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### Recognizing Invisible Violence

#### *A Thirty-Year Ethnographic Retrospective*

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As an anthropologist writing since 1979 about violence, poverty, and social inequality, first in Central America and then in the United States, I have worried about the danger of inadvertently contributing to a voyeurism or pornography of brutality that pathologizes the unworthy poor. I did not, however, seek out the topic of violence in my fieldwork sites. Violence imposed itself on me because it is central to the organization of power in everyday life and has been throughout history.

There is a much bigger problem with the politics of representation, however, in anthropology, social medicine, and public health, and that is the failure to recognize the violence that generally overwhelms the people we study. Violence is spread unequally across the globe, and the ways it maintains exploitative power structures need to be documented and denounced. Unfortunately, although direct physical violence is easily visible, it is merely the tip of the iceberg. Often it distracts us from being able to see the less clearly visible forms of coercion, fear, and subjectification through which violence deceptively and perniciously morphs over time and through history. These deceptive forms of violence are largely invisible to or “misrecognized” by both protagonists and victims—who are often one and the same. This misrecognition legitimizes to the general public the policies and institutions that politically impose suffering on the socially vulnerable.

## OPENING THE PANDORA'S BOX OF INVISIBLE VIOLENCE

In this retrospective reexamination of the problematic visibility of violence in my fieldwork sites over the past three decades, I am building on the preliminary theoretical categorization of the overlapping continuum of violence that Nancy Scheper-Hughes and I initially proposed in the early 2000s (Bourgois 2001; Robben 2008; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004b). Conceptual taxonomies often obscure as much as they elucidate. Nevertheless, by reshuffling and renaming several of the categories I had originally focused on within the continuum, I hope to identify more clearly three invisible processes of violence—structural, symbolic, and normalized. I believe that these processes require more systematic theorization because of their central role in the consolidation of the punitive version of neoliberalism that has come to dominate the globe at the beginning of the twenty-first century. I am particularly concerned with the shift from politicized violence to intimate violence occurring in many Latin American nations, which has legitimated social inequality and demobilized popular demands for the redistribution of resources. My three categories of invisible violence are meant to be a pragmatic, analytical starting point for highlighting the linkages between the virtually infinite, specific manifestations of visible forms of violence that one encounters throughout history—most notably, the contemporary increase in intimate violence during the epoch of globalized neoliberalism.

At first sight, intimate violence—whether criminal, delinquent, or self-inflicted—appears to be the exclusive fault of individuals who are sociopathic, criminal, or, at best, irresponsible or organically sick. The practical stakes of rendering the tentacles of violence more visible are high because one social group's violence is often another's virtue and, in tandem with hierarchies of symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 2000), interpretations of violence and virtue generally follow the unequal distribution of resources (figure 2.1).

The concept of "structural violence" comes out of marxism and liberation theology but was first formally coined by a social democrat in Norway, Johan Galtung, as a critique of the United States' Cold War understanding of nationalist and socialist revolutionary movements (Galtung 1969). Paul Farmer has emerged as one of the most eloquent contemporary proponents of focusing on structural violence in anthropology and social medicine (Farmer 2004a; Farmer et al. 2006). His approach emphasizes the ways historically engrained, large-scale, political-economic forces wreak havoc on the bodies of the socially vulnerable. Others have provided critiques (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004a; Wacquant 2004) or elabora-

## The Pandora's Box of Invisible Violence

- **Structural violence**  
Political-economic forces, international terms of trade, and unequal access to resources, services, rights, and security that limit life chances
- **Symbolic violence**  
Domination, hierarchies, and internalized insult that are legitimized as natural and deserved
- **Normalized violence**  
Institutional practices, discourses, cultural values, ideologies, everyday interactions, and routinized bureaucracies that render violence invisible and produce social indifference

**FIGURE 2.1**

*The Pandora's box of invisible violence.*

tions of structural violence in medicine and public health (Heggenhougen 2005; Pedersen 2002; Singer 1996; Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz 2004). Despite its invisibility, structural violence is shaped by identifiable institutions, relationships, force fields, and ideologies, such as the unequal market-based terms of trade between industrialized and non-industrialized nations, carceral systems, discriminatory laws, gender inequity, and racism. It manifests visibly in health disparities resulting in distinct morbidity burdens, mortality rates, and occupational injury levels across class, ethnicity, and citizenship status.

The concept of "symbolic violence" was initially developed by Pierre Bourdieu and refers to the mechanism whereby the socially dominated naturalize the status quo and blame themselves for their domination (Bourdieu 2000, 2001; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). For example, an insult per se is not symbolic violence. Symbolic violence occurs through the process of misrecognition. The socially dominated come to believe that the insults directed against them, as well as the hierarchies of status and legitimation that curtail their life chances, are accurate representations of who they are, what they deserve, and how the world has to be. The concept of symbolic violence helps us understand the mystery of social reproduction: why do the subordinate tolerate the status quo?

The term "normalized violence" is adapted from Schepher-Hughes's earlier concept of everyday violence, inspired by Franco Basaglia's critique

of treatment procedures in psychiatric hospitals to call attention to the social production of indifference to institutionalized brutalities (Scheper-Hughes and Lovell 1987). Scheper-Hughes revealed, for example, how the "invisible genocide" of infants dying of hunger in a Brazilian shantytown was routinized and unconsciously legitimized by such things as the banal rituals of bureaucracies, inappropriate medical prescriptions, and the religious consolation of bereaved mothers (Scheper-Hughes 1996).

The concept also coincides with Michael Taussig's notions of the "culture of terror" (1984) and the "nervous system" (1992). The prevalence of brutality and human rights violations creates a "space of death" that normalizes murder and torture and silences opposition (Taussig 1984). Recognition of the process of normalized violence is also consistent with Walter Benjamin's (1968[1940]) call during the rise of Nazi Germany to recognize that every day is a state of emergency for the socially vulnerable. A critique of normalized violence, for example, can heighten our awareness of the "commonsensical" discourses that render systematic patterns of brutality invisible, such as romantic love manifesting as domestic violence, scripts of masculinity leading to the toleration of "femicide" by the state, and rape being "misrecognized" as harmless or deserved.

### **LA MOSKITIA, NICARAGUA: A CULTURAL-NATIONALIST REVOLUTIONARY CIVIL WAR, 1979-1981**

My first fieldwork was as an applied anthropologist writing for the Ministry of Agrarian Reform in Nicaragua during the first three years of the Sandinista Revolution (figure 2.2). It was an idealistic moment in the Cold War when charismatic revolutionaries overthrew a US-supported dictator, Anastasio Somoza, and initiated a socialist redistribution of resources. I was sent to the Moskitia, the poorest region of the country, along the Atlantic Coast border with Honduras, to organize cooperatives and write a report on the economic and political needs of the Miskitu and Mayangna (Sumu) Amerindians. To my dismay, I watched an inspiring mass mobilization for indigenous rights turn into a bloody civil war, expressed in a racist and cultural-nationalist idiom by both opposing sides. The Miskitu mobilization was initially inspired by the revolutionary state's discourse of redemptive populist and nationalist political agency. The Sandinista government cadre who entered the region, however, was promoting a Latino-centric vision of class struggle, anti-imperialism, and pan-peasant solidarity (Bourgois 1986). The Sandinistas considered Miskitu demands for indigenous cultural rights to be reactionary. I was expelled from the country after co-authoring a report advocating regional auton-



**FIGURE 2.2**

*Fieldwork sites: (1) Miskitu communities, La Moskitia, Nicaragua; (2) United Fruit Company Plantation along the Costa Rica–Panama border; (3) FMLN territory, Cabañas, El Salvador; (4) Street level crack sellers, East Harlem, New York; (5) Day laborer and gang corner, Mission District, San Francisco, California; (6) Homeless encampments, Warehouse District, San Francisco, California. (Map by Ellis White.)*

omy for the Atlantic Coast territories (Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios de la Reforma Agraria 1981).

The Miskitu were rebelling against the structural and symbolic violence of internal colonialism. The racism of Latinos against Amerindians and Afro-Caribbeans was palpable during those years and was deeply engrained in the village-level economic structures. The local markets for grain and agricultural inputs that the indigenous peasantry depended upon were controlled by Latino immigrants from the Pacific Coast. The state's model of centralized, socialist land reform exacerbated Latino–Amerindian tensions. An influx of non-indigenous state officials spoke of bringing “progress and civilization” to all poor farmers. They referred to the “low cultural level of the Indians” and plastered the region with cartoon-style revolutionary billboards celebrating “The Atlantic Coast: A Giant Who Is Awakening! [Un gigante que se despierta!].” At the time, I was traveling to remote Miskitu communities as an employee of the agrarian reform promoting cooperatives and offering credit and seeds. I was accompanying an indigenous representative from the newly formed indigenous-rights mass organization

(MISURASATA), which initially was supported by the central government in response to popular demand for Amerindian representation in the revolutionary process. Unlike my offers of technical and material support for the formation of cooperatives, the speeches of my MISURASATA colleague on the revolutionary dignity of the Miskitu people were received with cheers and shouts of the former Sandinista slogan “Freedom or Death [Patria libre o morir!],” transposed into a cry for Amerindian nationalism.

Within a year, there was an incipient guerrilla organization demanding the formation of an independent Miskitu state. The violence and volatility of the Miskitu nationalist autonomy movement can be understood as being primarily driven by a rejection of symbolic violence. For example, there was a spontaneous revival of the Miskitu language. Suddenly, it could be heard spoken proudly and loudly on the streets of the regional capital, Puerto Cabezas. Individuals of indigenous descent in positions of local bureaucratic leadership who had formerly passed as Latino or as Afro-Caribbean suddenly switched to speaking Miskitu, embracing with pride their formerly despised Amerindian culture. The rise of Miskitu nationalism mirrored the rise in Sandinista pan-Latino nationalist opposition to US imperialism. Both sides of the indigenous–Latino conflict can be understood as mobilizing in response to historical patterns of internalized racism—patterns they were suddenly inverting.

Redemptive movements for justice in a civil war context are often especially bloody (Kalyvas 2006). The rejection of symbolic violence is capable of spawning unexpected interpersonal brutality amongst neighbors and even within families. For example, the Miskitu guerrillas sometimes cut off the ears and tongues of indigenous villagers who sided with the Sandinistas (Americas Watch Committee 1985). Similarly, three decades earlier, during the Algerian war of independence from France, Frantz Fanon (1963) eloquently documented the bloody consequences of overcoming the internalized racism of colonialism, a classic form of symbolic violence. In the preface to Fanon’s book, Jean-Paul Sartre (1963) went so far as to argue that deadly violence is a necessary prerequisite for liberation from colonialism. The advantage of historical hindsight on the Algerian war has demonstrated the limits of Sartre’s romantic, idealistic interpretation of liberatory revolutionary violence.

In the Cold War–1980s context of revolutionary Nicaragua, the United States took advantage of the populist Miskitu cultural-nationalist outpouring and flooded money, automatic weapons, and CIA trainers to the region. The CIA imposed an alliance between the Miskitu guerrillas and the *contras*, an irregular army led by former National Guardsmen from the ousted Nicaraguan dictatorship. The Sandinista government responded by jailing

grassroots leaders, sending troops to burn indigenous villages along the Honduran border, and resettling civilian populations into more controllable zones. After two and a half years of bitter fighting, the Sandinistas declared an official *mea culpa* and changed their policy toward the indigenous populations. They granted regional autonomy to the Moskitia and instituted, among other policies, bilingual primary education and decentralized control of natural resources. By Latin American standards, this dramatic political, economic, and cultural restructuring of a large Amerindian-dominated territory emerged as a positive model for institutionalizing indigenous rights (Hale 1994). Significantly, the Miskitu responded to these actions by almost immediately ceasing their armed struggle. The Sandinista autonomy process represented a historic first step toward dismantling the structural and symbolic violence of internal colonialism.

#### **A UNITED FRUIT COMPANY PLANTATION IN PANAMA AND COSTA RICA: CLASS STRUGGLE IN A MULTINATIONAL CORPORATE ENCLAVE, 1981–1984**

In my second fieldwork site, I continued documenting the experience of internal colonialism and institutionalized racism. I was living in the workers' barracks of a six-thousand-person United Fruit Company banana plantation, spanning the border of Panama and Costa Rica on the Atlantic Coast (Bourgeois 1988, 1989a). Banana plantations were in the midst of violent labor struggles during these years. Several workers were killed by the government during strikes across the country, despite the fact that Costa Rica was at peace during these years and was considered internationally to be a model of nonviolent democracy, compared with its Central American neighbors.

My field notes on the plantation document the details of class struggle that were easily visible in daily interactions between management and labor. In my analysis, I linked those conflicts to the structural violence of a US transnational agroexport enclave. I also documented the repression of political organizing and the domination by both the US government and the United Fruit Company of the local Central American bureaucracies and nation-states (Bourgeois 2003c).

My field notes contain several references to domestic violence. I also reported the destructive consumption of alcohol and widespread brawling. One of my friends, for example, had his throat slit with a machete in a bar. I noted these incidents, however, only because they erupted directly in front of me and caused me ethical angst over how to intervene as an outside ethnographer. I did not seek to document more systematically the meaning of the intimate violence pervading daily life on the plantation.

Furthermore, I did not realize the importance of the often gendered vector of the intimate violence around me, nor did I relate it systematically to the structural violence of the agroexport plantation or the direct repression of the unionized workers. To paraphrase Michael Taussig's (2006) phrase from Walter Benjamin, I was only beginning to realize that every day is a state of emergency for the structurally vulnerable. I had not read the autobiographical literature produced by Holocaust survivors that provides insight into how coercive power can make monsters out of the meek. Specifically, I would have benefited from Primo Levi's concept of the gray zone, which explains how survival imperatives in the Nazi death camps overcame human decency as starving inmates jockeyed desperately for a shred of advantage within camp hierarchies, striving to live just a little longer. Four decades after Auschwitz, Levi (1989:40) eloquently urged his readers to recognize the less extreme gray zones that operate banally all around us in everyday life, "even if we only want to understand what takes place in a big industrial factory." The six thousand day laborers in that isolated, swampy enclave of the United Fruit Company banana plantation on the Costa Rica/Panama border were not confined to a death camp, but they were embroiled in the gray zone imposed by multinational agroexport and maquiladora (sweatshop assembly plant) enclaves throughout the non-industrialized world.

### **CABAÑAS, EL SALVADOR: REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE IN REVOLUTIONARY CIVIL WAR, 1981**

My third fieldwork project was in El Salvador and overlapped with my research on the banana plantation. Drawing on the theories of peasant revolution developed by Eric Wolf (1969), I entered a territory controlled by guerrilla fighters from the Farabundo Martí National Liberation front (FMLN). In addition to my theoretical interest in political mobilization in peasant studies, I was committed to documenting the human rights violations perpetrated by the military government of El Salvador with funding and military assistance from the United States.

The Salvadoran peasants supporting the FMLN were striving to survive as small independent farmers, but unequal patterns of land tenure and usurious market arrangements obliged them to migrate seasonally to temporary jobs on coffee and cotton plantations or to enter indentured-debt peonage relationships with local cattle-raising landlords. My hypothesis was that the articulation of three contradictory modes of production—1) semi-subsistence peasant farming, 2) semi-feudal indentured labor, and 3) agro-export, capitalist, piecework day labor—was creating a phenomenon of structural



violence that was violently mobilizing the starving peasants of El Salvador. The sub-sistence peasant economy was subsidizing the cost of their reproduction, allowing the agroexport plantations and the local landlords to impose abusive working conditions. The cost of creating and supporting families was shouldered by the subsistence-based economy. Families were forced to send their young healthiest men, at the height of their productive life cycle, to work for miserable wages. Unhealthy, disabled, problematic, and superannuated workers were excluded from the agroexport economy (Burawoy 1976; Meillassoux 1981; Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz 2004; Wolf 1982). The profits of the agroexport and maquiladora sector were—and still are—predicated on slowly starving the peasant population to premature death. The untenable position of the malnourished, wannabe-independent small farmers of El Salvador was the structural basis for their capacity to mobilize violently against a much more powerfully armed state and landlord class.

On my second day at this new field site in a remote corner of the province of Cabañas on the Salvadoran border with Honduras, I found myself trapped in a scorched earth campaign launched by the military government. I fled under fire with the approximately 1,500 local residents from a dozen hamlets within the 40-square-kilometer region that was under attack. We were encircled by government troops that fired at us from the ground and bombarded us from the air. There were about 150 FMLN fighters defending us. Virtually all were teenagers or young men from local hamlets. In addition to their political commitment to obtaining access to land and fair markets, they were determined to defend their families from being massacred and their houses and fields from being burned (figure 2.3). For two weeks, we ran during the night and hid during the day, chased by the government troops, which killed everyone they encountered, including the elderly, the infirm, and unarmed women carrying newborn babies. The troops also burned the fields and houses.

When the grenade landed on the teenage fighter up ahead, I dove into the dirt behind some bushes. I accidentally jostled a young mother who was already crouching behind the bushes where I landed. I startled her six-month-old baby and it began to cry. The mother hissed in my ear, "Vete! Vete de aqui! Rapido! [Get out of here! Scram!]." At first, shocked, I thought she was angry at me and was being cruel, pushing me off into the hail of bullets. Suddenly, it dawned on me that she was trying to save my life: her baby's cries were beginning to cut through the sound of the gunfire. I jumped



**FIGURE 2.3**

*Salvadoran FMLN fighter with baby brother resting during the scorched earth campaign (Cabañas, El Salvador, November, 1981). Philippe Bourgois, photographer.*

to my feet and sprinted forward, just as another barrage of machine guns fired into the shrieks of mothers and babies behind me. (Bourgois 1982a:C5; see also Bourgois 2001)

Twenty years later, Armando, a survivor who was seven years old during this scorched earth campaign, published his account of being captured by the government troops chasing us. His life was spared, but only after he was forced to call out to his mother from across a ravine in the dark. When she called back to him, revealing her location, she was immediately killed in a barrage of grenades and machine gun fire (Asociación Pro-Búsqueda de Niñas y Niños Desaparecidos 2002).

Approximately 250 villagers were killed during this two-week-long scorched earth campaign, including approximately twenty-five fighters. These massacres occurred at the height of President Ronald Reagan's escalation of the Cold War, and I managed to publish a summary of the military operation in the US media as an opinion page editorial (Bourgois 1982a). My account was covertly denounced by the CIA in a slideshow delivered to members of Congress "as an illustration of the problem of guerilla 'propaganda' reaching the U.S. public" (United States Congress 1982:15).

My fieldwork among the Miskitu had alerted me to the way redemptive rejections of symbolic violence produce new vectors of political violence

that resonate with a sense of rage and grief. In a discourse that combined liberation theology and Marxism-Leninism, the Salvadoran revolutionary peasants were proud of having "seized consciousness" (*concientizado*). They spoke of their revolutionary violence in explicitly redemptive terms. Less than a year earlier, they told me, they had been barefoot, illiterate, land-poor laborers indebted to local landlords who treated them worse than cattle (Bourgeois 1982b). As armed revolutionaries, they suddenly found themselves in the role of God's chosen people, showing the path to equality and justice to the rest of the world. For example, I tape-recorded the newly written poem that a forty-six-year-old peasant with the nom de guerre of *Hercules* recited to his comrades-in-arms to commemorate his son, who had just died in combat:

*Oh you who showed us so clearly what the struggle is about  
 From heaven you listen to our prayers, oh my dearest son  
 How many nights of prayer you have led us through  
 But we are happy because you are in heaven  
 and your destiny was to be a good guerrilla fighter  
 Your memory will always remain in the hearts of your companions  
 Revolution or death!  
 The people armed will triumph!*

The revolutionary peasants were explicitly and articulately resisting structural violence, but they also spoke of overcoming the rampant, interpersonal, delinquent violence that had formerly pervaded their lives. One of the fighters told me, "We used to be machistas. We used to drink a lot and cut each other up. But then the organization showed us the way, and we've channeled that violence for the benefit of the people." In short, intimate violence was being powerfully channeled into political resistance, rupturing chains of symbolic violence. This was manifested in acts of altruistic heroism and political dedication, as portrayed in the novels of Manlio Argueta (1983, 1987). In a similar vein, Oscar Lewis (1970:75) reported on a conversation he had in 1959 during the first year of the Cuban revolution: "I was told by one Cuban official that they had practically eliminated delinquency by giving arms to the delinquents! The people had a new sense of power and importance. They were armed and were given a doctrine which glorified the lower class as the hope of humanity."

Unfortunately, the logic of normalized intimate violence continued to ferment during the revolution—even if less visibly. Immediately after the

ceasefire, it reemerged with redoubled intensity. When I resumed my fieldwork ten years later among the surviving revolutionary villagers, I was forced to document domestic violence and alcoholism. It was too visible not to be recognized as a widespread, urgent social problem.

### **EAST HARLEM: US INNER-CITY APARTHEID, 1985–1991**

Before returning for follow-up fieldwork in rural El Salvador, I lived with my family next to a crack house in East Harlem in order to explore the phenomenon that I call “US inner-city apartheid” (Bourgois 2003a). I befriended a social network of street level crack sellers and their families and customers. Unlike my earlier research among revolutionary peasants in El Salvador, I did not initially think of myself as attempting to document the political effects of violence. I did not recognize it as a historically evolving phenomenon that arises out of invisible processes of violence (structural, symbolic, or normalized) and legitimizes them. My new fieldwork site, however, forced me to begin theorizing the highly visible phenomenon of intimate violence. I was overwhelmed by the fists and bullets flying in the households around me and by the decrepitude of the chronic addicts and alcoholics milling on the surrounding street corners. I also shared with my neighbors a chronic fear of assault and burglary.

My residence in East Harlem coincided with the end of the Cold War and the consolidation of the punitive version of US neoliberalism, exacerbated by the escalation of the War on Drugs. The United States was becoming the nation with the highest per capita carceral population in the world. Theorizing visible delinquent violence, consequently, emerged as an urgent political and intellectual topic. Ever since the end of the Cold War, reinterpreting the misrecognition of intimate violence has been a central concern in my ethnographic projects and in the reanalysis of my fieldnotes from the Cold War era.

My residence in East Harlem also made me recognize the centrality of the way gender power relations distribute violence unequally (Bourgois 1996, 2003b). Following Paul Willis (1981) and Bourdieu (1990), I developed an understanding of expressions of resistance and opposition in East Harlem as being mechanisms for the symbolic reproduction of domination. I began to recognize how the hypervisibility of intimate violence was fomenting symbolic violence among inner-city residents. I saw how it masked the invisible, politically imposed structural violence of US inner-city apartheid by legitimizing the increasingly punitive social and economic policies being instituted by President Reagan, which were increasing income inequality between the rich and the poor.

Most of the crack dealers had dropped out of school in their early teenage years and were being expelled from the legal labor market for rejecting what they considered to be humiliating working conditions. Instead, they sought success as independent entrepreneurs in the underground drug economy and in hip-hop street culture. The street culture that emerges from the drug economy represents a creative response to exclusion and creates new forums for masculine achievement, such as gang leadership and drug entrepreneurship. It is predicated, however, upon being expressively aggressive, unexploitable, and enmeshed in drugs and violence. Drug sellers must engage in public displays of violence to enforce credibility; addiction is one of their occupational hazards (Bourgeois 1989b, 1997). The popular hip-hop art form of gangster rap triumphantly celebrates murder, rape, and drug consumption, as well as opposition to police repression and personal insult.

#### **A STREET CORNER, SAN FRANCISCO: THE SEQUELAE OF US COLD WAR MILITARISM, 1991–1996**

My next fieldwork was conducted jointly with Jim Quesada and Jeff Schonberg on the corner of the block where I lived in San Francisco's Mission District and where a neighborhood-based gang congregated. Undocumented day laborers also assembled at this site to display themselves to passing traffic in the hope of finding employment. We befriended second-generation teenagers of Central American descent who alternately coexisted with and preyed upon the new immigrant day laborers seeking wage work. Many of the undocumented day-laborer immigrants were veterans of the proxy civil wars funded by the United States during the Cold War. The corner we studied, consequently, represented a quintessential post-Cold War, globalized, neoliberal public space where the socially vulnerable prey upon one another at the same time as they offer a convenient source of flexible, low-wage labor to the wealthy.

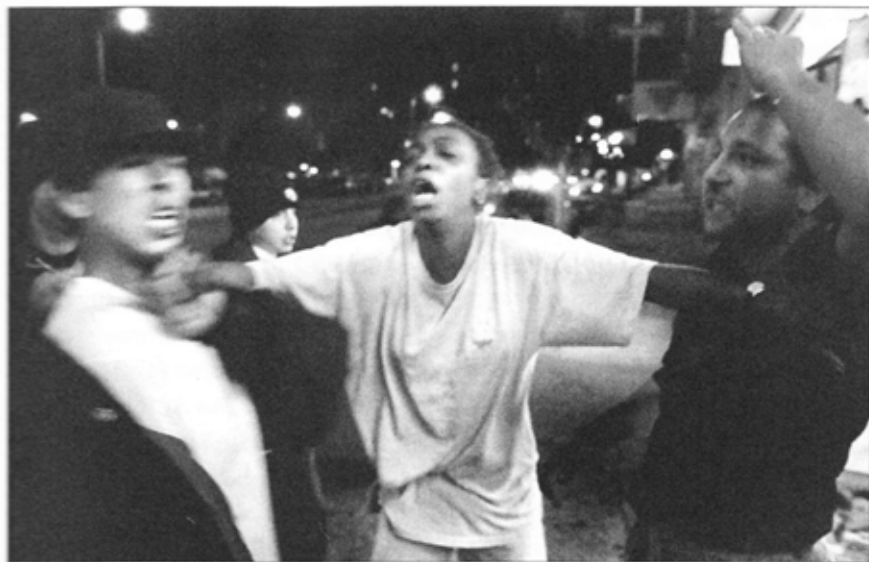
Most of the day laborers had been forced to leave their home communities because the peasant economy in their home countries was being wiped out by subsidized US agribusiness exports. They stood anxiously on the corner, striving to make friendly eye contact, waving at cars that slowed down or stopped at the traffic light. Many of them would smilingly show off their muscles to passersby—auctioning themselves in the neoliberal voluntary version of the US slave market. They strove to project the image of having strong, healthy bodies and to portray their honesty and eagerness for hard, disciplined labor. This stylized posture conveying masculine strength, but also docility, rendered them especially vulnerable to occasional taunts from

passersby. The presence of the gang members on their corner enraged them. They frequently discussed how worried they were that the passing drivers might mistake them for “lazy good-for-nothings [*vagos*], drunks, and drug addicts.”

The Mission District was gentrifying at the time, and within three years the parents of the gang members we had befriended had all moved to lower-rent cities in the East Bay or to the exurbs. The number of undocumented day laborers on the corner, however, had increased over the years. They survived primarily by cleaning yards and working for fly-by-night contractors, renovating formerly working-class housing into million-dollar luxury abodes for primarily white homeowners. We chose this site purposefully in order to link its local manifestations of intimate violence to the macro-historical effects of US military violence in Central America and to the structural violence of the entry-level US labor market, where law enforcement imposes low wages and high levels of discipline on undocumented immigrants fearing deportation (Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz 2004).

At the same time, within this hyperexploitative “American nightmare,” there persists the American Dream of upward mobility through hard work and good luck. The economic path of our primary protector at the site, a deserter from the Jordanian air force and co-owner of the corner store, exemplified the power of this dream. His primary source of revenue came from maintaining illegal poker machines, selling cigarettes and beer to the underage gang kids, and selling fast food to the undocumented day laborers. His partner was a Palestinian immigrant refugee, and their entire operation appeared to be based on trust. We never saw any evidence of formal bookkeeping. He worked as the cashier on the dangerous night shifts and maintained good relationships with the teenage gang members who assembled on his corner (figure 2.4). He was able to maintain their respect by occasionally punching and even pistol-whipping them when they broke bottles, vandalized trees and cars outside, or sold drugs indiscreetly in front of the store. When rival gangs swooped down onto the block to fight over territory, he simply pulled down his shutters and waited. He was a business major at the local state college and eventually moved on to invest in an Internet café farther downtown. My last contact with him was when he invited me to his wedding to a Russian woman who had taken advantage of the legacy of the Cold War by immigrating to the United States as a persecuted Jew.

We also befriended two Salvadoran day laborers who had been on opposite sides of the civil war. Juan was an alcoholic former member of a right-wing death squad and worked in asbestos removal. Rodrigo was a for-



**FIGURE 2.4**

*Customer intervening in fight between gang member and manager of corner store (Mission District, San Francisco, 1993). Jeff Schonberg, photographer.*

mer FMLN fighter who had used the four thousand dollars he had received from the United Nations for his AK-47 automatic weapon to pay a smuggler to get him across the Mexican border into the United States. The two undocumented Salvadorans avoided talking politics, recognizing their shared vulnerability as functionally illiterate day laborers subject to immediate deportation (Quesada 1999). Both felt betrayed by the leaders they had followed during the war. The death squad member would occasionally burst into tears, shaking: "I'm damned [Fui muy maldito]! I killed many people, Felipe! Yes, I killed many people [maté mucha gente]!" But he would provide no more details.

In contrast, Rodrigo, whose legs were riddled with scars from machine gun bullets, was proud of having fought for his rights as a former starving peasant. He was acutely aware, however, that history had betrayed him and that many of his former commanders now drove air-conditioned cars paid for by international NGOs. Peace had transformed him from a revolutionary hero into a despised, underpaid, undocumented day laborer. "After all these years, I have no education! I only know how to work." He had the advantage, however, of having grown up in FMLN territory where alcohol and drugs had been banned, and he abhorred the substance abuse by the

gang youths surrounding us. In fact, he occasionally joked about using his military experience to kill them all.

Initially, Rodrigo's primary goal was to make money to send home to his mother and to the children he had fathered with several women during the war. Four years later, however, he managed to obtain legal residency status as a war refugee and married a newly immigrated, undocumented woman, with whom he had a child. They bought a share in a half-million-dollar house with several cousins. None of the new homeowners made more than twelve dollars per hour in wages, and most of them were hired without documents by low-budget contractors on short-term projects. They often went several weeks or even months without employment. Their house was severely overcrowded and was located opposite a large, primarily African American, housing project with one of the highest gang murder rates in San Francisco.

They eventually lost their house, victims of a "teaser balloon" variable rate on a subprime mortgage scheme and also harassed by the racially motivated differential enforcement of a city rezoning ordinance against alleged overcrowding in their house. Simultaneous with this housing crisis, Rodrigo's wife moved out with their daughter to live with another undocumented laborer as soon as she obtained residency papers through her marriage to Rodrigo. She and her new lover each worked two jobs washing dishes at restaurants, with no health coverage. Rodrigo was temporarily jailed on domestic violence charges that were not prosecuted by the district attorney because Rodrigo had more marks on his body than his wife had on hers. Rodrigo insisted that he had not hit her, only held her away from him while she was hitting him. He did tell me, however, that in his home village he did not know a single family in which the man did not beat both his wife and his children. In fact, he said that one of the reasons he joined the FMLN at age fourteen was to escape his father's domestic violence.

Meanwhile, on the gang street corner the violence in the lives of the adolescent gang members was also primarily focused around intimate relations, but it was dramatically exacerbated by drug consumption. One teenager committed suicide when his girlfriend left him, and another was locked up indefinitely under California's three strikes law for mugging a couple with a gun in the midst of a crack binge. Earlier that evening, he had ritualistically "bitch-slapped" my co-fieldworker, James Quesada, and threatened me with the same treatment when I attempted to intervene. He had been smoking crack and had become irritated by our behavior, which he interpreted to be insulting. As we were leaving, he suddenly decided to teach us another lesson about manhood in front of his "homies" and taxed us five dollars each.



Eventually, the gang youth “disappeared.” Most of them simply followed their mothers to lower-rent neighborhoods. One particularly sociable youth occasionally returned to beg for change in front of the corner store to buy beer. He confided that he could no longer return home because his father had been released from prison for murder and often, when drinking, beat him, his mother, and his little sister.

### **RURAL EL SALVADOR: REVOLUTIONARY MEMORIES UNDER GLOBALIZED NEOLIBERALISM, 1994–2009**

In the midst of my work on the corner with the day laborers and young gang members, I began revisiting the resettled villages in El Salvador of FMLN supporters and former fighters with whom I had been trapped in the military’s scorched earth campaign in 1981. Most immediately tangible was witnessing the silent structural brutality of small farmers trying to keep their families alive by growing corn and beans on eroding hillsides.

I had hoped that this return visit would be a cathartic reunion of companions with whom I had bonded politically and humanly during the fourteen-day ordeal. It turned out, however, to be an awkward and often disillusioning experience of tiptoeing around interpersonal minefields of misdeeds, deceptions, and betrayals. My friends recounted the hideous details that are common to all populist civil wars: unnecessary deaths due to military strategy; abandonment of wounded comrades under fire; inadvertent suffocation by mothers of crying babies while hiding or fleeing in the dark; desertion of fighters; killing of wounded comrades to prevent their capture and torture by the enemy (Bourgeois 2001). Like Rodrigo in San Francisco, they felt betrayed by their political leaders, but most of them still believed in the justice of their former socialist-populist revolutionary cause. Nevertheless, the armed struggle had caused them great suffering and was now generating conflictive instead of empowering memories.

In hindsight, it is apparent that the revolutionary movement in El Salvador was distorted by the repressive military government violence that it was organizing against. Through an almost mimetic process, the military’s brutality was transposed into the FMLN’s organizational structures. Throughout the 1980s, the Salvadoran government had killed and often tortured anyone even vaguely suspected of being a “communist subversive.” In much smaller numbers, the guerrillas also killed individuals in their ranks suspected of being traitors or political revisionists (Americas Watch Committee 1991). There was a survival logic to most of these internal killings that had made them appear “normal” at the height of the war: when in serious doubt over an individual’s loyalty, the guerrillas could not

risk letting that person go free because, if he or she really was a government informer, they would all be captured, tortured, and/or killed. The literature on civil wars confirms that, despite their often utopian, liberatory idioms, partisans resisting repressive central governments often kill suspected infiltrators and their kin (Kalyvas 2006). Furthermore, individuals who are rendered desperate by structural violence in the most marginal interstices of the contemporary economy—such as slowly starving peasants who are forced to undertake part-time, marginal migrant labor—are especially vulnerable to being both victims and brutal perpetrators in the face of political repression.

The instrumental, interpersonal, internal killings committed by the FMLN in the name of its idealistic politics were often shaped by gender power relations (a central organizing form of inequality and one of the most normalized forms of violence). Although the killings were invariably justified in a political idiom during the war, a retrospective examination reveals that they often followed a patriarchal romantic pattern of constructing morality and hierarchy. Jilted men accused ex-girlfriends or rival boyfriends of being government spies. More perversely, their accusations were not necessarily far-fetched: such is the nature of romantic love and intimate betrayal in the context of a civil war.

Women suffered the brunt of these deadly accusations because they were able to cross enemy lines more easily than men precisely because the traditional models of gender roles made them seem less likely to be guerrillas in the eyes of the all-male military authorities. Furthermore, the liberatory discourse of the revolutionary struggle was destabilizing patriarchal power relations within families and communities, and the young, independent, politicized women became socially suspect. For example, Clara, a charismatic woman I befriended in the main refugee camp in Honduras where we took refuge, became in subsequent years a leader of one of the FMLN's revolutionary women's associations. She volunteered to return to government-controlled territory, camouflaging herself as a Popsicle seller in order to obtain military intelligence and to purchase medical supplies for her fellow fighters. After several months of this dangerous work, a rumor circulated that she was having an affair with a death squad member in the military town where she sold Popsicles, and she began to be suspected of being a double agent. She was killed by her comrades-in-arms after several landmines suddenly began appearing on the trails leading to main guerrilla encampments and several fighters lost their legs. Clara was considered the likely cause.

Ten years later, no one continued to suspect Clara's loyalty to the rev-

olutionary cause. It is possible, following romantic vectors of masculine power and privilege, that she might, indeed, have found herself obliged to develop sexual or even amorous relations with a military official in the village she had infiltrated. This would have shielded her from accusations of being a guerrilla sympathizer or protected her from being tortured and killed if she was apprehended. At the same time, being the local leader of the women's "mass organization" in her community, she had often demanded that the local commanders address women's rights. In short, she had transgressed masculine-dominated norms of political leadership and ideological debate. The normalized violence operating through the specific logics and tensions of romantic violence, military security, and political disagreement—which made her assassination appear to be necessary and even judicious—was encapsulated in the words of the former fighter who told me about it years later: "A weed has to be cut. That's what they used to say. [A la mala hierba hay que cortarla. Así decían.]" (See Irina Silber's 2006 postwar account of the social ostracization of a former woman fighter by her neighbors in a resettled FMLN community for having been a woman's rights activist.)

The overwhelming role of the military government's directly violent repression in raising the deadly stakes of mutual suspicion gets obscured, and the fact of human rights violations, as well as unequal gender power, remains unanalyzed in popular discourse. Instead, the tragically irresponsible acts of former companions and leaders are condemned, and there is a sense of having been fooled. Memories of unjustifiable, interpersonal killings and accusations in the name of politics during the war years demoralize former revolutionaries. Following the logic of symbolic violence, they delegitimize post-war, radical-political critique of the contemporary neoliberal status quo.

Since 1991 El Salvador has technically been at peace, but more people die each year from delinquent criminal violence than were killed by political violence at the height of the civil war. Criminal violence exploded after the peace agreements with the consolidation of US-style neoliberalism. El Salvador has one of the highest per capita murder rates in the world (Leggett 2007). The use of force to settle disputes, obtain instrumental gain, and assert masculine authority is normalized, buttressed by the former mimetic logic of repressive military violence that was necessary for survival during the civil war years. It manifests itself interpersonally in the prevalence of domestic violence, carjacking, mugging, rape, gang fighting, and drunken brawling.

The direct relationship of the civil war to the increase in peacetime violence is sometimes clearly visible in the specific logistics of an individual

violent event. For example, two years after my 1993 return visit, one of my friends, Alberto, was killed by his fourteen-year-old little brother with a gun leftover from the war, to prevent Alberto from beating up their mother in a drunken rage at being refused money for more alcohol. Alberto had stepped on a landmine during the war. After the signing of the peace accords, he metamorphosed from being a convalescing revolutionary hero to being a disabled peasant unable to farm his small hillside field, located a mile from his shanty shack home. He became an alcoholic, living primarily by manipulating women romantically. He spent much of his time reminiscing about the war, but some of his former comrades added insult to injury by criticizing him for having been merely a messenger, not a real fighter.

The continuum of violence spanning the civil war years to the present, in this particular case, did not end with Alberto's murder. On the contrary, his little brother was recruited into a gang while serving time in prison. He now lives in San Francisco and is covered with gang tattoos and scars. The last time I saw him was at the baptism party for one of his cousin's babies. He intimidated me into lending him twenty dollars and then ran off to smoke crack. Intuitively, one suspects that a disproportional amount of peacetime criminal violence may be committed by former fighters on both sides of the conflict. This is an empirical question, however, and requires further documentation. As time passes, the visible links are obscured in the maelstrom of intimate violence. For example, the second-generation modeling of wartime trauma by Alberto's little brother appears today most visibly as the individual acts of a sociopath, or an addict, rather than as the overdetermined psychoaffective outcome of a history of structural violence, gender norms, and political repression.

### **HOMELESS ENCAMPMENTS IN SAN FRANCISCO: NEOLIBERAL LUMPEN ABUSE AMONG DRUG USERS, 1994–2007**

The centrality of gendered vectors normalizing intimate violence was easier to recognize in my next long-term fieldwork, among a group of homeless men and women in San Francisco. For more than a decade, my collaborator, Jeff Schonberg, and I followed a multiethnic social network of aging, homeless heroin injectors and crack smokers who lived under a tangle of highway overpasses a half-dozen blocks from my home (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009).

Persecuted by the War on Drugs, the homeless addicts subsisted in Primo Levi's gray zone of mutual betrayal. They could not access subsidized housing, drug treatment, or other coherent social services. Most of them related harrowing stories of having survived violence as children and

of inflicting violence on their sons, daughters, and lovers as adults. All of them cycled intermittently through the carceral system, and many had been locked up as adolescents. In their middle age, most of their violence had become internalized in the form of substance abuse. They endured the chronic pain and anxiety of hunger, exposure, infectious disease, and social ostracism in their pursuit of heroin, crack, and alcohol. Abscesses, skin rashes, cuts, bruises, broken bones, flus, colds, and heroin withdrawal symptoms were constant features in their lives.

With the help of Bridget Prince and Sarah Thibault, we also followed several additional social networks of younger homeless injectors in San Francisco's gentrified (and very white) Haight Ashbury District. They were still at the height of their physical strength and were more actively violent. They organized the boundaries of their social networks through a moral economy of solidarity and obligation that routinely propelled them into conflicts with acquaintances and strangers (see discussion by Karandinos [2008]). They frequently beat up one another and openly confronted the police, who frequently arrested and harassed them.

Most of the homeless considered instrumental violence to be a moral compass for defining their self-worth and for punishing transgressors. Their sexual relations were fraught with jealousy. The men routinely battered the women who accompanied them for being unworthy, immoral, or disobedient. In turn, the women fell in love with jealous, violent men capable of protecting them from the ever-present risk of sexual harassment and rape by strangers and friends (Bourgeois, Prince, and Moss 2004).

## CONCLUSION: WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The cutback in social services for the poor and the "precarization" of the entry-level wage labor market since the 1980s, with the consolidation of a punitive neoliberal model in the United States, has produced rising numbers of social pariahs with no productive relationship to the legal economy or to their society's moral discourse. Their daily lives are increasingly embroiled in intimate violence. The United States rates poorly in international comparisons of quality of life statistics that measure life expectancy, health, ethnic segregation, literacy, and homelessness. It has consistently had the highest levels of income inequality and per capita incarceration of any wealthy nation in the world. Its murder rate is six to forty-four times higher than that of most other industrialized nations (Andrews 2003; Public Safety Performance Project 2008; United Nations Development Programme 2006:295–296; Wacquant 2009).

Marx's ill-defined term *lumpen* is useful for identifying the social sectors that are most vulnerable to becoming victims and perpetrators of violence.

He often used the term carelessly as an arbitrary political value judgment or insult in his polemical writings. Technically, the category "lumpen" refers to people from any social class who were expelled or excluded (often violently) from their historical era's productive economic system. In Marx's conception, the lumpen are the historical fallout of large-scale, long-term transformations in the organization of the economy (that is, structural violence) (Bovenkerk 1984; Draper 1972; Marx 1972[1852]:75; Parker 1993; Stallybrass 1990).

The lumpen belie totalizing definitions of classes as bounded units, because they can hail from any class origin: aristocratic, peasant, proletarian bourgeois, and so forth. Foucault's understanding of subjectivity, biopower, and governmentality is useful for expanding the destabilized approach to the concept of class inherent in Marx's term *lumpen* to render class a modifying characteristic instead of an absolute, bounded category. In Foucault's conception, subjectivities are identities and senses of personhood that emerge in historical moments. They appear to be purposeful choices but, in fact, impose themselves on individuals through a process of "subjectivation" (or "subjectification" [Bourgois and Schonberg 2009: 18–19, 214–215, 318]). We discipline ourselves (whether oppositionally or submissively) into becoming who we think we should be, drawing on the discourses of ethics and morality available to us.

Biopower, according to Foucault, was a new form of state power and governmentality that emerged during the modern era and is based on managing the health and welfare of citizens efficiently. Disciplinary forms of knowledge emerged, such as jurisprudence, psychology, and epidemiology; these came to define normality, legality, progress, and citizenship rights and obligations. Foucault developed his concepts to draw contrast between the administration and effects of power under modernity and feudalism. The king inflicted bloody, torturous violence on his subjects and peasants obeyed their lords out of fear and awe instead of a desire to be good, normal, and modern (Foucault 1978, 1981, 1995).

In welfare states, the effects of governmentality for the most part promote productive, life-enhancing outcomes for citizens. As a result, much of the control of the general population occurs through self-discipline. Discourses of knowledge and truth are internalized and become part of the "souls"—that is, the subjectivities—of individuals striving to be healthy and smart. Arguably, biopower operates with a different valence under neoliberalism. There has been a dramatic increase in lumpenized populations all across the world since the 1980s. Under the global dominance of US multinational corporations, "free markets" have been maintained by international wars, finance capital has received large subsidies, income inequality

has risen, subsidies for the poor have been curtailed, and carceral complexes have been expanded and have been rendered more purposefully brutal. Arguably, governmentality has become more abusive than supportive to ever-larger numbers of citizens who find themselves expelled from a stable footing in the economy and who develop violent subjectivities. In the 2010s the lumpen can be defined as those sectors of the population scrambling for survival in a parasitical relationship to their era's mode of production. Their subjectivization is spawned through an abusive instead of a life-enhancing relationship to biopower and governmentality (see discussion in Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:18–19, 317–318).

Neoliberalism is a pressure cooker for fomenting intimate violence. During times of peace, the lumpen disproportionately lash out against those closest to them, as well as against themselves. The highly visible pathology of their intimate lives deepens the misrecognition of causes and linkages. It generates a powerful symbolic violence that sets up new chains of invisible violence, including legitimation for punitive social policies. Marginalized population groups bearing the brunt of the symbolic violence that intimate, interpersonal violence propagates are also especially susceptible to mobilization into instrumental delinquent, millennial, or redemptive movements—whether these be fundamentalist religions, gangs and warlord militias, revolutionary politics, or armies invading foreign nations in the name of liberty or a god. The lumpen, consequently, disproportionately, become cannon fodder, torturers, and killers when they invert the symbolic violence weighing on them. Furthermore, it is easier to recruit brutal, or even suicidal, foot soldiers from sectors of the population in which peacetime lives are already infused with normalized levels of interpersonal aggression.

Academic schemas oversimplify and are often pompous. A conceptualization of the invisible forms of violence percolating within an open Pandora's box that overflows into infinite manifestations of visible violence—especially intimate violence—under neoliberalism can derail the cycles that generate symbolic humiliation and that normalize brutality to the point of making it appear to be deserved. The misrecognized hypervisibility of intimate violence in the United States, for example, created popular support for the massive expansion since the 1980s of its military and carceral complexes, in much the same way as delinquent violence spawns support or passive acceptance of the extrajudicial murder of criminals by state-sanctioned death squads in countries like Guatemala and Colombia (Taussig 2003). Today, ever-larger proportions of the world's population survive precariously in refugee camps, rural and urban wastelands, shanty towns, housing projects, tenements, prisons, and homeless encampments

because of the economic abuses, military interventions, and environmental degradation inherent in contemporary neoliberalism—including the global recession that began in 2008, triggered by the corrupt practices enabled by the deregulation of finance capital in the United States.

Recognizing the magnitude of globalized structural violence, as well as the capillary-level power of symbolic and normalized violence, can have a demobilizing, politically paralyzing effect on intellectuals. However, the end of the Cold War and the deepening of the global recession/depression offer new paths for productive engagement in nondogmatic, creative forms of political and humanitarian organizing, especially around health, the environment, and personal security. The class reductionist and authoritative patterns of popular mass mobilization against structural violence that occurred during the Cold War in an often dogmatic political idiom wasted a great deal of idealistic goodwill, even when those movements sometimes effectively redistributed resources and rechanneled the flow of intimate violence into political resistance. Totalizing revolutionary visions, however, tend to collapse into violent dead ends.

Crises in health and environmental degradation—most notably, global warming, infectious disease epidemics (HIV), expanding patterns of chronic morbidity (diabetes, asthma), and rising levels of personal physical insecurity—require global solutions. They highlight the structural faults of income inequality, corporate profiteering, and government policies enabling, for example, a critique of international biocapital (big Pharma) (see Comaroff 2007) and corporate toxic dumping (see Auyero and Swistun 2009).

Ironically, the ravages caused by neoliberalism open up political possibilities for uniting disparate populations around common causes that benefit the socially vulnerable, that is, those whose life chances are limited by local and globalized power hierarchies. In a best-case scenario, mobilizations against punitive neoliberalism might generate cross-national solidarities and cross-class alliances and reshape disciplinary subjectivities in liberatory directions. Expanding the definition of human rights to include health, cultural dignity, environmental sustainability, and peace and personal security, for example, offers multiple political paths in the 2010s, including new social movements around biosociality, such as therapeutic citizenship in the face of HIV infection, multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis, and diabetes (Epstein 1996; Kidder 2003; Nguyen 2005). The challenge will be for these forms of organizing in the second decade of the twenty-first century to prove themselves more capable of redistributing resources humanely than did the traditional nationalist and class-based modalities of the Cold War in the 1980s.



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