

For whom the whistle blows: Welcome to the immunity frontier

Rada Iveković

Immunity concerns nowadays one additional area and dimension that came into existence recently: the space of Internet. The Internet is also one of the possible warzones invested by the military, a fourth theatre — after land, sea, and air. Logistical operations coordinate not only the transfer of data, but also that of labour, knowledge and of populations across borders while, at the same time, borders are constantly multiplying and shifting. These operations act according to control, planning and order protocols that govern all social relations.¹ They are dealt with through immunity too. Whistle blowing is one of the immunity instruments, exercised by formal or informal associations, institutionalised or not so, by various lobbies of such and such a cause and at times even by individuals. Whistle-blowing institutions or networks, quite independently from their positive or negative impact, do not emerge from representative politics. In this respect, they resemble the various rating agencies and other Moody's that now decide on the credit rating of States and thus the fate of the population. Both appear as politics has vanished replaced by economy emerging as a dispersed agency, while globalisation hasn't produced any political subjects whatsoever on the transnational level. They are recognised or aren't, in the myriad of "alternatives" to subjects, subjectivations, subject-positions, agencies *etc.* ... They don't respond either to a "political society" or to a "civil society"... They are between the "public" and the "common", towards the latter rather but not quite, neither civil society nor political society,² between event and awakening, neither black nor white or both, something of a post-representational politics.

Often in ecology, in matters of corruption and generally in all sorts of denunciations of neoliberal capitalism and of the national state on moral grounds — whistle blowers pretend to wake up moral and political awareness. Whistle blowers' actions have come to be useful in many cases and sometimes irreplaceable, often well informed technically and specialised in issues that a larger public, the consumers, and the 'people' (*peuple*, if there is still any such thing) need not know. An equivalent degree of possible fallacy and manipulation goes without saying.

Whistle blowers as immunity agencies are interested, we might say, in the

¹ Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, "The logistical city": <http://transitlabour.asia/blogs/Logisticity> : Accessed 19.10.2011.

² Partha Chatterjee, *The politics of the governed: Reflections on popular politics in most of the world* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

political unconscious and in its deadly effects and appeal to morals. A big portion of them, or some sectors, are voluntarily anonymous or secret by precaution, in a world where international law has a doubtful future since the till recently largest player (USA) doesn't recognise any higher office than its own will (still carrying out extra judiciary killings around the world [2011] after extraordinary renditions *etc.*). Many of the whistle blowers promote some such security that doesn't serve either the state or the international system of states or big corporations. They may promote some kind of citizen's 'security' or interest, and it is often the case that such 'citizens' do not correspond to the traditional description of a citizen loyal to or subordinate to a state. Some transnational whistle-blowers also promote (but do not "represent") interests of transnational citizens, of migrants. They may operate over the Internet or other social media, but need not be concerned by only cyber-activity. In any case, the latter is now inextricably connected to all the rest. They are feared by states and business alike (showing that the two are not to be disentangled), and can become the targets of security as much as they can contribute to it.³ Some can even engage in action, in sabotage, in anarchistic and borderline operations, in banking and finance, since 'whistle blowing' is not innocent and not completely distinguishable from other activities and associations... The *performative mode* appears clearly in it. Wikileaks' doing is an example of that, although the information it publishes is not necessarily original. But the *fact of publishing* it was politically performative. We have seen how Julian Assange was tracked down as the greatest of terrorists, however ambiguous and really inscrutable to the public eye his personality and his doing. He is perceived by the public as some kind of Robin Hood, outlaw for a good cause. The question of the politics (the 'cause'), of the subject ('who?' — except that the latter concept is indeed put into question by whistle blowing — an ever evading, evasive 'subject'), as well as of the ethics of whistle-blowing will be posed. But generally speaking, no concept opens the question of its own origin, or the question about the axiom that launches it... So whistle-blowing introduces a blurred inter- or overlapping no-where 'space', difficult to locate and identify, between state and (civil) society, a secret space between politics and social issues, between subject and object. It is one that would not be recognised as political by a more traditional appreciation of politics, because the latter proceeds from an originally monotheistic and hierarchical configuration where official single truths erase or dissimulate all other and alternative lines of knowledge, of law, of value. Whistle blowing disturbs one-dimensional immunity, the suicidal immunity directed paradoxically in principle toward preserving

³ "The threat of cyber-attack is driving States and corporations to devote ever-greater resources to meet the challenge. The accompanying debate about the scale of the risk has profound implications for the future of the internet", says Ben Schiller, "Cybersecurity: Politics, interests, choices": <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ben-schiller/cybersecurity-politics-interests-choices> : Accessed 19.11.2011.

oneself from others. That immunity is eventually suicidal in a universe of interdependence, because it is in the first place murderous and it pretends to eliminate all risk. A different and shared immunity encompassing the other, however, needs to accept and share some risk. There is a risk-cost dynamic.

Immunity is usually taken as protection of a closed organism or group against the external other, although the other is not necessarily, and in a way never, totally external. A prospective philosophy for the future, based on an *ecological* and *emancipatory imperative*, needs to be cautious (*prudent*) but it also needs to expand the principle of immunity in order to comprise others. Being cautious means being wary and responsible regarding life preservation, regarding the solidarity of all forms of life (*karma*), regarding knowledge as one of the production forces. It will allow avoiding a “waste of (alternative) knowledge”⁴ and accessing such emancipatory and “decolonial” knowledge that it shared by multifarious worlds within globalisation (within a world society) and within intersecting networks. In such knowledge the other(s) in space and time are not forgotten, although they may not be intimately present. In such a world, immunity is not directed against the other, since the other is part of us,⁵ but is reciprocal and interrelated in a space and time of interdependence. In this scenario, humanity is not the option, but is comprised as a possible perspective among many others in a universe of multiple alternative knowledges, forms of life, juridical regimes and labour relations. Integrating the other(s) also means integrating ‘abstract’ others into a real experience that surpasses abstraction through engagement and solidarity with unknown contemporaries, with future generations and with other places. It means decentring the world from oneself individually, but also from one’s particular culture or community. Asian philosophies are well acquainted with the ideal of not putting oneself in the centre, not developing the office of a subject, restraining egoism. This is set in a world where life-and-death are seen as one. If we put aside abstract (and hierarchical and hegemonic) universalism, says Sloterdijk, we can only draw on a “universal immunology” for this.⁶ Such universal immunology reaches beyond the individual and the collective, encompassing them. It concerns smaller and bigger units. It means reciprocal, interrelated or “universal” immunity that allows different communities, life forms, labour formations or social configurations to coexist in interdependence, in systems

⁴ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *A crítica da razão indolente. Contra o desperdício da experiência* (São Paulo: Cortez, 2000).

⁵ Roberto Esposito, “Communauté, immunité, démocratie”, *Transeuropéennes* #17, *La fragilité démocratique* (1999): 35-45; Jean-Luc Nancy, *Communitas. Origine et destin de la communauté*, précédé de *Conloquium* (Paris: PUF, 2000); *Immunitas. Protezione e negazione della vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002); *Bíos. Biopolitica e filosofia* (Turin: Einaudi, 2004).

⁶ Peter Sloterdijk, “Co-immunité globale. Penser le commun qui protège”, *Multitudes* 45 (2011): 42-63.

of *shared immunity* that include more than one and that therefore are not solely exclusion mechanisms. It will certainly apply to different individuals or ensembles differently and unequally in different regions of a given 'territory', depending on the density of tension between emancipatory and regulating tendencies. Immunity, and especially reciprocal immunity, is thus not only a closure instrument, but also one of opening, sharing and mutual protection. Any kind of social organisation, from the smallest to the largest, is therefore primarily a relation, a process, a becoming (*devenir*) in reciprocity-and-relation and an individuation, including for individuals.⁷ It is not something given and already there. The individuation of individuals includes sharing and reciprocity (as that which is common; the common in the making), which is its condition for emancipation and for breaking beyond mere regulation. The "poetics of relation" acknowledges relation as primary and preceding any "identity".⁸ In exactly the same way, the transnational precedes and creates the "national",⁹ and translation precedes language,¹⁰ rendering possible (but also overcoming) "identity" *etc.*, and rendering its overcoming possible.¹¹

New surveillance and secret intelligence techniques (as well as their leaking in public) belong to the new surroundings of weakened state sovereignties and their surrender to the decentred domination of autonomised *transnational and globalised economic interests* that have no aim in developing social good, welfare or gross national happiness. The predominance of economy over state political and social aims is now accompanied by the autonomisation of financial capital that is not based on material production, but on speculation over fictive values, and which doesn't respond to representation. Technologies of surveillance and corresponding intelligence are found on all sides of the divide: they are developed by transnational financial interests (as economic surveillance and intelligence serving transnational corporations), they are carried out by states in order to serve national interests and protectionism, and they may also be practiced by

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1972).

⁸ Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of relation (Poétique de la relation)*, Betsy Wing, trans. (University of Michigan Press, 1997).

⁹ Naoki Sakai, "Translation and bordering", paper at the conference "Borders, displacement and creation", Porto University, August/September 2011.

¹⁰ R. Iveković, "Langue coloniale, langue globale, langue locale", *Rue Descartes* 58 (2007): 26-36; "Traduire les frontières. Langue maternelle et langue nationale", *Asylon(s) — La revue des deux asiles* 4 (2008), dossier "Institutionnalisation de la xénophobie en France", sous la direction de l'*Observatoire*, <http://terra.rezo.net/article749.html>; "Translating borders/Traduire les frontières. Borders in the mind/partage de la raison", dossier "Sans papier": http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/french_studies/publications/index.asp?pubid=4017; "The watershed of Modernity: translation and the epistemological revolution", *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 11, 1 (2010): 45-63.

¹¹ Bruno Latour, "Il n'y a pas de monde commun: il faut le composer", *Multitudes* 45 (2011): 39-41.

individual initiative, all of it in a rhetoric of depoliticised moral discourse 'in the name of the people', but outside any representational context. Intelligence and surveillance, as much as finance speculation, or as age-old espionage, has never been voted in any classical electoral system, but is all the more imbibed with a 'citizen' and 'public good' rhetoric, secretly speaking for the 'people' rather than by it. Bankers have never been elected and yet they now govern our lives more than politicians. An essential part of this mechanism is the desemanticisation and twisting of the meaning of words, creating consensual moralising 'newspeak' beyond politics. Politics, in the sense of a tension and battle between different political projects and interests is nowhere to be found any more. But representative politics has been deserted or given up at the other side of the spectrum too: on the side of the people (as well as the 'people'), *i.e.* on the side of those who used to be known as 'subject' and 'agency'. These have evaporated into politically unrecognisable forces and have partly reduplicated themselves into the immaterial spheres of Internet, of wishful thinking and also of new forms of knowledge. In cognitive capitalism as a changing paradigm, they operate from within and are not easily identifiable (yet). Representational politics, as the basis for democracy, is now completely compromised from opposite sides. But however compromised it is, the fact of uncontrolled surveillance, of spying, the threat of Internet public leaks, intelligence's usurpation of citizens' networks as well as of the related lack of respect for any democratic international politics and for international law on the side of the now agonising hegemonic power (the USA; but smaller players follow suit) — make one be nostalgic for representational political practices however moribund they are.

The end of the Cold War announced the end of representational politics, a feature of a globalisation without any political project and with no distinction between left and right. Military and medical control, monitoring through welfare tools and classification, electronic technologies spying on private individual lives from the 'inside' gather data on a more and more passive 'population'. Politics has abdicated to economy; the 'public sphere' is saturated with 'information' to the point of being strangled, of being completely non-selective and of lacking criteria (Wikileaks included), while attention is being diverted by the creation of data-gathering scandals or scandalous public figures (financial, economic, sexual, political, moral — abusive of power in any case) and camera footage of their lives. 'Moral power' is enhanced and comes to the fore through accepted public rhetoric and a calibrated vocabulary, often fuelling on the divide of 'good' and 'evil', usually corresponding to 'us' and 'them'. Identity politics, which is no politics at all, is thus ushered in (again).

State politics (individual states and the 'international community') responds to the building of the afore-said reciprocal immunity by constantly restructuring immunity as exclusive of others with a view to perpetuating itself/oneself. Riots in French suburbia in 2005 or in England in August 2011

— are designed as apolitical and as ‘mere crime’, the deadly attack in Oslo by a lone bomber in July 2011 is depoliticised and explained as an exception. All along, the state and the ‘international’ system, will function as the context producing, breeding, reproducing and fighting ‘terrorism’ or whatever the enemy of the day is, formerly by politics, regimes and periods of terror, and more recently by *generalised terror on a bigger and international scale in the form of inconclusive and pre-emptive wars and enforcing democracy through military means*, in the name of national, state and global security.¹² The latter will also take individual security as a pretext. The scandal, by which US intelligence agencies had acknowledged that the war against Iraq boosted and dispersed a myriad of small and disconnected terrorist groups, in fact allotted them — and thus ‘connected’ them to — the label of Al Qaeda, only confirming the matter.¹³ This had become a double-edged question in which the two sides — ‘(Islamist) terrorism’ and the ‘(Western) war on terror’ mutually constructed each other as opponents. National and state security is clearly not concerned with the security of the individuals, of the people and of collectivities, but mainly of states and of the ruling class.¹⁴ This makes it very difficult to amend the general social context of such events.

If we are to understand complex global processes in the making, their actors should never be described as pre-existing their engagement. In *naming* terrorists, the latter are predefined as being prior to their taking part in those processes. Terrorists do not pre-exist terrorism. Terrorism’s globalisation is not necessarily or not only achieved through networks and connections among insurgent groups themselves, or among those who commit such acts, but also to a great extent through the international networks of intelligence, state cooperation from law to security, surveillance, through counterinsurgency and anti-terrorism, all seeking immunity for ‘their’ lot.

¹² Papers at the conference “Societies, States, “terror” and “terrorism” — A historical and philosophical perspective”, Paris 2-4 Nov. 2006; Ranabir Samaddar, “Philosophies and actions in the time of terror”; Alain Brossat, “Demandez le programme! Quelques réflexions sur le “extraordinary rendition program””; R. Iveković and Ranabir Samaddar (sous la dir. de), “Terreurs et terrorismes”, in *Rue Descartes* 62 (2008); Samir Kumar Das and Rada Iveković (dir. par), *Terror, terrorism, States and societies. A historical and philosophical perspective* (Delhi-Calcutta: CRG-Women Unlimited, 2009).

¹³ Mark Mazzetti, “War in Iraq is nurturing terrorists, study finds”; Brian Knowlton, “Tough talk over Bush’s handling of threats”, in the *International Herald Tribune* (25-9-2006): 1; and other articles.

¹⁴ R. Iveković, “Terror/ism as the political or as heterogeneity”, *Accedit* (18.12.2007): <http://www.accredit.com/auteur.php?id=82>; *Democracy, conflict and human security: Pursuing peace in the twenty-first century*, Judith Large and Timothy D. Sisk, eds. (Stockholm: International IDEA Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2006); also Judith Large, “Democracy and terrorism: The impact of the anti”: <http://www.idea.int/conflict/upload/Democracy%20and%20Terrorism.pdf> : accessed 19.11.2011.

There are national, international and now also global 'security realms', interlinked.

Characteristically since 9/11, 2001, 'terror/ism' and security as a topic have globally dominated international political discourse, until this last period when financial speculations took it on themselves to further make politics non-existent:

We will direct every resource at our command — every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war — to the disruption and to the defeat of the *global terror* network... And, finally, please continue praying for the victims of *terror* and their families, for those in uniform, and for our great country. Prayer has comforted us in sorrow, and will help strengthen us for the journey ahead... We will come together to give law enforcement the additional tools it needs to track down *terror* here at home. (Applause). We will come together to strengthen our intelligence capabilities to know the plans of *terrorists* before they act, and find them before they strike. (Applause). ...*Some speak of an age of terror*. I know there are struggles ahead, and dangers to face. *But this country will define our times, not be defined by them. As long as the United States of America is determined and strong, this will not be an age of terror; this will be an age of liberty, here and across the world.*¹⁵ (Applause).¹⁶

Thus, "terror" is not, with Bush, something pertaining to the higher office of the state or some such instance.

'Terrorism', called "terror" in Bush's twist of language, is nevertheless created and maintained by the state in a process of declared reciprocation. The latter is, however, damageable in the long run, in the sense of corrosion of solidarity and confidence, as well as for politics, legislation and state-construction. The states play the game of the terrorists when they curb liberties and human rights, whereby a general erosion of social stability and a global deficit in peace develop worldwide. Terrorists look for provocation, whereby they redirect the military, intelligence and security efforts of states — towards the states' own populations. They disrupt whatever immunity-pact had been worked out.

The state frames the society including what is euphemistically called civil society. The distinction between the two is highly constructed and

¹⁵ My emphases.

¹⁶ George W. Bush, "Address to a joint session of Congress and the American People", United States Capitol, Washington, D.C., *The White House Release*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html> : Accessed 19.11.2011.

instrumental in the course of imposing and preserving order.

Partha Chatterjee¹⁷ and Kuan-Hsing Chen¹⁸ explore these questions with regard to India and greater China: while Chatterjee introduces the concept of “political society” and displaces political activities by the people from the bottom into “political society” from the long deactivated “civil society” of colonial origin,¹⁹ Chen confirms the limitation of “civil society” and resorts to the alternative concept of “min-jian”. Both imply that the concept of the “political” is normative (as well as being of western and colonial origin), and because of that, of no use. It belongs to the sphere of make-believe, of official truth and of corrupt one-dimensional language, together with such other terms as ‘democracy’ *etc.* Such rhetoric, sustained mainly by states within the ideal framework of ‘sovereignty’, covers a reality and real life by the pretence of an ideal, as if the ideal ‘were true’.

Through these boundaries and borderlines moving to and fro, cutting across national susceptibilities, state-building, constitution through various types of institutionalisation including through mobile forms of socialisation and work, through the more recent economic boom and bust, through the technological superiority characteristic of present day Asia and the new dimensions opened by the Internet, new media and social networks, the “political society” of Partha Chatterjee²⁰ seems to be fast overridden. Not only is it not anymore any particular alternative to the “civil society” or to the all-pervasive and ever adaptable alternative (Chinese) “min-jian” (Kuan-Hsing Chen)²¹ or the more traditional but also very modern “guanXi” (Aihwa Ong)²²: “political society” is indeed itself not particularly political anymore at

¹⁷ Chatterjee, *The politics of the governed*, 2004.

¹⁸ Kuan-Hsing Chen, “Civil society and min-jian: On political society and popular democracy”, *Cultural Studies* 17, 6 (2003): 876–896, [883]; *Asia as method. Toward deimperialisation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

¹⁹ For Asia, the distinction between political society and civil society can be seen differently and can be practically reversed, starting from Partha Chatterjee’s analyses of colonial and contemporary India. For Chatterjee, civil society had been most innovative during the colonial period in the occupied “non west”, driven by modernity. Since independence, political creativity has been more present with “political society”, opposing the vindication of democracy to the conquests of modernity, and consequently multiplying the latter in numerous and alternative modernities.

²⁰ Chatterjee, *The politics of the governed*, 2004.

²¹ Chen, *op. cit.*

²² Aihwa Ong, *Flexible citizenship: The cultural logics of transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); *Neoliberalism as exception. Mutations in citizenship and sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); *Underground empires. The cultural politics of modern Chinese transnationalism*, Aihwa Ong and Donald M. Nonini, eds. (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); *Global assemblages. Technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems*, Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier, eds. (Malden MA/Oxford UK/Carlton Australia: Blackwell, 2005).

all, as it is drowned into the governance of governmentality somehow without being caught into the networks of old (*guanXi*) or new (Internet; migrant labour), and it is also nowhere near the epistemological revolution which is being prepared worldwide in order to overcome the coloniality of power, including the power of knowledge.

New immunity frontiers, drawn by unknown and un-transparent agents such as whistle-blowers or rating agencies, do not represent anyone, but claim a 'universal' moral standing, neutral and depoliticised, and claim to promote the interests of individuals (in the plural) in the name of some 'well-known and agreed-upon' common good or project. The latter is unquestionable and usually amounts to market ideology. It is not clear that there is any such transnational political and socially *conscious* common project in globalisation, and by known agencies. It seems that it is since the end of the Cold War and the end of its ideological opposition that politics, as a tension confronting projects, has disappeared. It is not any more in the hands of the states, whose sovereignty is eroded and subordinate to transnational and corporate economic interests. Is it in the hands of the 'people' (if such a category is still pertinent) as the reverse to the state of affairs and as resistance? If so, the spectrum is large: on one end — the more likely to be politicised — are the migrants and migrant labour. On the other, the 'indignant' across many countries and now continents, not asking any more for a maximum or an excess as revolutionaries once did, but demanding a minimum within the system maintained. Among these are the new homeless and despoiled victims of banking, as real-estate fraud and financial bubbles lead by speculative financial interests. Like the migrants, the indignant too do not appear *yet* as political. But this may change, as our concept of the political opens more to reciprocal immunity. Migrants are beyond the abyssal lines or on the border, as *borderers* uncomfortably inhabiting the lines of division. They are those who nowadays 'threaten with contagion', while the indignant are within, and suffer from local ailments.

As hyper-immunisation progresses, the indignant, the migrants and migrant labour too have to deal with and choose from a Universalist and a particularist approach. Those may be better off who take care of both aspects.

The whistle blows in the wind. It may come this way, or any way. While it takes the whole horizon and all our attention, mimetically followed by the media, it is not clear who blows it or for whom, which means that no political orientations are available. Or no 'value' if you prefer (but I don't), no criteria. And this has to do with the configuration of our knowledge and perception, not only with social and political issues. We probably need to deeply reconstruct our geography of reason and knowledge, drawing also on other continents and parts of the planet as well as on alternative knowledges within a now transformed world.