"Terrorism"

By Deborah Root

The Geography of Terror I: the *Desaparecidos*

We know the difference between terrorists and freedom fighters and as we look around the world we have no trouble telling one from the other.

> Secretary of State
> Schultz, 1984[1]

Within the global escalation of post-industrial capitalism, a language of images is articulated in which the "terrorist" emerges from a multitude of fragments. Continually reconstituted through propaganda, films, literature and so forth, the "terrorist" is further made to turn and feed upon itself in an allusive technique which layers referent upon referent: the gun, the bomb, the *kuffiya*, the list of demands.

The usefulness of the category "terrorism" as a hegemonic device seems clear; at the crudest level, it provides an unintelligible and alien enemy from which the State can appear to protect its subjects. At the same time, "terrorism" permits certain states to escalate their own terrorism by referring to an arena of struggle which increasingly is displaced. The polemic of "terrorism", and particularly its recent innovations, also refers to and sustains a worldwide shift in capitalist economic and political strategies which necessitates the disappearance of whole populations. The systematic ethnocide lately carried out in East Timor,

Guatemala, Sri Lanka, Eritrea, Palestine and elsewhere is one of several "counter-insurgency" techniques practiced against economically superfluous and troublesome peasants and tribespeople; massacres occuring in various parts of the globe should be read not as a miscellany of local tragedies but rather as symptomatic of late capitalism's escalation and transformation of hegemonic practices.

A new ideological tactic which accompanies this strategic mutation can be marked in recent pronouncements of the Reagan administration and its European allies: terrorism is war. Whereas formerly terrorist acts were downplayed and officially interpreted as a kind of banditry and/or criminal activity, today armed action is presented as the "greatest threat facing Western civilization". Official statements centre on two points: the first defines terrorism as a form of warfare and in so doing positions armed struggle in

a traditional military schema of opposing armies, battles and the like. The second refers to "state-sponsored terrorism" and suggests that armed actions emanate from hostile foreign governments, either because these governments order specific attacks or because they finance "terrorist" organizations.

Reagan's definition of a bombing or hijacking as an "act of war" implies a correspondance between such acts and the attack on Pearl Harbour, the sinking of the Lusitania, and so forth; it demands retaliation, and retaliation of a specific sort. Reagan also appealed to international conventions of warfare: "Under international law, any state which is the victim of acts of war has the right to defend itself". The Reagan administration is explicit about the identity of the "terrorists" currently threatening Western civilization, i.e., American interests; they are members of Third World liberation movements, "communists" and/or Muslims, allegedly directed by Iran, Libya, North Korea, Cuba and

Nicaragua. (Obviously, Reagan's "terrorism" does not include European neo-fascist terror, the state terror of Israel, South Africa, El Salvador and elsewhere, the CIA, contra "freedom fighters", etc.).

It may be that Reagan equates terrorism and the act of war in an effort to intimidate the "outlaw" states which he suggests are solely behind anti-American activity. Rather than being directed solely at relatively small liberation movements, then, his recent remarks could be read as an ideological preparation for an attack on any one of those countries. While an attack on, say, Tripoli would certainly provoke criticism,[2] the experience of Grenada indicates that flimsy prior justification for such attacks neutralizes much opposition. According to *Time* and *Newsweek*, many Americans are longing to see the U.S. slap Khomeini's or Qaddafi's wrists: the President has not been "tough enough".

Yet the escalation of both direct and indirect intervention after the American successes in Chile and Grenada could indicate more than simple-minded belligerency towards a few "looney tune" states and their alleged lackeys; it also suggests a perception of loss of control in the Third World and a fear that armed struggle is effective, a genuine threat to its interests. At the same time, Reagan's apparent willingness to use force underlines the equivalence of tactics being deployed around the world, which includes the increased use of military strength here (recall the 1985 bombing of "terrorists" in Philadelphia for failing to heed an eviction notice).

Post-industrial capitalism is moving quickly: if in the West it seeks to displace traditional political terrain, in the Third World it endeavours to bring about the total disappearance of politics and of populations which reject "modernization" and which potentially could be politicized, i.e., traditional peasants and tribespeople. The effect of capitalism's expansion, carried out by new tactics or repression, is no longer a subdued population providing cheap labour; it is, rather, no population at all. The techniques used to depopulate vast areas, euphemistically termed "counter-insurgency" operations or "fighting communism", are strikingly similar across the globe and range from outright massacre to forced resettlement; other repressive techniques include economic sabotage and destabilization, instigation of inter-ethnic hostility and collective punishment.[3]

Those not physically killed off disappear in a different sense: they are subjected to capitalism through integration into a Western mode of consumption. Pre-capitalist alliances are broken down as the dissemination of Western culture creates new affiliations based on consumption of our commodities and related "lifestyles". The dumping of Western goods in the Third World, along with continuing missionary activity,[4] constitutes late capitalism's covert war; in the latter's strategic escalation, the circle of disappearance begins with massacre and ends with commodity fetishism.

Capitalism seeks the appearance of seamlessness, of closure, but its authority is not yet absolute. Its moves are interrupted by "terrorism", that is to say, by armed struggle, as well as by the presence of margins, both here and in the Third World, which are difficult to

penetrate. The "terrorist" acts of the Third World, defined by state apparatuses as anything from commando attacks on airports to rock-throwing by children,[5] constitute a refusal of imperial hegemony which (momentarily) underlines gaps in the expansionist machine. While this refusal is in many instances contradictory in that the notion of armed militancy itself tends to reproduce repressive apparatuses (cadres, military discipline, trials and executions, etc.), the danger it poses to capitalism lies in its ability to represent the points of rupture which normally are concealed.

The Geography of Terror II: Algiers/Beirut

The hijacked plane crisscrossed the Mediterranean four times: Beirut to Algiers, Algiers to Beirut and back again, Empire's lake recreated by TWA Flight 847. These two cities represent the duality of "terror" in Europe's imagination, yet each appears to exemplify a different politics, or, if you will, a different "terror" undertaken by seemingly different Arabs. In the 1950s and 60s, Algerian terrorism gave rise in France to a questioning of the colonial relationship which ultimately led to the latter's withdrawal from the colony; "Arab terror" exposed French state terror in the colony and neo-fascism at home. While the Algerian war was debated in Paris primarily in terms of its effects on France itself, it was nevertheless the bombs of the FLN which demonstrated the costs of maintaining direct political and military involvement in the colony.

In the 1980s, terrorism provokes a reverse effect: the bombs directed against the American and Israeli presence in Lebanon conceal state terror and reinforce imperial involvement in the Middle East. Unlike the bombs of Algiers, those of Beirut have been decontextualized to the point where they seem to exist only as the incomprehensible acts of insane religious fanatics. Although Israel and the United States no longer maintain troops in Beirut, they nevertheless affirm that the level of violence and apparent anarchy in this city poses a strategic danger which necessitates their interference in its affairs. The style of involvement is neo-colonialist: profoundly intrusive yet for the time being covert, with insinuations of the possibility of direct military action if the situation gets too far out of control (underlined by the examples of Tunis, Sirte, Sidon...).

The terror which marked the battle of Algiers -- bombs on the one side, torture and rape on the other -- has been rehabilitated and made intelligible, the ululating cries of *qasbah* 's women becoming part of a heroic cinematographic legend which ultimately refers to the convulsions of the Fourth Republic, to De Gaulle and to Sartre rather than to the anti-colonialist aspirations of the Algerians themselves. The bombs which were set off in *pied-noir* cafés in the 50s and 60s seem today to have more to do with, say, the cannon surrounding Dien Bien Phu than with the struggles currently being waged by Palestinians and Lebanese Shi'ites: in the polemic of "terrorism", the Algerian bombs have become a postscript to French Colonial history or, at most, a moment in an old film.

Algeria, invaded in 1830 ostensibly to put an end to the hijacking of ships in the Mediterranean, has achieved respectability in the eyes of the West through its ability to negotiate with -- and appear to subdue -- the "bad" Arabs who bomb and hijack. After a lengthy and bitter struggle against the French, the "Algerian revolution" was bureaucratized and put into the service of the Empire (although it's probably not useful to say that this revolution was co-opted by reactionaries and transformed into a state bureaucracy; the Algerian revolution was always both, affirmations of freedom and the FLN's officers imposing hierarchy on the fedayeen). While at one time Algeria represented the triumph of the political act, that is to say, the affirmative violence of a dying colony in which the terrorist bomb exists in a trajectory of cause and effect, today it displaces anti-colonialist politics through its disciplining of armed struggle and reproduction of a particular style of socialism, characteristically Third World yet wholly Western, integrated into the world economy. The "terrorists" rehabilitated themselves.

Beirut occupies different space; in a geography of destruction, this city exemplifies the way in which political causality now seems to turn in on and consume itself. Interference by external forces has fractured and rendered unreadable political acts occuring in this city: it goes on and on, event overtakes event, but the act itself becomes increasingly less tied to that which ostensibly precedes and follows it. There is no longer an intelligible trajectory of the political, nor is there an outcome; winner/loser/victory/defeat have

collapsed. A cycle of death is produced by floating microacts perpetrated by no one and everyone: CIA, Mossad, Phalange, PLO, Amal, Hizb'ullah -- the list continues, nothing changes. It is in this sense that nothing really happens on the ground, on political terrain, although all appears to.
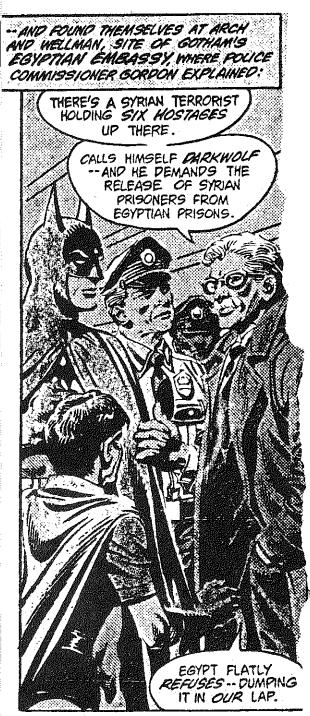
The continuing destruction of Beirut reinforces the imperial claim to the Third World, which has been based on a notion that the latter creates dangerous situations and is incapable of governing itself. We come to believe in the capitalist state as a benign, protective agency which subdues, rather than creates, dangerous situations: capitalism becomes progress, taming the destructive cruelties of primitives and religious fanatics. This city has become an *auto-da-fé* through which faith in "our way of life" is reaffirmed and its ritualized death made the redemption of imperial power; Beirut is the abyss, it is what the absence of the capitalist state would look like. In this sense the destruction of Beirut is absolutely necessary for the reproduction of post-industrial capitalism and for "the West's" construction of itself as civilization through its barbaric inversion in Lebanon. Decoding the events in Beirut as pure barbarism in effect conceals the global reinscription of empire; there is no "us" who is able to watch "them" destroy themselves -- Beirut is everywhere, inside us all.

The Geography of Terror III: Bombshelters

Terrorist war is a form of total war, which sees the whole of society as the enemy and all the members of society as appropriate objects for violence. It is the absolute war because its goal is the absolute destruction of the old society.
        Jeanne Kirkpatrick,
        October 1984 [6]

As a polemical device, "terrorism" no longer refers to a political practice or mode of resistance. Rather, this category as construed within late capitalism both refracts and deploys the latter's hegemonic strategies by promoting an *appearance* of politics, that is to say, of an arena of political action existing on the ground where a liberal, consensual State defends "innocent people" from "extremists".[7] "Terrorism's" reinscription of politics conceals the increasing displacement of traditional political terrain, a displacement marked both by

--AND FOUND THEMSELVES AT ARCH AND WELLMAN, SITE OF GOTHAM'S EGYPTIAN EMBASSY, WHERE POLICE COMMISSIONER GORDON EXPLAINED:

THERE'S A SYRIAN TERRORIST HOLDING *SIX HOSTAGES* UP THERE.

CALLS HIMSELF *DARKWOLF* --AND HE DEMANDS THE RELEASE OF SYRIAN PRISONERS FROM EGYPTIAN PRISONS.

EGYPT FLATLY *REFUSES* -- DUMPING IT IN *OUR* LAP.

intensified configurations of social control and by an escalation of various forms of state terror. The global "political crises" continually produced by "terrorism" in effect demand an extension of state terror.

Armed struggle (the ostensible referent of "terrorism") not only is excluded from acceptable political discourse as an inherently "illegal" form of political practice, but the "terrorist" act has come to be defined as an act of war equivalent to an attack launched by a hostile foreign power. In effect, this appropriation reinforces the semblance of traditional zones of political struggle and obliges resistance groups to appear to fight on increasingly moribund terrain. "Terrorism" is war/war is terrorism: both are capitalism. Capitalism deploys terrorism against "terrorists"; armed militants deploy "terrorism" against themselves if they are enticed

into regarding their struggle in terms of seizing - or reproducing -- the state apparatus rather than exploding it.

The "political event" -- election, invasion, massacre -- can no longer be relegated to an "out there" but is embedded deep inside the subjects of Capital. Politics collapses into spectacle, and this spectacle is driven into the subject's mind to the point where an equivalence is achieved between spectator and spectacle. More than an identification with, or internalization of Capital, or power/fascism/empire, the result of this process is a transmutation of external/internal space. As atomized subjects of post-industrial capitalism, we live increasingly inside our own heads rather than "in society"; we produce our own micro-fascisms and simulacra of the outside. *L'état c'est moi*: the "political" is resurrected as an internal colony in which the power of capitalism is always absolutist.

In the film *The Little Drummer Girl*, the "outside" collapses into the individual, and it is through the individual -- and through individuated desire -- that Middle-Eastern "terrorism" is explained and played out. For the Englishwoman, Charlie, "terrorism" is adventure and romance, yet it is "counter-terrorism" which permits her to transform her vicarious dream into "real" romance, "real" adventure. The romance is real; for Charlie, the question of political commitment becomes a choice between two men, or rather two political styles given bodily form by two males, the Arab and the Israeli. For the film's Israelis, and to a lesser extent for the Palestinian characters, political terrain exists as an interiorized stage where the drama is personal; the Middle East is transformed into individuals wrestling with moral doubt as they attempt to do the right thing in a crazy, mixed-up world.

Atrocities, at least on the Israeli side, become understandable, a case of human error: "we all make mistakes" seems to be the explanation for Deir Yassin, "but we want to be good people". With the Israeli "counter-terrorists" appearing as a group of young men and women striving for the same idealistic goals as Charlie, she is able to overcome her initial reservations about their methods, which appear identical to those of the "terrorists", because of the purity of their motives and the basic goodness of their personalities. This film was considered remarkably fair in its

portrayal of Palestinians as dedicated idealists as well, but idealists of a sort motivated by a harsh discipline which at times refers explicitly to German fascism (the German terrorist working with the Palestinians had ways of making Charlie talk: she slapped her around). After an Israeli agent explicates the "Palestinian problem" to her, Charlie is able to persuade herself - and us - that politics essentially occurs in shades of grey: like all good liberals, she allies herself with the side that appears most moral, that is to say, most traditional.

The ostensible point of *The Little Drummer Girl* was to depict how Charlie, or a woman like Charlie, that is to say, a "modern woman", became confused as she learned to play two opposing roles, to become two women. At once Zionist spy and Palestinian revolutionary, Charlie ultimately was won by the greater romance of Zionism, embodied in a liquid-eyed Israeli agent. A greater romance because so obviously moral as well, a morality made even more powerful by its capacity for self-doubt and regret at what it has been "forced" to do: again, "we make mistakes, but we're doing the best we can". The Israeli body is good, honest stock, familiar, not foreign.

In this film, the distinction between "terrorist" and "freedom-fighter" is elucidated through reference to sexuality and to personal style, marked by the attractiveness of the bodies representing the two categories. The politics of the characters is represented by their erotic potential. The Palestinian "terrorist" (who bombs children) possesses a "bad" sexuality which Charlie rejects after sleeping with him on the orders of her Israeli lover. The Israeli, on the other hand, initially exuded a "bad", somewhat oily seductiveness when he posed as an Arab but soon came to embody the "good" sexuality of the familiar, the known. Charlie, the middle-class heroine who expresses the values of Western liberalism, is the conduit of both sexualities and her choice of the Israeli renders him -- and his politics -- intelligible and negates his self-admitted political excesses: he becomes not really Other, not really terrorist, not Arab.

Sex/style/"terrorism": in the 1960s Che Guevera expressed the eroticism of the outlaw, and his image was reproduced in the millions of posters found on walls across North America and Europe. This "Che" of T-shirts and interior decoration was in the vanguard of post-industrial capitalism's appropriation and

commodification of "the revolution", of armed struggle, soon to become "terrorism". Again, Capital transforms into its own image that which it has constructed against itself; again, the political is interiorized.

Nora Astorga is transformed in the Western press from a Sandinista guerilla into a fearsome Circe, a man-eating woman who ensnares men with her sexuality in order to kill: she elicits a frisson of forbidden delight, a masochist's dream of the Dragon Lady whose attraction lies in her ruthlessness. Carlos and Qaddafi: here, capitalist ideology plays a double game in which "terror" also evokes the charm of revolutionary will and olive drab, again, the allure of the merciless, the Nazi in his greatcoat. One reads in the *Toronto Star* of a sixteen-year-old suicide bomber in Lebanon, a girl "dressed in a camouflage uniform, long black hair streaming from under a red beret" and "terrorism" becomes high fashion, like the boutiques on Mykonos named "revolution" or "Mao". Political action is transformed into a commodity, a *kuffiya* to be purchased at a Greek island resort and worn in European capitals.

The Geography of Terror IV: Black Holes

1492: the beginning of the European conquest of eighty-five per cent of the globe, and the beginning of resistance against colonial expansion. Imperial Europe and America have always treated acts of native resistance as horrific crimes against civilization itself and as confirmation of the savagery inherent in the Other, a savagery which must be suppressed if it is not to rise up in a huge wave of blood and destroy us all. The Sepoy mutiny, Little Big Horn, Mau Mau provoke images of fear, of sabre-wielding savages who kill without pity, for the sheer enjoyment of the act, for fanaticism.

The imperial machine structures all native resistance, violent or not, around the possibility of the knife at the throat, the Kalyshnikov at the head; any act which questions Western domination threatens to disrupt the hegemonic machine and ultimately to destroy civilization. Like the nineteenth century American officials who branded Indians attempting to retain their traditions as "renegades", and those accepting the civilizing mission "progressive", imperial capitalism today manipulates a similar dualism in its characterization of pro-American stooges as "moderate"

(e.g. Duarte, Sadat) while all else becomes "resistance", which in turn refers to a potentiality for "terrorism".

Imperial capitalism fears the Third World: it is the space of rupture, of unpredictability, where the codes not only are permeated by ambiguity but can break down altogether. Khomeini emerges, seemingly from nowhere. Whole countries disappear, or rather, we "lose" them, as we lost South Yemen, Ethiopia and, for a time, Grenada. Although post-industrial capitalism is attempting to export 1980s-style Western commodity fascism along with older coercive techniques and neo-imperialist economic practices (which are reasonably successful in places such as Singapore and Hong Kong), enormous black holes still exist which are nearly impossible to delineate and control, at least for the time being. The Third World, or rather its pre-capitalist culture and structures of alliance, is still in a very real sense unknown by Empire; the imperial relationship itself obscures the West's ability to perceive the Third World and leads it to employ increasingly repressive methods which in the long run may lessen the efficacy of capitalism's strategic moves to displace political terrain.

Yet traditional zones of political struggle also are becoming increasingly displaced in the Third World as local conflicts are inserted into the wider problematic of nuclear war; the former are permeated, or are presented as being permeated, by this possibility. Each small "crisis" ultimately refers to the threat of a larger "crisis", the final crisis. Local actions are structured within a schema of superpower rivalry, which provides a justification for the latter's interference in local affairs. Commodity terrorism is moving into the Third World along with tanks and missiles; as in the West, the atomization (or to use the CIA's term: "privatization") of "individuals" and the destruction of traditional social alliances hasten the closure of political space and of an arena in which action is still possible, is still relevant.

The contraction and displacement of political space in effect creates an equivalence of such actions as hijacking/commando raid, and of such roles as terrorist/president/hostage. The American air force hijacks hijackers; the distinction between the "forces of law and order" and the "terrorist" has become meaningless.

A particular event displays itself as a conflict between the "legitimate government" and the "terrorist" and as a political crisis, a drama of events, decisions and so forth, yet in actuality it occurs in a dormant area where very little happens and where movement is nearly impossible: the "terrorist"/political act fractures into thousands of empty gestures which fly about, encircle, intersect and are ultimately reconstituted, but which do nothing.

The Geography of Terror V: Zones of Conquest

Terrorism is defined as the unlawful use of force or   violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.
                    F.B.I. Annual Report, 1983[8]

We do not regret our decision to attempt to sabotage the   production of the Cruise missiles's guidance "brain". We only claim in all honesty that this action was never meant to be an act of terrorism. We were not trying to   threaten or kill the workers or executives of Litton systems. We were attempting to destroy part of an industrial facility that produces machinery for mass murder.
                Communiqué from Direct Action, October 1982[9]

Because of its ability to represent external, "political" space, "terrorism" eclipses the strategic invasion and interiorization of the subject within post-industrial capitalism. "Terrorism" exists as the final Other, the dangerous fragmentation of code which appears as random violence, as the anarchy of Beirut, as the absence of State; it appears doubly dangerous because of its role as the herald of Armageddon. "Terrorism" seems to threaten public safety and the authority of the state, and in so doing it produces a fear which can only be assuaged within capitalism. Although "terrorism" is constructed on the inversion of "lawful society", and as a violent refusal of civilized values, it is precisely through a manipulation of this appearance of inversion that capitalism reproduces itself and the process by which power is made desirable.

The noise surrounding "terrorism" bears little relation to any acts which have or might occur "out there"; rather, they exist in a vacuum where they echo endlessly against each

other. In effect, "terrorism" provides a foil against which a new, post-1970s style of fascism is able to constitute itself, a fascism characterized not by an explicit attempt to foster identification with the State, but rather by a profound interiorization. The colonized subject is produced by the continuous and simultaneous fragmentation and reconstruction of internal simulacra, which reproduce themselves exponentially; it is no longer possible to separate "people", i.e., society, from their own interiorization.

Notes
[1] Quoted in *Middle East Research and Information Project* Report 128:2.
[2] Note the responses of Italy and the Arab League to the U.S. shelling of Sirte in March 1986; other countries have expressed a certain unease with such actions.
[3] See Pieterse, J.N., 1985, "Israel's Role in the Third World: exporting West Bank Expertise", *Race and Class* XXVI: 3, pp. 9-30.
[4] The use of monotheistic religions to integrate tribal people into the state economy is widespread; the presence of Protestant missionaries in Central America, Muslim missionaries in Indonesia are two examples.
[5] In a *Toronto Star* article (10 February 1985, p. B1) on West Bank tensions, the author refers to stone-throwing as "terrorism".
[6] Kirkpatrick, J., 1984. Contribution to "Lost in the Terrorist Theatre", *Harper's* 269: 1613, pp. 43-60.
[7] This seems to be changing as an increasing number of governments stress the need for military strength and acts of revenge against "terrorism" rather than liberalism and restraint. For example, prominent members of both the Labour and Likud parties of Israel have called for this country to appear in the eyes of the world as an "insane" state, which would be capable of anything, including nuclear attack, if threatened. See Chomsky, N., 1984, *The Fateful Triangle: Israel, the United States, and the Palestinians*, Black Rose Books, Montreal, (Chapter 7).
[8] Definition quoted in *New York Times* 12/12/84.
[9] Reprinted in *The Ubyssey* 16 November 1982.

Post-Script

The U.S. attack on Libya, which occured soon after the above was written, exemplifies how "terrorism" proliferates equivalences: it no longer matters who the terrorists "really" are or which city is bombed in retaliation, or whether the bombings can "in fact" check terrorism. Many Americans were gratified at the thought of Libyans burning in their beds in a way that had little to do with terrorism *per se*. The attack (cluster bombs and all) can be read as a reminder to the American people, a kind of anti-personnel bomb distributing internal security along with vainglory and rabbit nationalism.

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HE ALONE IS THE UNDISPUTED LEADER OF DAR HARAT, AN ARMY OF THE WORLD'S DEADLIEST TERRORISTS!
HAIL HARAT! MONDO SPEAKS, WE OBEY! OUR LIVES BELONG TO DAR HARAT! DEATH IS THE ONLY GLORY!