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Staging sovereignty: Punitivity, xenophobia, and the frail society
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ABSTRACT
Faced with growing *surplus populations*, states are increasingly adopting a variety of expressive, exclusionary, and fortifying measures, which can be described as instances of *staging sovereignty*. Across the postindustrialized world, performances of sovereignty, aimed at bolstering the apparent power and glory of the state, both fuel and are themselves fueled by the resurgence of ethnonational and ethnoracial denigration and a strong public appetite for punitive responses to insecurity, crime, and criminal offenders. With the burgeoning ranks of supernumerary individuals bereft of a positive economic place in postindustrialized capitalism, staging sovereignty is only likely to grow increasingly integral to the practice of late-modern statecraft. Following the work of Loïc Wacquant, and against the backdrop of growing surplus populations and rising social insecurity, one might very well expect to see not the withering away of the state (as anarcho-libertarians and techno-utopians hold) but its rise to a magnitude hitherto not even contemplated: the state as an intrusive Leviathan capable of interpenetrating its citizen-subjects, neurologically, genetically, and ideologically, to move the human subject "beyond" its seemingly essential humanity, using technologies of discipline *and* control. Staging sovereignty is nothing less than the state's favored response to social anxieties and social insecurities, however ineffectual such reactions might be, as so many prophylactic and palliative measures targeting new forms of social suffering and those supernumerary populations consigned to bearing them.

KEYWORDS
surplus populations; sovereignty; punitivity; ethnoracial domination; statecraft

I. Introduction

There has been an increasing recognition among thinkers of state power that sovereignty is contested and disjointed, an "uneven and fragmented performance, rather than a stable capacity" (Bonilla 2017: 333). The imperative of a continuous performance of sovereignty, which crucially revolves around a display and projection of public authority *as if* it were not fragmentary, is central to late-modern statecraft. Simultaneously, one of the central problems in postindustrialized societies is that of *surplus populations*, those individuals for whom there exists no positive economic use under increasingly advanced conditions of capital accumulation, and who consequently must increasingly be regulated, managed, and controlled by agencies of the state.

Such organizing actions seek to prevent the eruption of smoldering social pathologies into blazing fires that might incinerate the dominant order – what a Citigroup economist calls "Vox Populi risk" (Fordham 2015), a euphemism partly covering the exercise of popular sovereignty in liberal democracies, primarily centered on "protests and volatility in public opinion" which are said to "pose ongoing, fast-moving risks to the business and investment environment." In response to rebellions, resistance, retreatism, and what postwar sociologists would have called "dysfunctions," the state mobilizes both its "left" and "right" hand, in Bourdieu's conceptual terms, i.e. either the *assistive* or the *disciplinary* wings of the state (see Bourdieu 2008), from countercyclical economic initiatives and social assistance programs to more traditional coercive measures, including the police, jails, and prisons. The response to such surplus populations, or "problem populations" (Spitzer 1975)—disorderly youths, unemployable "ex-cons," unassimilated immigrants or asylum seekers, unskilled and underskilled members of the working class, and (to use a bureaucratic neologism) so-called NEETs ("not in education, employment or training"), to name but a few categories—is the state's reassertion of its sovereign powers over the social body, often undertaken with quite public, even theatrical displays, which can be conceived of as acts of what we might call *staging sovereignty* – including aggressive policing, carceral expansion, assertive rebordering, and the politics of austerity being among the most prominent examples. Staging sovereignty involves bolstering, displaying, and reaffirming the sovereign authority of the state, and this becomes all the more important in the face of the trenchant problem of surplus populations, which constantly threaten to turn into unruly problem populations.

Against this broad societal background, two of the most prominent sources of social anxiety that feed and fuel acts of staging sovereignty are, on the one hand, the fear of immigrants, asylum seekers, ethnoracial minorities, and other "foreigners"—those groups which Wacquant (1999) ironically labels "suitable enemies"—and, on the other hand, the fear of criminal offenders, convicts, inmates, and other disorderly or "anti-social" bodies. It has, of course, become something of a truism that the fear of crime and criminals and the fear of "foreigners" and other "others" have become increasingly intertwined. But why are these disparate issues so often amalgamated in public discourse? And what can we learn about the proponents of xenophobia and punitivity by viewing them as one? On the one hand, the fear of foreign bodies betrays a fundamental lack of belief in themselves by host populations, "native" inhabitants, and ethnonational or ethnoracial majorities. These fears are a transmuted expression of a lack of faith in the strength and solidity of their group, involving an absence of self-confidence in the idea that a self-identified group, national culture, or "way of life," possesses sufficient strength to withstand the weight of an opposing force, to resist the cuts and slices of a "tide" or "wave" (those popular metaphors so often invoked in collective representations of mobile bodies), in short, a lack of belief in its capacity to *assimilate others* rather than *be assimilated*. Similarly, the fear of crime and criminal offenders, the need to punish inmates harshly, to establish austere conditions of confinement, betrays a lack of belief in the strength of law, morality, and the state.

As Hegel notes in the *Philosophy of Right,* a truly strong state has no need to punish crime harshly. A society that is self-assured knows that a criminal act cannot really affect it, cannot shake its foundations. And the converse, too, is true of a weak society or state: "If society is still unstable in itself, then an example must be made by inflicting punishments, since punishment is itself an example over against the example of crime" (Hegel 2008: 208). A society that is "internally strong," enjoying widespread legitimacy and relatively settled social antagonisms, Hegel writes, has no need to enact harsh punishment, because criminal acts are incapable of

shaking its foundations: the act of crime is "something so feeble" compared with the magnitude, certainty, and solidity of civil society and state that are sure of themselves, while punishment—the "annulment" of crime, in Hegel's terms—correlates more with the perceived salience of the act to a particular society than to any intrinsic features of criminal offenses themselves. The penal code, Hegel claims, is mainly a "child of its age and the state of civil society" (Hegel 2008: 207). Only a "weak" society, riddled with insecurities, must mete out severe, retaliatory, and punitive reactions to injurious acts. As Garland points out, both Nietzsche and Durkheim shared this basic insight, too, perhaps unsurprisingly given the sweeping influence of the Hegelian system on French and German intellectuals of their age. "Punitiveness may pose as a symbol of strength, but it should be interpreted as a symptom of weak authority and inadequate controls," writes Garland (1996: 4).

To punish harshly, then, as the United States and Russia do today (indexed by their respective rates of incarceration), is to betray a belief in the feebleness of these very polities. To call for heightened punitivity—from "zero tolerance" policies in New York City through anti-social behavior orders (ASBOs) in England to the policing of "hooliganism" (*khuliganstvo*) in Russia—is to disclose a subjective sense of insecurity amongst social elites vis-à-vis national culture. It is, as Slavoj Žižek points out in a different context, to act like the rage-filled Father who beats and berates those around him, a figure "in whom impotence and excessive rage coincide" (Žižek 2009: 313), and who thereby only mounts on display his own frailty. Staging sovereignty, which means bolstering the appearance of power of the state over and against both external and interior enemies alike, is a demonstration of infirmity – as every observer of military parades— with their seemingly endless and mindless rows of ballistic missiles and parading troops—knows well.

There is something suspicious about such acts: they seem more like attempts at covering up or concealing an infirmity that resists being hidden. As Adorno (2005) understood well, every display of health—and strength is the ultimate display of health—is only additional proof of the reality of mortality, of a death-fixation, or the "sickness of the healthy," as Adorno puts it: "The very people who burst with proofs of exuberant vitality could easily be taken for prepared corpses....Underlying the prevalent health is death. All the movements of health resemble the reflex-movements of beings whose hearts have stopped beating" (Adorno 2005: 59). The essentially reactive obsession with displaying strength is, at a societal level, revelatory of a societal sickliness, a decrepitude that becomes all the more apparent, the more such groups and societies insist on their vitality and potency. But where does this subjective insecurity stem from? They are primarily derived from the *economic dislocation* of large sections of the working and lower-middle classes and the *symbolic displacement* of previously dominant or valorized social groups: the disappearance of stable, high-paying jobs, the reordering of relations of symbolic domination, as is gradually taking place, at least in the space of public discourse, with white males in Western Europe and North America, an incontestability being challenged by previous social subordinates, from women through sexual minorities to black and brown bodies.

In short, we can derive a dictum from the contemporary political situation in postindustrialized societies, which has special relevance for those who study the application of *negative social energy* (the most precise definition of punishment imaginable) and the *reinforcement of ethnonational and ethnoracial categories* (which captures a wide range of nativist inclinations and actions): Those who punish and nativize the most, simultaneously present and publicize their own frailty. All societal anxieties and moral panics reveal a lack of confidence, a lack of self-assuredness in the group-level mode of being. More specifically, ethnoracial anxieties, xenophobias, and racisms are, in a purely analytical-descriptive sense, revelatory of *inward weakness*. Those who would defend a nation against immigration, or a society against crime (the two are increasingly imbricated and interwoven), claim that they do so from a position of superiority. The thing they purport to represent is worth preserving, these hosts and defenders claim, because it is greater than or worth more than the force which is said to threaten to disturb it.

But this position of superiority is also an admission of frailty. Studying the comments section on the right-wing news website Breitbart.com—the premier website of the "alt-right" movement in the United States—is revelatory of this tendency. In a comment on a Breitbart piece on immigration reform and the importation of "low-skill farmworkers," one reader writes, tellingly,

"Those 'low skilled workers' are the reason we spend trillions on entitlements for illegals. They bring their entire families with them - children, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins...A dozen plus live in one-bedroom apartments and every single one qualify for food stamps, get free healthcare, welfare, tax credits, education, child care and more."[1] Majorities are minorities; minorities become majorities. That which is superior is also fragile, a vulnerable thing; that which is inferior is excessive and exceedingly potent.

Staging sovereignty involves one or more of the following: *exclusion*, *expressivity*, and *fortification*. It may involve *targeting specific groups for symbolic exclusion* from the social body, as with US President Donald Trump's travel ban aimed at Arabs and Muslims. It may *express and communicate*, as with "three-strikes laws" that signal the state's resolve to "take crime seriously" by subjecting repeat criminal offenders to punitive actions. It may involve shoring up the perceived power of the state, or *fortifying the nation*, often in quite literal ways, as with the slated construction of a border fence between Norway and Russia, likely to be largely ineffectual due to Norway's mostly unguarded land borders stretching some 2,500 kilometers alongside Russia, Finland, and Sweden. When the state acts in one or more of these ways—excluding, expressing, or fortifying—it stages its own sovereignty. When the Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven promised to consider deploying Sweden's armed forces against the perceived growing threat of urban gangs (Nilsson and Skoglund 2018), he was trying to block the right-wing Swedish Democrats from appropriating the symbolic profits connected with appearing tough on crime. When early in his presidency Donald Trump regularly—and by one account, frantically—quizzed his advisors, *"Should I fire Bannon? Should I fire Reince? Should I fire McMaster? Should I fire Spicer? Should I fire Tillerson?"* (Wolff 2018; emphasis in original), this routine "ritual" was "more a pretext to a discussion of the power he held than it was, strictly, about personnel decisions," in Wolff's (2018) estimation. It was an attempt to assert the president's authority, and by extension, the sovereignty of the state, over and above its constitutive members. With the assassination of the former Russian FSB officer Alexander Litvinenko—by most accounts ascribable to a covert operation ordered by Russian President Vladimir Putin (e.g. Harding 2016)—the Russian state was signaling its capacity to strike down its former citizens and security personnel "gone rogue" or turned dissidents.

The paradox of staging sovereignty is that such acts often take the form of attempting to assuage nativist and punitivizing anxieties, which are expressions of inward weakness, with the express aim of projecting the strength, glory, and potency of the state. To take one example: in January 2018, the UK disclosed that as part of an Anglo-French bilateral agreement, it would invest some £44.5 million in strengthening border security in Calais in northern France (Travis and Stewart 2018). This is part of a wider transnational trend by which sovereignty spills beyond the proper limits of national boundaries, e.g. the United States stations "preclearance" US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) personnel at major airports around the world to "inspect travelers prior to boarding U.S.-bound flights" (CBP 2017), Norway ships inmates to serve time in a Norwegian-Dutch prison in the Netherlands (Pakes and Holt 2015), and in 2015 the EU signed a 3 billion euro deal with Turkey to block refugees from reaching European shores (European Council 2016). The point of the Calais deal is to show that the government of Theresa May is doing something—and doing it resolutely—about the (right-wing populist) perception that Britain's borders are being swamped with refugees. "This is about investing in and enhancing the security of the UK border," a government spokesperson said. According to *The Guardian*, Britain has now invested more than £150 million in border security in Calais since 2016, including the construction of the 1-kilometer concrete "Great Wall of Calais" – to prevent mainly asylum seekers, from making their way into the border tunnel under the Channel. This is a textbook act of staging sovereignty: erecting thick slabs of drab grey concrete to keep out mainly young men from the Middle East and North Africa, a move resonating and reverberating with the infamous Brexit campaign poster, unveiled by the then-leader of the UK Independence Party Nigel Farage, that

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[1] Facebook comment by "guest," 17 January 2018. Available online at: Munro, N. (2018) "Paul Ryan's 'Merit Immigration' plan includes low-skill farmworkers." *Breitbart.com*, 17 January 2018. http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2018/01/16/paul-ryan-merit-immigration-plan-includes-low-skill-farmworkers/.

proclaimed a "Breaking Point" in immigration levels, while complaining that "the EU has failed us all" and that "we must break free of the EU and take back control" (Stewart and Mason 2016).

But there is also a sort of tragic quality to displays of what has come to be known as *security theater* (Schneier 2009), that is, seemingly tough measures intended to provide a feeling of safety, while doing little to change basic facts and trends. The refugee camp known as the Jungle in Calais houses around one thousand individuals, and yet Britain has been forced to expend more than 150 million pounds in (probably ineffectual) efforts to keep them and others off its terrain. All the bloated budgets devoted to securitization, militarization, and penalization in postindustrialized nations—the United States devoted some 598 billion dollars to the Pentagon and related defense activities in 2015, or more than half of the discretionary budget, at a time of great social need and crumbling civilian infrastructure—merely emphasizes and underscores the inadequacies of the state in our age: its failure to ensure human welfare without ramping up the "right hand" of the state, a coercive fist in place of an assistive and outstretched hand. Amidst "waning sovereignty," Wendy Brown (2010) notes out, it is increasingly tempting to build walls to provide a (false) sense of comfort:

> They confer magical protection against powers incomprehensibly large, corrosive, and humanly uncontrolled, against reckoning with the effects of a nation's own exploits and aggressions, and against dilution of the nation by globalization. These theological and psychological features of the clamor for walls help explain why their often-enormous costs and limited efficacy are irrelevant to the desire for them (Brown 2010: 133).

Borrowing a term from Philip K. Dick's *Minority Report*, Zedner (2007) claims that we are entering a *pre-crime* society, where an activist state tries to preempt various (criminal) risks to life and property, as opposed to a *post-crime* society, which is primarily reactive and attempts to deal with criminal offenders after the fact of crime. This analysis is a good one because it simultaneously highlights the fact that there is literally no aspect of human life that cannot be made the target of surveillance and intervention by a state fixated on pre-criminal risks. The most minute deviation from the norm, or the *slightest sign*, could be read as a pre-criminal mark by such a state: switching off one's smartphone could be the tell-tale sign of a nascent criminal offender who does not want to be detected; an elevated heart-rate could be the mark of potential aggression and violence – and in fact some airports have now installed such "biosignal" detection systems: "Nemesysco's devices use a series of patented signal-processing algorithms that can differentiate between a 'normal' voice and a 'stressed' voice. If emotional stress is detected, officials can determine if the passenger should be taken aside for further questioning" (Rosenblatt 2008). A pre-crime state is a paranoiac state, but perhaps also a wholly dysfunctional one, drowning in data streams and reams of undistilled information. In this way, pre-crime becomes the restless resting state stance of an ever-vigilant state that has failed to produce the social conditions that would allow it to relax its paranoid gaze.

II. Majorities becoming minorities

In the eponymous Platonic dialogue, Timaeus observes that whenever matter like air, water, and earth is "caught inside fire and gets cut by the sharpness of fire's angles and edges, then if it is reconstituted as fire, it will stop getting cut." Fire is energy, and it remolds the three remaining kinds of matter in the Platonic-Timaeaen ontology. Fire ceases to remake air, wind, and earth if they too are made into fire, sensibly enough, because "a thing of any kind that is alike and uniform is incapable of effecting any change in, or being affected by, anything that is similar to it." To be of a kind means to be incapable of affecting an entity of the same kind: if water could dilute water, then either the thing doing the diluting or the thing being diluted is not truly (or rather, purely) water. But, Timaeus continues, "as long as something involved in a transformation has something stronger than it to contend with, the process of its dissolution will continue non-stop" (Plato 1997: 1259). While Timaeus's aim is to describe the transformation of physical particles in nature, his description resonates with modern debates on the "rehabilitation" of criminal offenders or "integration" of immigrants:

> And likewise, when a few of the smaller corpuscles are surrounded by a greater number of bigger ones, they will be shattered and quenched. The quenching will stop when these smaller bodies are willing to be reconstituted into the form of the kind that prevailed over them...But if these smaller corpuscles are in process of turning into these and one of the other kinds encounters them and engages them in battle, their dissolution will go on non-stop until they are either completely squeezed and broken apart and escape to their own likes, or else are defeated, and, melding from many into one, they are assimilated to the kind that prevailed over them, and come to share its abode from then on (Plato 1997: 1259-1260).

The imagery of a *war of assimilations*, a contest of strength that can only yield one victor, will be familiar to those following contemporary discussions of immigration policies, particularly in Western Europe and the United States. Both nativist struggles against immigration and law-and-order campaigns against criminal offenders and inmates revolve around the symbolic representation of the strength hosts and "intruders" respectively. Who is the "smaller corpuscle," to use Timaeus's term? Who will be "shattered and quenched," and who will be "squeezed and broken apart"? Magnitude is itself a stake in the battle, as Bourdieu's theory of fields reminds us (Shammas and Sandberg 2016). There are no ready-made "minorities."

On the contrary, one of the central stakes in symbolic struggles over collective representations is precisely the right to proclaim oneself an embattled majority, which amounts to a *de facto* self-proclamation of minority status (because of a purported inferior degree of strength), and a portrayal of the intruding force as a vanquishing minority, which amounts to pronouncing it a majority (because of allegedly superior strength). Thus, a nativist party like the Swedish Democrats opposes immigration from "culturally remote" (*kulturellt avlägsna*) societies, a term covering nations said to be "different," in one Swedish Democrat's words, including "the Far East and Africa" (Sveriges Radio 2013) – or perhaps, with greater precision and less anachronistically, Africa and the *Middle* East. "The Swedish Democrats are not opposed to immigration," the party proclaims in its manifesto, "but believe that immigration must be kept at such a level and be of such a character that it does not pose a threat to our national identity or to the welfare and safety of our nation" (Swedish Democrats 2018). Immigrants from so-called culturally remote and "different" nations are a threat because the "total net effect of mass immigration from remote [*avlägsna*] nations is strongly negative, both economically and socially." In short: these unappealing groups are said to resist cultural assimilation, threatening instead to assimilate true Swedes into *their* outmoded cultural life-forms, and they fail to participate in the labor market – one of the cornerstones in a productivist welfare state reliant on high rates of labor force participation and a strong tax base to fund generous programs and policies by the state.

In this way, majorities are transubstantiated into minorities, a possibility produced by subtle symbolic shifts from quantitative to qualitative emphasis, or from scalar to vectorial understandings of the majority-minority couplet. Numeric majorities can possess a minority-becoming, to speak with Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, requiring a constant labor of self-representation downplaying own capabilities—the capacities of the host—while eagerly emphasizing, indeed exaggerating, the power and potency of the intruder. Perhaps one of the first things to insist upon in symbolic struggle, particularly relating to crime and immigration, then, is to ask: What are the *real magnitudes* involved?

But this apparent solution only raises yet another vexing issue: Can we even imagine a unitary metric from which such seemingly rigorous numbers could be derived? All rigor is a *rigor mortis*...To speak of an "objective" risk presupposes an observer-independent God's-eye-view, and the meaning of risk, as Luhmann (1993) notes, is always relative to a process of sense-making or symbolic construction: the concept obeys the logic of semiotic plasticity, by which terms are *loaded* with meaning, often after long and arduous struggle. As Luhmann notes, the "risk" of a car crash from speeding could also be viewed as being offset by the "risk" of arriving too late when remaining within the speed limit. Who is to adjudicate what is the better, more valid appraisal of the term? Risk is typically seen as the obverse side of security, and yet who gets to decide what counts as the one and not the other? One man's risk is another man's freedom fighter...To those who seek to downplay the importance—the risks—of terrorist attacks by citing

the number of deaths from slipping in wet bathtubs, we can only remind those critics that the subjective fear of suicide bombers and hijackings remains greater than the fear of bathing, and that this fear must, premised though it may be on "objectively" (i.e. numerically) lower risks of mortality, be reintroduced into the concept of risk.

Perhaps a term more obviously wider than that of risk would serve our purposes more clearly: *salience*. Salience is risk modulated by subjectivity. And subjectivity is "real," in the sense that it leads a real enough existence in social life, in the collective imaginary, and cannot simply be willed away by descriptive statistics or appeals to "rationality." For "the rational" is always a central stake in symbolic struggles, too, as Bourdieu understood well, over and against the Habermas (1971) of *Toward a Rational Society*, an unimaginably counter-revolutionary work born of a revolutionary age (its texts were originally published in West Germany in 1968 and 1969). "Rationality....is, logically, a central stake in historical struggles, no doubt because reason, or at least rationalization, tends to become an increasingly decisive historical force," says Bourdieu (2000: 83). We cannot let "the rational" do any of the heavy lifting in our analytical labors; we cannot allow ourselves to be duped into thinking that we have solved any problems by using the term. In fact, we have only created additional problems...

We can think of the dual and intertwined problems of immigration and crime in terms of hospitality or a lack thereof. "No-one hastens to serve the guest, however long he has to wait," Adorno (2005: 117) writes, "if the person responsible for him is busy: concern for the institution, a concern that reaches its culmination in prisons, takes precedence, as in a clinic, over that for the subject, who is administered as an object." And isn't this one of the main reasons why calls for tough-on-crime and tough-on-immigration policies have been so forceful in postindustrialized societies in recent decades? The natives, or the hosts, are busy; they are hard at work sorting out their own immiserated, immiserating lifeworld, desperately trying to engineer a neoliberalism with a human face, a capitalism capable of being moderately decommodifying market society, which means making jobs, the ever-present problem of creating jobs – of how to deal with their *own* surplus populations (the unemployed, the criminals) before taking on the surplus populations of other continents (the immigrants and asylum seekers, bounty hunters, what the Norwegians derisively call *lykkegjegere*, happiness-seekers, as if it were a terrible vice to seek out happiness...). In this light, the only antidote to xenophobia, perhaps, is *philoxenia* (see Cheliotis 2013): in place of hatred, a *love of foreigners*.

III. The fear of the rabble

All social anxieties should be understood as the transmuted expression of group-level subjective insecurities. Wherever panics, punitivity, excessive policing, and restrictions on immigration gain a foothold, and wherever policies are enacted to shore up the perceived strength of the state—and thus of society and the social order as such—by acts of staging sovereignty, there should we go in search of a sense of insecurity: fear of newly arrived immigrants taking up scarce positions in the labor market; fears that these selfsame immigrants will be incapable of working, and therefore a source of risk to welfare states dependent on high rates of labor force participation rates; a fear of cultural ways of life being upset by (perceived) intrusive foodways, places of worship, and patterns of dress. We should be careful not to brush these insecurities aside as just another series of ideological figments. Their basis can occasionally be "real" enough, in the sense that they can be derived from "actual" or "objective" sources - deep wells of material, economic, and, indeed, cultural or symbolic suffering (which should not be relegated to a lesser "superstructure"). For instance, economic analyses suggest that immigration has had a negative effect on the wages of semi-skilled and unskilled workers in Britain (Nickell and Salaheen 2015) – and even though such declines are said to be "small" (a 1.88 percent drop in wages with a 10 percent increase in the proportion of immigrants), any decline in real wages must be contrasted with the tacit expectations of rising real wages on the part of many workers, which has been a reasonable assumption in postwar Western Europe.

Social anxieties are patterned responses to what Bourdieu terms "social suffering" (e.g. Bourdieu et al. 1999) and attempts to quell and counteract socially produced and induced forms of pain. If nociception is pain produced by the "stimulation of nerve cells," then *socionociception* is pain arising in the individual subject as a consequence of deleterious social processes. But immigrants are inconsistent figures in the nativizing and racializing imaginary. They are at once

too many, too weak, and too strong: they contribute nothing while taking all those jobs rightfully belonging to the natives, according to the nativist fantasy.

Such symbolic inconsistencies are to be expected, of course, because ideology does not obey what Pascal calls the "geometric spirit" (*l'esprit de géométrie*) but rather the "spirit of finesse" (*l'esprit de finesse*): not science, but intuition or practical reason; folk knowledge, not analytic concepts (see also Wacquant 2015: 9). Their function is to stand in for real sources of socionociception, or social suffering, and to take their place. As Žižek (2008: lxx) notes in a perspicacious analysis of the representation of Jewish populations in Nazi propaganda, such portrayals are deeply inconsistent, viewed as both a source of symbolic pollution and excessive power, a vector of infirmity and exploitation, because such populations are taken to stand for the central contradictions underpinning 1930s German society: contradictions between rural folkways and advanced capitalism, between agrarian traditionalism and urban hypermodernity. Such contradictions find their outlet in the inconsistent and irreconcilable symbolic representations of an externalized category, which must be filled with tension precisely because it stands for conflicting phenomena beyond and outside the category (see also Sharpe 2004: 161-162). Similar contradictions obtain for representations of Arabs in the modern imaginary. In *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac (2000) makes frequent allusions to Arabs as a source of criminal danger and existential risk ("a band of Arabs coming in to blow up New York"; "She leaned on a wall to rest a minute and an *Ay-rab* rushed up and appropriated her ring finger before she could let out a cry"), but also as bearers of the extraordinarily ecstatic and harmonious inwardness ("It was like a long, spectral Arabian dream in the afternoon in another life—Ali Baba and the alleys and the courtesans."). Folk notions are often filled with contradictions because they are not really about the object being represented but about the subjects doing the representing.

The key social development underpinning the production of group-level subjective insecurities is the rise, resurgence, and recalcitrance of *surplus populations*, which are both the *source* and *locus* of societal anxieties, from "unemployable" ex-convicts, immigrants and asylum seekers, unskilled or underskilled youths (often of ethnoracial minority or ethnonationally foreign background, residing or originating in working-class neighborhoods), and manual workers susceptible to foreign price competition and vulnerable to automation and robotization – famously, nearly half of all US jobs have been estimated will disappear in the wake of the "robot economy," according to two Oxford University researchers (Frey and Osborne 2013). Such supernumerary populations were long ago identified by Marx (1991) in the third volume of *Capital* as one of the central and necessary byproducts of advanced capitalism. As capitalism becomes increasingly advanced (in the sense of becoming an economic system increasingly suffused with sophisticated productive technologies), Marx argues in the book's famous and controversial third part, on the "law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall," that the number of persons for whom no positive economic function exists, will continue to increase in undiminished form (e.g. Marx 1991: 317-375).

These supernumerary fractions were a source of worry to Hegel, too, in his concerned allusions to and rather extensive discussions of the formation of the rabble (*Pöbel*) (see Ruda 2011; see also Hegel 2008: §240-246). What to do about them? Hegel identified the polarizing tendencies of semi-modern, commercial society, with a "large mass of people" living the minimum subsistence level and, "at the other end of the social scale, conditions which greatly facilitate the concentration of disproportionate wealth in a few hands." For the purpose of this discussion, I want to focus on just one single aspect of Hegel's analysis of socioeconomic inequality: that of its outward-pushing drive, its tendency towards what could only reasonably be described as imperialism. Hegel says that one of the effects of the formation of the rabble is that society goes looking for solutions – charity and social assistance are out of the question as complete solutions, because they only threaten the principle that each individual should be responsible for their own economic well-being; if too many able-bodied paupers were to live on welfare, the social imperative to work would be undercut – the incentives to seek employment would be undermined. So what to do? There is enough wealth in a society overrun with paupers, Hegel says, but there is no way to get it to them without disturbing central mechanisms regulating social life. Thus, "despite an *excess of wealth* civil society is *not rich enough*, i.e. its own resources are insufficient, to check excessive poverty and the creation of a penurious rabble" (Hegel 2008: 222; emphasis in original). This is the apparent contradiction of late-modern

capitalism, too, in the postindustrialized societies of the Global North: an *excess of wealth* abounds, but in societies that are still *not rich enough*.

The solution, says Hegel, is to seek out markets abroad, to expand aggressively beyond a nation's borders. The strange contradiction between a simultaneously sufficient and inadequate wealth is really an "inner dialectic of civil society" that "drives it" to "push beyond its own limits and seek markets, and so it's necessary means of subsistence, in other lands which are either deficient in the goods it has overproduced, or else generally backward in creative industry, etc." This is what Harvey (2005), drawing on a rich vein of Marxian thought from Lenin ([1917] 1963) onwards, terms capitalist imperialism, the "politics of state and empire" combined with the "molecular processes of capital accumulation in space and time" (Harvey 2005: 26). In other words: states controlling specific terrains, and capitalists circulating capital across (injecting into, extracting from, and moving along) such terrains. But if, as Durand (2017) argues, this spatial fix to the problem of the superfluity of particular populations is now drawing to a close—as the seemingly infinite wellsprings of cheap and pliable labor in the Global South are starting to run dry—we must ask what will replace the interior-conserving function of exteriorizing imperialism. If neocolonial adventures beyond the national terrain have preserved the social harmoniousness obtaining within such territories, what will states do when there are no more unknown lands left on capital's maps? One answer is that of staging sovereignty, with states engaging in forceful displays intended to bolster their own authority, facing down increasingly troublesome supernumerary sections of the population. If the state is God, as Bourdieu (2000) claims (a proposition derived from Durkheim but extended beyond its Feuerbachian intent), then staging sovereignty means building cathedrals into the sky, intended in equal parts to glorify, overawe, and terrify.

We find Marx's response to Hegel's apparent contradiction in Volume Three of *Capital*: "It is not that too much wealth is produced. But from time to time, too much wealth is produced in its capitalist, antagonistic forms" (Marx 1991: 367). In other words, this strange state of affairs only arises because it takes place within a specifically capitalist framework. Capitalism works a little too well: its drive to innovation, technological advancement, and tremendous expansions of the productivity of labor is responsible for the overaccumulation of capital, which also involves an overaccumulation of commodities, and which also involves the creation of an "artificial surplus population" (Marx 1991: 363). Constant capital cannot find a productive outlet: it piles up against its own success. The result is a desperate, clawing attempt to find some sort of meaningful outlet, with capital "forced onto adventurous paths: speculation, credit swindles, share swindles, crises" (Marx 1991: 359). But these aren't *enough*. The central problem of capitalism is "unoccupied capital on the one hand" and an "unemployed working population on the other" (Marx 1991: 359). Too much capital, and too many workers: these are the primary causes of our present-day political situation, from the financial crisis of 2007-2008 (generated by excess capital) to the rise of so-called populist political movements (facilitated by excess workers).

Movements favoring a political alterity beyond the capitalist horizon have failed to come up with a sound response to this key dynamic. A universal basic income has been the only minimally plausible solution offered by intellectuals in the service of such movements. Proponents of such schemes implicitly assume that if surplus populations are the central problem of our times, we can mobilize the political field to decide by fiat that they are not supernumerary and should simply be reintegrated into the social fold. Guaranteed income schemes are attempts to re-include excess bodies in a social order that has no real economic or productive need for them. Marx himself would clearly not be impressed with such schemes. The dynamic of overaccumulation cannot simply be willed away so long as one remains fixed beneath the capitalist firmaments.

Jonathan Simon (2007) formulated the notion of "governing through crime," a phrase that surely constitutes a fundamental self-misrepresentation of Simon's actual thesis: the book concerns *governing through the politics of punishment,* or *through crime control*, not *through crime* as such. To truly govern-through-crime would mean to establish a sort of Mafioso state, or a politics of "social banditry," of the kind Eric Hobsbawm (1981) discusses in his *Bandits*: young men who employ crime in heroic struggles for "social justice" of one kind or another, against the rich landowners and other figures of power. But aside from this, Simon helpfully formulates the idea that crime control is a kind of "politics of fear" (2007: 260), one which is fundamentally

dysfunctional, in that it only entrenches the social pathologies it set out to inoculate the body politic against. The "war on crime" is a mark of weakness—an indictment of the failures of late-modern sovereignty—because it creates "vulnerabilities in the very accumulations it produces on subjects and their institutions. This includes the massive concentration of black and Latino young men and, increasingly, women in the criminal justice system, and the attendant impact on their communities, dependents, families, and neighbors" (Simon 2007: 273). It pushes criminalized and penalized populations deeper into the very practices it set out to free their communities from. In place of social amelioration, this sort of politics produces social deterioration. In this sense, governing through crime control has a tragic quality: set out with more or less noble intents—to protect the weak, to defend hard-working citizens from crime—its results are nevertheless largely a failure, on just about every measure conceivable: *fiscal* (the American crime-control complex swallows up tens of billions of dollars every year that could have been spent on education, healthcare, and housing), *human* (families are broken up, convicts are often only more deeply entrenched in a criminogenic lifestyle upon release from prison), and *cultural* (the mass proliferation of fear and a cultivation of feelings of resentment among ethnoracial minorities and the poor).

The ideological implications of Beck's (1992) "risk society" thesis are perhaps most readily apparent in his discussion of the flexibilization of labor at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Rather than denounce the rise of flexible employment—the disappearance of stable employment conditions and high-paying jobs—Beck considers this turn of events to be "an ambiguous, contradictory development" (1992: 144) that will introduce problems *and* gains. While unemployment disappears when everyone is flexibly employed (with the normalization of zero-hour contracts and Uber-style subcontractor status in the "gig economy"), Beck writes, the disappearance of unemployment "reappears in new types of generalized risky underemployment" (1992: 144). If *everyone* is underemployed, so this sophistic bit of argumentation goes, then *nobody* is underemployed. But of course, these risks are themselves stratified, inter alia, according to socioeconomic class, ethnoracial background, and spatial location. Crucially, Beck welcomes the "destandardization of labor," as he calls it, because it will, on the one hand, and from the vantage-point of employers, result (so he claims) in increased productivity, while on the other hand, and from the perspective of workers, it will result in greater autonomy over one's life. "From the perspective of the employees, the risks accompanying the forms of underemployment compete with the partial freedom and sovereignty gained in being able to arrange their own lives" (Beck 1992: 148). Now, Beck wrote this in the early 1990s, and with the benefit of hindsight, having actually passed through much of the "destandardization" of labor that Beck predicted, it is increasingly evident that Žižek's original indictment of Beck's thesis is in the main correct. As Žižek points out, Beck's analyses are really "doing the crucial ideological work of trying to sell us new anxieties as new forms of freedom" (cit. in Olson and Worsham 2001: 266). Why worry about being paid a pittance to sell one's labor on various platforms (to echo Srnicek's [2017] helpful concept of "platform capitalism), from Amazon's Mechanical Turk to Airbnb and Uber, when this could be viewed as an *opportunity*, as a form of "working people's gains in sovereignty over their work" (Beck 1992: 143)? But this is a cheap, stale sort of sovereignty, the false sovereignty of the frail and marginalized. In this sense, Beck's vision of the sovereign (but impoverished, insecure) worker in the risk society perfectly mimics the proliferation of various performative strategies for bolstering sovereignty at the level of the state.

IV. Reactive sovereignty

The name we should give to the state's response to social anxieties and insecurities bred by the overaccumulation of capital, commodities, and labor is *staging sovereignty*. In this concept we find the conjuncture of theatricality and state authority: it is not enough to enforce and enact, but also to stage these actions (or *acts*) as public displays, a morality play, symbolic dramas that tutor and teach those not directly handled or managed by the actions of public authority. Against all those excessive elements generated by advanced capitalism, the state finds itself tasked with shoring up its own appearance of potency and power. It does so by surveilling, policing, and penalizing excess populations (e.g. Wacquant 2009). In its post-neoliberal phase—and we are on the cusp of entering this phase after the neoliberal era from ca. 1980 onwards draws to a close, with increasing political polarization (between Sanders and Trump, between Corbyn and right-

wing Brexiteers) and fastidious criticisms of neoliberal assumptions (even IMF economists have taken to deploying the notion of "neoliberalism," a clear sign that its end is near [see Ostry, Loungani and Furceri 2016])—the state is being called upon to regulate, organize, and manage everything from ecological catastrophes to migrant bodies to infrastructural demands.

The "infrastructure push" currently underway (see Ougaard 2018) is a telling example: it reveals how the neoliberal ideology of (partial and piecemeal) minimalist anti-statism has threatened the demands of capital—every good capitalist knows that they need roads, railways, power lines, airports, seaports, and so on, if only to bring their products to market—and that one of the aims of transnational, pro-capital organizations like the G20 is now to correct this defect in the neoliberals' blind faith in markets. Garland (2005) shows how white supremacists in the US South staged their violent acts of lynching as oppositional, defiant actions against the state, "a show of strength, claiming the sovereign power to manage their own affairs, defeat their own enemies, and assure their own security" (Garland 2005: 822). This is a paradigmatic act of staging sovereignty, albeit (in this instance) one carried out by non-state actors. But the underlying theoretical notion underpinning such actions also moves states to engage in "lynchings" of their own kind: locking up black and brown bodies in excessive numbers in the United States, for instance, or rolling out gargantuan infrastructure projects, like China's New Silk Road railway connection extending from Beijing to Western Europe, which is a reassertion of the grandeur of the state against free enterprise, a way of glorifying the divinity of public authority, which is, in Bourdieu's terms (2000: 245), "that realization of God on earth, the State."

The aim of staging sovereignty is to shore up strength and deny weakness. The fixation on strength and weakness is evident in places like Document.no, a Norwegian right-wing website, operated on a heady ideological brew of Islamophobia, nativism, Bannonite Trumpism, Nordic supremacy, and the occasional statement of sympathy (at least in the comments section) for the Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik. Commenting on the formation a new center-right coalition government, including the right-wing populist party, the Progress Party, one reader comments: "Zero respect for these politicians who are incapable of stating the one important challenge facing us. Namely that our trusting, law-abiding, and productive population is being replaced by new kinds of people who lack trust, are criminals, and produce absolutely nothing."[2] Or, as another reader writes, "The illusion that one can integrate people from Somaila [sic] and the middle-east [sic] really only exists in the minds of the political correct. Where I live there are zero signs of integration, which we, moreover, aren't interested in either."[3] Document.no is suffused with *fear*, with ethnoracial and ethnonational anxieties, equal parts beguiled with and terrified at the prospects of being overrun by Arab, Somali, and Muslim immigrants while beholden to "liberal" elites incapable of stemming the tide and dealing effectively with alleged problem populations, who, it is thought, will bring about the downfall of an exceptionally wealthy and generous welfare state, social democracy, social trust, ethnoracial purity, and a particular (national) way of life. Xenophobia is mobilized in defense of the welfare state. What is so fascinating, if that is the right term, is that these stalwart defenders of social democracy are miles removed, politically speaking, from the political organizations and parties responsible for bringing about a modestly decommodifying welfare state, including trade unions, the Labour Party, and various other political factions of the center-left. To them, the social order is both superior and fragile: it is far greater and better than any comparable national society, and yet it is always threatened with being overrun by semi-barbaric hordes.

What characterizes these movements above all else is their *ressentiment*. They are, to think with Nietzsche (2006: 48-49), reacting rather than responding. The truly healthy individual "acts his reactions" or "responds instead of reacting," in Bogue's (1989: 26) take on Nietzschean *ressentiment*: "Once the reactive forces gain dominance in an individual, a spirit of revenge takes over, a permanent feeling of *ressentiment*, or resentment. Because the man of *ressentiment* is incapable of acting or ridding himself of his memory traces, every object that affects him causes pain, and he blames every object for that pain and seeks revenge against it. Eventually, that

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[2] Facebook comment by "Erling Marthinsen," 14 January 2018. https://www.document.no/2018/01/14/den-nye-regjeringen-vi-ma-lose-seks-utfordringer/.
[3] Facebook comment by "AMG65," 14 January 2018. https://www.document.no/2018/01/14/den-nye-regjeringen-vi-ma-lose-seks-utfordringer/.

revenge is directed against active individuals" (Bogue 1989: 26). To the nativist xenophobe, often imbued with punitive inclinations, every experience is coded within the matrix of a generalized resentment against the Other, no matter how "objectively" far-fetched. Immigrants, minorities, foreigners, asylum seekers, and criminals are lumped together in a conceptual jumble, a "folk category" (see Khalidi 2013: 55-65), composed of distasteful and dangerous bodies who must be nullified or subjected to a strategy seeking to "select, eject, and incapacitate" them from the social body, in Webber and Bowling's (2008) apt phrase.

Against the backdrop of growing surplus populations and rising existential insecurity (e.g. Shammas 2017), expect to see not the withering away of the state (as anarcho-libertarian capitalists and techno-utopians predict) but its rise to a magnitude hitherto not even contemplated. The state will become a magnificent, gleaming beast, an intrusive Leviathan capable of interpenetrating its citizen-subjects neurologically, genetically, to move the human subject "past" its seemingly essential humanity with technologies of discipline *and* control (Foucault and Deleuze were both right: discipline and control will coexist and commingle). In this phase, staging sovereignty readily describes the state's responses to social anxieties and insecurities, however ineffectual such reactions might be, as so many prophylactic and palliative measures targeting new forms of social suffering and those supernumerary populations consigned to bearing them.

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