

# Violence & Orders

## Introduction

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The moment a person enters the world, they find themselves surrounded by precedented orders; concrete forms of political borders and categories such as citizenship, kinship, gender and so forth, as well as the prejudices and grammar that underlie them. These constitute an integral part of human affairs including how we understand ourselves and how we navigate each day. There is no social order that is not reliant on prejudices which include certain people and exclude others. Dragged through time, these and the according orders are naturalized, turned into truths that are thought to be self-evident. The task for critical theory is therefore not necessarily to eliminate orders *per se*, but to consider that they are political. Hannah Arendt reminds us that “the danger of prejudice lies in the very fact that it is always anchored in the past – so uncommonly well-anchored that it not only anticipates and blocks judgement, but also makes both judgement and a genuine experience of the present impossible.”<sup>1</sup> The power formations behind judgements originally had their own experimental basis, which might well be inapplicable or unjust for the present. This inaugural issue has taken as its task to lay bare the violence that springs from this ordering.

The articles in this issue are gestures of resistance: a way to critique and contest old and new prejudices. In this spirit, Daniel de Mendonça in *Egopolitics as Order* argues that a novel form, “*egopolitics*”, has come to dominate political discourse in Brazil. For Mendonça “*egopolitics*” has been normalized by Bolsonaro, the political discourse that propagates his presidency, and the policies of the current government. An individualized and private way of taking political decisions, “*egopolitics*” refuses any sense of obligation to a community, to a public or to ‘the people’. This violent refusal is being asserted in the domain of the political to actively endanger citizens whom democracy is supposed to represent. Similarly, Jules Joanne Gleeson’s *Conflict, Recognition and Gender Transitions* intervenes in the UK Government’s recent weaponization of the Gender Recognition Act (GRA). Gleeson shows how the GRA is a violent ordering of bodies along cis-normative and

heteropatriarchal lines; and government refusal to acknowledge and work with their own public consultation on the GRA only serves to reinforce the (b)ordering of acceptable bodies. Drawing on Robert Brandom's work on *semantic pragmatism*, she thinks about identities as 'semantic communities'. She thus refuses and resists the violent prejudices of cis-normative and heteropatriarchal logics which attempt to order, delimit and efface Trans and Non-binary lives.

With every order there are certain forms of violence at play. This breaks with the idea that violence springs from a lack, a deficiency of order. Violence is not an indication that things are out of joint, but in fact that these orders are at work. Violence and orders are intimately connected. Paula Biglieri in *Hating the People!* points to the swelling violence in Argentina which grows out of the anti-populist politics. This discourse posits "the people" as a danger that must be suppressed in order for democracy to function properly. Order must reign. This justifies ever more exclusion and fuels outwardly violent acts against people who are associated with *Kirchnerismo* and populist movements. In *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism* (2019), Wendy Brown argues that the anti-democratic forces of far-right movements across the globe today are not necessarily a correlate symptom of neoliberal *ruins*. Rather the decades-long neoliberal decimation of democracy, its obsession with, and evisceration of, any kind of political or social domain has laid the conditions under which far-right movements now proliferate. Therefore, the ruins of neoliberal orders of violence have been met with new and renewed forms of violence. In their interview, Ian Sinclair and Harrison Lechley ask Brown to reflect on her book against the backdrop of 2020: a year of pandemic and rebellion. Brown demands that we fight for democracy, now more than ever, to resist the violent and anti-democratic forces globally.

Understanding violence as intimately connected to order, and not as that which order prevents, propels responsibility to the forefront of matters. If violence is incipient to order, if the distinction violence-order cannot hold, how are we to think institutional responsibility and resistance? Aisling Walsh's *A Haunted City: Institutional Orders of Violence and Memory* urges us to rethink the distinction without ever evading the question of responsibility. Walsh merges and blurs reporting, narrative and research when she writes of femicide and (neo)colonial violence in Guatemala City. Her account lays bare the meaning of institutional violence by demonstrating how (neo)colonial and patriarchal orders induce violence against women. Violence cannot be solely understood as a purposeful act of violence, but also the failure to acknowledge accountability for forms of violence that spring from inaction. *A Haunted City* demands we act; for inaction is, too, always a decision.

In *The Force of Nonviolence* (2020) – here reviewed by Mark Devenney – Judith Butler draws out how hostility is a part of our psychic constitution, yet the enactment of it is not. She connects an ethics of nonviolence to a forceful politics of social equality that actively resists violence. Her book constitutes part of this nonviolent struggle by bringing the notion of *grievability* to the forefront. In the interview conducted by Viktoria Huegel, Butler reflects on the significance of unsettling the distinction between violence and nonviolence. After a year which has seen the paradoxical coincidence and disastrous implications of both the action and inaction of governments, Butler continues to insist on a politics that vehemently demands justice.

The idea of an intricate relationship between order and violence poses further questions. Is there a way to think about order productively? Can we imagine social organization that might not be ‘always already’ all inclusive, but which remains open to human plurality, future experiences, the event, the *arrivant*...? For a while now, critical thought has been resisting the idea that universal categories, such as human rights and citizenship, are a viable instrument for emancipatory politics. The idea that such categories are all inclusive carries its own threats. In his recent book *On Universals* – here reviewed by Luke Edmeads – Étienne Balibar takes on the question of whether universal categories are still valuable. He argues that universals, precisely because of their ambiguous nature, open up sites of resistance that can serve as a productive tool for radical politics.

Jacques Lezra in his article on *Insufficiency* takes on the task to reconfigure the universalism of reason. He follows Heidegger in his recurrent turning to reason in order to draw out how it is reason’s own insufficiency that resists its metaphysical principles. The performative aspect of Lezra’s work here is just as important as the content of critique: the text twists, pushes and cracks the limitations imposed by the order of reason; at the same time, it conjures a principle of insufficiency to imagine logic differently.

This raises the question to what extent politics, or the political, is not a site of resistance, but instead functions itself as an ordering principle. Already Marx, in *The Jewish Questions*, argues that “by emancipating himself (sic) politically, man emancipates himself in a devious way, through the intermediary, however necessary this intermediary may be.”<sup>2</sup> Mark Devenney’s book *Toward an Improper Politics* – reviewed here by Francesca Kilpatrick – warns us to refrain from returning all too quickly to a notion of *proper* politics, from hastily re-drawing the lines between what counts as politics. Instead, Devenney foregrounds his theoretical arguments by recounting short stories of movements, resistances, objects and plays, which allow us to imagine forms of politics that are improper.

So, are anarchic forms of political struggle imaginable? Is emancipation truly possible? Or do we have to understand politics in an ongoing antagonistic relationship to order? Frank B. Wilderson III’s book *Afropessimism* urges us to pause on the question of how Black emancipation is possible. In the interview with Siddhant Issar and James Padilioni Jr., he elaborates on why Black people are an integral part of the order of modern society - yet at all times excluded from it. With *Afropessimism* he therefore “gives a middle finger” to all those voices that long for a guidance for emancipatory struggle and instead demonstrates why it needs the end of the world, with no suggestion of what might come after.

And yet, the idea that orders are not natural, but political, demand us to rethink existing regimes for the present, and for what is to come. The orders and violence that are to follow: that is to be decided.

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## NOTES

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken, 2005), 101.
2. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 30.

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