

## PART IV. DEAD EXCHANGES

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## POWERS OF DEFENDING FREEDOM

In the last years before the ascendance of a post-truth, anti-Enlightenment, antiliberal US regime, there was a lot of talk of “academic freedom.” In the proclamations and debates ensuing among scholars, university presidents, and public officials and advocates in the wake of the 2013 American Studies Association resolution endorsing the boycott of Israeli academic institutions, “academic freedom” was what was held to be violated and upheld, threatened and defended, ignored and defeated.<sup>1</sup> According to those opposed to it, the boycott violated the principles of free speech and academic freedom, as well as the free exchange of ideas, that are the bedrock of education, scholarship, and ultimately democracy. Supporters of the boycott and critics of opposition to it on the basis of academic freedom pointed out that such “defenses” of freedom willfully ignored, and by doing so condoned, the absence of effective or substantive academic freedom of Palestinian academics and students, as well as the lack of basic freedoms of Palestinians more generally, in both the occupied territories and within Israel.<sup>2</sup>

There have been many serious and acute reflections on the conflicting notions of freedom at work in those debates, as well as on the questions and

conditions that liberal notions of academic freedom deflect attention from or foreclose.<sup>3</sup> Though closely aligned to this latter critical approach to the issue of freedom in the global Palestinian solidarity movement—an approach that I see as akin to or at least congruent with Marx’s critique of political emancipation and part of contemporary critiques of “rights-based” struggles for political recognition and inclusion, which I myself have drawn on to critique global humanitarianism—my reflections here on the constraints of freedom are guided by a slightly different perspective: one that is historical and cross-regional in its purview, and centrally shaped by a concern for how we might understand and struggle against imperialism today.

### Constraints of Freedom

Certainly, it is important to argue that the defense of already existing, legitimate freedoms, as precepts codified and protected by the laws of an unjust order, is a defense of that order and its defining structures of inequality and injustice, including unrecognized, racialized forms of unfreedom. As the Black radical tradition has movingly argued and shown over and over again, today these forms of unfreedom, which underwrite the formal, abstract freedoms of US democracy, are largely borne by the descendants of the enslaved and the colonized. The sense of freedom’s imperilment or its privation begs the question of what “freedom” is at issue that it requires protection or guarantee, even extension (in time and space), and, further, what such freedom depends on or entails to be realized. As Angela Davis poses: “Democratic rights and liberties are defined in relation to what is denied to people in prison. So we might ask, what kind of democracy do we currently inhabit?”<sup>4</sup>

Davis’s point, which is echoed by an entire body of critical resistance and prison abolition work, is that systemic forms of unfreedom, such as those carried over from the historical institution of slavery and reinstalled within the prison system, serve as key ideological supports and practical mechanisms for the state bestowal and “protection” of the prescribed rights and liberties of US citizens.<sup>5</sup> The racialized deprivation (*disenfranchisement*) of those same rights and liberties by means of the institutions of the prison and police secures the meaning and substance of the freedoms defining US “democracy” and the “American way of life.” As Saidiya Hartman writes of an earlier moment, when the formal rights of freedom were extended to the formerly enslaved only for that freedom to be encumbered by economic and extra-economic forces of indenture, peonage, white discipline, terror, policing, and constraint, “the illusory universality of citizenship once again

was consolidated by the mechanisms of racial subjection that it formally abjured.<sup>6</sup> Insofar as the stipulations of abstract equality continue to be predicated on racial subjection, she argues, “emancipatory discourses of rights, liberty, and equality instigate, transmit, and effect forms of racial domination.” Certainly these extant contradictions of liberalism, which grow ever more belligerent in the face of challenges to it, can be seen in the racism of its institutions, blatantly evidenced in the suprasubjection of Black, Latinx, and Native people to the judicial and extrajudicial violence of its penal provisions, practices, and laws.<sup>7</sup>

As central tenets undergirding the expansion of the already bloated US prison system and the globalization of its privatized maximum security models, freedom and equality continue to this day to serve as political ideals of both soft and hard wars of imperial humanization undertaken in the name of emancipation—for example, a global imperial feminist movement bent on spreading its normative, resistant subject of freedom to those it wishes to save, through various humanitarian and nongovernmental projects, as well as military campaigns of regime change in nations and cultures deemed “un-free.”<sup>8</sup> It is no accident that such a feminism bears the same carceral logic of the liberal democracy it wishes to expand.<sup>9</sup> For as Black, postcolonial, and third world feminists have allowed us to understand, the extension of these liberal freedoms of the already human to those deemed not fully human entails furthering the forms of punitive violence on which these freedoms intrinsically depend.<sup>10</sup>

In the international arena, the upholding of democracy and freedom (as already realized accomplishments to protect and expand) constitutes one of the most important lynchpins of the US-Israel regional militarist project of security in the Middle East or West Asia. (It’s worth remembering that Operation Enduring Freedom was the official name of the US war against terrorism launched in Afghanistan and in Iraq.) *Freedom* and *democracy* have also been the rallying cries of the transnational political ideological and military campaign against insurgent struggles beyond this region, just as they were in the Asia-Pacific during and even long before the Cold War: notably, in the US imperial conquest of the Philippines (along with Puerto Rico, Hawai’i, Samoa, and Guam) while Filipinos were waging their final, winning battles of anticolonial revolution against Spain at the turn of the twentieth century, and in the US war against Vietnam in the middle of the latter’s own anticolonial, communist revolution in the second half of the same century. This longer history allows us to view the post–Cold War “shift” of US foreign policy to “democracy promotion” and “democratization” as the continuation

and refurbishing of older security, proxy wars in Southeast and Central Asia as well as in Latin America, which had intended but largely failed to crush the “insurgencies” of what could be considered a global antiimperialist and decolonizing movement.<sup>11</sup>

From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, these older, counterinsurgent Cold War security wars faced outright defeat (in Vietnam and Nicaragua), the transformative rise of “people power” insurrections against US-supported dictatorial regimes (Philippines), and prodemocracy movements in other Cold War “nondemocracies” (in China and the Eastern Bloc), spurring the late twentieth-century shift in US foreign policy. At the same time, as we will see, decades of Cold War counterinsurgent warfare also produced the conditions for the proliferation and empowerment of transnational, violence-based, illicit enterprises (drug trafficking, gun-running, piracy, smuggling, labor trafficking) and the emergence of “illiberal” regimes with deep links to this transnational shadow economy. Yet, despite these uncontrollable and threatening consequences of an earlier era of “freedom and democracy” security wars, *freedom* and *democracy* once again returned as organizing ideals for new imperial state and military projects, which took these consequences and the very proxy forces of violence they abetted to their own ends, as the *casus belli* of a new era of unremitting “global” wars.

In light of the permanent wars that the tenets of freedom and democracy serve to organize, how are we to understand these scholarly and public exchanges over freedom? What is the status and role of the field of discursive exchange (the arena of “debate”) in which notions of “freedom” figure, with respect to the logics, institutions, and infrastructures of empire?

### Fields of Dead Exchanges

Freedom and equality are not only compromised by the narrow scope of claims to political rights with respect to the bourgeois state. Freedom and equality are also the idealized expressions of the productive, real basis of capitalist exchange. As Marx observes, it is the relations of equivalence established through the exchange of commodities that both stipulate and prove the equality and freedom of the subjects of exchange. “Equality and freedom are thus not only respected in exchange based on exchange values but, also, the exchange of exchange values is the productive, real basis of all *equality* and *freedom*. As pure ideas they are merely the idealized expressions of this basis; as developed in juridical, political, social relations, they are merely this basis to a higher power.”<sup>12</sup> For Marx, this field of exchange on which equal-

ity and freedom evidently operate in everyday, ordinary transactions in fact maintains and occludes the depoliticized arena of practice within which real inequality and unfreedom are produced. While for Marx this depoliticized arena is the arena of production where the exploitation of wage labor takes place, it is importantly also the arena of reproduction where life is made and taken; both are arenas in which the depoliticized hierarchical “differences” of sex-gender, race, class, and so on, are “presupposed” and “allowed to act in their own fashion.”<sup>13</sup> As ideological notions wielded and elaborated within the institutions of the law, in the public sphere, and in the social life of individualized subjects, equality and freedom form part of the superstructure reproducing the material basis of capitalist life.

Following this familiar critique of liberalism for a moment, we might say that the field of discursive exchange on which debates about freedom and democracy take place around the question of Israel (as subject) similarly serves an ideologically occluding as well as reproductive function with respect to those violent processes and structures of elimination and dispossession directed toward Palestinians that are fundamental to the logics of settler colonialism and racism (logics through which capitalist accumulation historically and currently depends). On this view, such debates might be compared to how one *New York Times* editorial describes the way that diplomatic talks toward a two-state solution for Israel-Palestine function: that is, as a *camouflage* for de facto land expropriation through annexation and settlement. In camouflaging these de facto processes, the peace process industry, “with its legions of consultants, pundits, academics and journalists,” and Washington’s efforts to protect peace talks thus also served to enable “the very process of de facto annexation that were destroying prospects for the full autonomy and realization of legitimate rights of the Palestinian people that were the official purpose of the negotiations.”<sup>14</sup> We could say that, like these “negotiations to nowhere,” talks about given freedoms, and efforts to abide by or protect them—as the substance of rights or the stipulated condition of social and individual contracts—are *dead exchanges* in which any potential for real change is already dead in the water.

There is, however, another aspect to these exchanges of and over freedom. Marx asserts that equality and freedom are, as “pure ideas,” idealized expressions of de facto economic processes of capital accumulation, namely, “the exchange of exchange values.” However, “as developed in juridical, political, social relations, they are merely this basis to a higher power”—that is to say, they *are* this basis, they *are* economic processes, but operating exponentially, that is, at multiple, expanding levels above it. Beyond acting as

formal and abstract ideals, equality and freedom are, in this reading, also *practical mechanisms* for the ordering of behaviors into forms proper to capitalist life. Just as Marx once argued that the dispossessive violence of primitive accumulation was “itself an economic power,” these expressive ideals, as code-scripts of juridical, political, social apparatuses, act as forces directing and implementing “the exchange of exchange values,” that is, as forces of capitalist exchange.<sup>15</sup>

Hence, the recognition and granting of juridical rights guaranteed by nation-states and their legal apparatuses serve not only to “hide” the structural racial, sex-gender inequalities that contradict the illusions of democracy whose material basis they constitute. The granting of these narrow juridical rights claims can also buttress and propagate proprietorial and territorial conceptions of the subject, individual as well as collective, on whose behalf those claims are made—institutionalized conceptions that we could argue install, within the subject, a relation of colonial possession and enslavement of others as the very psychic structure of self-possession. In doing so, they make antiblackness, racism, heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia—the systemic forms of social devaluation, subordination, and punishment that are internal to capitalist life and its regulatory state apparatuses and social institutions (the ideologies of their operation and reproduction)—into “experiences” shaping the “cultural” attributes and dispositions of the free, sovereign subject, if not its very intrinsic nature. Moreover, they make *inadmissible* (even imperceptible) in the courts and public spheres of judgment and their apparatuses of redress the broader milieus intrinsic to those subjects’ being and action.<sup>16</sup> They repeat the social alienation on which the proprietorial subject is founded. As an instrument of proscription of these broader milieus of being and action as salient agents (plaintiff, defendant, witness, accessory, accomplice), legal adjudication can indeed become the means for further deracinating the becoming-human from the matrices of their making, and in this way can play an important part in the processes of their dispossessive (mis)recognition and collective disenfranchisement (as we already saw with respect to land and Indigenous people). The performative action of the law, particularly in its punitive function, is such that it executes this very “freedom” for which it stands—in Chandan Reddy’s words, a “freedom *with* violence”—implemented “in the name of securitizing civil society for its entitled subject, the citizen as capitalist.”<sup>17</sup>

This freedom is, on the one hand, for the legally enfranchised, the exemption from and transcendence of the punishment of racial, sex-gendered subjection (which, as we have seen, is to be borne by expendable life). On the other hand, for the disenfranchised, this freedom spells the deracina-

tion and dispossession of “individuals” from their means of life, that is, from the matrices of transpersonal, even transspecies being—socialities of human and nonhuman life—which thereby become illegible in the claims for particular, discrete and integral *lives*. These socialities of life-making among the dispossessed surpass, even bypass, the organized conditions of domination and exploitation, milieus of toxicity, disease, mutilation, incapacitation, and death—entire environments—with which they are programmatically conflated as well as forced to inhabit.<sup>18</sup> Yet, juridical, political, and social rulings along these codifying lines (in compliance with the freedoms they uphold) overwrite these social matrices of living as simply the background of their proper subjects. They help to disappear the dispossessions they enable.

Finally, the deployment of the code-scripts of freedom and equality to demand rightful, punitive responses of the state, even to demand reforms of its policing-prison systems, shores up the very criminal punishment system that ensures the production of disposable, unfree life within the nation-state.<sup>19</sup> Further, it directly impels the making, organizing, and expanding of punishment as a global political and economic enterprise.<sup>20</sup>

Understood through these far-reaching critiques of the practical work of the law (that is, beyond its representational function), Marx’s mathematical metaphor for what has come to be understood as the base-superstructure model (or analytic) for understanding capitalist societies can be suggestive beyond the context and perhaps conceptual reach of Marx’s own argument. Against the more static, topographical model shaping much of political critique of the constraints of liberal freedom, and beyond the bounds of the nation-state within which much of this political critique is confined, the metaphor of exponents, with its suggestion of repeated multiplication of the base and amplification through scaling, allows us to think of the function of these exchanges over freedom in more dynamic and variable ways, that is, within a less fixed spatiotemporal framework, and on much larger (as well as much smaller) scales than the human subjects (whether individual or social) scale of civil, democratic discourse and debate.

### Imperial Codes in the Making of Global Infrastructure

Things in fact begin to take on other dimensions when we move beyond the field of national and international bourgeois liberal democratic civil society exchanges and look at imperialism as a project of dynamic expansion rather than a seemingly static condition or state of affairs, as the notion of “empire” might imply, and as a multiscalar project that today has reached “higher powers.”

Although today Israel is represented as a bastion of democracy in a region purportedly culturally hostile to freedom, with a “special relationship” to its partner and benefactor the United States, it was not so long ago that the Philippines was represented in exactly the same terms. From well before and certainly during the Cold War, the Philippines was upheld as a showcase of democracy, colonized in its name, reshaped with its institutions and norms, and put into service as a pivotal neocolonial military platform from which the United States could shape the politics and economics of the region that would eventually see the rise of newly-industrializing economies and the Asia-Pacific as a rival center of global capitalism in the post-Cold War period. Freedom and democracy were not simply *ideological screens* for business as usual, but rather central symbolic *organizing protocols* for the project of capitalist expansion in the region, that is, for the imperial “annexation” of new associated milieus for capital. It is in this sense, that is, as regulatory, programmatic rules of behavior, that we can understand “freedom” and “democracy” as *codes* of the dominant international Free World fantasy-production operating through the political and economic policies of participating nation-states such as the Philippines.<sup>21</sup>

The *work* that Philippine democracy-making both accomplished and required (or “exacted,” as Edward Said wrote about Zionism with respect to its Palestinian victims) throughout the twentieth century can in fact be told as the history of US imperial capitalist infrastructure building in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>22</sup> Compelled by the insurgent, revolutionary demands of both its own new citizens and its targeted colonial subjects, soon to be made into new “nationals”—on the one hand, what Robin D. G. Kelley calls the “freedom dreams” of Black people in America rising up against the intensified wave of mob violence and lynchings in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery, and on the other hand, the revolutionary movement of Filipinos successfully fighting to free themselves from the colonial rule of Spain—the early twentieth-century US overseas empire refashioned the naked brutality of its near genocidal conquest with the lofty political ideals of liberty and freedom.<sup>23</sup>

More than mere rhetoric, the ideals of self-government, fundamental individual human rights and liberties, and democratic citizenship practically guided and infused its colonial, tutelary rule, acting as the very means of colonization and cooptation of an emerging, revolutionary nation. In fact, it was through the installation of all the apparatuses of US-style liberal democracy, including its form of government, electoral system, laws and legal system, police, central banking, public mass educational system, and modern infra-

structures of public transportation, communication, and health—colonial “experiments” through which the United States developed and refined, and against which it distinguished, its own—that the grounds for a “mixed” economy of metropolitan and elite-dominated free enterprise built on a peasant agricultural base would be fully established.<sup>24</sup> Such were the conditions of granting freedom and independence to the colony that it had subjugated, the means by which the United States accomplished the subsumption of the Philippines as a key “pericapitalist” milieu—an economic as well as political-military platform—for global capital.

The human and other costs and consequences of this under-told historical accomplishment can be gleaned from the postcolonial authoritarian development of Philippines as a sexual economy servicing mili-tourism and export-oriented manufacturing industries from the 1960s to the 1980s and, subsequently, beginning in the early 1990s, its conversion into one of the biggest export labor economies fueling the global reproductive domestic, care work, and service industries today, not only in Western Europe and the new industrial nations of East Asia, but also in other places including, importantly, Israel and Palestine, and other countries of West Asia (notably Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Lebanon, and Libya)—the leading regional destination of Philippine overseas workers.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to its prominence in the global reproductive labor economy, the Philippines is the second largest single source (after China, which only recently displaced it as top producer) of seafarers in the global shipping industry, providing a quarter of the entire labor force in an industry that transports 90 percent, by weight, of all global trade.<sup>26</sup> Since the late twentieth century, the Philippines has also become the world’s largest destination for business process outsourcing (BPO), with the majority of its clients comprising US companies, and today it serves as the leading call center country globally.<sup>27</sup> It is in this capacity—as a major producer and provider of deterritorialized, serviceable, ancillary humans as disposable service labor in industries of global reproduction and circulation (of capital)—that we see the importance of the Philippines’ historical transformation for today’s new global economy.

In its “special relationship” with its democratizing benefactor, the United States, the Philippines went from serving during the Cold War as a central, semipermanent US military base for developing, establishing, and maintaining regional security—a role that depended on low-intensity counterinsurgency operations, which devastated entire swathes of rural life, “freeing” newly dispossessed labor and land resources for an expanding transnational

urban economy—to serving during the post–Cold War period as an authorized temporary station for “visiting” or mobile US military forces on patrolling and invasive missions in and beyond the region in the unending global war against terrorism.

The Philippines has certainly long functioned as a “special” provider of labor, land, and other natural resources to its foremost neocolonial patron, as well as to a growing array of multinational capitalist buyers. But it has just as long territorially functioned as a pivotal military platform for maintaining hegemonic political and economic relations within the Asia-Pacific region (after World War II, as a US platform for fighting security wars in Southeast Asia to curb communism, including “processing” the people displaced by its own wars in refugee camps; and after the Cold War, for projecting “presence” in the region to curb the imperial reach of China as well as the reach of political Islam in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Southern Philippines).<sup>28</sup> Such a geopolitical location, and the history of continued political access to it, has also enabled the Philippine nation-state, in the post–Cold War shift in imperial policy, to function as a pivotal military platform for launching US “global” coalitional military campaigns in the farthest reaches of West Asia, including the subcontracted enterprises of privatized “reconstruction” that accompany the destructive projects of war, for which it additionally provides migrant contract labor. For example, enlisting in the “coalition of the willing” in the global-US war on terror, the Philippines functioned as logistical and maintenance support for the global-US invasion and occupation of Iraq, supplying the largest number of foreign contract workers to service U.S. military coalition camps and to labor for private corporations charged with “rebuilding” the destroyed nation.<sup>29</sup> Philippine contract workers were additionally brought in to build the detention facilities of the US military base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, a base that they also currently maintain.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, Philippine contract workers are part of the “offshore captive labor force” (referred to in military argot as third country nationals, or TCNs), which Darryl Li argues, plays a central role in “contemporary US security architecture.”<sup>31</sup> Working as adjuncts to the US military in countries where the latter is at war, TCNs find themselves, like other migrant and foreign subcontracted workers, in a legal interstitial zone of little to no protection (subject to governmental power but not due its protection) and thus of heightened vulnerability to direct violence and egregious exploitation and abuse. Yet precisely in this liminal state, they perform a significant function for the military enterprise that they service. In addition to the deeply discounted reproductive, service labor they provide as vital infrastructure for the global

US military-security industry, migrant military contract workers (like the Muslim extraterritorial prisoners of war who are neither local nor American, and who are also called TCNs) also play a nonlaboring role. Invisibly circulating “between different nodes in a global network of sites under US control and influence,” like the prisoners they help to make and maintain, Philippine migrant military labor and other TCNs operate to incur and disappear the life costs of US military exploits.<sup>32</sup> As Li astutely observes, military migrant workers constitute “an offshore military labor force that allows the United States to keep politically sensitive troop numbers low while also reducing dependence on local populations with suspect loyalties”—that is, they function as extraterritorial proxy forces that can be expended with little cost and next to no obligation—their fatalities a matter of neither care nor responsibility, constituting neither sacrifice nor risk—to the US nation.<sup>33</sup>

As “the first democratic nation in Asia” and as “America’s oldest ally in Asia,” accomplishments that, at the moment when it was enlisted to join the global war on terror, George W. Bush both paid tribute to and claimed US credit for, the Philippines was “naturally” made for this role of servicing US military needs. While historically it did so with its territorial hosting of US military bases and offshore personnel and operations, today it continues to do so in extraterritorial fashion. Just as they serve as vital support for capital life in the globopolis—the life of globopolitical citizens as well as the life of circulating capital—overseas Philippine contract workers serve as vital support for the fatal, violent policing and war machines of imperial governance. In all these ways, as semisovereign territory to host US military and capital flows (as we saw earlier, a *server* for capitalist platforms) and as a producer and provider of ancillary human strata in the maintenance of its life-and-death enterprises, the Philippines has served as an important component of the global infrastructure of US empire.

What the far-reaching role of the Philippines—in its “special relationship” to the United States, which I have briefly rendered above—should highlight is how the field of exchange among subjects, on which the terms of freedom and democracy operate as ideological-practical codes for organizing political, military, and economic practice (we might understand them as global *command functions*), has long operated in and through the international system of nation-states. Moreover, this discursive field of exchange continues to operate today, though in new and refurbished ways. As we saw in the project of city everywhere (see chapter 7), freedom as a scaling protocol of capital life organizes the form of enfranchisement built into the protected freeports and zones comprising the global metropolitan archipelago. Like city everywhere, the logic of the (Operation Enduring) “freedom” war enterprise (destruction and

reconstruction) applies in conflict zones everywhere and at varying scales, including, as we will see in chapter 9, in the southern Philippines, where long-standing conflicts over land and more recent conflicts over territorial monopolies over violence (between transnational state and parastate forces) have occasioned and legitimated decades of direct US and multinational investment in sometimes indistinguishable military and humanitarian life-and-death projects.

The example the Philippines provides should additionally remind us that imperialism is not a dyadic relation between two states, peoples, or nations, but rather practical imaginary relations among many states, not only within the same region (e.g., the Asia-Pacific or West Asia) but also, importantly, across regions. It is the system of these multilateral, transversal unequal relations (cooperative as well as competitive) among states that oversees the management and coordination of social relations of production on a regional and global scale. That is to say, imperialism's recruitment of the cooperation of multiple states (in multinational economic projects through trade and currency agreements as much as in transnational policing/military governance projects, such as the "US security architecture" or the "security archipelago" of South American and Arab states, as Paul Amar shows<sup>34</sup>) is the process and condition of expansion of its social bases. By the expansion of the social bases of imperialism, I mean the subsumption of people, their forms of social cooperation and social reproduction, within the structures of production and reproduction of this global mode of life. All these relations of cooperation between and among states, and between and among peoples, whether "hardened" or "solidified" in information, security, financial, communication, and transport systems, such as military and civic airports, flight paths, shipping routes, satellite, web, and cellular technologies, or maintained as "soft" or vital systems of migrant contract work in domestic, care, and agricultural industries or in offshored auxiliary military and business functions (as well as outsourced life services), can be understood as comprising the milieu of global capital built through the protocols of political and economic freedom and democracy.<sup>35</sup>

So while it would seem that the example I offer here of the Philippines' "democratic" role in the Asia-Pacific during the Cold War suggests a simple (analogical) comparison with that of Israel in the Middle East during the post-Cold War period—certainly there is a comparison suggested here between the Philippines' ideological and military role in Cold War security in the Asia-Pacific and Israel's similar role in post-Cold War security in West Asia—I intend rather for the example to foreground direct connections

across these regional areas and projects. These are connections in which developmentalist democracy-making in one region (the Asia-Pacific) enables and supports liberalizing democracy-promotion in another region (West Asia): through flows of military-security personnel, apparatuses, and operations (the history of US counterinsurgency wars from Vietnam to Iraq), capital (between China-financed, debt-driven growth in the United States and “creative destruction” through wars in Afghanistan and Iraq), and labor (waves of Filipinx and other foreign immigrant labor to replace or supplement Arab labor in Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Gulf States).<sup>36</sup>

These inter-Asia connections, within and across the Asia-Pacific and West Asia and their respective imperial democratization projects, are undoubtedly long-standing. Democracy security wars before and during the Cold War established the precedent and foundation for democracy security wars in the post-Cold War period. In the early 1960s, with state concern over the possibility of a pan-Islamic movement reaching the Southern Philippines, a top Philippine military officer was sent on an intelligence training course in Israel under sponsorship of the Joint US Military Assistance Group, bringing back with him new communications technology for counterinsurgent surveillance.<sup>37</sup> More recently, under the partnership of Presidents Benjamin Netanyahu and Rodrigo Duterte, the Israeli Defense Forces has begun training the Armed Forces of the Philippines in counterterrorism techniques, while the Philippines has purchased missile systems, radars, and drones from Israel, bypassing the United States altogether.<sup>38</sup>

These “deadly exchange” programs surely attest to the expanding global military-security industry engaged in profitable, counterinsurgent and terrorist wars to be human. They are structural means for the “exchange of exchange values” installed through the code-scripts of freedom and equality, which are written out in bilateral and multilateral agreements, treaties, and exchange programs. But the cross-regional and intraregional connections that make for the global infrastructure of capital life, which such dead exchanges enable, are ongoing and multifarious. They include important connections between different forms of disposability, whereby the conditions and consequences of the assault on the social reproductive capacities of certain populations (e.g., Iraqi, or Palestinian) might be offset and supplemented with the labor resources of another population whose own social reproduction is under different assault (e.g., Filipinos)—predominantly, though not only, to the final end of imperial reproduction and expansion. It is no accident that among the many bilateral agreements signed by Netanyahu and Duterte during the latter’s historic state visit to Israel in 2018

were memoranda of agreements for reducing brokerage fees for the 28,000 Filipinx caregivers in Israel and for encouraging mutual investment.<sup>39</sup> This too is a field and product of deadly exchange.

The international field of exchange for the adjudication of freedom and democracy should thus be viewed as the plane of action where processes of subjectification and social identification with respect to nations operate—whether the public sphere of “the international community” or the political sphere of institutional apparatuses of states. It is where we would readily locate the disciplinary, normative work of race, gender, and sexuality in shaping the distribution of life-devaluation across particular given ethnonational social groups and racialized populations. That is to say, as norms of subjectification, such categories of identity work at the level of both domestic and international relations to configure and regulate the global social relations of production through which various peoples emerge and encounter each other as immigrant or foreign workers, illegals, and criminals, the unemployed and permanently idled, refugees, and internally displaced persons, or as fellow citizens—so many social categories subtended by organizing ontological codes of the human. The organization and coordination of these relations among states and among the social groups, peoples, and populations over whom states have jurisdiction mobilize these normative codes of *free, sovereign subjects* as regulative mechanisms of “the global economy” and its constituent forms of governance. Today, some of the most powerful subjects bear the names of corporations, banks, and entire financial sectors (e.g., Wall Street), the vicissitudes of their daily fortunes told with gripping, personifying detail, like the lives of kings.

Finally, it is on this field of subjects, whether domestically or internationally configured—that is, whether the “free world” of citizens defined against the world of the prison in the domestic arena of US democracy, or the “free world” of nations defined against communist or Islamic states in the global arena—that political claims continue to be made on behalf of specific “peoples” and bridges of solidarity or coalitions built across. It is the field on which both warfare and lawfare campaigns take place, to defend, renegotiate, and resolidify the freedom contracts upholding the dominant nations, institutions, and peoples of the globopolitical free world. It also the field on which political counterclaims of the becoming-human are made—claims of antiimperialist nationalisms, of radical Islamic transnationalisms—often on behalf of the same organizing terms of humanity whose freedoms they might contest, yet, as we will see in the case of the Philippines’ recent political transformation, with unanticipated, contradictory, sometimes uncontrollable, proliferating effects.

## Imperial Shift: After Normative Culture, after Economy

But here I would like to raise the question of the role and status of this field of exchange with respect to imperialism in today's global context, particularly in light of notable shifts in the dispensation of state power (i.e., the exercise of its monopoly on violence) and in the calculuses of capitalist value extraction. Two aligned and overlapping features come to mind: (1) a shift in governmentality, and (2) a shift in political economy.

The first is what has been widely understood as the shift in political rationality or governmentality from one constructed around rights and property to one constructed around risk and security, which many identify with neoliberalism (discussed in chapter 5). Contributing to scholarly work on this shift, Eva Cherniavsky argues that neoliberal governance entails the abdication of the disciplinary project of the state in relation to the nation and hence the erosion of "normative culture as such," which had been tasked with the production and reproduction of rights-bearing citizens. She notes that rather than the field of legal recognition through which democratic rights have been claimed and obtained for particular social identities in relation of formal equivalence to the abstract norm (and measure) of *citizen-subject* (according to logics of disciplinary societies), neoliberal "societies of control" entail what she calls *serial culture*, operating on a "field of virtual sociality," a social environment that is ideologically saturated with a fictive reality and minutely regulated, "regulated not because [neocitizens'] positions are prescribed, but rather because their movements and affiliations are tracked (as so much social data), archived, mined, risk assessed, and so (variably) policed, overlooked, or supported."<sup>40</sup>

Militarily, the shift in political rationality can be gleaned in the shift from imperial states' use of counterinsurgent strategies of low-intensity conflict (in proxy wars) to their tactical uses of high-intensity preemptive targeted strikes (paradigmatically exemplified by drone warfare in the international arena as well as police and vigilante "patrol" execution killings in the domestic arena). The shift is encapsulated by the transformation of the US permanent bases in the Philippines by the 1999 visiting forces agreement, which stipulated "access" to distributed sovereign capacities (territories, forces of violence, and labor) rather than ownership and settlement—a model of enterprise now characteristic of the platforms of city everywhere (chapter 7).

The visiting forces agreement was one of ninety similar agreements worldwide, signaling the strategic shift in US defense policy from fixed bases to a more diffuse and agile global response stance, predicated on a dispersed network of floating "lily pads" from where "sudden strikes against rogue actors

anywhere in five continents” could be launched.<sup>41</sup> The shift in defense strategy is supported by the restructuring of the US military since 2001 through extensive privatization, particularly the significant offshoring of its logistical and security functions to TCNs, as Li shows.<sup>42</sup> These changes signal the autonomization of military logistics, not as the means of waging war as event but rather as the means of everyday governance. Incorporating administrative mechanisms for governing emergencies, this new military logic of “vital systems security” is organized around the same principle of indeterminacy and risk around which financial capital has structured its modes of value extraction.<sup>43</sup> While in their broadest outlines democratization wars (wars against terrorism) continue much of the same work as the wars of democracy (wars against communism) of an earlier era—they demonstrate a much closer integration or synthesis between governance and enterprise than ever before.

The second feature of today’s imperialism, closely related to the first, is what I have attempted to lay out in previous chapters as the new political economy of life, which war—both in the exercise of direct, coercive, and punitive violence and in the practice of humanitarian and humanizing rehabilitation—is a primary instrument for bringing about. As the process of the expanded reproduction of capital over all of “life,” through the overcoming of spatial and temporal limits posed by an earlier era of exploitation (formally based on a model of industrial labor-time), imperialism effects, through war, calibrated punishment, and discriminatory assaults on social reproduction, qualitative gradations and divisions of “life,” and distinctions among “times of life,” or life-times, on which different modalities of expropriation of value are based. This is not simply a top-down process exercised by a unified agency from above, insofar as the very code-scripts that imperial war deploys and executes through powerful states, corporations, and institutions also serve as a general social calculus for people’s everyday parsing and parceling out of their own as well as other’s life-times into value and waste.

While this distinction obtains in the form of distinct *lives*—that is, in the wholesale distinction between lives worth living and lives worth expending—the distinction also traverses the sociological categories of individuals and groups, obtaining in *kinds of times* lived, differentiated by activities, modalities, and spaces of varying worth, appraised through codes of race, sex-gender, nationality, religion, and so on. As we saw in the excursus, servitude or serviceability consists of a range of life-times subordinated to the production of lives worth living, for which purpose they are redeemed temporarily or permanently from life worth expending. As the case of military contract workers shows, serviceable life-times are also put toward the production of

absolutely expendable life. What is important to note, however, is that the divisibility, factorability, and aggregability of *life-times* is what allows the multiplication and scaling of levels of value extraction beyond the famous limits of labor-time embodied in the working day. Indeed, it is as parceled and aggregated *life-times* that entire populations—rendered absolutely expendable by the social calculus of white supremacist, antiblack, settler colonial, heterosexist, ethnic and religious racisms—have become the matter and medium of proliferating profitable enterprises of punishment and control.

The paradigm for this logic of the new political economy can be found, as I discussed in earlier chapters, in the sheer expenditure of life-times (rather than whole lives and whole bodies, which are nevertheless used and destroyed in this expenditure) of warehoused and indefinitely detained populations, around which national security industries of policing and war build their expanding mortal enterprises (gruesomely exemplified in the open prison of Gaza). It can also be seen, in the contexts of foreign investment-dependent nation-states, where the disposable life-times of surplus populations represent the quantified abstract future that is colonized, mortgaged, and brokered by states on behalf of transnational elites and ethnonational constituencies precisely through their sovereign control of national territories, to which the disenfranchised both at home and abroad are tethered as captive populations.<sup>44</sup>

The financial calculus to which the aggregate life-times of absolutely expendable life are subject points to the ascendance of the social logics of the derivative in the moment Randy Martin calls “after economy.”<sup>45</sup> Martin’s claim is that the logic of derivatives—which is no longer the logic of the commodity as a bounded thing but is instead a logic of disassembling and bundling of attributes of both old and new materialities (commodities, identities, ideas, weather, DNA)—is calling into question the fantasy undergirding both liberal democracies and leftist critique, that is, the fantasy of an autonomous domain of reality called the economy that would be behind or beneath a more immediately legible politics of representation or recognition. It suggests that the financialization of life through the logic of derivatives undermines “the social imaginary of individual selves and collective masses,” which had been based on the autonomous thing-in-itself status of the commodity form.

The logic through which growing security enterprises build themselves on the sheer expenditure of people’s life-times (grafting multiplying layers of service industries contingent upon the actual or threatened enforced expenditure of the life-times of criminalized populations) is not, however, merely the

outgrowth of finance capital's search for investment opportunities—that is, its expansion through capture of the aggregate futures of captive populations (guaranteed by longer and repeated forms of sentencing).<sup>46</sup> The development of derivatives as a mode and instrument of value extraction contingent upon the distributive divisibility or disaggregation of integral things with and as properties (houses, human lives) is not only the logical extension of their abstraction as exchange values.<sup>47</sup> Nor is it simply the effect of a monetizing view that comes to encompass all of life. Rather, as Martin himself argues, this is also the logic of “money after decolonization”—that is, the social logic of the derivative is the very consequence of decolonizing movements transgressing and unmaking the naturalized ruling ontology, with its “imposed unities and alignments of persons and places,” of a prior political economy.<sup>48</sup>

In my own thinking, the financial logic of derivatives is part and parcel of the rebounding of racial capital in the aftermath of decolonization, certainly by feeding on the ruin and detritus it created but also by preying on the capacities of those laid to waste for continuing to live against their organized devastation. Preserved and destroyed to serve as the open secret cache of capital, the milieus of such life rendered free for the taking consist of modes of survival that both formal and informal forces of enterprise prey upon, copy, and scale. These modes of survival were of necessity never predicated on ownership or property, relying on notions of life and vital power that remained unbound by the forms of their capture and subsumption within bourgeois societies.

Crystallized in the persona of the arbitrageur, for whom “leverage takes precedence over ownership,” volatility and risk over stability and equilibrium, the logic of derivatives can be glimpsed prefigured in those improvisatory practices of livelihood among the systematically disenfranchised, such as the petty financial and entrepreneurial practices of the urban poor who use and sometimes generate the very conditions of uncertainty, contingency, and blockage that they live in as the conditions of their own value-extractive bets, cuts, and other acts of timing (as we saw in chapter 7). It is these same practices of life-making that become subsumed by the capitalist logic of derivatives at an altogether different and staggering scale.

### Ratios of Life and Death

In the wake of these imperial shifts in governmentality and political economy, two different but tightly intertwined fields of symbolic and material exchange, or planes of communicative action and interchange, manifest themselves, and it is on these analytically distinct planes that “politics” ob-

tain globally: on the one hand, *democracy*, the field of subjects and legitimate *peoples*; and on the other hand, *demographics*, the field of nonsubjects and disposable *populations*. While there is no doubt that the first plane continues to bear relevance for the organization of imperial relations (serving as the ground rules of conduct of citizens and nation-states), it is also undermined as an autonomous and privileged domain of power by the politicization and economization of both life and death in the current moment of imperial expansion. Increasingly, the ambit of democratic politics is narrowing, even as it is predicated on this other plane of demographics, which is steadily expanding.

If life as interest-bearing capital is the modality through which neoliberal subjects are made into life-entrepreneurs and investor-subjects, it is for such lives that the democratic political-representational claims and actions of globopolitical “neocitizens,” “netizen”-subjects, humanitarians, and so forth, continue to take place and make sense. Life as waste, on the other hand, is the modality in which the lives of disposable populations are dissolved into liquid life-times, which can be used by various kinds of capital as numerical units of capitalist temporality, measurable in terms of duration/endurance as well as of potentials/futures, to be expended as labor-times or sentencing times, calculated for investment and remittances, and packaged, priced, and traded on derivative markets. Such lives certainly provide the biomasses that are at once the consumers for and the raw, metabolic material consumed by food, health, and pharmaceutical industries.<sup>49</sup> But these biomasses also figure, on another level, as risk factors, consuming capacities, earning potentials, life and death and illness expectancies, actuarial projections and numerical sums that can enter a financial calculus no longer tethered to the stable commodity of yesteryears. Here it is not so much a matter of populations as polities or peoples as it is a matter of populations as aggregate and disaggregated biogenetic materialities convertible to quantitative sums and micro- or molecular units of “life” expressible as digital values.<sup>50</sup> Hence, in another register, disposable life becomes converted to, as Jonathan Beller puts it, “a standing reserve of information,” bits of data processed through the algorithms of speculation and warfare.<sup>51</sup>

Such a demographic/algorithmic logic is nowhere clearer than in Israeli military parlance and strategy. Consider for example the Israeli deterrence strategy known as “cutting the grass,” where Palestinians in Gaza are figured as “the grasses of hatred” that must be periodically mowed down, “a task that must be performed regularly and has no end.”<sup>52</sup> Representing the Israeli military invasion of Gaza in 2008, which resulted in the deaths of over 1,400 Palestinians, as “necessary maintenance operations,” the figurative military

code of “cutting the grass” demonstrates that “relations” between Israeli military forces and Palestinian lives do not concern subjects or peoples (obeying an order organized by principles of gendered, racial, or sexual norms of independent social identity). What these “relations” concern are rather conflicting or opposing “forces”: machinic or technical operations and natural phenomena. From the Israeli side, war thus becomes an experiment to find and maintain “optimal balances” of materialities (“maximum land, minimum Arabs”), with the effect of normalizing the violence of settler colonialism.<sup>53</sup>

Rather than any mandates of human freedom, or human or civil rights, the established protocol for regulating such “relations” thus follows a logic of calculations involving optimal balances of security and threat, in which human life and death are not so much objects as they are variables of measure. Such calculations are grotesquely evident in the research presentation to the Israeli Ministry of Defense for the purposes of formulating policies for the embargo of the Gaza Strip beginning in 2007, titled “Food Consumption in the Gaza Strip: Red Lines.”<sup>54</sup> This research set up parameters for the calculation of what it called “the minimum subsistence basket,” that is, a formulation of “nutrition that is sufficient for subsistence without the development of malnutrition,” which would guide the limits for the entry of goods into Gaza during the embargo-siege. “Minimum subsistence” indicates the way Gaza Palestinian *lives* are conceptualized as a single quantitative unit of measure—subsistence, or “a basic fabric of life,” set as a sum consisting of grams and tons of food consumption and caloric and nutritional values required daily on average according to age, gender, and ethnicity/race (Arab vs. Israeli), against the needs of “the security situation in the Gaza strip” and with an eye toward preventing “a humanitarian crisis” in the same.<sup>55</sup>

While humanitarianism comes to act as a counterforce of exemption from violence, proportionality becomes the guiding principle for dispensing pain, injury, and death. As Eyal Weizman shows, Israeli military strategists increasingly rely on a principle of proportionality, which “approximates an algorithmic logic of computation” of death ratios in its calculation of risks of collateral damage against effective destruction of militant organizations or situations.<sup>56</sup> In this context, proportionality is a moderating principle employed to constrain the use of force according to “a ‘proper relation’ between ‘unavoidable means’ and ‘necessary ends,’” that is, a balance “between military objectives and anticipated damage to civilian life and property,” maintained through calibrated measures of violence.<sup>57</sup> The principle of proportionality is also clearly exemplified in the IDF “policy of injuries,” or what Jasbir Puar calls “sanctioned maiming,” which is a strategy of keeping Pales-

tinian “casualties” low—that is, to keep the injured out of the “dry statistics of tragedy,” evading “the optic of collateral damage,” which depends on the whole number of countable deaths.<sup>58</sup> Debilitation in this case is a strategy of number, part of an algorithm put to economic as well as ideological ends.

This demographic/algorithmic logic, ascendant in imperial governance today, is guided by concerns of what Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff call “vital systems security,” where what is to be protected is not the life of any specific population except insofar as that population is identified with what is effectively “life itself”—that is, the very “vital systems” (interlinked utility systems critical to economic and social life, such as transportation, electricity, and water) whose operations make it possible for (valued) life to exist at all.<sup>59</sup> The perceived “vulnerability” to threat of these socio-economic operating systems has led to the significant expansion of security complexes as political technologies of emergency: that is, as forms of governance designed to protect against and preemptively contain the effects of anticipated catastrophe.

If we follow the logic of vital systems security, we can readily see a continuity between, on the one hand, the targeted destruction of other people’s homes, exemplified in the demolitions of Palestinian houses in Israel/Palestine and of squatter homes in urban centers everywhere, and on the other hand, the protected building of homes and infrastructures for valued life (settler residences, urban real estate development and gentrification projects), as well as the service projects to protect that life (the building of prisons, checkpoints, walls, and detention centers as well as the provision of security services, including intelligence reports, risk analyses, cash processing technologies, etc.). In fact, these are two sides of a vital-mortal system that operates through punishment and its exemption, freedom. As we’ve already seen, punitive measures of violence exercised through security wars have become integral to capitalist enterprise. Permanent security wars are also policing measures, and the forms of racist collective punishment that they deploy against the populations they target also come to figure in algorithmic ways for value extraction.<sup>60</sup>

### Calculus of Words: The Waning of Content, the Withering of Subjects

Although we are all well acquainted with the way algorithms are at work in the value production of Web 2.0 industries, and specifically of social media platforms, we may underestimate the way that the discourses of debate and arguments of contestation and persuasion through which we conduct our

politics are themselves becoming mere fodder for algorithmic operations. We might consider, for example, the way news and social media language is used as data in new kinds of algorithm-based data-tracking projects to predict war, insurgency, genocide, and political violence, where words and phrases that signify tension, such as *crisis*, *clash*, *combat*, and so on, are used to create a mathematical model to predict when war is likely to break out between nations a year in advance and, within nations, six years in advance.<sup>61</sup> In such projects, words and phrases are no longer parts of larger semantic assemblages with ideological effects but are instead indices used to map and predict crisis, violence, emotions, actions, and their attributes.

The Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT) Project based at Georgetown University, for example, seeks “to create a real-time computable record of global society that can be visualized, analyzed, modeled, examined, and even forecasted.”<sup>62</sup> Providing some of the most sophisticated tools for visually rendering the enormous data sets created from “the billions upon billions of words of new information published each day,” the project codifies and “extracts” from these words the physical activities comprising “events” happening all over the world, as well as the persons, organizations, locations, emotions, and “themes” (categories such as cost of living, refugees, drones, borders, food security, democracy, and free speech) that purportedly “underlie” these events and their interconnections. With people (“who’s involved”) and their emotions (“how they’re feeling about [what’s happening]”) included in the second dataset figuring as the “base” of physical events, we are very far away indeed from the model of the economy underlying our juridical, political, and social relations.

There are no sovereign subjects in this scenario, a scenario that takes place on the plane of action of demographics/algorithms. Like the “grasses of hatred,” events are “outbreaks” of quasi-natural, most often catastrophic or at least turbulent physical phenomena. Certainly words are also constituted as events themselves, as often reported by the media as so-called real, physical events. But they are reported as signs or memes of crowd movement (either mass mobilizations or affective movement), much in the way the stock market watches for signs indicating changes in the moods affecting the value of shares—that is, as information that, it is posited, will ultimately be reflected in asset prices. In this scenario, which is paradigmatic of not simply commoditization but more specifically the *financialization* of life on earth in general, there is a continuity between word and things posited by a logic of derivatives that overrides the force of rational debate.<sup>63</sup>

This last example, should perhaps lead us back to Marx for another meaning attendant on *dead exchanges*. If these discursive exchanges are, as Marx's formulation would have it, "the exchange of exchange-values" at a higher power—words and phrases (the semantic bits and pieces that rational civil society exchanges) as the exchange values of speculative informatics (the financialization of ideas and arguments about freedom as exemplary of the exponential function of the abstraction of value)—then "dead exchanges" could be thought of in the sense of "dead labor," that is, as the objectification of living labor in the instruments and means of production and circulation of a higher order of capitalism.

*Freedom* certainly continues to operate as an ideological code mobilized not only for imperial military campaigns but also for ICT- and cyberdevelopment projects, which both diffuse and extend the Israeli settler colonialism through digital-technological means, as Helga Tawil-Souri and Miriyam Aouragh argue.<sup>64</sup> In these forms of "digital occupation" and "cybercolonialism," *freedom* functions as a code for building and securing the logistical systems that bring war and capital together.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, however, talk of freedom is itself among the many forms of content fueling these new capitalist enterprises, where all social exchanges provide the impetus and material for a value extraction that issues out of the sheer activity of circulation of statements, thoughts, and sentiments among socially valued beings (as part of their interest-bearing lives). *Freedom* is thus a skeuomorph, a metaphorical image of an older technology that works as a sign-command function on the front end of integrated systems of power, including capitalist platforms. As the facilitative means of reproducing the "civil" life of already "free" social subjects, civil debates about free speech and other "freedoms" guaranteed by imperial democracies are semiotic gestures that also function as socio-symbolic components of infrastructures for the politically and economically enfranchised. Through constant iteration, they create the "hard" channels of any meaningful and legitimate exchange, and thereby attempt to foreclose the threat of other modes of life seeking to fully emerge.

As we see in the United States today, the most clamorous political claims to these "freedoms" are made by white supremacists, fascists, Zionists, racists, imperialists, and patriots. Their liberties to speak, act, and express their entitlements as well as resentment and hate against those they believe have stripped those entitlements from them (making them "no longer")—all these liberties of the already human are defended, even heralded, as much by the state as the capitalist platforms they fuel and uphold with their vitriol. In

this way, the exchanges over freedom are also the immaterial matter and means of new high-financed forms of capitalist enterprise. The liberties they finally espouse are freedoms for the making of competitive environments of extreme cutthroat survival.

These new imperial strategies, which have raised freedom exchanges to a “higher power,” are the result of the dominant systemic efforts on the part of the rulers of the world to recoup the power and profitability that decolonization movements all over the world had radically undermined. The very capitalist expansion of the global business of counterinsurgency through security industries of policing and war at the end of the twentieth century attests to the threat that such movements posed to global elites (whose own wealth and rule has depended on the monopoly on violence held by their protective states). At the same time, the virulence of such industries based on the war to be human has spawned grave effects. Unremitting wars in the peripheries of a globopolis buoyed by them have given rise to more and more people dispossessed of land and livelihood, refugees fleeing to urban shores, offering themselves as serviceable life to reproduce others’ lives elsewhere or to expend the lives of even their own, all for survival. The wars have also generated transnational shadow political economies trading on the same disposable life, in bids by local warlords to play the great game in their own ways and to their own gain.

When we turn to the context of the Philippines, we see a massive rejection of and indifference to this talk of “freedom,” a flouting of liberal democracy and its preoccupation with “rights.” Rather than “freedom” figuring centrally in political claims, we hear denunciations of the corruption and collusion of liberal elites, of their reasonableness and politeness, their well-behaved manners and regulations, as merely the screens of insatiable greed, indifference, and unfairness. And yet the rejection of “freedom” and the liberalism of elites on the part of the becoming-human can also be an embrace of the violence that promises a “life worth living.” Instead of radical change, we see a transformation of demographic politics through another field of “dead exchanges,” in which extrajudicial killings undertaken by the Philippine police state under Duterte’s war on drugs operates on the logic of derivatives, with dead bodies or spent life as its underlying assets. That the Duterte regime, which is founded on and proudly espouses an antiliberal ethos, should be in a new, historic partnership with the Netanyahu regime, which maintains the ethos of liberal democracy (in a purportedly antiliberal, unfree world) comes as no surprise. Both use the global master’s tools to build masters’ houses for the valued life they define as their own.

## Time of Persistence, Powers of Sustaining Life

In the meantime, within the so-called bastion of democracy, those expelled from their homes to make way for the urban settlement of the newly colonially enfranchised persist in their political claim and everyday struggle, as Magid Shihade writes, “to live in dignity, to be able to move freely, and to go about their lives as usual, working, creating and re-creating, and dreaming.”<sup>66</sup>

Sitting in a small living room in January 2012, listening to Maryam Al-Gawi recount her family’s violent eviction from their home across the street in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem, I notice behind her, just above the red roses on the coffee table between us, a security monitor sitting on a lace-covered side table. It is an odd fixture in this domestic interior furnished with patterned upholstered chairs and a framed embroidered picture of a tranquil lakeside house in an idyllic woodland setting. The monitor’s screen is divided into four smaller screens, two of which are turned on, one showing a security cam view of the street and the other of the concrete pathway leading from the street to this house at the back of the lot. Seeming to rise from the monitor’s screen view of the street are the first three letters of a word written on the wall: FRE. I wonder if perhaps the word is *freedom*, but I doubt it and do not really know.

Maryam is talking to us, a voluntary group of five U.S.-based academics who have been invited to Palestine to hear its people’s claims.<sup>67</sup> She is describing how at 4:45 in the morning of August 2, 2009, a group of Israeli police forces, masked and dressed in commando gear, fully armed, set a bomb off in front of her door. Having gone to answer the loud pounding that woke her up, she was thrown across the room by the blast together with the door, and all the windows were shattered. Dragged out of the house barely dressed in her nightclothes, she ran to gather the twelve children living in the house at the time, including her own six children, who were being thrown out of the second-story window. Her twenty-four-year-old son was thrown down and detained, and her nine-year-old son, shocked and terrified, frantically ran back into the house to seek refuge in a place that was no longer his home. Within an hour, the police had cleared the house of the thirty-seven members of the extended Al-Gawi family (not counting the baby born on the day of their eviction) as well as the house of the Hanoun family, their neighbors. Trucks were brought in to take away their furniture and belongings and then dump them at the UN Worker’s Relief Agency (UNWRA), as if it were the latter’s property or problem. As soon as the soldiers emptied the houses, more trucks entered the neighborhood to bring settlers to take the place of these

recently evicted people, who were left on the street to witness the scene of their own dispossession and displacement.

It was a scene reminiscent of many other scenes, past and present, in this violently contested colonized land. It is a common and even ordinary scene that at once epitomizes and repeats an original injustice that continues to remain unrecognized as such by that self-appointed guardian and arbiter of humanity, the international community. More than sixty years after this historical atrocity—what Palestinians remember as al-Nakba, “the catastrophe,” the mass expulsion and dispossession of Palestinians from their ancestral lands in the aftermath of the 1948 war, which founded the State of Israel—the scene is repeated countless times throughout the lands within the shifting borders of the nation of Israel. This relentlessly repeated enactment of Palestinian dispossession is the very instrument for shifting the outer and interior borders of this expansionist colonial nation-state as it encompasses ever-greater stretches of land under its sovereigntist power. Conducted with impunity and met with international apathy, the dire situation of constant evictions, house demolitions, and land confiscation that leave Palestinians homeless has been made banal to all but themselves and those others who, through their own historical experiences, feel their plight as the recognizable condition of a colonized, disposable people deemed barely human.

There is no other reason to explain the dearth and inaudibility of international outcry against the routine and relentless way that Palestinian life is destroyed. In the name of a gated “democracy” that must be preserved at all costs, Palestinians are seen at best as merely the casualties of a permanent global war of security waged by the allied sovereign states of the Western world, including its latest and most avid and exemplary member, Israel. At worst, they are the very defining instance of that “democracy’s” declared enemy: Arab/Muslim terrorism. “Democracy” is the alibi and rallying cry of the already human, whose ranks Israel has joined with a vengeance, defending its conceded place in the roster of sovereign states of global political humanity with the violent zeal and anxiety of a coerced convert now serving as exemplar and rampart of the imperial civilization that was once the executioner of its own people.<sup>68</sup>

Hailed as “the embodiment of Western values and democracy, surrounded by backward and savage people bent on its destruction an ever-present external threat to the Jewish state,” Israel garners support not only from those who are gripped by the myth of eternal ethno-religious strife propagated by Zionism, including a Christian Fundamentalist world with which Zionists have found themselves in an “unholy alliance.”<sup>69</sup> As the bastion of Western “democracy” in a region believed endemically hostile to such modern ideals, Israel finds

support from those who feel their own status of privileged humanity steadily eroded by the very consequences of imperialist civilization (what Césaire identified as its own deep-seated barbarism) and threatened by the refusal of the wretched peoples of the earth to be reduced to the status of the less-than-human. Such support for Israel, above all and crucially from the United States, is what one man from among those evicted from Sheikh Jarrah tells us, “fills us with shame.”<sup>70</sup>

Against such seemingly endless recurring violation and in defiance of all pernicious will and might to have them disappear is the power of Palestinian persistence. Recounting their forced “evacuation” from their homes, Maryam and her neighbors, Maher Hanoun and Nabil Al-Kurd, tell us that their families came from a group of five hundred Palestinians (originally refugees from 1948) who were subsequently relocated in this neighborhood in East Jerusalem in 1956 by means of an agreement made between the UNWRA and the Jordanian government. With the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem after the 1967 war, the land in Sheikh Jarrah came under Israeli authority, enabling the disputable Israeli Jewish claims of prior ownership that undergird these evictions.<sup>71</sup>

Maryam relates how the tent they put up to live in by their occupied house was taken down seventeen times by the municipality in the six months they lived on the street. Seventeen times the municipality evicted them from the tent, confiscated all kinds of belongings, from the portable gas tank they used for cooking to the rocks and strings that kept the tent in place, and then exacted fines from them for being on the street. Seventeen times they set up their tent again. The harassment continued with repeated arrests and detention of the young men in the family. Discriminatory apartheid Israeli law allows for this arbitrary detention of Palestinians without charge or trial. The ever-imminent threat of arrest and incarceration permanently defines their collective and individual lives. Maryam, Maher, and Nabil recall how the Israeli police were soon arresting everybody, exacting fines with each arrest and threatening imprisonment. When I am sitting with them, hearing their stories, it has been more than two years since the eviction of the Al-Gawi, Al-Kurd, and Hanoun families, but they refuse to leave, to give up their rights to their homes, to be made refugees yet again.

But the little children bear deep and open wounds from the night of their militarized eviction and the persistent, daily violence against their families since then. Maryam’s youngest child has separation anxiety and cannot sleep at night without her mother beside her. Three months don’t go by without Maher Hanoun’s four-year-old daughter having to go to the hospital for anxiety attacks. The settlers had made sure she saw them burn her bed with her

dolls in it, a seemingly petty, gratuitous, and yet profoundly injurious act of cruelty intended to destroy all feeling of freedom, safety, and carefree happiness that accompanies and defines children's play. It seems to have been successful. Today she keeps waking up in the middle of the night screaming about her toys. For whom is it a triumph to shatter the sense of at-homeness-in-the-world of a two-year-old child? "Settler trauma," Maher says, is the diagnosis. An infliction of pain meant to irreparably sear that sense of belonging essential to a collective future.

Seeking some semblance of normal life for the children, Maryam and her family have rented an apartment elsewhere. But every single day Maryam takes out her chair and sits under a tent outside her house to make a physical claim to her house and to this land just outside it, the rights to which she says she will never give up. She says she was born into a refugee status, and she refuses to have done to her what was done to her parents' generation. Maher and Nabil, whose family was the first in Sheikh Jarrah to be shut out of their home by court order, tell us that the settlers continuously harass Maryam, calling her dog and pig, yelling at her that she is going to die, that they will kill her. Every day the settlers occupying their houses (who do not remain the same people but in fact are changed periodically) harass them with acts of belligerent personal confrontation and physical and verbal attacks, including throwing excrement on them and setting dogs to tyrannize and defile their domestic spaces (the presence of dogs prohibits the practice of prayer in these spaces, according to the tenets of Islam). All these are clearly tactics in a deliberate campaign of daily harassment to coerce all of them, particularly Nabil's octogenarian mother who still manages to live in this house behind her son's occupied home, to leave the neighborhood and ultimately to abandon these lands claimed for and as Israel.

Beneath the thresholds of political meaning and concern drawn by the global codes of freedom undergirding Israel's own war to be human, Palestinians engage in daily persistent practices of living as a powerful political act and claim. Against the relentless physical and verbal assaults of settlers in East Jerusalem—the words and images as well as the objects violently lobbed against them to prevent the very possibility of continuing life, the tarps and tents that the Al-Gawi, Al-Kurd, and Hanoun families put up as tenuous defenses—are small yet vital political acts of survival. Like the tarps and wire mesh put up by Palestinian vendors over their stores and pathways in the Hebron market to prevent the similarly relentless projectiles of rocks and excrement launched by settlers, these are acts and accoutrements for staying

on the land, for holding on to and continuing the living of generations, for living in defiance of the willed disappearance of one's people.

Here, on the intimate plane of everyday survival, where the calculus of financialized military enterprise and governance manifests itself in what Nadera Shalhoub-Kervokian calls "the physics of power," which Palestinians contend with daily and on the ground—a calculus inflicted on Palestinians by means of demolished homes, checkpoints, confiscated land, denied transportation services and building permits, discriminatory legal exclusions, and the prohibition of memory—are to be found a plethora of small acts of undaunted living.<sup>72</sup> If that physics consists of "strategies of protecting and ensuring the survival of a certain power" by impeding the past, present, and future of the Palestinian people, here other powers obtain—powers for sustaining life.<sup>73</sup> Here, against the ever-divisible calculus of demographic/algorithmic logics, with their ratios of life and death, proportionalities of means and ends in the calibration of violence, and derivative gains to be made of signs as events, we find an altogether other temporal and spatial scale and sense coursing through the life-making practices of people in a time of war.

At the site of the Kufr Qasem massacre, where Israeli Border Police soldiers killed forty-nine Arab villagers, Mahmoud Darwish writes, "Here they sleep. The sunset grows larger and changes into forests of dry trees. There is no hour to commemorate their death, no occasion, and no appointment. The stones themselves are time, and the expanse of the pale sunset is time."<sup>74</sup> When Darwish and others try to mourn the killed villagers at the site of their massacre, their killers prevent them from offering condolences. Yet Darwish writes that they, the Palestinian people, know how to commemorate and avenge their dead—"by holding on to the soil of the homeland with their nails and teeth."<sup>75</sup> He continues, "We realized that stones are made of time, and we sat down on them to sing to the homeland."<sup>76</sup> No hour, no occasion, no appointment to memorialize. Holding on, the commemoration and avenging of the dead by the surviving as well as the very form of this survival rest on the kind of place and time that stones and skies are made of. A time of persistence as the time of struggle to live free and a place where, as Nada Elia puts it, "justice is indivisible."<sup>77</sup>