

GEOPOLITICAL FORUM

Leaky Geopolitics: The Ruptures and Transgressions of WikiLeaks

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The unfurling of violent rhetoric and the show of force that has lead to the arrest, imprisonment, and impending extradition of WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange, serve as an exemplary moment in demonstrating state-sanctioned violence. Since the cables began leaking in November 2010, the violent reaction to WikiLeaks evidenced by numerous political pundits calling for

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Assange's assassination or execution, and the movement within the US to have WikiLeaks designated a 'foreign terrorist organization', amount to a profound showing of authoritarianism. The 'Wikigate' scandal thus represents an important occasion to take stock and think critically about what this case tells us about the nature of sovereign power, freedom of information, the limits of democracy, and importantly, the violence of the state when it attempts to manage these considerations. This forum explores a series of challenges inspired by WikiLeaks, which we hope will prompt further debate and reflection within critical geopolitics.

RHETORIC, PREJUDICE AND VIOLENCE IN THE FACE OF WIKILEAKS—SIMON SPRINGER AND HEATHER CHI

Anyone who has ever doubted the violence of the state and the arbitrary nature of law should look no further than the recent unfurling of violent rhetoric and the show of force that has lead to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's arrest, imprisonment, and impending extradition as reasons to reconsider their position. As the WikiLeaks cables began to leak, Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), Sweden, and the United States (US) – governments of the so-called "Free World" – were busy scouring their laws to find some crime, any crime, to charge Assange with presumably so that he could be not only silenced, but also vilified in the public eye. Similarly, those who have hitherto doubted that a capitalist class is now unequivocally at the reigns of the state (aside from remaining anomalies like Cuba and Burma) have some explaining to do with regards to the unprecedented reactions to WikiLeaks from Mastercard, Visa, PayPal, Amazon, PostFinance, and the Bank of America. The response has been swift and immediate, yet every allegation that WikiLeaks and Assange have come up against thus far are just that, allegations. The juridical principle of presumed innocence has been repeatedly ignored, and the closing of accounts based on a "crime" being committed appears prejudicial – in the double sense of both *prejudice* and *prior to law* – which says something important about how the idea of crime is positioned in relation to a capitalist status quo.

Since the cables began leaking in November 2010, the violent reaction to WikiLeaks evidenced by the numerous political pundits that have called for Assange's assassination or execution, and the movement within the US to have WikiLeaks designated a "foreign terrorist organization", amount to a profound showing of authoritarianism, thereby signalling the underlying logic of the state. A profusion of geopolitical readings on the significance of the WikiLeaks scandal have emerged in the media, among think tanks, within

government institutions, and across Internet message boards. If you listen to the fear mongering that pervades conservative media outlets in the US, WikiLeaks is rendered in the national imagination as a “threat to America”. This notion actually has some resonance of validity if we think dialectically and invert its intended meaning. That is, if we consider “America” as a cipher for systemic covert dealings and organised impunity rooted in an entrenched system of privilege – in other words, if we consider America as a state – then indeed WikiLeaks represents a threat as it challenges the parameters of liberalism, the ideology upon which the American state is founded. The “Wikigate” scandal thus marks a watershed moment for the future of both liberalism and the state. Consequently, it also represents an important occasion to think critically about what this case tells us about the limits of democracy, freedom of information, transparency, and accountability, and as anarchist critiques have long suggested, the violence of the state when it cannot control these limits.¹

The idea that there are significant intersections between state, capital and violence is by no means new within the realm of critical geopolitical inquiry.² Similarly, Facebook, Twitter, and the Internet in general have opened up transnational networks that remap contemporary geopolitics in potentially emancipating ways. In this regard Wikileaks is but one component in a larger process of the Internet being used as a tool to destabilise the hegemony of state power and the arrogance of US power in particular. However, in preceding both the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement, the Wikileaks case revealed with empirical force how the theorised intersections between states, capital, and violence have become increasingly overt in the Internet era, signalling what may be considered a shift in sovereign logic. Wikileaks demonstrated how sovereignty could become ‘opened up’ to new and intensive forms of critical public scrutiny, meaning that demands for transparency and accountability became more intensive than they have ever been in the past. States must now come to grips with being under the microscope of the public eye, where the ability to deceive the population can no longer be taken for granted. Yet at the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, sovereignty has also been ‘closed down’, where states attempt to manage increasing information flows and the probing that comes with such accessibility by amplifying authoritarian responses such as shutting down websites and cutting off access to revenue in an attempt to curb the flow of knowledge.

It is our contention that the significance of Wikileaks is that it brings emergent geopolitical issues into sharp relief, which requires some reflection on what this all means in relation to the current geopolitical order and its potential transformation as a result of the probable emergence of multiple Wikileaks-style operations in the future. Will sovereign authority be able to respond fast enough to the changing field of power and find new modes of adaptation to maintain its monopoly on legitimacy, or will it ultimately

collapse beneath the its own weight as more and more light is shed on the misdeeds and abuse that seem to come concomitant to sovereign rule? We do not presume an answer to this question, as the future is not yet written. We also want to be careful not to reify positions here either, as our interpretation of sovereignty is, following Foucault, circuitous, meaning that it flows from and between people and states in a protean and reciprocating exchange.³ So the question is not so much a binary case of the people versus the state, as it is a taking stock of the role, meaning, and place of sovereignty in an age of increasing digital connectivity. Increasing knowledge and awareness for the actions of states transforms the way sovereignty is operationalised in any given context. As public political will begins to shift on the basis of newly acquired information, so too does the orientation of sovereign power. In an effort to initiate different kinds of interrogations concerning the present and future of geopolitical configurations of power, we propose a series of five discussion points that we feel are worthy of engagement, debate, and further reflection by human geographers:

Government and the State

We have been thinking about whether the actions and practices of WikiLeaks – operating as a stateless news agency largely outside the capitalist world of mainstream journalism – are creating an important space for alternative political discourse and agency. WikiLeaks is perhaps the first news organisation to publicly criticise the *basis* of the international state system and, importantly – though not the first – to criticise the secrecy that shrouds state-driven foreign policy. WikiLeaks also appears reluctant to be the gatekeeper of information, and is careful when claiming to act “in the public interest” – leaving “the public” largely to judge WikiLeaks’ actions and information as it will. Geographers are well positioned to consider and comment on whether WikiLeaks’ actions have indeed opened multiple spaces for politics, wherein power/knowledge is increasingly in the hands of individuals as opposed to governments or the media. While the state (and the media) look likely to continue monopolising the forces of violence and law to prevent such a transition/shift of power, we are keen to see a dialogue emerge within critical geopolitics and human geography that assesses the extent to which WikiLeaks is rupturing geopolitical imaginations in such a way that renders state power increasingly suspect and therein transforms existing governmentalities. Although speculative, we wonder how much of an impact these developments had on the Arab Spring and Occupy Movements that emerged not too long after the WikiLeaks debacle. At the same time, a referee has prompted us to think through the degree to which Wikileaks actually operates within the bounds of sovereignty as part of neoliberalisation’s new epistemic conditions, signalling not necessarily an abrogation of power, but rather its filiation.

Accountability and Transparency

One of the major – if so far subtle – implications arising from the release of US foreign policy embassy cables has been that it has shown foreign policy to be largely self-serving and exploitative, and political leadership to be banal, corrupt, and arbitrary. The cable leaks have revealed that, while governments publicly justify classification and the lack of transparency on account of “national interest”, this lack of transparency appears to be largely effected to avoid embarrassment and damning critiques of governments’ legitimacy. Yet we feel that the arbitrariness and ordinariness of foreign policy and government (i.e., foreign policy appears to be an exchange of favours, where leaders do not appear to be “sacred” and many are not even accountable, responsible, or moral/ethical) reveals how arbitrary sovereignty itself is – and raises questions about whether any system of sovereign power has any essential right to exist or rule. These are not exactly new questions within the gamut of political geography and geopolitics, but we do feel that some of what has been revealed by WikiLeaks provides concrete evidence to support such theoretical positions.

Legality and Privacy

We have been intrigued by Wikisceptics, many of whom betray conservative positions, and (unwittingly) provide fodder for debates on the philosophy of law within their arguments. A key argument has revolved around WikiLeaks’ violation of the right to privacy, which connects inevitably to the right to private property, a right that appears to trump all others within the current system of capitalist hegemony. These critiques have accused WikiLeaks of theft and disrespecting governments’ right to keep their communications private. Our response to such scepticism is twofold. First, an individual’s right to privacy surely cannot be equated to a government’s right to not be transparent, given that the latter are – at least ostensibly – accountable to the population. Defending governments on this count seems to be a slippery slope. Who decides what information should or should not be in the public domain and what information is or is not “in the public interest”? Clearly there are vested interests in any state that play a pivotal role, and it is not simply the “common good”, a normative idea with little analytical value. Second, if such sceptics feel the right to privacy trumps the right to freedom of information/expression, then surely privacy is best assured in a political-economic system without states to which individuals are accountable. Paradoxically, this may in fact be the very world that WikiLeaks envisions. Moreover, despite the various condemnations WikiLeaks and Julian Assange have received from governments and the media, the question of the *legality* of WikiLeaks’ actions remains an open one. WikiLeaks has opened the Pandora’s Box of international law to reveal

a minefield: the difficulty of extraditing Assange suggests that international law remains contingent on national law enforcement, and that national law can only be enforced upon territorially rooted and qualified political life. In our view, WikiLeaks' legal evasion exposes this loophole: there appears to be nothing essential about law; the distinction between legal and illegal exists as a violent and arbitrary line drawn in the sand by sovereign powers with the monopoly of force to police it and implicate biopolitical subjects within it.

Geopolitics and the Internet

The primary interest of WikiLeaks to date, in their own words, has been to "expos[e] oppressive regimes in Asia, the former Soviet bloc, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, but we also expect to be of assistance to people of all regions who wish to reveal unethical behaviour in their governments and corporations". Somewhat ironically, Assange's work has led him to receive a number of high profile awards for his journalism, including the 2008 Economist Index on Censorship Award, and the 2009 Amnesty International UK Media Award for exposing extrajudicial killings in Kenya. Yet when, in late 2010, the WikiLeaks lens turned to the 'West' – curiously absent from their statement of purpose – the gloves came off and Assange's character was attacked. Russia, Brazil, and Venezuela have taken the WikiLeaks affair as an opportunity to expose 'Western' hypocrisy vis-à-vis press freedom and democracy to the extent that the office of Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, issued a statement calling for Assange's nomination as a Nobel Prize laureate. From the perspective of critical geopolitics, this calls for renewed attention not only to the ways in which an East/West binary is constructed, but also to how the tropes associated with this dichotomy are deconstructed for political gain. It has been interesting to note that while there has been a great deal of support for Assange on the street in North America, Europe, and Australia, elsewhere the reaction has been somewhat muted. Yet this uneven geography of response is not limited to the material spaces of the public, as one of the most profound unfolding lessons of the WikiLeaks affair is how it reshapes our understandings of the contested politics of cyberspace. While WikiLeaks has contributed to widening the possibilities of the Internet's emancipatory horizons, we remain concerned for the potential ways in which the organisation's transgressive tactics lend themselves to a conduct of resistance politics centred on cyberspace to the neglect of material protests enacted on the ground. Public response to the scandal has primarily played itself out not in the material public spaces of the so-called 'West', but within the blogosphere, across social media, and particularly among Internet 'hacktivists', which tells us something important about the protean geographies of activism. Rather than being overly pessimistic, we feel that such developments actually call for greater attention

among geographers to how 'the material' and 'the cyber' differentially map onto each other in various sites as either a dialectic or dissonant process.

Human Lives

Finally, a major accusation levelled at WikiLeaks has been that the organisation has needlessly endangered human lives by releasing the Iraq and Afghanistan documents, as well as US embassy cables. While we are inclined towards believing that these are largely media scare-mongering tactics, it would be imprudent to not at least consider the idea that people could potentially be harmed as a result of these releases. Of course, the real villain here is US foreign policy, which is responsible for some of the worst episodes of violence in human history, and certainly within the last few decades. While we are hopeful that the release of these documents might alter US foreign policy, this does not appear to be happening. Instead of taking this moment as an opportunity to reflect critically on the damage wrought by decades of subversion, coercion, and jingoism, the US is now talking openly about the need for even tighter security on information and ratcheting down what little transparency remains in its veiled foreign policy. The irony of public debate on the issue of secrecy is not lost on us. Yet while we remain concerned about the benefits versus the potential harms in releasing this information, and refuse to concede that the loss of a few lives in the service of some greater good is a justified means to an end, we wonder whether this is even a fair debate to have at this stage. The vast majority of the cables, while politically embarrassing, have so far been relatively banal. Thus the harm being done – at least as of yet – is not being tallied as a body count, but in terms of damaged reputations among global elites. The fact that WikiLeaks has, as of October 2011, ceased its leaking operations as a result of the financial blockade mounted by corporate America only compounds our scepticism.

In what follows, the assembled contributors of this forum unpack these issues in greater detail. Our collective hope is that these collected reflections will encourage those interested in critical, anti-, and alter-geopolitics to weigh in on and critically engage with the important debates that the WikiLeaks affair has invoked.

OUTSOURCING THE STATE—JEREMY CRAMPTON

What's important to understand about WikiLeaks is that it's not WikiLeaks that is important. Assessments of WikiLeaks tend to revolve around WikiLeaks as either a force for good or ill and ignore two important questions. First, what are the merits of the material published by WikiLeaks? It is often claimed that this material is already known – but we might ask, known

to whom? There are multiple levels of information asymmetry. Second, what does the varied response to WikiLeaks tell us about the nature of power and sovereignty?

WikiLeaks is paradox. It is in pretty poor shape. The founding editor Julian Assange faces accusations of sexual assault and as of May 2012 he had not been formally charged. Within WikiLeaks there has been much dissent, with former Assange deputy Daniel Domscheit-Berg acrimoniously leaving to found OpenLeaks after accusing WikiLeaks of losing its way and betraying its remit. (Founded in January 2011, OpenLeaks has yet to publish anything). Since December 2010 there has been a blockade against WikiLeaks by banks, credit card companies and PayPal, which prevents it from receiving donations. In 2011 it was revealed that three companies, HBGary Federal, Palantir, and Berico, known as Team Themis, had put together plans to target WikiLeaks, left-wing activists and the journalist Glenn Greenwald of Salon.com at the request of the Bank of America. The plan was revealed when Anonymous hacked and published internal e-mails between the companies. Berico and Palantir then severed connections with HBGary Federal, and its CEO Aaron Barr resigned. (In February 2012 HBGary was bought by ManTech International, a defence and intelligence contractor.)⁴

If WikiLeaks is impoverished and attacked, it is because it is part of an epistemic shift in sovereignty. This is by no means to be understood as a central government trying to suppress challenges, or of the state in crisis. Rather, it is the state itself that is outsourcing and spinning off its capabilities in an unprecedented manner, especially in the defence and intelligence sectors. Paradoxically, WikiLeaks is part of this outsourcing, and the insecurities of it playing in this larger game reveal much about how it is supposed to be played – and who can play it and profit from it. Palantir received \$2 million from the CIA's technology venture capital company In-Q-Tel and now has \$300 million in funding to provide analytic capabilities historically done by the National Security Agency (NSA).⁵ Its links to the defence and intelligence community (IC) are strong. It recently hired former National Counterterrorism Center director Michael Leiter. As a military-intelligence contractor, it and the many other similar contractors get security clearances and access to the government's most guarded secrets. Indeed, of the 1.4 million people with the nation's highest clearance (Top Secret) at last half a million are held by contractors.⁶

Let's examine the two questions posed above; whether WikiLeaks is merely providing information that is already known, and second what the responses to WikiLeaks might tell us about contemporary sovereignty.

Certainly, the question of whether something is known is complex, and there are multiple levels of information asymmetry involved. Something can be known to a few (such as area experts), but not generally known to the public. For example, when WikiLeaks published the State Department cables it was sometimes argued that these were trivial observations, gathered at

embassy cocktail parties. Yet we did learn that the USA carried out rendition prior to 9/11, that in violation of international law the US sought “biometric data” on senior UN officials, and more about the pressure the US receives from Saudi Arabia to depose Iran’s leadership.

It is true that the cables themselves were classified at relatively low levels (only 6.2 percent were classified as “Secret” and 53 percent were “Unclassified,” none were “Top Secret”). However, it is this very differential in information and knowledge that is at stake in whistle-blowing, or bringing to public light activities and facts not known more widely. In the case of the Pentagon Papers for example (which *were* Top Secret) the leaker, Daniel Ellsberg, did so because he had evidence that successive administrations were lying to the public. The Pentagon Papers, said Ellsberg, need not have been classified at all because they contained no national security implications and were only classified for political reasons. In today’s Obama administration, which ran on a promise of governmental transparency but has failed to deliver, whistle-blowing remains of critical importance. In this regard, alongside WikiLeaks we may acknowledge the case of Thomas Drake, a whistle-blower who worked for the NSA. Drake, who provided unclassified information to a reporter regarding billion-dollar inefficiency and waste at the NSA, was charged by the government under the Espionage Act for retaining classified documents, but the case dissolved in 2011. Notably, after the case in a very rare move, the NSA and the Department of Justice had a formal complaint filed by the former Bush administration classification official that the allegedly retained documents should not have been classified in the first place. There is no doubt then that whistle-blowing activities are part of this ongoing struggle between access to and continual over-classification of documents. According to official figures, over 77 million documents were classified in 2011, a 40 percent increase year-on-year.

Even when something is published by WikiLeaks, and presumptively known to all, this does not mean that the information can be utilised. In 2011 for example WikiLeaks released hundreds of files about prisoners being held in the Guantánamo prison. Compiled by the Joint Task Force at Guantánamo (JTF GTMO) and known as Detainee Assessment Briefs (DABs) they provided new information on almost all the 779 prisoners held there since the prison opened. This has created some novel legal implications because the attorneys representing Guantánamo prisoners have been enjoined by the government from using information in the DABs since they remain classified documents. Although the government can use the DABs against the detainees (they contain what defence lawyers contend is unreliable information extracted under torture, duress or coercion) and the documents are published globally, the defence lawyers initially had no access to them, nor can they discuss them. The government later allowed defence lawyers to view them on a non-government computer but not to download

or transport them. Defence lawyers have now filed a motion arguing that the government has no legal right to restrict access since the lawyers are only prevented by Nondisclosure Agreement (NDA) and Protective Order from viewing classified material supplied by the government, and that these documents come from an independent source (that is, WikiLeaks and the original leaker) and are publicly accessible.

These examples show that WikiLeaks is part of the ever-ongoing contest over control and access to information that we see in copyright disputes, geographies of knowledge, the digital divide, censorship, counter-censorship and many other related issues. The question of what is “known” is certainly a political question.

What can WikiLeaks tell us about power, government and sovereignty? It might be interesting to get beyond the usual dichotomies here. As noted by a referee on an earlier draft, these tend to see WikiLeaks as powerful threat to sovereignty. But what if, instead of being opposed, we see them as part of the same trend, that is, the outsourcing of government beyond the state? As government spins off, we can then see that WikiLeaks (and other democratic uses of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, etc.) is part of the struggle to pick up the pieces.

Matt Hannah’s concept of “epistemic sovereignty” is useful in this light, and we can use it to place WikiLeaks into a wider historical context.⁷ Epistemic sovereignty refers to the rights that authorities such as the state can assert over information and knowledge, typically in an asymmetric fashion. These rights can be (to a certain extent) resisted. Some historical examples will illustrate this point.

Government domestic dataveillance takes at least two forms: open data collection, for example the census and closed collection, for example signals intelligence (SIGINT) of the NSA which collects all e-mails, texts and phone calls. There is a big difference. Closed (classified) information collection has no public oversight, no public budgets, and no public descriptions of programmes and activities. Despite constitutional protections it can be subject to political pressures. President Kennedy signed off on FBI surveillance of Martin Luther King (partly because J. Edgar Hoover had evidence of the president’s extra-marital affairs). These COINTELPRO activities went unknown for fifteen years and included illegal wiretaps and other shady activities known as the “dirty tricks.” Negative public response to the COINTELPRO programme, as well as Nixon’s Watergate illegalities, led to the Church Committee Report of 1975 restraining covert surveillance. The Church Committee also established the FISA (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, 1978) Court, which oversees government requests for surveillance on foreign powers or agents.

There are several issues worth highlighting here. Given that the right of government to perform dataveillance is almost universally conceded (Hannah’s book is about a rare example where a government census was

successfully boycotted) the question that next arises is that of oversight and transparency. The FISA Court provides an important mechanism in ensuring that warrants, based on probable cause, are used in surveillance. What WikiLeaks usefully reminds us is not that we should be opposed to dataveillance in principle (I cannot see how any individual or social organisation can operate without collecting information, that is, without knowing things), but that it should be bi-directional and not asymmetric. Currently, we are very far from this, and the little oversight we have can break down. (The *New York Times* revealed in 2005 that after 9/11, the Bush administration and the NSA carried out a series of warrantless wiretaps.⁸) This is not an argument for the efficacy of pure knowledge (that if we just know something everything will be alright). Knowledge is struggled over as I discuss above.

The second issue lies in the outsourcing of government. It is now estimated that there are two government contractors for every government employee.⁹ Information available from USASpending.gov (an oversight database) reveals that no fewer than 50,000 contractors received money from the Department of Defense between 2000 and 2012.¹⁰ These include large military contractors such as Lockheed-Martin (recipient of \$286 billion in DOD funding) but also companies such as CACI, which provided interrogators for the Abu Ghraib prison and were revealed in 2004 to have substantially mistreated prisoners (recipient of \$12.5 billion). WikiLeaks has covered this area on a couple of occasions, including the Stratfor e-mails (hacked by Anonymous) known as the “Global Intelligence Files” and another project known as “The Spyfiles” which contain documents from various intelligence contractors.

In the geography sector similar developments have occurred. In 2010, two spy satellite companies, GeoEye and Digital Globe, were awarded a ten-year contract by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) worth \$7.3 billion to supply the government with imagery (an activity traditionally performed by the secretive National Reconnaissance Office). However, very little is known about the contract, the imagery to be delivered and whether defence cutbacks will negatively affect the companies and their own subcontractors.¹¹

An inescapable conclusion is not that sovereignty is being weakened or challenged, but rather that it is being outsourced and redeployed beyond the state. This is cause for concern, because there is less accountability in such arrangements, not to mention that contractors can work outside the military chain of command (for example, contractors are used to operate the CIA’s drone system). WikiLeaks is a minor but symbolically powerful figure operating among governmental outsourcing and acting as an outlet for whistle-blowers and providing oversight and transparency. Until (at a minimum) there is true participatory bi-directional dataveillance, we must continue to value WikiLeaks for these efforts.

SOVEREIGNTY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND TRANSPARENCY THROUGH THE WIKILEAKS LENS—FIONA McCONNELL

One of the most prevalent placard slogans during the 2003 anti-Iraq war protests in the UK was “not in my name”. It is a statement which, in all its concise directness, sums up the often strained relationship between a state’s foreign policy and its citizens: between internal sovereignty and external sovereignty. However, such frustrated disagreement with the British government’s reasons for going to war was expressed despite the information available at the time being revealed since as partial and misleading. With the WikiLeaks US embassy cables we have before us a dizzying array of disarmingly frank foreign policy deliberations and decisions made in citizens’ names, albeit largely citizens of one “super-power” state. On the one hand, the revelations that governments are corrupt, world leaders are self-interested, and diplomatic relations are often banal are hardly new or startling. Indeed, in many ways the disclosures reinforce what political geographers have been contending for years: that sovereignty is a contested concept; that the state is constituted through a set of performances and practices; and that foreign policy is constituted by modes of representation.¹² On the other hand, the advent of WikiLeaks pushes these critical understandings of sovereign authority in important new directions. For, alongside the headline-grabbing revelations of Saudi Arabia’s desire for an American attack on Iran, China’s willingness to accept Korean unification, and US diplomats spying on UN officials, the leaked cables also provide a valuable window on the arbitrary and tacit nature of sovereign power and foreground the relationship between sovereignty, transparency, and accountability.

At first glance, while WikiLeaks might be seen as the next installment of a growing list of government leaks, the extent, scale, and distributive mechanisms of “Cablegate” appears to rupture conventionally understood sovereign authority in a series of important ways. For a start, this release of 250,000 US embassy cables represents a breach of external sovereignty. Its disclosure of information to those who were never meant to see it lies somewhere between interference with and intervention in the external relations between states. If we subscribe to the analogy of international politics as a game, then the players have caught a glimpse of each other’s cards. Perhaps not enough to jeopardise the game itself, but sufficient for each player to deem that their authority has been violated, thus necessitating an altered approach to their gameplay. Meanwhile, the act of leaking itself can be seen to threaten the internal sovereignty of states. For, if individually many of the disclosures are relatively trivial, as a whole the deluge of classified records undermines the US’s ability to control internal communications and to keep its own and other states’ secrets. Internal sovereignty is compromised by the fact that whistle-blowers are, by definition, “insiders”. As journalist Heather Brooke puts it, “The powerful have long spied on citizens (surveillance) as

a means of control, now citizens are turning their collected eyes back upon the powerful (*sousveillance*)".¹³

But are such ruptures to state sovereignty really anything new? Within and beyond political geography, sovereignty as absolute, indivisible or inherently territorial has been critiqued and refuted, with evidence drawn from processes of globalisation and decolonisation, and the actions of a range of non-state and often extra-territorial authorities.¹⁴ Many scholars have been right to caution against a dismissal of state sovereignty, arguing that national sovereignty is being transformed rather than diminished.¹⁵ I want to suggest here that WikiLeaks and other open-source web projects intervene in these debates in three important ways: by disrupting the traditional landscape of sovereignty from the position of cyberspace; by forcing us to consider seriously the role of transparency and accountability; and by casting issues of legitimacy and statecraft in a new light.

The series of reactions triggered by this new provocateur in international politics – from the arrest and impending extradition of Julian Assange, to the suspension of WikiLeaks' access to the global payment, and domain name systems – certainly refutes any claim that states are losing their geopolitical significance. To this extent the ontopolitical status of the US as a global super-power is arguably not challenged by the subversive actions of WikiLeaks. Yet, at the same time, as a stateless network, WikiLeaks does not fall under the jurisdiction of any state and this immunity to intervention fundamentally disrupts the established topography of post-Westphalian political power. Whilst leaker Bradley Manning faces life imprisonment, the US's ability to effectively legislate to protect its secrets has nevertheless been jeopardised by the fact that the leaked information can be replicated on innumerable "mirror sites" independently of any individual who could be prosecuted.

Whilst the existence of cyberspace as a terrain of political resistance is far from new, WikiLeaks is arguably challenging the privileged position of law and state sovereignty in unprecedented ways. It has brought this new frontier of sovereignty – between states and informal web-based networks – to the fore at a scale and with an impact never seen before. Indeed, this raises the question of whether WikiLeaks is emerging as a new sovereign authority in and of itself.¹⁶ Such claims may be somewhat premature, and region-specific "Leaks" movements may prove as significant as Cablegate, but how these new sovereign dynamics play out should be of significant interest to political geographers. With its ability to transgress and disrupt state affairs and remain seemingly invulnerable to state prosecution, WikiLeaks looks to have won the first round. But will it remain autonomous, and will states continue to struggle to exert sovereign authority in cyberspace?

However, perhaps this distinction between cyber politics and "real" politics is a false one. For, ironically, one area where liberal democracies appear to be engaging in Internet technology is that of transparency and the idea of open government. Not only has there been much public talk of these

issues strengthening democracy and promoting effectiveness in government, but this has been followed through with initiatives such as Data.gov in the US and the disclosure of government salaries and organisational structures by the British government. But what does transparency actually mean? These open government initiatives are limited, and when complete disclosure arrived in full force via WikiLeaks – and turned its attention on the world's super-power – the US did not seem quite so keen on the concept. It was hard to miss the hypocrisy of Hillary Clinton lauding global freedom of information while denouncing WikiLeaks as an attack on the international community. For here, sovereign states were coming up against a very different interpretation of and approach to transparency: the global transparency movement, of which WikiLeaks forms but one part, which employs new approaches to scrutinise powerful institutions.¹⁷ Such projects bring issues of credibility, transparency and trust into direct dialogue with practices of sovereignty and statecraft and, with the WikiLeaks cables doing this with such audacity, this is a conversation which demands analytical attention. It does so not only in terms of the novelty of the Internet as a medium for such enactments of transparency, but also because, on another level, this is nothing new. Exposing the inner workings of power politics and assuming that such transparency would prevent powerful states wreaking geopolitical havoc has a long history. Indeed it is arguably central to the establishment of International Relations as a discipline post World War I where the motivation was to uncover hitherto secret strategies within states of the Concert of Europe. Whilst sharing this broad rationale of shedding light on inter-state relations, what the case of WikiLeaks adds, I want to suggest, is the raising (if not answering) of questions around accountability.

Secrecy and discretion underpin practices of international diplomacy, and there are strong arguments for maintaining diplomatic privacy in terms of fostering mutual trust, facilitating timely decision-making, and enabling states to act in their “national interest”. However, what the leaked cables have revealed in spectacular fashion is the fact that not only do state leaders say one thing in private and another in public but, while governments publicly justify classification on account of “national interest”, this lack of transparency appears to be often effected to avoid embarrassment and critiques of governments’ legitimacy. As geopolitical actors, it is to be expected that states are self-interested, but what the WikiLeaks cables do is to put the question of who this “self” is, and to whom states are actually accountable, literally in the public domain.

As democracy advocate Micah Sifry argues, WikiLeaks is a symptom not a cause of this new networked era where those conventionally understood as “the governed” can “unmake the credibility of authorities with little more than a click of a mouse”.¹⁸ In this environment where accountability and credibility are increasingly up for grabs, events such as Cablegate challenge traditional structures of power and, crucially, call the legitimacy of states’

actions into question. Such a foregrounding of legitimacy is to be welcomed, as it is a concept somewhat overlooked within political geography, and one which, exposed to a critical gaze, could yield productive insights. Indeed, the contested nature of legitimate authority is aptly demonstrated here, with the legitimacy of WikiLeaks' role in releasing the classified cables being questioned, and its own accountability and financial transparency coming under scrutiny.

So where does this leave us with understandings of sovereignty? On the one hand, the WikiLeaks affair offers a highly partial and limited view of sovereign relations. From the perspective of the 2010 disclosures it is a view focussed on the US and one which considers only the sovereign practices of the geopolitical elite. On the other hand, with sovereignty as an elusive and amorphous concept, the rupture provided by WikiLeaks provides a valuable glimpse of moments and spaces where the contestations of sovereign authority can perhaps be pinned down. It confirms sovereignty as an enduringly powerful yet inherently arbitrary concept. Contingent on individual personalities and the outcomes of chance meetings and informal exchanges, this broader reading of sovereignty therefore cautions against abstract theorising and demands a contextual approach which is attuned to the tacit nature of sovereign power. Indeed, the "empirical material" which WikiLeaks offers is a very different set of texts concerning foreign policy to be critically deconstructed: an unscripted foreign policy, or perhaps more accurately the personal annotations in the margins. It also offers a perspective on the practitioners and intellectuals of statecraft,¹⁹ which simultaneously humiliates and humanises these individuals. In turn, this reinforces statecraft as a set of social practices,²⁰ but also encourages us to push the term further and think about it as an art which is always in the process of being learned.

However, the extent to which this geopolitical elite are learning to listen to their citizens remains to be seen. Enforced transparency does not necessarily lead to greater accountability. Equally, the fact that we are now increasingly aware of what is being done in our name does not necessarily lead to a citizenry more engaged with how sovereign authority is employed. WikiLeaks may have made certain procedures of foreign policy transparent, but having the information and acting upon it are two very different processes.

WIKILEAKS, ILLEGAL LEGALITIES, AND THE BIOPOLITICS OF COLLECTIVE COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE—JULIE CUPPLES AND KEVIN GLYNN

The "technologized hypervisibility" of contemporary society entails a "constant shrinking" (by increasingly pervasive cameras and computers) of "the

terrain of the private, which we must now define as that which can be made invisible".²¹ Access to privacy is in this sense distributed highly unevenly across the social differences that generate differentials of power, for "social power always involves the power not to be seen, or at least the power to control which of its doings are to be made visible".²² The weaker social power of countersurveillance may therefore be the primary available means of resistance in a surveilled society, *not* because it results in a higher degree of democratic accountability when the dominant power it is turned against is that of the apparatus of the state, but rather "because it *contests the management of visibility*" through which, on many different levels, dominating forms of power (including sovereignty) increasingly exert themselves.²³ The capacity to exercise forms of countersurveillance includes those processes of retrieval and circulation that turn 'dead' information into 'live' knowledge – processes that lie at the core of WikiLeaks' activities. Through their contestation of the power to manage visibility, such processes necessarily reveal the extent to which public and private spheres may be understood as "continuous rather than distinct" from one another.²⁴

WikiLeaks emerges as an oppositional project within the post-9/11 conjuncture, wherein new modes of surveillance and countersurveillance proliferate rapidly, and the US has made a last-ditch attempt to salvage old-style imperialism in the age of Empire by illegally invading two sovereign nations.²⁵ These invasions and the modes of biopower that underpin them are characterised by a range of "illegal legalities" committed by the US and some of its allies.²⁶ The War on Terror has been built on an open defiance of the UN and established principles of national and international law. Prisoners at Guantánamo and Bagram have been held indefinitely without charge or trial, the civil liberties of US citizens have been curtailed and violated, and a new lexicon of euphemisms such as "extraordinary rendition" and "enhanced interrogation techniques" has come into being. Meanwhile, sexual minorities and people of colour have suffered from stepped-up violence and attack politics, while war-profiteering has flourished, socially irresponsible banks have been bailed out, and the hyper-rich have enjoyed massive upward wealth-redistribution. For Giroux, our political culture construes large numbers of people as disposable and produces social movements (such as the Tea Party) based on a principled and passionate opposition to any policy designed to alleviate human suffering.²⁷ According to Hardt and Negri, the contemporary global political order comprises a regime wherein legality and capital are co-configured such that private property rights usually trump all others; in this conjuncture, the individual is "defined not by being but by having."²⁸ So pervasive and banal is this power of property rights that we scarcely notice its exhaustively shaping impacts, nor its role as a vital engine of the violence and exclusions encountered daily by the "disposable" segments of the global population.

Insidious new modes of biopower are enacted in the name of increased securitisation for US citizens, but operate to ensure the “republic of [private] property”.²⁹ Such biopower is however increasingly challenged by new forms of biopolitics, such as user-driven media practices that blur the boundary between production and consumption and potentially facilitate new modes of political engagement and citizenship. The War on Terror has thus been contested through a range of citizen-led transmedia activities that promote countersurveillance and produce what Hardt and Negri designate as the common: a mode of being in the world that is neither public nor private while existing simultaneously within and against Empire. Much that is shared freely on the Internet circulates through wikis and generates a form of the common through productive biopolitical collaboration. WikiLeaks itself mobilises the bottom-up, immaterial labour of the multitude who traverse authoritarian landscapes and deploy proliferating biopolitical tactics to transform “privacy” into *public visibility*. Its products spread rapidly across media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and a host of newspapers and broadcasts. They stem from and are used by whistle-blowers, activists, politicians, journalists, diplomats, dissidents and citizens who wish to disrupt the benign public self-images promoted by corporations, governments and military organisations and replace them with popular scepticism. WikiLeaks thus constitutes a form of collective (counter)intelligence. In their attacks on WikiLeaks, some US officials and other detractors have branded Julian Assange a “terrorist” because of the damaging impacts they fear from the public exposure of government communications. Clearly, the popularisation of less than benign images of powerful institutions creates and expands alternative popular imaginaries and thus new possibilities for the organisation of social collectives – witness, for instance, the broad-based social movement that developed around candidate Obama in 2008 and the Occupy Movements in more recent times.

A significant factor that differentiates WikiLeaks from earlier whistle-blowing practices is its exploitation of digital convergence in the age of Web 2.0 connectivities and capacities, which facilitate the production and rapid global circulation of counterimages, counterdiscourses and counterknowledges by citizens and that enable such content to cross intensively networked platforms, from “new” to “old” media and back again. In this way, WikiLeaks operates as a stateless, virtual news outlet that confounds the material and territorially based legal mechanisms to which citizens have traditionally been subject.³⁰ While Assange’s embodiment in space and time render him vulnerable to biopower and the possibility of being held to account for himself, he has exploited transnational mobility and digital communication networks to leap across jurisdictions and conflicting legal regimes, and to multiply and translocate his presence via electronic public appearances.

While the US government struggles to identify a criminal offence that might facilitate Assange’s extradition and containment, it appears to some

observers to be committing constitutional crimes of its own. For instance, Private Bradley Manning is currently awaiting trial in a Kansas prison consequent to accusations that he was a source of WikiLeaks military material, including the now viral “Collateral Murder” video that shows US soldiers firing from an Apache helicopter on journalists who were killed in the attack and Iraqi children and other civilians who were injured. Manning’s incarceration has been formally protested by numerous leading scholars who believe his treatment by jailors violates the Fifth and Eighth Amendments of the US Constitution and may transgress statutory prohibitions on torture.³¹ Furthermore, supporters of Manning and WikiLeaks have reportedly been subjected to searches, interrogations, harassment and electronic equipment seizures by US law enforcement officials eager to circumvent constitutional checks on police power. Hence, WikiLeaks spokesperson Jacob Appelbaum and MIT researcher David House, who had a hand in the establishment of the Bradley Manning Support Network, were lengthily detained when they attempted to reenter the US after travelling abroad and had laptops, cellphones, flash drives and other electronic devices permanently seized without search warrant or probable cause in either case. Such practices are constitutionally prohibited on US territory but not at border entry zones, a loophole the US government seems bent on exploiting to create a chilling effect among those who might otherwise be inclined to support Manning and others associated with WikiLeaks.³²

Such measures cast light on the relativity, geographical contingency and instability of liberal legal rights and rights discourses, which must be analytically placed and situated within broader contexts of power and control. However, the operation of formal legal discourse through abstractions and dichotomous conceptualisations such as “rights” versus “needs” and “public” versus “private” defies such placement; indeed, juridical discourse undermines the situation of such legal concepts within broader contexts of power and control by performing an inverse operation of analytical extrication that translates conflicts and grievances into an acontextual space where supposedly objective reasoning may be applied: “legal language flattens and confines in absolutes the complexity of meaning inherent in any given problem”.³³ In the current political conjuncture, attempts to contextualise and qualify rights claims often operate hegemonically through the application of biopower via the discourses of ‘national security’. Nevertheless, WikiLeaks has not only summoned intensified applications of biopower but has also unleashed the affectively charged forces of biopolitical blowback. The organisation is seen by its millions of supporters around the world as being on the side of peace, human rights, integrity, ethics, responsible journalism and free speech. Assange has received awards and accolades from Amnesty International, the Sydney Peace Foundation, the Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence, Time magazine, and Le Monde. When he was arrested in connection with an ongoing criminal investigation and

was initially denied bail, cyberactivists launched punishing digital attacks against several corporate entities that adopted policies designed to undermine Assange's legal defence efforts, including Amazon.com, PayPal, Visa and Mastercard. Meanwhile, support for Manning and condemnation of the conditions in which he is held prisoner are both growing.

WikiLeaks can therefore be understood as a biopolitical project that both arises from and generates affective connections and solidarities, social networks and collective (counter)intelligence. What is at stake here is not really the future of law, journalism or whistle-blowing. Assange is both reviled and adored because the WikiLeaks endeavour threatens not so much the privacy, security or safety of law-abiding citizens but rather the republic of property on which the contemporary system of neoliberal capitalism rests. As a biopolitical product, the activities that surround WikiLeaks "take common forms, which are easily shared and difficult to corral as private property",³⁴ and dramatically expose the precariousness of sovereign power and the state of exception. Because it disrupts the (neo)liberal state's capacity to manage the public visibility of its regimes of privacy, property, militarised violence and law, WikiLeaks is an important site of contestation over the imaginaries through which contemporary democracy is struggled for.

WIKILEAKS AND INTERNET GEOPOLITICS—BARNEY WARF

The Wikileaks phenomenon – particularly Bradley Manning's appropriation of a quarter million secret US State Department diplomatic cables (while pretending to listen to a Lady Gaga CD) in 2010 and passing them to the NGO that specialises in disseminating classified documents – offers a useful opportunity to assess the politics of cyberspace. This essay argues that Wikileaks reveals several important aspects of Internet geopolitics: the Internet as contested political space; the advantages, limitations, and disadvantages of cyberactivism; the geographies of empathy and caring that cyberactivism is capable of fostering; and the limits of Internet speech.

As a small army of critical theorists of cyberspace has demonstrated, the Internet is a contested domain of politics, an arena of conflict in which different discourses jockey for influence. Thus, while it has been most often used for entertainment and the ever-deeper penetration of commodity relations into the psyche of roughly two billion people worldwide, or 30 percent of the planet's population, the Internet also serves a variety of counter-hegemonic purposes, including ones with a socially conscientious and egalitarian orientation.³⁵ In this light, Wikileaks is part of a much broader constellation of progressive uses of cyberspace, a vast array of causes that harnesses the Internet for purposes broadly oriented to social justice and protection of the politically and economically marginalised, such as promoting human rights; preventing war; attacking poverty; environmental

protection; women's, gay, handicapped peoples', animal, and minority rights; and opposition to economic and political exploitation, including neoliberal globalisation. By allowing alliances to be forged and synergies to be fostered, the Internet greatly enhances the power of social movements, making them into relatively coherent forces that accomplish far more together than they could by acting alone. In short, Manning and Wikileaks fall squarely within the tradition of progressive hacktivism.³⁶

As Paasi notes, the geographies of globalisation reflect a "fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, ropy, capillary character that is never captured by the notions of levels, layers, territories, spheres, categories, structures, or systems."³⁷ In the context of shape-shifting global space, riddled as it is with wormholes, the rising leakages between the "container" of the nation-state and worldwide social and economic processes have rendered the simple dichotomy between "inside" and "outside" the nation-state increasingly problematic. This spatiality can be used for progressive as well as reactionary ends. Thus, cyberspace is an ideal mechanism for groups to jump spatial scales,³⁸ allowing them to leverage public opinion at the global scale in local struggles for justice. Wikileaks represents scale jumping at its finest: in releasing vast quantities of state secrets, Bradley Manning and Julian Assange revealed that the porosity of national borders can be utilised for emancipatory purposes. As a result, even the most powerful and best financed institution in the world – the US military – was revealed as having weak points, moments and spaces of vulnerability.

However, the liberatory potential of cyberspace can easily be exaggerated. Indeed, one of the most important myths swirling around the Internet is that it constitutes some inherently progressive force steadily widening the public sphere of civic debate and inevitably promoting democracy by giving voice to those who lack political power, and in so doing undermines authoritarian and repressive regimes. This trope is a favourite of conservatives, who frequently reduce complex social problems to simplistic nostrums of technological determinism. Ronald Reagan, for example, asserted that "the Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip",³⁹ while the chair of Citicorp, Walter Wriston argued that "the virus of freedom . . . is spread by electronic networks to the four corners of the earth."⁴⁰ On 17 February 2011, speaking with regard to the revolts of the Arab Spring, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pronounced that "the Internet has become the public space of the 21st century, the world's town square, classroom, marketplace, coffeehouse, and nightclub." Drawing on modernisationist views of development, in which rising education levels lead inexorably to a widening and liberalisation of the public sphere via a well-informed population, such discourses reflect an unrealistic utopianism. Such visions appeal to Western policymakers, who often exaggerate the extent and power of ostensibly freedom-loving cyberdissidents who challenge the power of dictatorships simply by diffusing knowledge to information-starved

masses.⁴¹ In reality, however, many governments are quite adept not only at censoring the Internet but also in using it for their own purposes.⁴²

Wikileaks presents an ironic twist to this popular narrative. It is one thing to use the Internet against, say, Mubarak's government in Egypt or Assad's Syria, but is quite another to use it against the United States. The American government, so used to operating in secrecy in other countries and abetting institutions that are anathema to democratic governance, found itself highly embarrassed by the illicit publication of its diplomatic cables, an event that turned cyberutopianism on its head. Suddenly Internet freedom was not something to be touted as the antidote to totalitarianism after all. In this respect, the importance of Wikileaks may lay not so much in the actual content of the cables released, but in the fact that it reveals the possibility of subverting enormously powerful institutions. In pulling back the veil that has been so carefully drawn over secretive diplomatic maneuvering for decades, Wikileaks revealed the arrogance, hypocrisy, and opportunism that consistently underlie US foreign policy. No wonder a Norwegian politician nominated it for the Nobel Peace Prize.

However, overreliance on the Internet can undermine other forms of political action: as Johnston and Laxer ask, "Is Internet solidarity a lazy activism of e-mail petitions, or simply a convenient tool to facilitate grass-roots organizing?"⁴³ Notably, Internet use by itself does not necessarily lead to heightened interest in political issues or greater participation. Ayres asserts that cyber-activism's "politics at a distance" has displaced traditional street-based forms of protest such as marches, which are far more telegenic and visible locally.⁴⁴ Social movements that rely exclusively on the Internet to foment long-term linkages are unlikely to succeed: cyberspace is a complement, not a substitute, for "real world" contacts. For this reason, Morozov warns against "slacktivism,"⁴⁵ the common tendency to equate the easy act of signing an e-mail petition with real, often painful, struggles to confront oppression and poverty. Indeed, an exaggerated emphasis on Internet politics can be debilitating for movements that rely on volunteers, money, and boots on the ground to effect meaningful change. Thus, cyberactivism is a complement, but certainly not a substitute, for more conventional means of political organising.

It is worth inquiring who, if anyone, benefited from the media spectacle that swirled around Wikileaks. Certainly not Bradley Manning, Julian Assange, or the Wikileaks organisation. The damage to the US military and diplomatic bureaucracy was relatively minimal, despite a few minor embarrassments. If anything, the publicity will cause the State Department to be even more secretive and cautious about potential leaks in the future. Now that the initial hysteria has subsided, Wikileaks will likely decline into a footnote in history, a brief moment when one brave individual sacrificed his career (and possibly more) to expose, however briefly, the machinations that form a normal part of everyday diplomatic maneuvering.

Finally, despite its manifest limitations, cyberactivism may also help to foster alternative geographic imaginaries in which identity is defined relationally through feelings of mutual responsibility rather than simple proximity.⁴⁶ Cyberspace provides an accessible venue for information, lessons, best practices, and expertise to be shared, moral commitments and group solidarity to be enhanced, publicity to be gained, dissent made public, sympathisers alerted, resources to be pooled, and funds to be raised, or what Harvey calls “militant particularism,”⁴⁷ in which local solidarities find common ground with one another. In facilitating rhizomatic networks of power, the Internet can facilitate the generation of geographies of compassion and empathy that stand in sharp contrast to xenophobic discourses of hate and exclusion. Vivid pictures and films of atrocities and injustices circulating over the Internet can have powerful impacts in raising awareness about a variety of issues. For example, the Internet played an important role in fostering sympathy and support for the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico, facilitating coordination of protests against the IMF and G-8, anti-sweatshop campaigns directed against Nike and similar firms, the international campaign against land mines, numerous non-governmental organisations, struggles against foreign biotechnology firms in India, and many other contexts.⁴⁸ In such a context, the moral community to which each person owes an obligation is, by definition, worldwide, generating an obligation to “care at a distance,” in which the concerns of distant strangers are held to be as important as those of people nearby. Such a view is in keeping with the emerging literature on geographies of care and the ethics of responsibility.⁴⁹

Subsequent to Wikileaks’ release of the document, the American and British government engaged in distributed denial of service (DDOS) attacks on the website, prohibiting its use of cloud storage, and a systematic, coordinated policy of preventing contributions to the organisation by shutting down its access to credit card payments and forcing Amazon and PayPal to drop it as a client;⁵⁰ indeed, it now teeters on the brink of bankruptcy. These actions reflect what happens when the Internet is used to embarrass authorities and challenge the iron fist behind the velvet glove by demonstrating the limits to Internet freedom. The West may talk the talk of Internet freedom in other countries, but when the interests of the powerful are challenged, it walks the walk of blunt and over repression. Bradley Manning’s successes, and subsequent imprisonment, thus become closely tied to our own interests in speaking truth to power.

ON WIKILEAKS AS A THREAT TO HUMAN LIFE—WES ATTEWELL

On 25 July 2010, WikiLeaks released the ‘Afghan War Logs’ (AWL), a collection of 91,731 internal United States military logs documenting the occupation of Afghanistan. In response, senior coalition military officials

excoriated WikiLeaks for failing to redact its file dump: a critical oversight that would “increase the enormous dangers that [Western] soldiers” face in occupied Afghanistan, as the neo-Taliban would be “poring over every one of the leaked documents with a fine toothed comb”.⁵¹ These concerns were seemingly validated by the insurgents themselves on 30 July, 2010, when they threatened to decapitate those Afghan collaborators whose anonymity had been compromised by the publication of the uncensored AWL.

Representations of WikiLeaks as a threat to human life, however, are fundamentally problematic. This is because they serve as powerful moral justifications for figuring the perpetrators of “WikiGate” as insidious and terroristic threats to the established neo-colonial “order of things” that must be neutralised through an immediate reactivation of the old sovereign right to “take life, or let live”. Sarah Palin, for instance, suggested that the editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, be “hunted down” as though he were an “anti-American operative with blood on his hands”: an analogy which was taken to the next level by Tom Flanagan, who “jokingly” called on Obama to “put out a contract” on Assange and “maybe use a drone or something”.⁵² Similarly, Private First Class Bradley Manning, the soldier accused of downloading hundreds of thousands of classified documents from the Pentagon’s “Secret Internet Protocol Router Network” and passing them along to associates of WikiLeaks, has been branded a traitor for whom “anything less than execution is too kind a penalty”.⁵³

Although these calls for sovereign vengeance were not acted upon by the Obama administration, this does not mean that Assange and Manning escaped punishment. Manning, in particular, has been charged with the capital offence of “aiding the enemy”, meaning that he could potentially face execution should the military judge presiding over his trial override the prosecution’s current decision not to seek the death penalty. Furthermore, the conditions of his detainment at a top security military prison in Quantico, Virginia, have been described as cruel, inhumane, and degrading. Not only has Manning been held in intensive solitary confinement for most of his incarceration (which is understood to comprise a form of “no-touch” torture), he has also been un-officially labelled a “suicide risk”: a deliberately ambiguous designation which provides the flimsiest of justifications for his subjection to onerous “prevention of injury” restrictions which not only mandate that he strip naked and sleep in a “suicide smock” every night, but also that he be checked on by prison guards every five minutes at all hours of the day.⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly, lawyers working for the Pentagon have assured the Obama administration that Manning’s detainment conditions are “appropriate” in the sense that they meet “basic standards”.

What is particularly interesting about this controversy is that it shows how the spectre of the global war prison still looms large in the public consciousness. The editorial board of the *Washington Post*, for instance, was quick to highlight the uncomfortable parallels that could be drawn

between Manning's detainment conditions at Quantico and the "intimidating and humiliating tactics disavowed after the abuses at the Abu-Ghraib and Guantanamo prisons".⁵⁵ This juxtaposition may be powerful, but it is also problematic. Recently, geographers have explored the ways in which the White House has mobilised an "involved legalism" in order to transform the global war prison into a topological "space of exception" where the law – and by extension, sovereignty – is not suspended, but rather, operates in excess to maintain suspected "terrorists" in a state of indefinite detention.⁵⁶ In stark contrast to the inmates of the global war prison, however, Manning was recently transferred to a "more open" facility at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Although the Pentagon's top lawyer, Jeh Johnson, maintains that Manning's transfer should not be interpreted as an indicator that his detainment conditions at Quantico were "inappropriate", he did acknowledge that his case received "high-level" attention because "of persistent criticism by human rights groups, some members of Congress, and others".⁵⁷

But what is it that makes Manning's case *more deserving* of high-level Pentagon attention? Following Butler, Manning's transfer raises three crucial questions: First, who counts as human? Second, whose lives count as lives? And third, what makes for a grievable life? "Lives", according to Butler, "are supported and maintained differently and there are radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe". Certain lives – namely, Manning's – will be highly protected, while others – the inmates of the global war prison, as well as the "forgotten souls" languishing in America's infamous "prison industrial complex" – "will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as grievable".⁵⁸ Here, certain parallels can be drawn between Butler's claims and Agamben's theorisation of "bare life". But whereas for Agamben, "bare life" is the product of a sovereign decision – a "cut" in the very fabric of life – Butler complicates this narrative by suggesting that such a differential valuing of human beings is linked to a "resurgence of sovereignty in the field of governmentality" that is being driven by an increasing proliferation of "petty sovereigns": bureaucratic figures that have been delegated the ability to "render unilateral decisions, accountable to no law, and without any legitimate authority".⁵⁹ This, in turn, is significant, for it seems to me that representations of WikiLeaks as a threat to human life are ironically being conjured up by precisely those "petty sovereigns" who "reign" at the key "bureaucratic army institutions" that are most directly involved in the production of death and destruction in the borderland battlespaces of the "everywhere war".⁶⁰ This apparent contradiction can be squared only if it is assumed that such disingenuous critiques of WikiLeaks are ultimately undergirded by an inherently Orientalist calculus that assigns greater inherent value to politically qualified "Western(ized)" lives – our soldiers, our informants, our traitors, our collaborators, etc. – than the "bare" or "object" lives of the occupied "other" – their terrorists, their insurgents, their fundamentalists, and so forth.

Liberal critics of the long war, however, are keen to oppose this narrative by reframing the AWL as an institution that “speaks truth to power”. This is generally accomplished by engaging in a “politics of scandal” which seeks to shine a spotlight on diagnostic moments of explosive sovereign violence.⁶¹ *The Guardian*’s unshackling of the AWL, for instance, was accompanied by the publication of a slew of articles that drew on particularly scandalous logs to “expose” the “real” or “true” nature of Operation Enduring Freedom as a “dirty” war of “civilian killings, friendly fire deaths, and shadowy special forces”.⁶² This is a powerful, yet problematic strategy, for it accords greater discursive weight to an Afghan whose life has been extinguished by the violence of military operations, as they can then be more easily metricised into key tools of critique, such as civilian body count statistics.⁶³ Ultimately, I would argue that this critical narrative perversely reproduces, in its own way, a differential valuing of human life by refusing to imagine the occupied other as anything more than a passive victim of neo-colonial power. This is captured perfectly in Chatterjee’s claim that WikiLeaks, along with anti-war activists and journalists, play an important role when they “try to explain the lives of men who have . . . become transformed into [Kafka-esque creatures] with no voices of their own.”⁶⁴ Here, Chatterjee is specifically referring to WikiLeaks’ Guantanamo Bay Files, but it seems to me that his claims can also be made to speak more generally to the institution’s whistle-blowing activities.

This epistemological violence, in turn, is further compounded when the aforementioned critical interventions perform a public that is, in some very crucial ways, *also* deprived of political subjectivity.⁶⁵ This is because WikiLeaks’ media partners – *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Der Spiegel* – pre-parse, pre-interpret, pre-edit, and pre-visualise the AWL in ways that are designed to achieve maximum impact on a twenty-four-hour news cycle. In contrast to this simple, yet effective contextualisation of the AWL, the actual file dump itself quite user unfriendly – in the sense that it was made available in formats (HTML, CSV, SQL, and KML) that were incredibly difficult to navigate and interpret – while early attempts to solve this problem by creating a searchable online database out of the AWL were marred by unstable coding. These two factors combine to discourage lay readers from undertaking a deeper engagement with the AWL, thereby foreclosing the possibility of arriving at more progressive and responsible understandings of the occupied other through alternative readings of the broader archive. Here, we can begin to see some of the ways in which the general public is being reduced to a population of virtual “citizen-soldiers”: figures who blur the taken-for-granted distinctions between “the political role of the citizen and the apolitical role of the soldier”, and in so doing, further contribute to a gradual de-politicisation of the public sphere.⁶⁶

In order to address these lacunae, it is important to remember that Operation Enduring Freedom functions not only through an outward

projection of sovereign military power, but also, as the AWL clearly demonstrate, through a calculated administration of subjugated populations. The praxis of occupation, in other words, has crucial *biopolitical* dimensions. Although Foucault, “in his original discussions . . . described sovereign power and bio-power as ‘absolutely incompatible’, because one was exercised over territory, the other over bodies or populations” – they were, he insisted, exact “point-for-point” opposites – he was also “acutely aware of their contradictory combinations, and argued that the play between ‘the sovereign right to kill’ and the calculated administration of the right to life is inscribed ‘in the working of all states’”. Consequently, in occupied Afghanistan, biopolitics is, to paraphrase Gregory, “not pursued outside the domain of sovereign power, but is instead part of a protracted struggle over the right to claim, define, and exercise sovereign power”.⁶⁷ This more Foucauldian analytic, in turn, is useful precisely because it opens up the possibility of theorising the AWL as an *archive* documenting the banalities of occupation that can help academics construct an alternative critique of Operation Enduring Freedom: one that will foreground occupied Afghans as “embodied political subjects” that have the potential to become the “protagonists in the tales told about war”.⁶⁸

What might this look like in practice? In what remains of this intervention, I will tentatively answer this question by showing how a close engagement with the AWL has helped me contextualise my research on the poppy-substitution (or, “alternative development”) projects that are being implemented by the United States Agency for International Development and its field partners in rural Afghanistan. On a very basic level, a quick search of the AWL foregrounds a collection of documents that show how poppy cultivation figures prominently as part of the banal “coping” economies that sustain life in rural Afghanistan.⁶⁹ I argue, however, that these documents also help disturb popular representations of Afghan poppy cultivators as subaltern of Operation Enduring Freedom by re-scripting them as much more ambivalent figures that do not exist outside of broader matrices of power relationships, but rather, are constantly re-negotiating, evading, and in some cases, resisting the very terms of their governance by occupying forces.⁷⁰

This resistance, as Foucault points out, can assume a “plurality” of forms.⁷¹ Sometimes, it works through the banal practices of quotidian life. Certain logs, for instance, show how whole villages pay large sums of money to corrupt government officials in order to render their poppy fields “invisible” from the law. As Task Force 3/Fury reported on 3 May 2007:

1/c discovered a poppy field in the Shinkay Mountains Farmer was standing in the field at the time . . . farmer has stated that he and the town had paid 25 thousand rupees to the government so that they could grow poppy there.⁷²

Other logs describe the violent protests that were staged by poppy cultivators desperate to defend their only source of income from eradication by local police forces. On 26 February 2007, for instance, Task Force Chosin reported:

a crowd protesting poppy eradication, the crowd torched two tractors intended to be used for eradication of poppy. The protestors *threw stones* and *fired on* narcotics police. Afghan National Police defended by returning fire at the hostile protestors, resulting in 2LN wounded and 1LN killed. Afghan National Police will have extra police from Jalalabad on site for anticipation of *adverse reaction from* crowd.⁷³

Although law enforcement officials eventually suppressed most of these demonstrations, some were actually successful in (temporarily) halting eradication efforts. According to one log filed on 6 April 2007:

Thousands of protestors in Helmand province thwarted the Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) attempts to eradicate poppy in provinces Najh Sirraj district . . . the protestors complained to Helmand Deputy Governor Haji Pir Mohammad, who joined the AEF in its attempt to move to poppy fields, that the AEFs presence was unfair given Governor Wafa's earlier promises that there would be no more eradication in the district. [Afghan government] officials, for four hours, *attempted to reach a compromise with the protestors, but were forced to send the AEF back to their base camp*.⁷⁴

Such logs, at the very least, represent Afghanistan's poppy cultivating regions as fundamentally contested "human terrains" that are constantly mutating according to the logics of struggle and resistance. They also speak to the ways in which Afghan poppy cultivators have been increasingly recognised as the "centre of gravity" of military operations being conducted in rural Afghanistan. In fact, many commentators have suggested that it was precisely the concerns of Afghan poppy cultivators that drove the White House to ostensibly abandon forced crop eradication in favour of "alternative development". But as numerous logs effectively demonstrate, such a shift in counternarcotics policy did not necessarily translate into a wholesale replacement of "catastrophic techniques that damage and destroy life" with "providential techniques that repair and improve life" on the ground in Afghanistan's poppy cultivating regions.⁷⁵ Forced crop eradication often became the necessary pre-requisite to alternative development. On 21 April 2007, for instance, Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Nuristan:

conducted a key leader engagement with the mullah of Zeyerat. The mission was to assess the growth of poppy in the area. We explained to the Mullah that according to the Afghan government, the PRT cannot render services to anybody involved in poppy production. The Mullah explained

that poppy is what they thrived on to make a living. We reiterated that if the village wanted help from the PRT, they must eradicate the plant and find some other means to make a living . . . once the Mullah realized that he had to go thru the government . . . he realized what had to be done in order to help the village. At the conclusion of the meeting, it was agreed that the poppy had to be disposed of in order for projects in his community to be initiated. Both parties agreed that in one month, the PRT would meet him again to assess the area to make sure the poppy fields are disposed of and stay that way. He also agreed to work with the sub-governor, to find alternate ways of utilizing his land for farming.⁷⁶

This log, in particular, highlights the complex and nuanced interface between sovereign and biopolitical modalities of power that ensures the proper functioning of occupation in Afghanistan's poppy cultivating regions.

By way of conclusion, I want to point out that the AWL do not grant Afghan poppy cultivators uncomplicated access to agency. But by highlighting the extent to which neo-colonial occupation functions not simply through a meting out of death, but also through a calculated, yet partial, administration of life, they open up a space where Afghan farmers might be imagined as *more* than mere objects of power. This, in turn, allows us to refocus our critique, for what becomes unacceptable are not only the exceptional acts of violence that characterise the prosecution of Operation Enduring Freedom, but rather, their *prerequisite*: namely, the geography of occupation itself.⁷⁷ It is thus imperative that the progressive critique of the colonial present engage critically with this claim that WikiLeaks threatens human lives, for it is only in silence that we become complicit with those who differentially value the life of the occupied "other".

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