned is outside or inside the juridical order’. Accordingly, in the same way that the discursive production of savagery and the formations of violence designate a threshold between their dialectical ‘others’ of civilization and law in the trilateral of logics, so too does primitive accumulation also designate both exclusion from the juridico-capitalist order and the command and insignia of the sovereign.

By exposing the trilateral of logics through an illumination of its perverse rationality, we call the vampiric state back into the light where its grotesque contortions are revealed as always and everywhere Leviathan. The full implications of this sentiment were made evident to me in my interviews with the evictees of Mittapheap District, Sihanoukville, who saw their homes burned, their possessions stolen, their people shot, their animals slaughtered, and their children terrorized when police and military personnel stormed their village, forcing them from their land (see LICADHO
A constant refrain from participants was an analogy between life under the contemporary state and life under the Khmer Rouge:

The police are corrupt; they get money so they don’t care about us. They take our motorbikes, they take everything, like our chickens, ducks, dogs, our generators, everything. They are like robbers! They burn our clothing, burn our homes, and steal everything. These people are worse than the Khmer Rouge. They make my life more difficult than during the Pol Pot time. Before I did not have this problem, I just go to make money to live and for my family to eat, but now I have nothing left (Interview, Farmer and Fisher, Female, Age 48, 20 June 2007, Sihanoukville).

Life is very difficult here, more difficult than during the Pol Pot time. In the Pol Pot time they kill us but at least we have food to eat. Now they try to kill us and we have no food either. With Pol Pot we have land and can grow food, now we have no land so we cannot even feed ourselves (Interview, Farmer and Fisher, Male, Age 44, 20 June 2007, Sihanoukville).

Now my life is much worse than the Pol Pot time, because these people are so cruel, they act like we are not even human. They destroy our houses and steal everything from us. During Pol Pot, no, we just don’t have enough to eat but they did not hit us and burn our homes (Interview, Farmer and Fisher, Female, Age 38, 21 June 2007, Sihanoukville).

The common thread is the vanishing point between biopower and sovereign power, as life under both regimes ensures particular Cambodians are reduced to *homines sacri*, a people who may be killed, but not sacrificed, as their lives and thus so too their deaths do not count (Agamben 1998). The difference is that while Pol Pot’s policies disproportionately targeted affluent and educated Cambodians who were singled out as ‘enemies of the revolution’ (Kiernan 1996), Hun Sen’s regime of accumulation by dispossession targets poor and uneducated people with little recourse to resist eviction, whether through legal means or otherwise. As these quotations suggest, for many Cambodians who comprise the majority rural poor, their daily lives did not change in such a radical sense under Pol Pot. The forced evacuation of the cities that was catastrophic for urban Cambodians appears to be somewhat of an intangible to rural Cambodians. The extent of their spatial disruption under *Angkar* consisted of a centralization of their efforts into cooperatives under the authority of local cadre, where their exposure to bare life came via malnutrition, medical neglect, and the paranoia that was instilled through a looming threat that at any moment they could be identified as a dissenter and sent to Security Prison 21 (S-21), Pol Pot’s notorious interrogation and torture facility (Chandler
In contrast, primitive accumulation is the *sine qua non* of the neoliberalizing Cambodian state’s dark matter, and it is therein that the production of bare life occurs.

### 9.4 Accumulation by Dispossession as the State of Exception

The notion that the bulk of Cambodia’s current problems rest on a lack of rule of law is a well-traversed line of argument (see Etcheson 2005; Verkoren 2005; Peou 2007; Bull 2008). Interviews conducted in 2007 revealed the extent to which this thinking is prevalent among Cambodia’s civil society, and thus hints at the depth to which it influences public perceptions of the country’s contemporary political economy:

> The lack of enforcement of the law [is Cambodia’s most pressing issue]. People can get away with their dishonest activity, their criminal act. I mean there are no sanctions, it’s the human behavior [to be violent and criminal]. It’s like if the kid committed any wrongdoing and you don’t condemn that, it encourage[s] him to go more and more, from [land] grabbing another place, to [land] grabbing another place. So I think because of the lack of enforcement of the law, that’s why land disputes happen. Also because Cambodia, after the Khmer Rouge there was no land title, there was no proper ownership certificate, so people can manipulate the farmer out of land title. The process of land registration has to intensify to mitigate the process (Interview, Anonymous Cambodian, Program Officer, Asian Development Bank, 3 August 2007, Phnom Penh).

> the violence that happens in Cambodia… is because the implementation of law is limited and corrupt at times. If we are not scared by law enforcement, then we do not care about what we do right? We can shoot, we can beat the people [when the law is not enforced, but]… we can see that the violence start to decrease after the people start to understand about the law and law enforcement. So I think that it is normal in society if the law enforcement is weak, then violence will happen (Interview, Sok Sam Oeun, Executive Director, Cambodian Defenders Project Director, 27 June 2007, Phnom Penh).

> the current government does not solve the country’s problems, on the contrary, they want the people to live in a miserable state, so that they can lead the country through fear, and through donations. It’s easier for them to maintain the country in such a state of lawlessness, and violence, and poverty. …people resort to violence, or are inclined to resort to violence because there is no, or a very poor alternative to violence. If there is no rule of law, no court, no justice, you have to take justice into your own hands, so this is violence. Mobs lynch alleged thieves and this is violence. In Canada, you have the police, the police would arrest any suspect immediately, but here it’s a kind of vigilante justice. So [the reason why violence continues to be a problem] is a lack of rule of law (Interview, Sam Rainsy, Official Leader of the Opposition, Sam Rainsy Party, 19 July 2007, Phnom Penh).

These views, which see a failure to implement the rule of law in posttransition Cambodia as the primary obstacle to greater democracy and peace, fail to recognize the connection between violence
and law, and in particular how the institutionalization of violence through law is the foundation of the property system.

Precisely because a legal property regime serves to legitimize a founding act of violence, primitive accumulation as it were, then so too must property be conceived as violence. That which serves to valorize a performance (in this case the performance of property) is never extrinsic to that performance, but is instead intrinsically constitutive. The presumed line between validation and expression is always blurry, and any apparently pre-existing phenomenon is always necessarily an artifact of its performative constitution (Butler 1997). In other words, property is impossible without accumulation by dispossession, and both are impossible without organized violence. As such, Blomley (2003) recognizes law as the glue that binds this bloody trinity together and argues that violent geographies must be recognized at all three levels of legal formation: origin, legitimation, and enforcement. Writing a century earlier Tolstoy (1900/2004: 37) arrived at much the same conclusion:

the essence of legislation does not lie in the subject or object, in rights or in the idea of the dominion of the collective will of the people, or in other such indefinite and confused conditions; but it lies in the fact that people who wield organized violence have the power to compel others to obey them and to do as they like. So that the exact and irrefutable definition of legislation, intelligible to all, is that: laws are rules made by people who govern by means of organized violence, for compliance with which the non-complier is subjected to blows, to loss of liberty, or even to being murdered. ... The same thing makes it possible to establish laws as enforces obedience to them: organized violence.

Yet law successfully deflects attention away from this character of innate violence, and as a consequence, “the particular “force” of law exists in this capacity of law to maintain itself in relation to an exteriority’ (Agamben 1998: 18). To Agamben (1998) the structure of sovereignty and the legal framework that defines it are constructed through a relation of exception, wherein the essence of state authority is not the monopoly to sanction or to rule, but the monopoly to decide, which demonstrates that the state does not require law to create law. What is principally at issue here is the production of the very space in which a juridico-political order may acquire legitimacy. The space created and defined by the state of exception is not limited to identifying that which is inside and
outside its domain, but instead ‘traces a threshold’ between the two:

on the basis of which outside and inside, the normal situation and chaos, enter into those complex topological relations that make the validity of the juridical order possible. The ‘ordering of space’ that is... constitutive of the sovereign nomos is therefore not only a ‘taking of land’ (Landesnahme)—the determination of a juridical and a territorial ordering (of an Ordnung and an Ortung)—but above all a ‘taking of the outside’ an exception (Ausnahme). In its archetypal form, the state of exception is therefore the principle of every juridical localization, since only the state of exception opens the space in which the determination of a certain juridical order and a particular territory first becomes possible (Agamben 1998: 19).

Extrapolating from Agamben, we can begin to understand how primitive accumulation comprises the very creation of both the sovereign (‘taking of land’) and the state of exception (‘taking of the outside’), and how sovereignty and exception concurrently constitute primitive accumulation. Because this originary logic of violence is continually reproduced under capitalism as accumulation by dispossession, we might productively consider capitalism as an ongoing campaign to create a sovereign state of exception, a project that has been globalized under neoliberalization.

Moreover, the corollary to the notion that law may be created without legal means is the idea that the basis of authority is always violence, whether explicitly enforced or implicitly threatened. However, because of the relation of exception that law maintains with respect to violence, ‘law is possible only to the extent that it has such an outside against which to define itself. That constitutive outside is at once radically set apart and deeply embedded within law’ (Blomley 2003: 124). Consequently, law is not only organized violence, but also a form of ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu 2001) insofar as it is a political tool that renders particular violences legitimate and invisible, and such that the coupling of law and violence becomes oxymoronic as our political (and geographical) imaginations are frozen towards the possibility of violence being internal to law (Keane 1996). We can see this freezing occur through the unfolding of the thoughts of the spokesperson for Group 78, a community under continuous threat of eviction because of its ‘prime’ waterfront location in Phnom Penh (see Barton and Sokha 2007):

I am afraid and very worried about this situation, but in this country we have the law, so I depend on rule of law. … It is a problem though that the government make[s] violence, like in Sambok Chap [a
neighbouring commune], they used violence to make them move out… They will try to do anything to get the people out of this land, like lie to them about other land, start fires, or even use violence. I was threatened before by someone from the government that they would take me to Prey Sar prison, but I said that I didn’t do anything wrong. … I am not afraid, because this is my land, my home and I will resist because I didn’t do anything wrong. ... They can catch me anytime because they have power, but I didn’t do anything wrong, so they cannot do anything because they have to follow the rule of law (Interview, Lim Sambo, Group 78 Community Representative, 7 June 2007, Phnom Penh).

Faith is initially placed in law, followed by recognition of how violence is entwined with law through its processes, in this case primitive accumulation. Yet this thawing of the participant’s political imaginary is fleeting and he ultimately returns to the icebound idea that rule of law will function in the service of social justice. Thus, in arguing that ‘the major challenge for Cambodia is to establish the rule of law and create the effective property rights which are a prerequisite for a market economy’, Russell (1997: 101) unknowingly demonstrates the trilateral of logics, whereby the legal construction of a property system is tied to the functioning of capitalism, both of which underpin the advancement of civilization, that is, ‘development’. Clearly this interpretation has nothing to do with the intention of his argument, the weight of which is firmly in favor of securing the rule of law so that neoliberalization may proceed more smoothly. This is because Russell’s political rationality, like that of the Group 78 representative, is preoccupied with the ‘invisibility’ of the Cambodian state’s dark matter. They view the exceptions of violence, savagery, and primitive accumulation as a dangerous chaos existing outside of the order of the state, rather than as constitutive, bound in a relation of inclusive-exclusion.

9.5 La Grande Danse Macabre

In the first half of 2008, a total of 60 land disputes across Cambodia came to a head through evictions, protests, violence, and/or court cases, and of these, Amnesty International (2008: 1) suggests that only ‘thirteen appear to have been forced evictions’. The organization bases this curious assessment of Cambodia’s evictions on the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
(1997) definition, which determines ‘forced evictions’ to be ‘the permanent or temporary removal against the will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection’. The implication is that law, if enforced, will offer appropriate protection for those subjected to eviction. This is, however, a sanguine interpretation, one that ignores the dialectic between law and violence. The Amnesty report further points to the UN Special Rapporteur’s (Kothari 2007: 3) ‘Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-Based Evictions and Displacement’, which states ‘the prohibition of forced evictions does not apply to evictions carried out both in accordance with the law and in conformity with the provisions of international human rights treaties’. While this statement is intended to lend an air of validity to evictions occurring through legal processes and thus win our favor for the implementation of law, there is an unanticipated double function at play, as a critical reading of this statement exposes how evictions can only be deemed ‘forced’ if they occur in the absence of law, and thus how the law is able to legitimize violent processes.

Marxist literary critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin (1921/1986) was well aware of this duplicitous character of law, and in his ‘Critique of violence’ he sought to expose the incessant tendency for violence to be obscured in its institutionalized forms. His conclusion was to condemn the juridico-political order on the basis of the concealment of its violence through executive and administrative channels. Similar concern for the institutionalization of violence shaped ‘classical’ anarchist thought on capitalism. For example, Reclus considered a capitalist mode of production pathological to human societies, and like Marx, he viewed property as theft, reasoning that to ‘steal it back’ was an emancipatory act (Fleming 1988). The profound disassociation between violence and property (and law more generally) is nonetheless an enduring feature of both civil society and political discourse (Blomley 2000), and it is this assumed incommensurability that animates the power of the sovereign. But while law constructs violence as outside its domain, it is in fact a relation
of exception, one that traces a twisted topology between them, so that law and violence are never actually opposed and instead ‘hold each other in a deadly embrace’ (Gregory 2007: 211). This relationship between the dialectics of sovereignty/bare life and the dialectics of law/violence is well documented by Agamben (1998), but there are also parallels that can be drawn with the dialectics of civilization/savagery as well, and it was again the ‘classical’ anarchists who pointed the way. In a passage composed in the dusk of the nineteenth century, yet the relevance of which suggests it could have been penned to describe the current manifestations of violence under neoliberalism, Reclus (1884: 638) wrote:

a close study of the present state of things [demonstrates] that the supposed period of tranquility in which we live is really an age of cruelty and violence. Not to speak of war and its crimes, from the guilt of which no civilized State is free, can it be denied that chief among the consequences of the existing social system are murder, maladies, and death. Accustomed order is maintained by rude deeds and brute force, yet things that happen every day and every hour pass unperceived; we see in them a series of ordinary events no more phenomenal than times and seasons. It seems less than impious to rebel against the cycle of violence and repression, which comes to us hallowed by the sanction of ages. Far from desiring to replace an era of happiness and peace by an age of disorder and warfare, our sole aim is to put an end to the endless series of calamities, which has hitherto been called by common consent ‘The Progress of Civilization’.

Contemporary anarcho-primitivists like Zerzan (2002) and Jensen (2006) have made similar repudiations of civilization. Citing Haraway’s (1994) ‘Cyborg Manifesto’, Zerzan (2002: 165) also condemns poststructuralism, arguing that it ‘greases the rails for the cyborg future’. Yet Zerzan’s treatment of poststructuralism is reductionist, and as with so many other variants of anarchist thought, some poststructuralist scholars have actually picked up on the current of critique against civilization. In particular, Said (1978/2003, 1993) has powerfully demonstrated the unremitting omertà between civilization and imperialism. To Said (1978/2003, 1993), the resultant imaginative geographies of this conspiratorial paring never only function at a metaphysical level, as the construction of savagery ensures that the ‘other’ is never left alone by the othering process. Instead, the ‘savage other’ is irrevocably drawn into the very constitution of civilization’s geographies through a relation of exception.
How ‘we’ define ‘ourselves’ in relation to ‘others’ who think differently is the process through which the topology of civilization is traced, marking the threshold, not only between civilization and savagery, but also between law and violence, sovereignty and bare life. Thus, the UN Special Rapporteur’s (Kothari 2007) notion that evictions and displacement can be categorized as ‘development-based’ demonstrates the functioning of the trilateral of logics, where legal logic necessarily coincides with civilizational logic. To be genuinely ‘development-based’, evictions must be legal, and to be ‘legal’ evictions should be undertaken in the name of development. Hence the erasure of the exceptions of savagery and violence from the processes of ongoing primitive accumulation is a mutually reinforcing phenomenon. So while Amnesty International (2008) bases their public appeals on the notion that rich and powerful individuals and groups involved in land disputes in Cambodia are increasingly using their power to silence opponents through the manipulation of the criminal justice system, as though some sort of perversion of law and the development process is occurring, what they fail to realize is that such depravity is the very heart of both development and law. To Gregory (2004), it is this sinister tonality–forged deep within what is seemingly a mundane set of cultural practices and formations–that licenses the unleashing of exemplary violence and calls ‘the colonial present’ into being. In echoing Marx’s view of how history is made, Gregory (2004: 10) compels us not to gloss over colonialism’s erasures, but to actively remember with all of our collective strength, the ‘exactions, suppressions, and complicities that colonialism forced upon the peoples it subjugated, and the way in which it withdrew from them their right to make their own history, ensuring that they did so empathically not under conditions of their own choosing’. The brilliance of Gregory’s (2004) exposition is that it not only alerts us to the ongoing affinity between the dialectics of civilization/savagery, law/violence, and sovereignty/bare life, but that it also encourages us to push our analysis even further to incorporate the dialectics of
capitalism/primitive accumulation thus revealing a *grande danse macabre*. Many ‘classical’ anarchists saw similar relational patterns, for instance Parsons (1887: 107) once argued:

The capitalist system originated in the forcible seizure of natural opportunities and rights by a few, and converting these things into special privileges, which have since become vested rights formally entrenched behind the bulwarks of statute law and government. … Capitalists [are] maintained, fostered and perpetuated by law. In fact, capital is law, statute law, and law is capital.

Capitalism, right from its genesis up to its present manifestation under neoliberalism, is thus immutably bound to the formations of law, civilization, and sovereignty. But like each component of the trilateral of logics, capitalism also produces a relation of ban, and as argued above, primitive accumulation thus constitutes not only *Landesnahme*, but also *Ausnahme*.

9.6 Of Black Flags

During the American Civil War, the black flag was a well-known portent of ruthless combat, indicating that no prisoners would be taken, no lives would be spared, and no quarter would be afforded to the enemy (Goodrich 1999). Arguably, it is for this same reason that the captors of Guantánamo Bay adopted it as their ensign, signifying that while they were holding detainees, they had taken no prisoners as these lives did not count, and thus they had kept their oath (see Gregory 2006). In many ways, the return of the camp with the global ‘war on terror’ represents an ominous warning (Minca 2005), a raising of the black flag, one large enough to cast a shadow over all of humanity. But has the camp really made a reappearance, or has it been ignominiously with us since at least the time of S-21, Auschwitz, the Gulag, the Second Boer War, Cuba’s insurrection against Spain, Canada’s residential school system, America’s ‘Trail of Tears’ and possibly even before? To Agamben (1998: 6) the camp is ‘the decisive event of modernity’, where such politicization of bare life constitutes the birth of sovereignty itself. This is shown, Agamben (1998: 15) argues, ‘by the fact that while prison law only constitutes a particular sphere of penal law and is not outside the normal order, the juridical constellation that guides the camp is… martial law and the state of siege’. Because
the originary logic of violence is continually reproduced under capitalism as a relation of exception through the processes of accumulation by dispossession, we can understand capitalism as an ongoing campaign that imposes martial law and maintains a state of siege. The business of capitalism then is the very production of *hominès sacri*, and it is for this reason that Agamben (1998: 116) argues that ‘today’s democratico-capitalist project of eliminating the poor classes through development, not only reproduces within itself the people that is excluded but also transforms the entire population of the Third World into bare life’. Although overstated insofar as local oligarchies and indigenous elites are well connected to the transnationalization of capital (Glassman 1999) and thus very much committed to accumulation by dispossession,⁵ Agamben’s point is well taken inasmuch as the position of the global south’s poor majority in the anatomy of capitalism can be productively understood as being maintained through a state of exception. What the invigoration of primitive accumulation under neoliberalism represents is an extension of capitalism’s violent geographies of exception. However, because the structure of the ban functions as much on an exclusive-inclusion (the sovereign) as it does on an inclusive-exclusion (the exception), effectively blurring to indistinction the line between those lives that count and those that do not (the threshold between life and death), the sovereign power ‘requires a material and mappable space within which violence becomes the constitutive element of both the torturer and the victim’ (Minca 2005: 407). Thus, what is most terrifying is the realization that the trilateral of logics represents the production of the camp on a global scale, where the zombification of capital has much the same effect on human beings. We all become prospective ‘Muselmanner’, undead figures located in a space of indistinction between the human and the inhuman, where each of us exists as ‘a staggering corpse, a bundle of physical functions in its last convulsions’ (Améry 1998: 9). The entire ‘necropolitical’ (Mbembe 2003) apparatus of the trilateral of logics—civilization as the production of savagery, capitalism as ongoing primitive accumulation, and
law as the apotheosis of violence—strips us of our humanity, producing an ‘anonymous mass’ of living dead, where we are all made ‘remnants of Auschwitz’ (Agamben 2000b), residues of S-21.

In this light, and in applying a (post)anarchist critique to Cambodia’s historical geographies of violence, what Pol Pot’s revolution did was simply lay the violent character of the state and its legal framework bare. By practicing capital punishment in such an overt and immediate sense, where no longer hidden behind ‘due process’ to preserve notions of ‘civility’, the sovereign power in Cambodia revealed the fundamental component of all modern sovereign power: bio/necropolitics. As a consequence, many scholars have argued that even beyond S-21, Pol Pot effectively transformed the entirety of Cambodia into a camp (see Kiernan 1996; Etcheson 2005). Yet metaphorically speaking, what the Khmer Rouge had really done was simply remove the comfortable furnishings and strip the paint from the walls to reveal a cage as a cage. This idea is in no way is meant downplay the suffering and ongoing trauma of the victims, and the intended meaning should not be misconstrued. My argument, following Agamben (1998), is that the possibility of the camp (as a space of exception) is made flesh by modern states, where the camp is understood as an inner dialectic of sovereignty. Thus, I simply seek to acknowledge that what may at first glance appear as exceptional violence, in fact comes to form the rule, it becomes exemplary. It encourages the opening of our political imaginations to the ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu 2001), ‘space of death’ (Taussig 1987), ‘constant state of emergency’ (Benjamin 1921/1986), ‘banality of evil’ (Arendt 1963), ‘fascination of the abomination’ (Conrad 1969), ‘pathologies of power’ (Farmer 2003), ‘social suffering’ (Kleinman et al. 1997), ‘invisible genocides’ (Schepfer-Hughes 1996), ‘cruel little wars’ (Joxe 2002), ‘Orientalism’ (Said 1978/2003), ‘impossibility of witnessing’ (Agamben 2000b), ‘vanishing points’ (Gregory 2007), and finally what I have called ‘dark matter’, that together comprise the omnicidal system of our times. In Cambodia, the dark matter of the trilateral of logics proceeds as a neoliberalization that celebrates the monetization of daily life, champions anomie, places social justice on the auction block, privileges
dispossession, allows authority in all its institutionalized guises to function in its own self interest, and ultimately produces *Muselmanner*:

> These people just do for themselves, they get benefit from the land because they know the land will get a high price and they will sell. … These people hire the police and army to do this to us, so they only care about money. Now everyone in Cambodia loves money more than being a human. They don’t care about anyone else they just want more money. The village chief, the commune chief, they don’t care about us either, they just come to take care of their own land and forget about us. No one helps us except the people in this village, we help each other (Interview, Housewife, Female, Age 52, 21 June 2007, Sihanoukville).

Although the ways in which neoliberalization reduces human beings to bare life are unnerving, the participant’s final sentiment reveals the political picture need not be as bleak as it seems, and that we should never allow our dismay to paralyze either our communal impulses or the project of emancipation. Through a recognition of the dark matter of states, and by employing a theoretical edifice centered on (post)anarchism, we can begin to view the state of exception that has become so emblematic of neoliberalism’s violent exclusions, not as a permanent and paradigmatic outcome of political modernity, as is Agamben’s (1998) belief, but rather as a momentary potentiality, whose realization is an occasion for political struggle (Gregory 2006). By tempering Agamben’s (1998) pessimism for the permanence of the camp, and aligning our geographical imaginations to what Gregory (2006) views as the potential of transformative politics, we may reinvent the black flag of no quarter’s animus with the black flag of anarchism’s liberationist spirit.

### 9.7 Conclusion

In making a recalcitrant argument that casts aspersions on the institutions of property, law, and the state, I open myself to the inevitable Hobbesian rebuttal that questions the nature of the human animal. Sovereignty, law, and by extension property are repeatedly said to be necessary because, if aggression is programmed into us, as we are told is emphatically the case, and if communalism of some kind is also ingrained, which I acknowledge, is not some form of statism both a necessary
expression of our spatiality and a bulwark against our pugnacious tendencies? In both instances these sentiments underestimate humanity, and reinforce the authority of oppressive systems of rule. Anarcho-feminist Emma Goldman (1910/1969: 61-62) offers an impassioned rebuke against both violence and statism by drawing an analogy between the state and the cages in which animals are kept:

Poor human nature, what horrible crimes have been committed in thy name! Every fool, from king to policeman, from the flatheaded parson to the visionless dabbler in science, presumes to speak authoritatively of human nature. The greater the mental charlatan, the more definite his insistence on the wickedness and weaknesses of human nature. Yet, how can anyone speak of it today, with every soul in a prison, with every heart fettered, wounded, and maimed? John Burroughs has stated that experimental study of animals in captivity is absolutely useless. Their character, their habits, their appetites undergo a complete transformation when torn from their soil in field and forest. With human nature caged in a narrow space, whipped daily into submission, how can we speak of its potentialities?

What Goldman reveals is the debilitating violence of ‘enclosure’, which we should interpret in its double meaning as both internment and as primitive accumulation. The functioning of the (capitalist) state through accumulation by dispossession is the paralysis of human capabilities; it adversely affects human potential by reorganizing our communal instincts in the service of individualism. Although carefully packaged in a discourse that speaks to unleashing human inventiveness, what capitalism is most concerned with is creative destruction (Harvey 2003, 2006) through the propagation and entrenchment of the trilateral of logics.

Within the trilateral of logics, civilization is conceived precisely insofar as society operates in the service of capital, where both are seen as rationalizing agents, bound under the codes and contracts of the juridical order as law. The dispossession of land and the construction of a property regime are thus rendered legitimate through the concept of civilization, and particularly through its exception, the construction of a ‘savage other’. That is, when primitive accumulation is enacted against ‘savage’ peoples said to be in need of civilization, the violence visited upon them is rendered ‘progressive’ and we are encouraged not to think of this as violence at all (see Springer 2009a). As
Blomley (2000: 89) argues, ‘law’s violence—construed as rational and regulated—is seen as not only necessary because of the anomic violence beyond law, but also as different. Similarly, liberal property regimes (and their implied violences) are often legitimized by comparing them with the violent spaces where property is absent’. Thus, through discursive appeals to rationality, the notion of civilization—and by extension capital and law—obfuscate the violence undertaken in their name. This continues to be the *modus operandi* of imperialism everywhere (Said 1993), the very essence of the ‘white man’s burden’. We must reject ‘commonsense’ views of violence as somehow essential, universal, or psychobiological, and that only civilization enabled us to overcome our cruel impulses. In fact, the opposite appears true, that our cruelty is largely a product of civilization and its discontents (Zerzan 2005).

Mainstream anthropology has largely abandoned the Hobbesian hypothesis that posits violence as a residual of our evolutionary origins as a species (see Gowdy 1998; Lee and Daly 1999; Sahlins 2003). The formations of violence (through expression and repression) are above all shaped by our social structures, ideologies, histories, and geographies, and thus, more than anything, it is by altering them along a non-violent axis that will open pathways to achieving sustained peace.

(Post)anarchism, when premised upon non-violent means, offers not only a radical critique of the violences of the capital, law, civilization, and sovereignty, but also a productive outlet for transformative politics. (Post)anarchism, despite the oft-repeated mischaracterization, is not about destroying all forms of organization. It is instead an appreciation for the decentralization and diffusion of power rooted in the ethics of difference (Mueller 2003), and is thus about creating new forms of organization. To Graeber (2002: 70), the ‘new anarchist’ movement is ‘about reinventing democracy’ and ‘enacting horizontal networks instead of top-down structures like states, parties, or corporations; networks based on principles of decentralized, non-hierarchical consensus democracy’. Yet through the continual reproduction of the trilateral of law, capital, and civilization,
we are actively discouraged from considering what the latent possibilities of human creativity might hold under (post)anarchism, once we are finally liberated from the pervasive logic of financial gain and material reward, and freed from the latent and direct violences of sovereignty. Neoliberalization is the continuation of the processes that began with the invention of capitalism (Perelman 2000), but what is new is its amplification of the hold the trilateral of logics has on our political imaginations. Consequently, much like the current ‘war on terror’, neoliberalization discursively persuades the wholesale acceptance of the vanishing point, wherein compassion for \textit{homo sacer} and awareness for the thanatogeographies of the exception undergo an erasure from our collective conscience (see Butler 2004). But we cannot lose sight of the shared humanity of \textit{all} members of human society, and in spite of the pronouncements of the state, its territorial logic of sovereignty, its insidious discourses of patriotism and civilization, and its enactments of law, all of which serve to segregate our collectivism as a single species and partition our good will into stringent categories of belonging, each and every single life counts. We must not forget that it is the exception of sovereignty, \textit{homo sacer}, who is most exposed to exemplary violence, and further that one’s place as \textit{homo sacer} is secured by an inclusive-exclusion from capitalism that is continually reproduced through the violent processes of ongoing primitive accumulation. Law and civilization further the legitimization of accumulation by dispossession, and wherever they are enacted, violence is deployed and the state of exception is invoked, exposing us all to bare life.

Sometimes the law is negligent when violent accumulation occurs, as is frequently the case in contemporary Cambodia, but this is of little consequence. To put our faith in the legal system fixing the problem of property in Cambodia, or elsewhere, is to put faith in property solving property, which is of course a contradiction. To the question ‘what is property?’, Proudhon (1890/1970: 223) answered, ‘property is not self-existent. An extraneous cause–either force or fraud–is necessary to its life and action. In other words, property is not equal to property: it is a negation–a delusion–
nothing’. But the historical geographies of capitalism suggest property is something, its existence in space is manifest and its enclosures intensifying with each passing day. Thus, when Russell (1997: 101) writes, ‘[t]here now exists an opportunity for the Cambodian people to refine their legal system and other major institutions. Such changes cannot be made in isolation from the lessons and the legacies of the country’s history’, we must in the second instance take him at his word, and in the first reject the myopia of his proposal. In understanding property, we must look to its ‘extraneous cause’, its histories, its geographies, and in that examination we may come to understand, like Hegel, like Marx, like Agamben, and like so many ‘classical’ anarchists, that what is so often thought to be an exterior is actually a constitutive interior. Property is violence, both in the annals of its history and in the unfolding of its present. To recognize this synchronicity is to reappropriate knowledge and decipher a long sealed truth, a revelation that may finally allow us to reclaim the role of history under conditions of our own choosing.

9.8 Notes

1 See for example Sneddon’s (2006) discussion of dispossession within the country’s fisheries, or Le Billon and Springer’s (2007) discussion of violent accumulation within Cambodia’s logging sector.

2 Non-capitalist states like the former Soviet Union and Pol Pot’s Democratic Kampuchea are still included because they at one time experienced a capitalist mode of production, whether as colonizer or colonized.

3 I have elaborated on the basis of the processual and enduring nature of resistance elsewhere, using radical democracy envisioned as public space as a spatial proxy for (post)anarchism in Cambodia (see Springer 2009c).

4 Zombification is meant in the sense of B-Movie horror films, not West African and Haitian witchcraft.

5 Cambodian elites are clearly no exception (see Springer 2009c).

6 Although Pol Pot’s regime raises the question of capitalism within the trilateral of logics, Cambodia passed through a capitalist stage both under and following colonization. Moreover, part of the fault of the Khmer Rouge revolution, and socialism more generally is that they look exclusively to one part of the trilateral (capitalism) as problematic and continue to want to work within the confines of law and civilization, thus promoting statism. The Cambodian autogenocide, like the atrocities of the Soviet Union, furthers the notion of (post)anarchism having a much more emancipatory tenor than any reconsidered socialism so long as it retains a state-based polity.
Freud (1930/1962) sits on the fence between these two views, identifying violence as a primitive instinct that was only subdued through civilization, but also acknowledging that the individual's quest for instinctual freedom is impeded by civilization's demand for conformity, hence the enduring discontent.

Democracy combines *demos* (the people) with *kratia* (power), meaning that democracy is not a system of rule, but a particular a mode of power. This etymology reveals that democracy's institutionalization changes it into something entirely different, into 'polyarchy' – a system of rule by multiplicity (Dahl 1971). (Post)anarchism then is not so much about reinventing democracy as it is about radicalizing it, that is, returning democracy to its fundamental nature as the empowerment of the people free from systematized rule (see Springer 2009c for a discussion in the Cambodian context).
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PART 4: CONCLUSION
CHAPTER 10

Conclusion: The Moment of Neoliberalism and its Exceptional and Exemplary Violence

Our alienation is becoming more acute. Our appetites are becoming voracious and indiscriminate cravings. Our fantasies more violent, and our episodes of violence more fantastic.
– Lev Chernyi *The Point of No Return for Everybody*, (1994: 9)

10.1 Introduction

In the past, the development of countries has been measured in terms of economic growth; however, as Jennifer A. Elliott (2002: 45) suggests, issues such as ‘egalitarian development, democracy, participation, ethics and human rights [now] suffuse development theory’. While both democracy and social justice have become entrenched as important themes, the subject of violence represents a relatively new direction in development studies, garnering much attention in recent years. Similarly, attempts by geographers to understand the phenomena of violence are becoming ever more common in the literature. With this rising interest in the subject of violence, which might be considered to run parallel to the rise of violence in our world, it is increasingly understood that violent geographies undermine the development of nations, both in terms of traditional development issues such as economic growth (Ayres 1998), and also in relation to more contemporary notions of development such as sustainability and empowerment (Moser and Holland 1997; Craig et al. 1998).

In many countries attempting to consolidate democracy following periods of political conflict, development is often conceived of as having been hindered because state-sponsored violence and interpersonal direct violence have not abated (Poppovic and Pinheiro 1995; Schepers-Hughes 1996; Berdal and Keen 1997; Pearce 1998; Moser 2001; Farmer 2004; Nordstrom 2004; Canterbury 2005; Steenkamp 2005). This is a finding that should lead us to call into question the concept of ‘development’, or at the very least impel us to question the political economic orthodoxy that currently underscores the contemporary development process, and how this doctrine characterizes the ‘democracies’ that have emerged. The recognition that violence continues to proliferate in both
nascent and consolidating democracies suggests a fundamental conflict between the egalitarian ideals and liberationist spirit that fuel support for democratic reform, and the realities of the neoliberalized version of democracy that is currently espoused on the world stage as a bastion of peace and the only path to prosperity.

In contrast to such idyllic proclamations, an increasing number of scholars have joined in the chorus of criticism against neoliberal policies due to their dogmatic focus on economic liberalization to the neglect and peril of social justice. There is a growing recognition that the structural adjustment policies (SAPs) imposed on the global south by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and that neoliberalization more generally may actually foster conditions of increased impoverishment that subsequently provide manifold opportunities for violent conflict (Vanderschueren 1996; Bourdieu 1998; Bourgois 2001; Welsh 2002; Uvin 2003; Demmers 2004; Farmer 2004; Bush 2007). Some scholars have categorically argued that SAPs (now PRGFs) are directly responsible for the increasing levels of violence in the global south (Adewumi 1996; Pinherio 1996). These understandings may be dismissed by those academics on the political Right who remain staunch supporters of free market economics, but regardless of one’s political leanings, the historical record demonstrates that the years under neoliberalism have been characterized by intermittent crises and deepening divisions between the world’s nations on ethno-religious grounds. Although in some instances poverty has arguably been alleviated or at least not gotten any worse under neoliberalism, in many more geographical contexts poverty has remained painfully acute, while inequality has unilaterally increased both within and between cities, states, and regions (UNDP 2002; Wade 2003; Harvey 2005). In light of the promises of neoliberalism, where we are all called upon to place our faith in the notion that a ‘rising tide lifts all boats’, the failure of its assurances to materialize has opened up multiple possibilities for violence to flourish. It is the imperative to take these possibilities seriously that has provided the impetus for this dissertation.
In the remainder of this concluding chapter, I will begin by contextualizing my dissertation within the field of research that other scholars have conducted on neoliberalism and violence in section two. In section three I will draw attention to the specificities of neoliberalism in Cambodia, by highlighting its unique characteristics within a particular geohistorical and political economic context. Section four will identify the significance and novelty of my research project, and attempt to draw together some of the themes that link together the various preceding chapters. In section five I will highlight some of the primary strengths and weaknesses of my dissertation. The sixth section will provide an indication as to the ‘status’ of my general working hypothesis, and suggest where future research might productively be deployed. I will then offer some final concluding thoughts on the connections between neoliberalization and violence.

10.2 Analysis In Light of Current Research on Neoliberalism

As an area of research, neoliberalism has picked up a great deal of steam among social scientists in recent years. From initial explorations focusing on the implications for state reform (Acuña and Smith 1994; Gill 1995; Mauceri 1995; Roberts 1995; Weyland 1996; Pastor and Wise 1997; Remmer 1998; Peck 2001), neoliberalism has expanded prodigiously into a field of academic inquiry that now sees scholars examining the imbrications between neoliberalism and cities, citizenship, nature, nationalism, sexuality and gender, subjectivity, discourse, democracy and authoritarianism, development, health, and education to name but a few. Although early treatments had a tendency to regard neoliberalism as a ubiquitous, singular, and monolithic end-state, neoliberalizations (in the plural) are increasingly understood as relational, variegated, and inherently contradictory processes contingent upon contextual specificity and articulation with existing political economic landscapes. Individual neoliberalizations then can be productively understood as particular geohistorical configurations, with a multitude of both differences and similarities between sites of
contact in terms of how the grand abstraction of ‘neoliberalism-in-general’ has been introduced, resisted, and challenged (Peck 2004; England and Ward 2007; Hart 2008). Within the existing literature there are four principal understandings through which neoliberalism/neoliberalization has been approached: 1) neoliberalism as an ideological hegemonic project (McMichael 2000; Cox 2002; Duménil and Lévy 2004; Sparke 2004; Harvey 2005; Plehwe et al. 2006); 2) neoliberalism as policy and program (Pastor and Wise 1997; Martinez and Garcia 2000; Klepeis and Vance 2003); 3) neoliberalism as state form (Peck 2001; Peck and Tickell 2002); and 4) neoliberalism as governmentality (Barry et al. 1996; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Lemke 2002). In this study I have argued that these four divergent theorizations can be productively understood as mutually reinforcing if we treat neoliberalism as a discourse, a task that necessarily involves reconciling (post)Marxian political economy with poststructuralism, in spite of their epistemological, ontological, and methodological differences. Precisely because it ‘remains politically important to constantly draw attention to the links between those in positions of power and the inequalities witnessed in geographically dispersed yet socially interconnected areas of the world’ (Ward and England 2007: 2), theorizing neoliberalism as a circulating discourse, an ongoing subjectivation that is interpreted, contested, and reconstituted in a multiplicity of ways, is of paramount importance.

Drawing on such a polychromatic conceptualization of neoliberalization(s), this study has placed its emphasis in understanding the imbrications and resonances of violence within the now orthodox political economic model of neoliberalism—disparate, protean, and variegated as it is. This study of course is not an initial foray, as many of the studies on neoliberalism cited above recognize the potential for violence within neoliberal reforms and their resultant institutional landscapes. Indeed, there is a small, but growing body of literature that attempts to make such connections more explicit, where violence is foregrounded as the locus of critique against neoliberalism. However, few of these treatments of the relationship between neoliberalism and violence have attended in any
significant manner to the contextual specificity of individual neoliberalizations, and instead, most studies seem content to replicate the notion of an externally imposed and monolithic neoliberalism-in-general, an approach that ultimately fails to capture the historical and geographical differences of how violence under neoliberalization has been experienced.

In contrast, while this study has demonstrated an urgent need to build conceptually relational linkages between the violence occurring in multiple sites undergoing neoliberalization, and to identify threads of commonality within these diverse spaces so that an emancipatory agenda of transnational scope may potentially begin to emerge, it is nonetheless simplistic and deeply problematic to assume uniformity across the various constellations of violent geographies that are occurring in neoliberalizing contexts. Such an approach reinforces the privilege and authority of neoliberalism as discourse, by continuing to circulate the idea that neoliberalism as a particular model of statecraft is inevitable, a criticism Gibson-Graham (1996) make more generally with regard to capitalism. Moreover, the point of our critiques should not be to temper neoliberalism with concessions, moderation, and niceties, as capitalism of any sort is doomed to fail. The logics of creative destruction, uneven development, and unlimited expansion, which not only stoke the fires of malcontent and conflict, but also contradict the finite limitations of the earth, are capitalism’s undoing regardless of the form it takes (Harvey 2006, 2007). Hence, what instead needs to be occurring in our scholarship on neoliberalism is a more thorough radicalization of our agenda, where the purpose appropriately becomes to consign neoliberalism and all other forms of capitalism to the waste bin of history, so that the exceptional and exemplary violences of this maligned chapter of human existence become a haunting abomination from our past, not an enduring reality of our present, or a conceded inevitability of our future. The literature on neoliberalism and violence must begin to move in a direction that simultaneously attends to the contingencies and specificities of how ‘local’ expressions of violence are articulated between existing political economic landscapes and
newly internalized, imposed, and instituted ‘global’ neoliberal reform initiatives, while also remaining cognizant to the ways in which the violences of neoliberalization are relationally connected and (re)produced across space.

10.3 Neoliberalism with Cambodian Characteristics

In the Cambodian context, the discourse of neoliberalism unfolds in particular, contextually specific ways that make the country’s experience with neoliberalization and violence unique. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) positions itself as a populist government, and frequently uses the heavily controlled Khmer language media (see LICADHO 2008) as a launching pad for criticisms of the IFIs and bilateral donors (particularly ‘western’ donors), which it portrays as ‘enemies’ to Cambodian interests. This discourse is in keeping with the same general premise that has existed in Cambodian politics since the time of the Khmer Rouge, when the incumbent regime instilled paranoia for ‘enemies of the revolution’ among its ranks (Kiernan 1996). When used against local opponents, the notion of ‘enemy’ has provided a rationale for much of the overt political violence that has characterized elections and democratic process, which among many donors, NGO workers, and scholars alike, has given rise to the notion of a ‘culture of violence’ in Cambodia, a conceptualization that this study has criticized as problematic. Nonetheless, the ‘enemy’ discourse persists:

they live in the war, and you know by having this mentality ‘you are the enemy’ because you belong to FUNCINPEC, and you belong to CPP, you belong to SRP, now even if you belong to another political party you are the enemy. And this regime continues to kill, to intimidate the opponent. …even right now they consider their competition as enemy if you don’t think like them. And this government perpetuates this kind of thinking. I don’t know if we can use the word ‘culture’ or not, I have to think more on that. Its easy for foreigner to say its culture, but for me, I think that I will leave the word ‘culture’ in one place and I will use the kind of ‘mentality of new generation’, but this government, especially the ruling party continues to encourage this kind of thinking. We always urge the government in Phnom Penh to give a strong message to the people in the countryside, and not to consider opponent as the enemy (Interview, Kek Galabru, President, LICADHO, 6 July 2007, Phnom Penh).
When employed against the international community, the language of ‘enemy’ is less direct and accusatory, is only ever articulated in Khmer, and certainly does not proceed from the position of suggesting this opponent will be stamped out. Misgivings with the donor community expressed in the local media are largely a posturing by the Prime Minister, Hun Sen, for a homegrown audience in order for the Cambodian government to maintain a degree of popularity and legitimacy with its electorate, and to have a convenient scapegoat in its back pocket when the strains of neoliberalization become most acute.

It is from the rural electorate that the ruling party fundamentally derives its power base even though this is also the location that receives the fewest rewards from the neoliberalization process as uneven development proceeds. This can be explained by the realization that whatever limited state provisions and benefits of development that do happen to ‘trickle down’ to rural areas are not considered to be sourced from the state. Instead, such development is frequently conflated with being from the ruling party, and in particular from Hun Sen. The confusion is not incidental, but orchestrated as a distinct technique of neoliberal development in the country, whereby infrastructural projects always bear the monograph of Hun Sen and a CPP party sign, despite the fact that the money typically comes directly from state coffers, and only occasionally from Hun Sen’s own incredibly deep pockets (Hughes 2003). In short, the CPP has become so thoroughly enmeshed with the RGC, that many Cambodians no longer identify a difference between the two. This strategy of confusion works in concert with the government’s symbolic hand washing from neoliberalizations effects, as both position neoliberalization (or globalization as it is colloquially known in Cambodia) as a hegemonic project of imposition spearheaded by foreign geopolitical machinations and foreign corporate greed, devoid of connections to the mediations of Cambodian elites, who present themselves as benevolent benefactors and the true champions of ‘development’, all while they rob state revenues through the ‘shadow state’ (see Reno 1995) they have constructed. Of course this is a
simplistic and thoroughly advantageous rendering for Cambodian elites, as it obfuscates the way neoliberalism’s ideological formation evolves through a variety of spatial settings, including its articulation with local political economic circumstances, in this case the patronage system. Similarly, this study has shown how Cambodian donors, and indeed many scholars of Cambodia, use a mirror image of the discourse mounted by Cambodian elites, suggesting that the tensions of neoliberalization are outcomes of explicitly ‘local’ political economic conditions, and in particular a ‘culture of violence’, with no consideration afforded to ‘global’ political economic circumstances. Both positions are reductionist assessments of the political economic complexity that comprises neoliberalization in ‘actually existing’ circumstances (Brenner and Theodore 2002a). In contrast, this study has attempted to stage a more nuanced understanding of neoliberalism, where its ideological hegemonic project is driven through a circulating discourse that emerges through a variegated picture contingent upon spatio-temporal context, combining dominance with willing consent and ‘common sense’ governmentalities (see Sparke 2004; 2006b), while continually responding to various forms of resistance (see Sparke 2008).

My interviews revealed that Cambodians frequently characterize Cambodia’s state form as communist, a claim echoed by some scholars who point to the Cambodian state’s historical legacy and bloated bureaucracy. Longtime Cambodia observer Craig Etcheson (2005: 143) for example suggests that although the CPP ‘publicly abandoned socialism along with command-and-control economic policies [in 1989]… The party did not, however, abandon its internal Leninist structures and procedures, which it retains to this day’. However, Cambodia’s swollen bureaucracy and internal party structures are not ‘Leninist’, but rather distinctly Cambodian and can be identified as one of the key characteristics of neoliberalism in the country, contrasting with notions of ‘small government’ that are typically associated with neoliberalism in other settings. These structures speak to Cambodia’s patronage system, which offers the foundation to the government’s ‘legitimacy’.
Neoliberal theory suggests such patronage will be washed away as market mechanisms come to be the sine qua non of all social relations. Yet the Cambodian experience demonstrates how patronage is in fact strengthened and entrenched (see Global Witness 2007, 2009). High-ranking government officials thus adhere to a neoliberal configuration in Cambodia precisely because of its capacity to provide them not only with enrichment, but also with the ability to control the monetary channels of privatization and investment in such a way that only those connected to their systems of patronage stand to receive any direct benefit. This condition is fundamentally a question of the orientation of power in the country, which far from being a transparent and open system of exchange, neoliberalization in the Cambodian context is mired in the obscurity of shadow state politics, where kickbacks are a required component of its substantive ‘roll out’.

The case of Sokimex stands out as particularly demonstrative of the shadow state, as the homegrown company, founded in 1990 to coincide with the country's transition towards a free market economy by local tycoon and close Hun Sen associate, Sok Kong, is Cambodia’s largest business conglomerate, repeatedly receiving special treatment in securing lucrative government contacts under a murky veil of secrecy and nondisclosure on its accounts (Cain 2009). The company maintains a wide ranging portfolio that includes business ventures in petroleum and gas importing, a service station chain, import-export services, garment manufacturing, hotels, property development and construction, transportation industries, rubber plantations, a domestic airline, an exclusive contract to supply the Cambodian military with clothing and fuel, and the concession to exclusively manage ticket sales to Angkor Wat (Cain 2009). Official leader of the opposition, Sam Rainsy, has publicly criticized Sokimex, calling it the ‘financial pillar for the ruling CPP’, where ‘You cannot make the distinction between Sokimex, the CPP, and the State. The CPP apparatchik is inextricably intertwined with the State. Sokimex was doing business not only for, but in the name of the State’ (quoted in “All that glitters seems to be…” 2000). On 14 February 2000, four Sam Rainsy Party MPs
sent a letter to Hun Sen requesting clarification about Sokimex's relationship with the Cambodian government. The RGC replied with an unsigned and undated statement indicating that the only reason it appears to favor Sokimex is because the company has proved itself highly competent and always fulfills its contractual obligations, which is a questionable claim given the company's record of shoddy construction projects ("All that glitters seems to be…" 2000). Thus, while the transfer of ownership from the public to the private sector maintains the ostensible goal of making public holdings more competent, efficient, and profit generating, the Cambodian characteristics of neoliberalization modify this idea through the country’s patronage system, so that efficiency and competency are of little concern, and profit for well-connected powerbrokers becomes the primary motivation (see Barton and Cheang Sokha 2007).

The overarching contextualization of policy response in Cambodia is framed by ongoing poverty in a country having only recently emerged from nearly three decades of war and genocide. In Klein's (2007) terms, this violent geohistorical context would be the initial ‘shock’ that permitted neoliberalization to step in as a purported panacea to Cambodia’s problems, while the Paris Peace Accords and the United Nations Transitional Authority laid down the general legal framework in attempting to ensure an ‘idealized’ state form though which subsequent neoliberal policies and programs could be implemented (see UN 1991). The agencies and institutions involved in the evaluations of policy are multiple in the Cambodian context, including the Cambodian ministries, local and international NGOs, as well as bilateral and multilateral donors. That said, although the relevant Cambodian ministries are typically responsible for oversight, the direction of policy and program orientation largely flows from the international donor community, only to be reinterpreted by Cambodian elites as they devise ways to ensure their privileged positions go unchallenged. Thus, as Cambodian elites increasingly come to view neoliberalization as an opportunity to shore up both monetary and political power, the underlying logic of any given reform policy must adhere to the
A general principle that it offers something of value (typically monetary, but also political) to entrenched elites. Empirically this is demonstrated by the leasing of the rights to collect admission on national monuments such as Angkor Wat and Choeung Ek to private ventures (see “All that glitters seems to be…”; Kea 2006) and the numerous land swap deals involving central Phnom Penh and Siem Reap locations where institutional facilities, such as ministries and police headquarters, are exchanged for substantial cash settlements and privately held lands on the periphery of the cities (Kothari 2005; Wasson and Yun Samean 2006; Pin Sisovann 2007). Both of these examples of transferring public holdings to private investors have been widely criticized among the local and international NGO community as examples of unpopular policies where corruption of the neoliberalization process has occurred as the bulk of financial remuneration mysteriously disappears from official state ledgers and the value of public assets are significantly and purposefully underestimated (see LICADHO 2005; LICADHO/LICADHO Canada 2008; Lesley and Sam Rith 2005; Ghai 2007). Land speculation in particular has been tainted by the insignia of primitive accumulation under Cambodia’s neoliberalization, where over the past fifteen years private investors have purchased an astonishing forty-five percent of the country’s land area (Global Witness 2009).

An interview with Sam Rainsy, illuminates the underlying logic:

Land disputes are related to corruption… when there is corruption at the top of the state, the leaders transfer all of the state assets to personal, individual assets, and land grabbing is related to this. …when Vietnam start to rebuild their economy, she started by redistributing land. There was no such a move to transfer the land from public hands to private hands. [In Cambodia] those private hands are a small group of the hierarchy, the top hierarchy of the former communist party. So, of course such a phenomenon may exist everywhere in any [neoliberal] transition, or transitional period, but in Cambodia it has reached an unprecedented scale. …they confiscate all the land and sell it to companies that can afford to pay millions of dollars. And it is the municipality who sells the land without any transparency. Most of the money lands in the pocket of small group, a small number of corrupt people. So this is a very specific approach that you cannot find in other countries. In Vietnam, they start to redistribute land and they punish whoever now is prosecuted for corruption. They get very severe sentences, including death penalty, but in Cambodia there is a total impunity for all kinds of criminals (Interview, Sam Rainsy, Official Leader of the Opposition, Sam Rainsy Party, 19 July 2007, Phnom Penh).
In short, what Sam Rainsy characterizes as distinctly Cambodian is how the patronage system shapes the privatization of land, making this a significant feature of neoliberal policy and program in the country. Although my interview with Sam Rainsy indicated he was still very much of a pro-market orientation, he has recently stated publicly that should he be elected as Prime Minister he will nationalize the millions of hectares of land that has been illegally acquired by tycoons and businesspeople through land swaps and land grabs (Meas Sokchea 2008). In contrast, Cambodia’s donors have long advocated that a cadastral property system be put in place, which means an ordering and bounding of all available space in the country into the structures of private ownership backed by legal rights and obligations. The call is for further legal reform and transparency, rather than a redistribution of the land that has been acquired through questionable means. The RGC has obliged this policy insofar as it is a monumental opportunity for enrichment through the circuits of patronage, as this system’s networks percolate through the judiciary, ensuring that legal rights and obligations are always interpreted in ways that benefit those who are in well-connected positions of power (Kothari 2005; Ghai 2007; LICADHO 2007a; ADHOC 2008; Center for Social Development 2008).

Conditions of patronage in Cambodia engender considerable violence, as those without its protections are frequently forcibly removed from their lands when and where speculation determines a monetary value. Speculation alone precipitates the capture of land, as was the case in Mittapheap District, Sihanoukville, when over 100 families were violently evicted from their village on 20 April 2007. The land they had lived on unchallenged for the previous twenty years, thus granting them legal ownership rights under the current land law, was now an area demarcated as a ‘development zone’ (LICADHO 2007b; Saing Soenthrith and Welsh 2007; Amnesty International 2008). Tourism in the area has increased substantially in recent years, and offshore oil exploration threatens to turn Sihanoukville into a boomtown economy, heightening speculative activities (McDermid and Cheang
Sokha 2007). I conducted interviews with recently evicted people from this village in June 2007, and one participant, who complained of the complicity local CPP officials had in their current situation, revealed the extent of the patronage system in Cambodia’s neoliberalizing process:

The village chief he did not help us. He didn’t have any problem like us because he lives in a different place. Now he doesn’t even come to look and see what our problems are. He doesn’t care about us. He did not come to talk and ask what happened here. He came once after this happened and he just blamed us for what happened! He said its our fault because we did not go to inform the authorities that we live here, and he said that we didn't inform him about this problem either. He said he could not solve the problem now because we didn’t give him any information about what happened here, but he didn’t ask us about our situation. He just wants to blame us. He told us that we have to wait and be patient and to just stay here like this, don’t go back to our land. The commune chief did not come at all. When there is an election, they come and ask about our problems and say they will help us, but when we have a real problem like this, no one comes to help us. They are CPP, and at election they give us money, and clothes, like a T-Shirt and promise to help us [if we vote for them], but after the election nothing. They just wait until after the election, and then destroy our homes and get rich by selling our land. These people don’t understand about Cambodian’s lives, they don’t care that we live here like this now, because they don’t care about Cambodians, and they are Cambodians! So I want to ask the foreigner to come and help (Interview, Farmer and Fisher, Female, Age 48, 20 June 2007, Sihanoukville; see also Hayman and Sam Rith 2007).

Given pleas such as this one, and the significant media attention that has been placed on land grabbing, one would like to think that investor ethics would slow the pace of violent evictions. The reality, however, is that evictions are taking place under the pretexts of ‘beautification’ and ‘development’ (Springer 2009), where local tycoons initially acquire the land in question, and only subsequently offer it for lease or sale to private foreign companies (Amnesty International 2008). Nonetheless, the drive for profits outstrips concerns for human livelihood and wellbeing as at least 10,000 families have been evicted from Phnom Penh over the last eight years in making way for various ‘development’ projects, where many families never receive money or resettlement in compensation for the loss of their homes (“Phnom Penh’s decade of land evictions” 2008).

Interviews conducted with NGO directors and recently evicted peoples further revealed that private companies were frequently exploiting the services of the military and police as private armies to effect these evictions. The reaction from the donor community is an ongoing call for respect of
legal norms, and a deepening of the rule of law so that less ‘nefarious’ investors (meaning foreign) will want to become involved:

there is no respect in the security force, there is no trust in the government, there is no trust in the court system, and that’s why there is no big company investor to come to Cambodia, because they do not trust in the rule of law and the court system. If the government fix that too, then you don’t need to go to US, Canada, and Europe to ask investors to Cambodia, they will come if they are sure that their interests are protected by the rule of law (Interview, Anonymous, Program Officer, Asian Development Bank, 3 August 2007, Phnom Penh).

The problem with this rendering, however, is that the protections offered by a legal framework are primarily oriented around procuring the stability of a property system, where human security is a secondary concern. This study has recognized the human security doctrine as one of the finer facets of neoliberalization in Cambodia, insofar as its scalar shift involves a qualitative restructuring of state form that effectively redraws the boundary between the individual and the state, transforming the state’s traditional role in security while fostering the emergence of new forms of neoliberal governmentality. I have further argued that the property system can be understood as a mechanism that confers legitimacy on processes of violent accumulation. In effect, respect for the rule of law according to donor standards would only entrench the violence currently being witnessed in Cambodia by concealing its underlying character of primitive accumulation through rendering this process legitimate. The fundamental difference with the current situation is that observance of the rule of law, and the breakdown of the patronage system neoliberals theorize such respect would engender, levels the playing field between Cambodian elites and their foreign counterparts in terms of access to the means of accumulation by dispossession. This is the essence of neoliberalization’s objective from the perspective of donors, while neoliberal reform is something Cambodian elites will only allow when it is evident that they alone stand to gain financially.

When the criteria of financial reward are either not met or put into jeopardy, there is typically a stalling process on legislation that can last for years. The adoption of Cambodian children by foreigners offers a useful example of obstruction tactics by the RGC. In 2001, US immigration
officials investigating adoptions in Cambodia accused Cambodian officials at the highest levels of government of complicity in scams that involved hundreds of babies and millions of US dollars (Cochrane and Sam Rith 2005). Moratoriums on adoptions from Cambodia were put in place by a number of countries, and members of Cambodia’s international donor community such as the United States, Canada, France, and the United Kingdom have been pressuring the RGC to adopt legislation that will regulate adoptions in light of fears over human trafficking. In addition to concerns over ‘baby buying’, another major goal of an adoption law on the part of the donor community is to build confidence in Cambodia’s legal system and the rule of law, conditions that will enhance liberalization and investment in their view (LICADHO 2007a; Mussomeli 2007; Development Partner’s Consensus Statement on Governance 2008). In contrast, the Cambodian government has stalled for years on this issue based on the requirement that a ‘fixed price’ on the processing of adoptions be established. Currently processing fees range from being essentially free up to tens of thousands of US dollars, depending on the connections of the individual facilitating the adoption. International agencies are charged higher rates than local facilitators, and those prospective parents negotiating the process themselves are not required to pay, but must bear the burden of much longer wait times and an ongoing requests for bribes from officials to see that their paperwork is moved through the Cambodian ministries. The broader implication for neoliberalization in Cambodia that can be drawn from this example is that those policies and programs that attempt to cut out the patronage system’s ability to accumulate capital are stonewalled, while those that facilitate capital accumulation within the patronage system are rushed through.

As a country heavily dependent on aid, with international donors having provided the equivalent of over fifty percent of the government’s annual budget for more than a decade now (Global Witness 2009), the intended audience for Cambodia’s privatization, liberalization, and deregulation policies is primarily the donor community that is requesting them. However, there are
shades to this as it is not simply a case of donor demands being implemented in full whenever and wherever they are requested. The donor community frequently complains about the lack of transparency in the mechanisms through which policies are being pushed through, in particular, bidding processes on government contracts and the sale of public holdings are frequently criticized as being corrupt:

the Fund has been pushing for transparency, and if there was transparency in the [procurement of land] concessions for example, it wouldn’t be a problem. So you debate openly, and then you have to pay for the resettlement, so there is no problem. But currently this is opaque. This is the issue, and if you look at the Fund website, we are pushing very hard for transparency. Bidding documents, sometimes you go to buy bidding documents and they say no. There is no transparency (Interview, Anonymous Cambodian, Economist, IMF, 10 August 2007, Phnom Penh).

In this regard, policy reform proceeds as though the curtain on a stage show is only partially opened. The substantive acts of the protagonist (i.e., neoliberalization) that are occurring at center stage are witnessed and applauded, while the other character in this Cambodian play (i.e., patronage) is still behind the curtain and out of view. What this means is that neoliberalization with Cambodian characteristics is an extremely secretive affair, and the networks of connections within the patronage system that informs neoliberalization in the country can only be speculated upon. The same small group of individuals inevitably walk away with the reward of a contract or newly privatized asset in hand, making the top of the patronage system quite apparent and well documented in a number of reports by watchdog group (see LICADHO 2006; ADHOC 2008; Global Witness 2009), yet what occurs below the top rungs of patron power are murky and not well mapped, although some evidence has recently come to light to suggest that they operate very much along familial lines (Global Witness 2007; “It’s a family affair” 2007).

What can be determined from Cambodia’s patronage system is that as a long standing, clandestine, and hierarchical mode of power relations in the country, it engenders significant violence, which carries over into the contemporary political economy of neoliberalization. This violence proceeds through particular channels as it keeps key mediators of social relations (such as
judges, top monks, high ranking military and police officials, journalists and media outlets, and commune chiefs) on an unofficial ‘payroll’. This payroll is not simply orchestrated by the ruling CPP as a whole, but rather through two rival patronage systems within the party, where the two key players are Prime Minister, Hun Sen, and Party Chairman, President of the Senate, and Acting Head of State, Chea Sim (Global Witness 2009). These adversarial factions within the party are not on equal footing, as it appears Chea Sim is much less involved in corruption than the Prime Minister, and accordingly has fewer supporters and a much smaller roll call than Hun Sen, who has control over both the military and the police. Conflicts between these two opponents have been numerous over the years, and culminated in July 2004, with Chea Sim fleeing the country after apparently refusing to sign controversial legislation to allow a new government to be formed following the 2003 national elections (Rand and MacIssac 2004; Saing Soenthirth and Yun Samean 2004a). He returned ten days later, citing that he had required medical treatment in Thailand, but no explanation was ever offered as to why military forces surrounded his home on the day of his departure, suggesting Chea Sim and Hun Sen had come to some sort of agreement concerning their differences and the conditions of his return to Cambodia (Cochrane et al. 2004; Yun Samean 2004).

Those connected to the patronage system face considerable pressure to conform, which as the case of Heng Pov confirms, often entails being an agent or accomplice in the murder of political adversaries, or at least a participant in an ongoing omertà. Heng Pov, as a former Undersecretary of State and assistant to the Minister of the Interior, as well as police commissioner of Phnom Penh and a personal advisor to Hun Sen, was long connected to the Prime Minister’s patronage circuits, amassing considerable wealth. What has not been categorically determined is Heng Pov’s role in any violence. However, after a personal falling out with the Prime Minister, Cambodian authorities on 21 July 2006 announced a warrant for Heng Pov’s arrest, accusing him of involvement in the 2003 assassination of Municipal Court judge Sok Sethamony and linking him to a string of other crimes
Heng Pov fled Cambodia 23 July 2006 and raids on his home apparently uncovered counterfeit dollars, weapons, and one million US dollars in cash. Heng Pov now alleges involvement by government officials in the 30 March 1997 attack on a peaceful protest outside the National Assembly, and also claims that a government official ordered the 7 July 1999 assassination of revered actress Piseth Peaklica, and the 7 July 1997 murder of then Secretary of State in the Ministry of the Interior, Hor Sok, both of whom were vocal critics of corruption within the ruling party (Gillison and Phann Ana 2006; “Heng Pov’s talk of high crimes” 2006; Phann Ana and Gillison 2006). Which side is to believed in this dispute on who murdered who is anyone’s best guess, but what is clear is that the patronage system engenders violence and provides the necessary framework and concealment to ensure it proceeds with impunity:

Nowadays, they don’t kill directly like Pol Pot, if he wanted to kill, he would just kill, but today they kill people indirectly. They contract someone to kill another person for them. So for example in the case of my brother, Mr. Chea Vichea, the real killer is hidden because they hire someone else to kill. When someone challenges a government official, they will investigate about this person first, and then have someone else do the killing of the person who challenged them. So for example, when they killed Mr. Hor Sok after the 1997 coup, they kill the people who worked in government, but today they kill people who work in the union when they speak out against the government, like my brother Chea Vichea, Ros Sovannareth, and Hy Vuthy. Or if they work for the Human Rights NGO, they will kill as well, like the activist killed the other day in Stung Treng. … So the government says they give one-hundred percent freedom for the people, but the NGOs and civil society groups feel this is not true. In the case of journalists, they do not have the freedom to talk, the government does not allow it. You can say what you want to say, as long as it isn’t critical of the government or a high-ranking official. So they kill journalists like Youk Tharidh, and the singers like Piseth Pilika, and Pov Panhapich, and a high-ranking monk, Bun Thoeun, they killed him as well. We can see that this is not really freedom, and this is not really peace in Cambodian society based on these examples (Chea Mony). (Interview, Chea Mony, President, Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia, 10 July 2007, Phnom Penh; see also Barton 2006b).

What Chea Mony’s statement reveals is how the violence of political rivalry in Cambodia has to some extent transitioned alongside neoliberalization. This particular form of violence now focuses its malevolent energies on those who challenge the logic of neoliberalization in the country, as it is neoliberalism that forms the contemporary backbone of political economic power that Cambodian elites enjoy.
Many of the Cambodian NGO directors I interviewed were acutely aware of the rising tide of inequality in the country, and viewed this as a product of Cambodia’s transitional political economy:

we have a few percentage of really, really rich, and we have many really, really poor. So you don’t have a middle class in this country, you have a lot of poor and then you come up to the very rich, and that’s it. You know, the question about the quality of life, when we look at this and we compare the poorest of the poor in this country, now the fact that these rich people are so rich and that these people are so much better off then the poor are, its actually making the poor much worse off in terms of poverty. Even if they are making the same amount of money, they are still much worse off today, where as before you can depend on other people’s free time to lend you a hand for example when problems happen. Where as before you depend on your young kids to do most of the work, now officially they have to work for an employer and earn an income and they spend all the money on survival. And the system again, they don’t have any land in hand to raise the poor. So the status and the relativity of the poor compared to the rich is getting worse and also impacting on their quality of life (Interview, Ou Virak, President, Cambodian Center for Human Rights, 4 July 2007, Phnom Penh).

Piled on top of intensifying socioeconomic disparity (see Hayman 2007) is the country’s historical legacy of war and genocide, where people continue to operate in what fundamentally amounts to a survival mentality. Interviews with ‘non-expert’ Cambodians continually revealed that people are more concerned with how much rice they are going to have for dinner that night, or how they are going afford to send their children to school the next day, than they are with the patterns of wealth disparity, except when it threatens their direct livelihood through accumulation by dispossession. What Cambodia’s historical context in concert with ongoing poverty and vast inequality means in terms of neoliberal governmentality is that most individuals in Cambodia are already well conditioned to fending for themselves. They have never known state provisions of social welfare, and repeatedly look to the patronage system as their only potential security blanket. On the other hand, their subjectivation to neoliberalism in terms of its ability to foster an entrepreneurial spirit is mixed. Individuals know how to make ends meet and often engage in the informal sector, but this does not always translate into sophisticated economic knowledge:

I think that the trauma and violence from the past somehow has [an] impact on people from participating in all this livelihood production, increase their access to marketplace, or market economy or whatever. So that could cause a problem for them, for example, people go to the bank right? So they will hand over their land title for their property to the bank in exchange for money, for a loan, and while the people are still struggling with their daily lives, with trauma, with stressful, with
violence, I think that a lot end up losing their land, losing their property, so big institutions like the bank, like ACLEDA for example, people lose their land to them. I think it's really a problem, so market economy, yes that's good, but I think they should help people deal with this problem first, help people understand, help people make a business plan or whatever. So without proper education or without helping people make a proper plan or whatever, I think it's going to be the rich become richer, the poor become poorer, its not going to change (Interview, Sotheara Chhim, Managing Director, Transcultural Psychosocial Organization, 23 July 2007, Phnom Penh).

Neoliberalism as governmentality in the Cambodian context thus ensures that individuals are caught between a Scylla and Charybdis of violence, as the poor must either look to the domination of the patronage system to ensure their livelihoods, or seek official economic channels as an alternative, where they become easy prey to usury. A Cambodian economist with the IMF even went as far as to make an impassioned excuse for this particular form of accumulation by dispossession:

look at the lending rate, the interest rate, what you [are] getting from the private moneylenders is very high. The rate now is, the gap is smaller, but still large. Basically I think, because I also know who lend money and who also borrow money, its roughly three to four times the commercial banks. But who do you want to blame? No one! [laughs]. How can you blame for this, you look at the history, you look at the rule of law here, if you try to give them cheap credit and you don't have any recourse to act to force them to pay you back, so that's the big mistake for the market, the whole market in Cambodia. So that's the, you know, the rule of law, with donors are pushing for reform in the court system, reform in the judicial system (Interview, Anonymous Cambodian, Economist, IMF, 10 August 2007, Phnom Penh).

In other words, in order to rescind the violence of ongoing primitive accumulation in the form of predatory lending practices, Cambodia must replace it with a new form of violence, a ‘force’ that will provide security on investments called ‘law’. In effect, this is a call for a different form of concealed violence, wherein should one fail to make payments on a loan due to economic hardship or any other reason, the law will step in to dispossess the individual of whatever meager means s/he has left, or strip the individual of their spatial liberty through incarceration. Neoliberalization in this sense would see the penal system do more of the dirty work, and thus entail a ‘legitimization’ of the means of accumulation by dispossession through a legal framework.

Effectively, ‘neoliberalism with Cambodian characteristics’ is a powder keg waiting to explode, one that may precipitate a repeat of the violent revolution of the 1970s should a proverbial match be dropped on the discontent that boils just beneath the surface. Ongoing violent
dispossessions may very well be the trigger (Cheang Sokha 2007; Lempert 2006), something Hun Sen well recognizes, as he frequently addresses the Cambodian media with paranoid invocations of his firm grip on political and military power (Saing Soenthrith and Yun Samean 2004b; “Hun Sen: Nobody can topple Hun Sen” 2008), and even more tellingly, on 03 March 2007 he declared ‘war on land-grabbing’ to symbolically demonstrate his concern (Barton 2007b; Yun Samean 2007), not for the people of Cambodia, but for his own position of power (see Vong Sokheng 2005). For now, what can be witnessed are episodic cracks in the structure that Cambodian neoliberalism has erected, where rapes, murders, and assaults have become a common lived experience for the poor as marginalization is furthered and minor differences are magnified, resulting in a pattern of conflict primarily between ‘underdogs’ (Uvin 2003). In contrast, elites effectively insulate themselves from any potential reprisal through an ever tightening security regime that utilizes the apparatus of the state, such as authoritarian clampdowns on public space, as well as private measures visible in the landscape, such as fenced properties patrolled by armed guards (Springer forthcoming). Likewise, there is some evidence to suggest that domestic violence is also on the rise:

since 1994 when we conducted the baseline survey on domestic violence, people still thinking that domestic violence is a private matter. If you are outside family there is no need to intervention, its not your problem, its my family’s problem. In 1995 we present our national survey to the government… and the results show that fifteen percent women suffer from domestic violence… The law drafted in 1993 was sent to Council of Ministries and was lost in red tape there for a long time because people still, even the government still feels that domestic violence is still private matter. And in 1999 we have women’s movement, mobilization of women in Cambodia. I think you may know already about the 60-day campaign against violence on women. … We came up with the press conference and the statement for the Prime Minister, that we [are] concerned about domestic violence and would like to have a domestic violence law. And the Prime Minister at that time in 2000 [Hun Sen], and since 1993, he don’t believe that we suffer a lot, so he get the Ministry of Planning to conduct the research with the Health Demographic Survey. But here they include 20 questions [on domestic violence]… and the result come up in 2000 that twenty-five percent of women in Cambodia suffer from domestic violence. From that time our Prime Minister finally agreed that domestic violence is not a private matter (Interview, Phally Hor, Executive Director, Project Against Domestic Violence, 6 July 2007, Phnom Penh; see also Ministry of Women’s Affairs 2005; National Institute of Public Health, National Institute of Statistics [Cambodia] 2006; LICADHO 2007c)

Although the government has finally responded to this growing epidemic by acknowledging it as a real social problem, the push to see a law on domestic violence passed through the National
Assembly represents yet another exercise in bureaucratic foot dragging, presumably because Cambodian elites had little to gain from the new law.

This slow pace of progress on the domestic violence law stands in stark contrast to the rapidity of the establishment of a pseudo-legal framework for oil and gas exploration. In the 1990s oil exploration was only speculatively on the agenda, but petroleum legislation was quickly passed in 1991 (Council of Ministries 1991), coinciding with the structural changes that would ensue as Cambodia transitioned to a free market economy under the Paris Peace Accords. Throughout the 1990s quiet amendments were made to the existing petroleum legislation, paving the way for the dubious establishment of the Cambodian National Petroleum Authority (CNPA) in 1999, without primary legislation passed by the National Assembly. This placed direct control of the institution into the hands of Hun Sen, and his deputy, Sok An (Carmichael 2003), making the institution highly politicised from the outset as exercise of this power sidelines and marginalizes those who are supportive of the Senate President, Chea Sim, and what’s more the CNPA’s establishment by royal decree means it operates without oversight from the Cambodian parliament or other relevant ministries (Global Witness 2009). By 2006, a rush for mineral resources was well underway as the Council for the Development of Cambodia, the body in charge of foreign investment, had approved US $403 million worth of investment initiatives. Global Witness (2009) has charged that concession allocations have occurred under a blanket of secrecy, where financial bonuses, totaling millions of dollars, paid to secure concessions do not show up in the 2006 or 2007 revenue reports from the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Once again, Sokimex is the company that stands to profit the most from these developments, having entered the petroleum business in May 1996 through its purchase of state-owned oil company, Compagnie Kampuchea des Carburants, as part of the government’s market-oriented privatization program. The deal tasked the company with the import, storage, and distribution of petroleum in Cambodia, and gave Sokimex a stranglehold on the industry
with a market share of approximately forty percent, raising further speculation of Sok Kong’s close
ties to Hun Sen and the CPP (Cain 2009), and leading many observers and donors alike to predict a
looming ‘resource curse’ (Barton 2007a; Barton and Cheang Sokha 2007a). These patterns of
corruption and patronage currently found in the country’s extractive industries are merely
replications of what was occurring in the 1990s, when the political elite focused their attention on
resource exploitation in Cambodia’s forest sector (see Global Witness 2007, Le Billon 2000, 2002; Le
Billon and Springer 2007). In short, ‘neoliberalism with Cambodian characteristics’ is shaped by a
kleptocratic system of nepotism, where ‘legitimacy’ is conferred through partisan control of the
military, a quasi-legal framework with a thoroughly corrupt judiciary (Sam Rith and Poynton 2007),
and a labyrinthine system of patronage that extends down through to the lowest levels of
government in the village.

This specificity of context suggests that the relationship between neoliberalism and violence
is necessarily imbued with characteristics that are unique to a given setting. My argument in this
dissertation is thus not to make a plenary, trans-geohistorical argument that suggests the substantive
effects of neoliberalism are everywhere and always the same. Instead, using theoretical arguments in
the first half of the dissertation I have attempted to draw out some of the connections neoliberalism
has with violence and how Orientalism shades these connections, while in the second half of the
study I have attempted to locate these intersections within the uniqueness and specificity of the
Cambodian context. Although I can reflect on violence in other geohistorical settings and its
potential relationship to a given context’s experiences of neoliberalization, I do not have the
empirical backing to make qualified remarks as to any specific nature, nor do I want to draw
conclusions that far reaching. That said, one of my primary concerns within this study has been to
highlight neoliberalism’s intersections with Orientalism, and it is through this particular set of
imaginative geographies that I have focused much of my critique.
In particular, my concern for Orientalism places my focus on neoliberalism in ‘non-western’ contexts, where the historical legacy of colonialism has laid down a framework of uneven development and ideological claims to ‘racial’ or ‘ethnic’ difference. This is not to suggest that Orientalism functions in the same capacity in every geographical and historical context of the ‘global south’ where such imaginative geographies can be discerned, or that Orientalism’s intersections with neoliberalism and violence are everywhere and always the same. I have argued that Orientalism is employed to legitimize double standards in the global distribution of violence in the name of securing neoliberalism itself, and thus it should be understood that Orientalism and neoliberalism necessarily proceed differently dependent upon context. In Cambodia, the ‘culture of violence’ thesis was the discourse of choice, and thus this study has attempted to shed some light on how Orientalism can be invoked to code both the violence imbued within neoliberalism’s ‘actually existing’ circumstances, and the violent responses that may arise from such conditions. How this ultimately plays itself out in settings other than Cambodia is not addressed here, and is open to interpretation. While ‘neoliberalism with Cambodian characteristics’ points to a very unique geohistorical set of power relations operating in conjunction with a wider hegemonic ideological project, this does not mean that this study can be considered as relevant only to the Cambodian setting. Certainly I would suggest that the implications of Cambodia’s particular imbrications between neoliberalism and violence have wider relevance based on their relationship to Orientalizing discourse, but determining precisely how far my theorizations can be carried requires comparative analysis and detailed empirical research in other countries. While I can speculate that patterns characterizing the relationship between neoliberalism and violence would emerge, this would always be checkered with contingencies and contradictions dependent on context, where at times the brutality of neoliberalism may prove to be more or less intense than is currently found in the
Cambodian setting. There is obviously much more work that needs to be done here, where my study is by no means the final appraisal, and instead should be considered as a point of departure.

10.4 Significance, Novelty, and the Relationships Between Chapters

This study is comprised of individual stand-alone manuscripts, and as such the novelty and significance of my dissertation is multiple, a point to which I now want to turn as I attend to some of the thematic linkages between chapters. In chapter two, published as a ‘critical review’ piece called ‘The Nonillusory Effects of Neoliberalization: Linking Geographies of Poverty, Inequality, and Violence’, I draw attention to the ongoing realities of capitalism’s festering poverty, rising inequality, and violent geographies, which are suggested to have been intensified under neoliberalism. The importance of this chapter is in its criticism of those commentators who seemingly want to abandon any and all conceptualizations of neoliberalism because of its inherent messiness, rather than seeking to identify and understand the complexities of neoliberalism as it contextualizes itself differently in various institutional landscapes. In drawing linkages to other chapters, an important thematic framework is established for understanding the explanatory power neoliberalism holds in relating similar constellations of experiences across space, and how this might offer a potential basis for emancipation.

Emancipation is placed front and center in chapter three, ‘Public Space as Emancipation: Critical Reflections on Democratic Development, Neoliberalism, and Violence in the Global South’, where the major importance and innovation rests in how public space is identified as offering an opportunity to infuse civil society with some radical content, allowing us to move beyond ‘top-down’, technocratic, and neoliberal approaches to development. I argue that by moving democracy back towards its etymological origins, a conceptual meaning emerges that is fundamental to an emancipatory political agenda. This epistemic understanding, however, must be grounded in space in order to give
existential meaning to a liberationist spirit, which necessarily means that contestation over the production of space will emerge. Sometimes the struggle over public spaces comes with a violent character on behalf of those seeking a new political arrangement, and this is almost inevitably the case with respect to those concerned with maintaining the status quo. My argument in this chapter is (post)anarchistic in the sense that it involves a rejection of both explicit authoritarianism, and ‘electoral authoritarianism’ (i.e., representative democracy), and the hierarchies that are promoted and supported by these two models of governance. In this way, chapter three offers a theoretical and spatial grounding to the (post)anarchist critique I explicitly present in chapter nine, while also offering an expanded theoretical framework to the arguments I advance in chapter seven.

The major significance of chapter four, ‘Neoliberalism as Discourse: On the Contours of Subjectivation, Good Governance, and Symbolic Violence’, comes from its attempts to merge (post)Marxian political economy with poststructuralism in advancing the notion of neoliberalism as discourse. Here, the focus is on neoliberal subjectivation, and how this works on individuals who are rendered as subjects and subjected to relations of power through discourse. The novelty of this approach is in its treatment of the good governance agenda, which is conceived as a discursive frontline in the creation of consent for neoliberalism insofar as it helps to facilitate neoliberal penetration at the level of the subject and contributes to the misrecognition of the structural inequalities of capitalism. Neoliberalism as discourse is argued to constitute symbolic violence, which is wielded precisely inasmuch as one does not perceive it as such, a consideration that is important in its own right, but increasingly so as it offers significant clues as to how we might begin to recognize the systemic violent geographies neoliberalism (re)produces. Such an understanding of neoliberalism is imperative to the focus on emancipatory politics found in other chapters, and brings more clarity and conceptual precision to the arguments presented in chapter two.
Chapter five, ‘*Violence Sits in Places? Cultural Practice, Neoliberal Rationalism, and Virulent Imaginative Geographies*’, is a theoretical exploration of the relational geographies of violence, framed within neoliberalism’s ability to mark these violent geographies as ‘irrational’ in those contexts it seeks to tighten its grip. I argue that through particular imaginative geographies that erase the interconnectedness of the places where violence occurs, the notion that violence is ‘irrational’ marks certain cultures as ‘other’. The noteworthiness of this argument is my identification of neoliberalism as being exploitative of such imaginative geographies in seeking to construct itself as the sole providence of nonviolence and the lone bearer of reason in our world. This is a inventive treatment inasmuch as it understands neoliberalism as a ‘civilizing’ project, which positions the market as salvationary to putatively ‘irrational’ and ‘violent’ peoples. From this, a ‘theology’ of neoliberalism emerges, where violence is treated in dogmatic fashion as an exclusively place-based phenomenon. But while violence is experienced through the ontological priority of place, any seemingly specific experiences are inseparable from the relational characteristic of space as an indivisible whole. This understanding brings neoliberalism as a hegemonic project back into focus, where despite the plurality, variegation, and messiness of its geographical points of contact as it plays out as contextually specific and historically contingent neoliberalizations, it nonetheless (re)produces violent geographies across a multitude of sites in similar ways that suggest something other than mere aberrance or ‘savagery’ on the part of local actors. The linkages of this argument to other chapters are in a shared understanding of neoliberalism/neoliberalization as an ‘out there’ and ‘in here’ processual phenomenon, ‘whose effects are necessarily variegated and uneven, but the incidence and diffusion of which may present clues to a pervasive “metalogic”’ (Peck and Tickell 2002: 383). In particular, a strong connection is made with chapter eight, where I bring empirical context to this theoretical argument.
The novelty and significance of chapter six, ‘The Neoliberalization of Security and Violence in Cambodia’s Transition’, rests in its critique of the human security doctrine, and how it is entangled in the construction of a neoliberalizing political economic agenda. Few scholars have been so critical in their assessment of human security, but I nonetheless argue that by shifting security’s frame of reference from the state to the individual, the potential for this scalar adjustment to be colonized by econometric goals becomes all too real as the focus on individualism coincides with neoliberalism and its market-based domination, a consideration demonstrated by the Cambodian experience. The violence that swelled both during and after Cambodia’s transitional phase reveals the human security doctrine as a pretext that effectively translates into acceptance and promotion of the political status quo, as Cambodia’s donor community rhetorically chastised state-sponsored violence, while doing little to curb its potential. Human security was treated in a sense that theorized security’s scalar shift in reference would ‘roll-back’ the Cambodian state in its traditional, ‘bloated’ capacity, while ‘rolling-out’ protections for the market through a focus on individualism and a new sense of openness to foreign interests. This chapter traces the early process of neoliberalization, and thus establishes some of the historical geographical context that informs the following chapters. It also highlights neoliberalism’s central concern for market stability and order, which are taken up in more detail as they relate to the contestation of public space in chapter seven.

Chapter seven, ‘Violence, Democracy, and the Neoliberal “Order”: The Contestation of Public Space in Posttransitional Cambodia’, is one of the very few published works on contemporary Cambodia that takes neoliberalism as a serious consideration in the country’s posttransitional political economy, and the first to do so in any sustained exploratory or explanatory sense. Many Cambodian scholars have been myopically reluctant to push their analyses in this direction, as they remain convinced that Cambodia continues to be a de facto communist state, largely because of its bloated bureaucracy and continuing authoritarianism. As such, this chapter is original in its contribution inasmuch as it argues
that neoliberal policies help to explain why authoritarianism and violence remain the principal modes of governance among Cambodia’s ruling elites in the posttransitional era. I argue that neoliberalization is a foremost causal factor in the country’s inability to consolidate democracy, effectively suffocating the emergence of a grassroots democratic polity. Like chapter six, such asphyxiation is considered to be an outcome of neoliberalism’s concern for order, which it attended to here through a consideration of the (re)production and contestation of public space. Thus, as mentioned, chapter seven offers an empirical grounding to the theoretical arguments outlined and identified in chapter three, and provides some indication as to how an emancipatory politics is beginning to emerge in Cambodia, despite the multiple violences of the neoliberal order.

The theories explored in chapter five are given empirical context in chapter eight, ‘Culture of Violence or Violent Orientalism? Neoliberalization and Imagining the ‘Savage Other’ in Posttransitional Cambodia’, which offers a critique of the ‘culture of violence’ thesis. Here I am attentive to the commonplace reductionist treatments of violence in the Cambodian literature, and in particular their tendency to blame posttransitional violence and the country’s democratic deficit on Khmer culture. This paper is innovative and notable insofar as it interprets the culture of violence thesis as a sweeping caricature shot through with Orientalist imaginaries, and a problematic discourse that underwrites the process of neoliberalization. The culture of violence argument is considered to invoke particular imaginative geographies that problematically erase the contingency, fluidity, and interconnectedness of the places in which violence occurs. While violence is certainly mediated through both culture and place, following Doreen Massey’s (2005) re-conceptualization of space and place, place is considered as a relational constellation within the wider experiences of space. Thus, like chapter five, it calls into question the notion that violence sits in place, a reflection that encourages us to recognize that any seemingly ‘local’, direct, or cultural expression of violence is necessarily imbricated in the broader patterns of ‘global’ violence. Through such understanding, this
chapter picks up on themes addressed in chapters two and four, by recognizing that in the current moment of political economic orthodoxy, structural violence experienced across space increasingly suggests a relationship to neoliberalism. This chapter’s argument is further connected to chapters six and seven insofar as it brings a new angle of critique to understanding the problematics and violences of Cambodia’s neoliberalization.

Finally, in chapter nine, ‘Violent Accumulation: A (Post)anarchist Critique of Property, Dispossession, and the State of Exception in Neoliberalizing Cambodia’, I link Marxian concerns for primitive accumulation with Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) notions of bare life and the state of exception, which offers a unconventional pairing. This chapter also has a degree of novelty in terms of its (post)anarchistic critique. ‘In the late 1970s’, Richard Peet and Nigel Thrift (1989: 6-7) comment, ‘Antipode published issues on the environment and anarchism which, in retrospect, were the last busts of colour in the fall of its 1960s-style radicalism’. Since the time these words were written, anarchism has drifted even further from the hearts and minds of radical geographers and the critical approaches they take to their work. In a sense, this chapter was inspired by a desire to bring a new ‘bust of colour’ to human geography, by drawing on the texts of classical anarchism and merging them with poststructuralist critique to (re)introduce (post)anarchism in the discipline. In this chapter, I specifically treat the dialectical logic of capital/primitive accumulation as existing in a mutually reinforcing triad that also includes the dialectics of law/violence and civilization/savagery. Law and civilization are argued to legitimize ongoing primitive accumulation, and wherever the trilateral of logics is enacted, I contend that the ‘state of exception’ is called into being, exposing us all as potential homo sacer. These arguments are framed within neoliberalizing Cambodia, which draws in connections to the chapters that precede it by shedding a different light on the violences made possible through the processes of neoliberalization. In particular, the preoccupation with strengthening the legal system in Cambodia is read, not as an altruistic development for the
betterment of society, or one that will improve the country’s chances of consolidating democracy, but as an imposition that serves to legitimize the violences of property. The (post)anarchism approach I have adopted here has strong connections with the processual nature of resistance and contestation that I advocate in chapters three and seven where I conceive radical democracy as public space, which should in turn be understood as a spatial proxy for (post)anarchism.

10.5 Dissertation Strengths and Weaknesses

Many of the principal strengths and weaknesses of this dissertation relate to the ‘manuscript-based’ approach I have taken to my write up. First, the nature of a manuscript-based dissertation necessarily means that there will be repetition on occasion, as each chapter has been conceived and written as an independent, stand-alone piece of writing, either already published as a journal article or book chapter, or laid-out and in review for this purpose. What this means is that I draw on particular ideas that are really valuable to my sense of geography—for example Doreen Massey’s (2005) relational sense of place, Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) production of space, and Edward Said’s (1978/2003) imaginative geographies—and re-introduce them in different chapters where the idea speaks to the argument I attempt to make. Second, because UBC Faculty of Graduate Studies (2008) stipulates that those chapters that are already published cannot diverge in any significant sense from the published version of the paper, the linkages between chapters is not always or necessarily as cohesive as that which would be found between chapters in a traditional dissertation. On the one hand, this tendency for ideas to repeat themselves across chapters speaks to how the various chapters can be conceived as being thematically and ideationally connected, thus ensuring that the reader can trace a series of threads between the various investigations of neoliberalism and violence that have been presented from one chapter to the next. On the other hand, the reader needs to understand that each chapter has been subject to the peer review process, which has necessarily reshaped and remolded
many of the presented papers in new directions according to the critical feedback received from referees and editors. Finally, the manuscript-based approach also means that I have had to work within the particular word lengths of the journals to which I have submitted, which has placed certain limitations on the scope of each chapter, although of course the themes addressed were based on my choices.

The dissertation may also be criticized for not focusing enough on empirical content, as most of the chapters are theoretically driven arguments. In the latter half of the dissertation the ethnographic aspect of my approach is much more visible, where I have relied on extensive and lengthy participant quotes to structure my arguments. However, in the first half of the dissertation, the arguments are almost exclusively theoretical, although chapter four in this section does rely on ethnographic methodologies and includes several quotes taken from participants. These decisions of course play to my individual strengths and weaknesses as a social scientist. I fully acknowledge my strength and interest is not decidedly located in empiricism, but rather increasingly focused on social theory. We all have particular strengths in our research practice, and I simply play to mine, as do we all. In the epilogue to their book ‘Approaching Human Geography’, Cloke et al. (1991: 204) comment,

at bottom what drives our own ‘geographical imagination’ is something that continues to be energised by quite fundamental beliefs which cannot readily accept their ‘equality’ with other sets of beliefs. For many of us, then, there is still a desire to cling to profound and seemingly consistent frames of reference.

In other words, as human geographers, each of us approaches our research from a particular vantage point, and although belonging to the same discipline, we all operate within a framework that is uniquely our own. The discipline of human geography is in many ways enigmatic, allowing a certain degree of flexibility and difference not afforded by other disciplines. As Agnew et al. (1996: 10) suggest, ‘human geography does not have an “essential” nature. It changes over time as its concepts are invested with different meanings and significance.’ In spite of this acknowledgement, there are geographers who continue to want to treat geography as a citadel of empiricism detached from social
theory, relying upon and appealing to scientism, placing value exclusively in quantitative analyses, and dismissing qualitative methodologies as ‘anecdotal’. This is something that concerns me, as the lissome and dynamic nature of human geography is what makes the discipline so broadly appealing. Such allure is what also positions human geography as a potentially transformative vanguard within the social sciences, where the plurality of accepted ontologies and epistemologies in itself offers a critique of the current political economic orthodoxy and the homogeneity it seeks to engender.

In my reliance on social theory, my goal is thus not to become a ‘Beverly Hills Geographer’, where the practice of human geography comes to be defined as ‘Ivory tower building’ (Nietschmann and Starrs 2001: 181). I see a great deal of value in pushing social theory in new directions, and contend that theoretical exercises offer as much new ‘material’ as empirical approaches that re-treading existing social theories in new contexts. Both must be considered as important contributions. Yet the primary concern with my approach to research, whether though theory or empirics, is a desire to play a part in effecting political economic change in the service of social justice, and to make a positive contribution to the lives of those who have participated in my study. Thankfully I am not a lonely voice in the wilderness with regards to my thinking about the nexus between research and social change, as many geographers ascribe to this philosophy (see Dyck 1993; Moss 1993; G. Rose 1993; England 1994; Kobayashi 1994; Nast 1994; Hays-Mitchell 2001; Berman Santana 2003; Chase 2003; Lynn 2003). Feminism’s closely related commitments to social justice, activism, and critical reflexivity have inspired and enlightened my practice of human geography, where corresponding to this philosophical agenda, I have a strong affinity for qualitative methods, largely stemming from feminist critiques of positivism. To some degree this is directly related to my experiences as a student, where interactions with individuals like Catherine Nolin, Gail Fondahl, Audrey Kobayashi, Joyce Davidson, Sarah de Leeuw, Gerry Pratt, and Juanita Sundberg have turned me on to the writings of feminist geographers. However, my encounters with feminist geographers
as being the principal advocates of a research practice that takes social justice as its primary concern also says something about the central focus of feminism itself. Feminist scholarship is motivated by the desire to tear down hierarchical power structures as they relate not only to gender, but also to other sociocultural constructions and constrictions such as sex, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, class, and ability (see D. Rose 1993; G. Rose 1993; Mackenzie 1999; Madge et al. 1997; Hyndman 2001). So although this study is not positioned as a feminist inquiry, it is inspired by feminist methodological critiques, and in particular, it is the ‘an-archy’ of feminism that has contributed significantly to moving my philosophies towards a poststructural and (post)Marxian anarchism—a (post)anarchism. It is this critical, radical, reflexive, and ultimately anarchist approach to research, in both theory and practice, that I would identify as one of my dissertation’s primary strengths.

A further limitation of this research is that while I can speak Khmer, I am unable to read it. This means I have not engaged with any Khmer language sources in the dissertation. I did not have adequate funding to hire a research assistant in this capacity, and accordingly a lack of engagement with Khmer texts remains a silence in my text. This is significant insofar as the Cambodian government uses Khmer language media as an important component of its self-representation and thus as an instrument of its power. While the majority of this application of power comes through radio and television, as literacy rates remain very low in rural Cambodia, textual sources nonetheless play an important role and this research would have benefited from their inclusion.

10.6 Status of Hypothesis and Future Directions for Research

Following Marx’s contention that the world is composed not of ‘things’ but of ‘processes’ that may on occasion crystallize into ‘permanences’, which are never really permanent, David Harvey (1996: 49) argues that every historical form is constituted by its fluid movement, where things do not ‘exist outside of or prior to the processes, flows, and relations that create, sustain, or undermine them’.
From this he develops the concept of ‘moment’, which Harvey (1996) suggests are linked but not bounded by time or space in any simple way, and can instead be considered as conceptual tools that assist in addressing complex and over determined social relations (see also Hartsock 2006). Marx (1939/1993: 99-100) identified a similar conception when he argued that ‘production, distribution, exchange and consumption are not identical, but they all form members of a totality, distinctions within a unity … Mutual interaction takes place between the[se] different moments. This is the case with every organic whole’. In this argument, centered as it is on fluidic categories, Nancy Hartsock (2006) recognizes the potential appeal to poststructuralists who are so frequently pitted in opposition to the supposed determinism of Marxian ideas. Poststructuralism is most notable for its concern with power relations, and Hartsock (2006) contends that what Marx was fundamentally trying to understand (and potentially transform) are these same processes, in particular those centered around the development of capitalism. It is here in the concept of ‘moment’ that (post)Marxism and poststructuralism become reconcilable approaches to understanding the world, and it is here that I similarly want to suggest that we may locate neoliberalism as a ‘moment’ of exceptional and exemplary violence.

The title of this dissertation, ‘Neoliberalizing Violence’, speaks to the ways in which I believe violence and neoliberalism have become entwined. I am well aware that this will not be an easy argument for many to swallow. Violence, in its typical treatment, is rendered as a ‘thing’, an occurrence without a history or a geography. It is thought to exist only in its instantaneous release, decontextualized from the processes and practices that informed its expression, and disengaged from the narratives that have called forth its existential manifestation. Nonetheless, when we consider violence in the elucidating light of the concept of moment, we suddenly become much more aware of its spatio-temporality as we are forced to acknowledge the complexity of process, or the
‘momentum’ that goes into any single ‘act’ of violence. A moment is not a still picture, but a moving one, where

the link with time pushes analyses to explore both the past and the future possibilities the moment contains… The concept of ‘moment’, then, can be analytically very useful in both separating out the social relations the theorist wants to concentrate on while at the same time reminding us that these social relations are in fact connected with and defined by other social relations with their own pasts and future possibilities (Hartsock 2006: 175-176).

To treat the material expression of violence only through its directly observable manifestation is a simplistic and reductionist appraisal. This view ignores the complexity of the infinite entanglements of social relations, and further neglects the future possibilities, or what Nordstrom (2004) calls ‘the tomorrow of violence’. When we bear witness to violence, what we are seeing is not a ‘thing’, but a moment with a past, present, and future that is determined by its elaborate relations with other moments of social process. The material ‘act’ of violence itself is merely a nodal point, a snapshot of oppressive social relations, and one that has an enduring tendency to be marked with absolutist accounts of space and time, when in fact, violence is temporally dispersed through a whole series of ‘troubling geographies’ (Gregory 2006).

Given that my philosophical positionality has been laid bare as (post)anarchist, that is ‘anarchy’ (against systems of rule), it should come as no surprise that what I am prepared to conclude about the relationship between neoliberalism and violence is directly related to the ‘archy’ (the system of rule) that neoliberalism constructs, justifies, and defends in advancing its hegemonies of ideology, of policy and program, of state form, of governmentality, and ultimately of discourse. The status of my hypothesis—a posited relationship between neoliberalism and violence—is such that I consider it tenable inasmuch as the inherent hierarchy built into neoliberal political economics at the very least facilitates the replication of violence. Neoliberalism is a context in which the establishment, maintenance, and extension of hierarchical orderings of social relations are re-created, sustained, and intensified, and as such, neoliberalization must be considered as an integral part of the moment of
violence in its capacity to create social divisions within the constellations of experiences that delineate place and across the stories-so-far of space (Massey 2005). Violence has a distinctive ‘reciprocity of reinforcement’ (Iadicola and Shupe 2003: 375), where not only may inequality lead to violence, but so too may violence result in conditions of inequality. In this light, we can regard the concern for causality as being a consideration that posits where neoliberalism might make its entry into this bolstering systematic exchange between inequality and violence.

The empirical record demonstrates a marked increase in inequality under neoliberalism (UNDP 2002; Wade 2003), encouraging Harvey (2005) to regard this as neoliberalism’s primary substantive achievement, yet to ask this particular question (i.e., ‘does neoliberalism cause violence?’) is somewhat irrelevant. Inequality alone is about the metrics and measuring of disparity, however qualified, while the link between inequality and violence is typically treated as an assessment of the ‘validity’ of a causal relationship, where the link may or may not be understood to take on multiple dimensions (including temporally, spatiality, economics, politics, culture, etc.). However, the point is that inequality and violence are mutually constitutive, and if we want to disempower the abhorrent and alienating effects of either, we need to drop the calculative approaches and consider them together as an enclosed system, as a particular ‘moment’. As Hartsock argues, (2006: 176) ‘[t]hinking in terms of moments can allow the theorist to take account of discontinuities and incommensurabilities without losing sight of the presence of a social system within which these features are embedded’. Although the enduring phenomenon of violence is riven by tensions, vagaries, and vicissitudes as part of its fundamental nature, within the current moment of neoliberalism, violence is all too frequently a reflection of the turbulent landscapes of globalized capitalism. Capitalism at different moments creates particular kinds of agents who become capable of certain kinds of violence that is dependant upon both their distinctive geohistorical milieu and their situation within its hierarchy. It is in this distinction that future critical inquires must locate their
concerns for understanding the associations between violence and neoliberalism. By examining the contingent histories and unique geographies that define individual neoliberalizations, scholars can begin to interpret and dissect the kaleidoscope of violence that is intercalated within neoliberalism’s broader rationality of power.

10.7 Conclusion

One of the most succinct summaries of neoliberalism I have ever encountered, and easily the most whimsical, comes from the public intellectual, Naomi Klein, who in an interview with geographer Neil Smith explained the difference between capitalism and neoliberalism as follows:

the period after the Great Depression and the postwar period was capitalism in its seductive phase. It was capitalism that knew there were rival suitors and it came with flowers and chocolates like health care programmes and unemployment insurance, minimum wages, and all kinds of goodies precisely because it was part of this seductive dance to keep people from sliding into the hands of the socialists or, God forbid, the communists. Neoliberalism is really just capitalism in its boorish phase, capitalism on the couch in an undershirt saying, “what are you going to do, leave me?” (Klein and Smith 2008: 584).

The image of a unkempt, middle-aged man sitting in his underpants, provoking his complaining partner to leave him while retaining a certainty that no such event will ever occur is an entertaining analogy because of its peculiarity. Yet beyond such amusement, Klein has offered an analogy that should trouble us deeply as it speaks to the sense of complacency and tolerance for mistreatment that many of us, at least outwardly, appear to have convinced ourselves to accept. It speaks to the notion that ‘there is no alternative’, and to the joyless relationship we seem to have with this political economic system, an orthodoxy that ‘for better or for worse’ and ‘come what may’, appears to be here to stay.

But what is not spoken in Klein’s account, nor is it foregrounded in most contemporary treatments of neoliberalism in the literature, is that neoliberalism has gone beyond the ‘boorish’ phase of our relationship. It has become so entrenched and comfortable in its place at the head of
the table, that neoliberalism has now turned abusive (see Bumiller 2008). Our silence on this unfolding violent matrimony is what allows this abuser to become more and more sure in the application of its dominion, and more and more brazen in the execution of its ‘necropolitical’ agenda (Mbembe 2003). To continue to embrace the maligned doctrine of neoliberalism and the malevolence it unleashes, is to stay the course of battery, exploitation, and assault, and to abandon those most embattled by its exclusions, and most scarred by its exceptional violence to the full fury of its wrath. This understanding alone should call us to action, it should provoke us to intervene and invigorate our collective strength with a desire to make right such terrible wrongs. But beyond this imperative for compassion, a compassion that never takes for granted our shared humanity, lies the danger of complacency, the shadow of indifference, and the menace of detachment among those of us who have not yet been subjected to our homes being forcibly taken by armed bandits known as police, to our children’s curiosity languishing because a basic education is an expense we cannot shoulder, or to our spouses dying in our arms having been denied adequate health care. What those of us still on the winning side of neoliberalism do not account for or anticipate—and let there be no mistake that this is a system that most assuredly creates winners and losers—is that in this abandonment of our ‘others’, we produce a relation of inclusive-exclusion (Agamben 1998), where the violence of neoliberalism is transformed from exceptional to exemplary, so that violence itself comes to define the very sovereignty of this political economic order.

‘Neoliberalizing Violence’ signifies the increasingly fantastic character of violence as our political imaginaries knowingly and unknowingly come to embrace the anomic and social disarticulation of neoliberalism’s dystopia of individualism. Within neoliberalism’s imaginative geographies of a global village, what is not spoken is the desire for a certain and particular homogeneity, an impulse to remake ‘the other’ in ‘our’ image, whereby the space of ‘the peculiar’, ‘the exotic’, ‘the bizarre’ is continually (re)produced through the relation of the ban. But this is a relation that Agamben (1998:
21) knows well to be one where ‘outside and inside, become indistinguishable’, and thus, as with all fantasies and desires, at the heart of neoliberalism’s chimera of strength and confidence lurks a deep sense of anxiety. This is not a disquiet without consequence, but one that licenses particular violent geographies in ensuring that the ‘tableau of queerness’ (Said 1978/2003) never disrupts its visions of global sovereignty. And it is here that we find another sense of the fantastic, a fantastic of heightened intensity and extraordinary degree, where the sheer volume of violence that pervades our contemporary world signals the looming specter of the ‘banality of evil’. This is a clichéd, hackneyed, and mundane force, an evil whose potential resides within each and every one of us, and whose belligerence is cultivated, harvested, and consumed under the premises of neoliberalism. Fantasy and reality collide under neoliberalization, and our participation in this process allows for the normative entrenchment of violence against the marginalized, the dispossessed, the poor, and ‘the other’. Yet this thanatogeography of fantastic violence is not the conclusion of neoliberalism’s violent fantasy; rather, it is its genesis. To the question of ‘where does neoliberalism’s exceptional violence end and its exemplary violence begin?’, the terrifying answer is to be found in Martin Niemöller’s celebrated poem ‘First they came…’:

First they came for the socialists,  
and I did not speak out,  
because I was not a socialist.  
Then they came for the trade unionists,  
and I did not speak out,  
because I was not a trade unionist.  
Then they came for the Jews,  
and I did not speak out,  
because I was not a Jew.  
Then they came for me,  
and there was no one left  
to speak for me

In this somber realization, and in echoing Marx, critical human geography must not merely seek to interpret the world; it must seek to change it by aligning its theory and practice on all occasions and in all instances to the service of social justice. This ‘age of resurgent imperialism’ (Hart 2006), this era of
‘the colonial present’ (Gregory 2004), this epoch of ‘Empire’ (Hart and Negri 2000) demands such courage of our scholarship. It is through a radical approach to research that I have chosen to speak out, not only for fear that I might be ‘next’, but more importantly, as an act of solidarity with the many voices of the Cambodians represented in this study: those who the violence of neoliberalism has already come for, and those who have been silenced by the complacency of a stifled collective imagination that views neoliberalism as a monolithic and inexorable force.

10.8 Notes


2 See Foote 1997; Koskela 1999; Mansvelt Beck 1999; Pickles 2000; Sharp et al. 2000; Hanlon Nolin, and Shankar 2001; Le Billon 2001; Rolnik 2001; Warrington 2001; Watts 2001; Watts and Peluso 2001; Blomley 2003; Meth 2003; Toft 2003; Giles and Hyndman 2004; Winton 2004; Caprotti 2005; Flint 2005; Korf 2006; Gregory and Pred 2007. The trend is also highlighted by the Annals of the Association of American Geographers, which is expanding to five issues per year beginning in 2009, of which the first extra issue will be dedicated to the subject of violence, and also by the Canadian Association of Geographers, who recently held a ‘Geographies of Violence International Symposium’ as part of its annual meeting in 2008.


4 Although in the late 1990s Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facilities (ESAFs) and Structural Adjustment Credits (SAC) were abolished, the replacement for the much maligned SAPs, Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF), are quite simply SAPs under a new name, so while the language has changed, the imperatives of privatization, liberalization, and deregulation remain firmly entrenched.


8 On nationalism see Powell 1996; Babb 2001; O’Toole 2003; Bond and Manyanya 2004; Desai 2006; Oza 2006; Goodman and James 2007.
On sexuality and gender see Haug 2001; Duggan 2002; Adam 2005; Schunter-Kleeman and Plehwe 2006; Rofel 2007; Bay-Cheng and Eliseo-Arras 2008.


On democracy and authoritarianism see Oxhorn and Ducatenzeiler 1998; Leys 2001; Solfrini 2001; Stokes 2001; Chomsky 2004; Giroux 2004; Lawson 2004; Canterbury 2005; Martin 2007; Purcell 2008.


Cambodian elites were not oblivious to this ‘shock’, as the 1980s were characterized by de facto privatization in response to changes in global geopolitics. By 1989, and prior to UNTAC, the Cambodian government was already committed to a number of economic reforms including revised marketing, land tenure, investment, and taxation legislation designed to attract foreign capital, as well as reductions on subsidies and the privatization of state holdings (Um 1990; St. John 1997).

These observations are based on my family’s own experience of adopting a Cambodian child in early 2007.

A reading of the ‘police blotter’ section in any issue of the Phnom Penh Post will confirm this claim.

My point here is not to raise the question of an abstract ‘what if’, as each of these scenarios was revealed to me with distressing regularity during the course of my fieldwork in Cambodia.
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE A*

1. What is your occupation? How old are you?

2. What would you define as a public space? Do you regularly use public spaces or do you tend to avoid using them?

3. Do you feel safe and comfortable being in public spaces? If not, can you explain what makes you feel unsafe and/or uncomfortable?

4. How does the presence of armed police officers in public spaces make you feel? Do they increase your sense of personal security, or do they make you more afraid of being in public spaces?

5. Do you ever discuss political issues in public spaces? If so, what types of issues do you discuss and are there topics that you tend to avoid discussing? If not, what are your reasons for not doing so?

6. Are you politically active in your community, or have you ever attended a public political function or rally? Do you think that public gatherings such as these are an effective way for people to communicate their views on particular issues?

7. Do you think protesting or demonstrating in public is a legitimate form of political participation? That is, should government treat such activity seriously and respond to them or make concessions to demonstrator demands?

8. How do you feel about the army or the police being used to disperse crowds of demonstrators?

9. Do you think that feeling comfortable and safe speaking your opinions and ideas about politics in public spaces is important to Cambodian democracy?

10. Do you think that Democracy Square is an open and suitable space for demonstrators to make their demands seen and heard?

11. Did you vote in any of Cambodia’s past national (1993, 1998, 2003) or commune elections (2002)? If not, why didn’t you vote? If so, did you feel secure during the voting process?

12. Did you discuss your voting preferences prior to, during, or after the elections? Why or why not?

13. The voting process was supposed to be a secret process so that no one other than yourself would know what party you voted for. Do you feel confident that your vote was in fact kept secret?

* Interviews conducted in 2004.
14. Do you think that not talking about your voting preferences with others was an ideal procedure for the election process, or do you think voters should share their preferences with others? Why or why not?

15. Do you feel that anyone or anything tried to influence the way you voted in any of these elections? If so, how was this done?

16. During election periods where you ever encouraged to support a political party publicly, when privately you intended to vote for a different party? If so, how did this make you feel?

17. In your opinion, was it necessary to have international observers overseeing Cambodia’s elections? Did these observers help contribute to a general sense of safety and personal security during the election process?

18. Did the international observers make you feel more comfortable in expressing your political opinions in public spaces during the elections? What about after the elections, once the observers left Cambodia? Do you think that international observers will be necessary in future Cambodian elections?

19. How would you define democracy? (Is participation an important element of democracy?).

20. Is democracy something that is desirable for Cambodia? Do you think democratic processes are working in your country (was the UNTAC successful)? How could democratic processes be improved in Cambodia, or do they need to be?

21. Do you think that political violence is a problem in Cambodian society in general? Is it a problem in your province or your home community?

22. How would you define political violence? Is it something done by the people, the state, neither or both?

23. Have you, your family members, friends, or anyone you know ever been victimised by politically motivated violence? If so, where did the(se) incident(s) occur?

24. How have these experiences of political violence affected your general behaviour and outlook on life? Have these experiences changed the way you behave and the things you say in public spaces?

25. Is there anything that can be done to stop the proliferation of political violence in Cambodia?

26. Is there anything that can be done to make public spaces more accessible to all members of Cambodian society?
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE B*


2. If I were to ask you what your country’s single most defining feature is, or how you would describe your country to someone who has never been to Cambodia what would you say?

3. Do you think Cambodia is a violent or peaceful society? Why do you feel this way? Do you think Cambodia is more or less violent than other countries?

4. Do you think inequality is a problem in Cambodia? In your city or village? How would you compare the level of inequality in comparison to other villages? How has inequality changed over time?

5. Has the gap between rich and poor increased or decreased since the time of UNTAC? Why do you think this is the case? How do you feel about this change?

6. Is poverty a problem in Cambodia? Do you think it is particularly bad in your village/neighbourhood or relatively the same to other villages/neighbourhoods? How about compared to the rest of the world, in your view is Cambodia one of the poorest countries? Why do you think Cambodia so poor?

7. Do you think poverty has increased or decreased since the time of UNTAC? Why is this the case, and how does it make you feel?

8. Do you compare yourself to friends and neighbours in terms of how much money or household items you have? Do you ever feel jealous or angry about your friends and neighbours who seem to have more money than you? Have you ever argued or physically fought with them because of this?

9. How do you feel about rich foreigners who visit or work in Cambodia? Are they welcome in your country? Do you think they are helpful, or contributing to more problems for Cambodia? How do you feel about the wealth they seem to have, does it ever make you jealous or angry?

10. How would you define violence? Do you consider poverty and inequality to be forms of violence?

11. What influences your perceptions of poverty and inequality? (i.e. religious beliefs, law enforcement, media, patron–clientelism, Khmer tradition etc.).

12. Do you think domestic violence is a problem in Cambodia/your community? Do you think it is worse in cities or in rural areas? Do you know friends or neighbours who have experienced domestic violence? Have you ever been victimized by domestic violence? Can you tell me about the experience? Who did you turn to for help?

* Non-Expert interviews conducted in 2007
13. I have heard about violence occurring in schools and pagodas in Cambodia, such as a teacher hitting a student or a head monk molesting young monks. Do you think this is a widespread problem in Cambodia, or are these isolated events? Why do you think a teacher would hit a student? Do you think it ever has to do with money? Why would a head monk hit a young monk? Is such action justifiable?

14. Are you fearful of the police and army, or do you feel they protect you and other Cambodians? Do the police and army ever abuse their power? Have you ever seen or heard of the police or army using violence against the Cambodian people? If so, where did this occur? Was it justified for the police or army to use violence against the people in this case? Are they ever justified in using such violence? (i.e. during evictions, against suspected criminals, against convicted criminals, during political demonstrations). Are the police paid fair salaries? Do you trust the police or do you think they are corrupt? What about the courts, do you trust them, or are they corrupt?

15. When you read the newspaper, watch TV, or listen to the radio and hear news stories about rape and murder, how does it make you feel? Do you think the rate of such incidences of violence has decreased or increased since UNTAC? Are you afraid of these things happening to your or your family? Do you think murder and rape are a problem in Cambodia? Is the problem worse in Cambodia than in other neighboring countries? Do you think it is worse in Cambodia than in America, Canada or France for example?

16. Why do you think murders and rapes occur? What motivates the perpetrators of such violence?

17. Do you think violence like rape and murder are related at all to poverty and inequality? How are they related?

18. Do you think violence like murder, rape and assault in Cambodia is more likely to occur in urban locations or rural locations? Who is committing these acts of violence? What about prior to the UNTAC mission, where was such violence more likely to occur at that time? Who was committing murders and rapes at that time?

19. Have you, your family members, or any close friends ever been a victim of rape? Murder? Assault? Where did the incident occur? If you feel comfortable, can you tell me what happened?

20. Do you think suicide is a problem in Cambodia/your community? Do you think suicide rates have increased or decreased since the time of UNTAC? How would you compare the suicide rate in your village compared to other villages? Are suicides more common in urban or rural areas? Have any of your family members or friends attempted suicide in the last year? Why do you think people in Cambodia commit suicide?

21. I have heard about some Cambodians purposefully burning, cutting, or injuring themselves. Have you ever engaged in such behavior? What about family members or friends? Why do you think some Cambodian people do such things to themselves?

22. Do you or any of your family members or close friends ever drink excessively, or use drugs? Why do you engage in these behaviors?
23. Based on your own experience, or your perceptions from what elders have told you, what time period in Cambodia's history was the safest and least violent? Where were you at that time? (If they chose any timeframe other than the present) How would you compare the safety of that time to today?

24. Based on your own experience, or your perceptions from what elders have told you, what time period in Cambodia's history was the most dangerous and violent? Where were you at that time? (If they chose any timeframe other than the present) How would you compare the danger and violence of that time to today?

25. Do you think capitalism/market economy is good for Cambodia? Does everyone in Cambodia have equal opportunity to make a living, or do some people or groups have an advantage over other people? If so, which people have an advantage, and why do you think they have such an advantage? If there is an advantage, how do you feel about this?

26. Are there many homeless people in Cambodia? Where do most of Cambodia’s homeless live, in the cities, or in the countryside? Are there jobs for these people? Do you feel there are appropriate and adequate social services in place to provide for these people? Who provides these services if they exist, NGOs, the government or both?

27. How do you feel about homeless and poor people? Are you ever fearful that they may become violent with you? What about rich people, are you afraid that they may become violent? Which group is more likely to be violent in your opinion?

28. How do you feel about the eviction of squatter settlements? Is the land the evicted people are being offered and moved to fair compensation for their land? Does the government have the right to remove these people when some of them have lived on the land for over 20 years? Why does the government want to move them?

29. How do you feel about the security guards and fences around the property of rich people in your community? Why do they have these fences and security guards, who are they trying to keep out and what are they trying to protect?

30. Do you think it is fair to view poor people as more violent than rich people, or are both groups equally capable of violence? What types of violence do poor people commit? What about by rich people?

31. Do you have adequate health care and education services available to you? How do you feel about having to pay to receive health care and education for your children? Does it make you angry at all? Can you afford to pay for healthcare and education fees? If not what do you do when you or a family member is sick and needs to see a doctor?
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE C*

1. If I were to ask you what your Cambodia’s single most defining feature is, what would you say?

2. How big of a problem does poverty currently represent in Cambodia today?

3. Do you think social and/or economic inequality is a problem in Cambodia? Why is there such great disparity between urban and rural? Why has the gap between rich and poor widened so much since the time of UNTAC?

4. Do you think the abundance of visibly rich foreigners visiting and working in Cambodia fosters any kind of resentment, animosity, or jealousy among poor Cambodians?

5. Do you think a capitalist free market economy is good for Cambodia? Does everyone in Cambodia have equal opportunity to make a living, or do some people have an advantage over other people?

6. How do you feel about the securitization of Phnom Penh? (i.e. body guards, security guards, and fenced properties). What does such an urban landscape represent?

7. How would you define violence? Do you consider things like poverty, inequality, homelessness, lack of access to education and healthcare to also be forms of violence or not?

8. Do you think Cambodia is a presently a peaceful society?

9. What do you make of the often-repeated description of Cambodia as having a “culture of violence”? What about a “culture of impunity”? Are these accurate characterizations?

10. How would you compare and contrast the violence of contemporary Cambodia, with that of the Pol Pot era? What are some of the primary causes of violence in contemporary Cambodian society?

11. When you read the newspaper, watch TV, or listen to the radio and hear news stories about rape, murder, and assault how does it make you feel? Are you afraid of these things happening to your or your family?

12. Do you think murder, rape, and assault are a problem in Cambodia? Do you think the rate of such incidences of violence has decreased or increased since UNTAC? Why do you think such acts of violence have become such a fixture in media reports? What is motivating the perpetrators of such violence?

13. Do you think domestic violence is a problem in Cambodia? Is it on the rise or decline? Can you offer any insight as to why its is seemingly so common?

14. Do you think there is any link between poverty and violence, or inequality and violence? If so, what are those links? If not, what makes these concepts irreconcilable?

* Expert interviews conducted in 2007.
15. Does the rapid liberalization of the economy have any role to play in contemporary expression of violence in Cambodian society?

16. Do you think alcohol and drug use are a problem in contemporary Cambodian society? What is contributing to the usage of such substances? Is there any relation to their use and violence?

17. Are there any places in Cambodia that you personally try to avoid because you are afraid of violence in those locations?

18. Do the police and armed forces ever abuse their power? Are the police or armed forces ever justified in using violence? Under what circumstances is the use of violence by police or armed forces justified? (i.e. during evictions, against suspected criminals, against convicted criminals, during political demonstrations etc.).

19. The municipality’s current focus on beautification often implicates the homeless as being detrimental to the cities reputation and image. How do you feel about homeless people, are they a threat to public order and security? Are they even welcome in the city? If not, where should they go?

20. How do you feel about the eviction of squatter settlements? Is development the motivating factor behind the RGC wanting to move these communities? Is the land the evicted people are being offered and moved to fair compensation for their land?

21. Do you think the “international community” is helping to reduce violence in Cambodia, or are they currently or ever a part of the problem? Do you think that current development programs in Cambodia adequately address violence in society?
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INDEX A*

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* Interviews conducted in 2004.
APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT INDEX B*

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* Non-Expert interviews conducted in 2007.
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APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT INDEX C*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Position</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Executive Director - Cambodian Defenders Project Director (Sok Sam Oeun)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Head of Women's Section - ADHOC (Lim Mony)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 President - Khmer Youth Association (Chiv You Meng)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Executive Director - Khmer Institute for Democracy (Dina Nay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Executive Director - NGO Forum On Cambodia (Chhith Sam Ath)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 President - Cambodian Center For Human Rights (Ou Virak)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 President - ADHOC (Thun Saray)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Director - Legal Aid of Cambodia (Peung Yok Hiep)</td>
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<td>9 President - LICADHO (Dr. Kek Galabru)</td>
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<td>10 Executive Director - Project Against Domestic Violence (Phally Hor)</td>
</tr>
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<td>11 Secretariat Officer - Housing Rights Task Force (Phann Sihan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Director – Mother’s Love and Non-Violence (Nou Sambo)</td>
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<td>13 President - Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (Chea Mony)</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 Executive Director - Cambodian Institute For Cooperation and Peace (Chap Sotharith)</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 Program Officer - Urban Sector Group (Neup Ly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 President - Human Rights Party (Kem Sokha)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Director - Documentation Center of Cambodia (Youk Chhang)</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 Opposition Leader - Sam Rainsy Party (Sam Rainsy)</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 Managing Director - Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (Dr. Sotheara Chhim)</td>
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<td>21 Third Secretary - Australian Embassy (Anonymous Foreign)</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 National Project Manager (Sok Chan Chhorvy) and Senior Policy Advisor (Anna Collins-Falk) Ministry of Women's Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 Senior Poverty Specialist - World Bank (Anonymous Foreign)</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 Municipal Coordinator - Cambodia Women’s Crisis Center (Nop Sarin Sreyroth)</td>
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* Expert interviews conducted in 2007.
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL- MINIMAL RISK RENEWAL

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<th>UBC BREB NUMBER: H06-80923</th>
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<tr>
<td>Philippe Le Billon</td>
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**DEPARTMENT:** UBC/College for Interdisciplinary Studies/Liu Institute for Global Issues

**UBC BREB NUMBER:** H06-80923

**CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):** Simon Springer

**SPONSORING AGENCIES:**
- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) - "The Absence of War Does Not Mean Peace: (Neo)Liberal Democracy, Social (In)Justice, and the Geographies of Violence in Post-Transitional Cambodia"
- UBC Hampton Research Endowment Fund - "The Absence of War Does Not Mean Peace: (Neo)Liberal Democracy, Social (In)Justice, and the Geographies of Violence in Post-Transitional Cambodia"

**PROJECT TITLE:** The Absence of War Does Not Mean Peace: (Neo)Liberal Democracy, Social (In)Justice, and the Geographies of Violence in Post-Transitional Cambodia

**EXPIRY DATE OF THIS APPROVAL:** November 25, 2009

**APPROVAL DATE:** November 25, 2008

The Annual Renewal for Study have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

*Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board*

- Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair
- Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
- Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
- Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair
- Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair
- Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair