Openings and Retrospectives

RETHINKING SOVEREIGNTY THROUGH HASHTAG PUBLICS: THE NEW BODY POLITICS

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Modern conceptions of sovereignty have come a long way, and anthropology has been centrally engaged in multidisciplinary conversations about the nature of sovereignty, including those related to notions of political authority and reconfigurations of body politics. Such explorations of political authority are not new to anthropology. Yet during the past fifteen years, we have seen an explosion in the renewal of discussions about sovereignty through the explicit understanding that it starts with sovereign authority resting in individuals and that, in order for political power to be seen as legitimate, it requires a transfer of that authority to other political bodies. Many explicit examples exist of these manifestations; one is the realm of citizen mass mobilizations that reconfigure sovereignty through changes in the body politic—that is, the practices and policies by which an entity is invested with political authority. Shifting away from a model of transferring authority from the individual to governmental authorities or civil-society and related judicial, technological, and scientific institutions, citizens are reconfiguring the body politic through new uses of digital technologies aimed at fostering a so-called human rights technology revolution. For example, in response to the Boko

Haram abduction of more than two hundred girls, the globally circulating hashtag #BringBackOurGirls has led to the invigoration of social activism as well as the use of scientific crisis-tracking technologies and cellular phone video-capture technologies to identify the girls, produce evidence, and prevent future violence. These two sets of digital tools—video capture through social media and geo-thermal satellite documentation—have led to the transformation of citizen political authority against twenty-first-century mass violence.

Since 2011, various partnerships with civil-society organizations, scientists, technology designers, and various judicial offices have proliferated with the aim of preparing courts for the transformation of new evidentiary approaches using digital technology. NGOs such as WITNESS and the European Journalism Center are developing tools to help people document crimes, and courts and judges to develop protocols for the untested evidence (Cole 2015). That new competitors—individual citizens, nongovernmental, governmental, and international institutions—are inserting themselves across borders and localities and struggling over the management of violence alongside states is indeed significant. Yet such mobilizations are changing the terrain of governance and the contours of sovereignty in post-independent states. From satellite tracking and surveillance, crowd-sourcing, social media, and autonomous weaponry, citizens are mobilizing their moral impetus to protect victims of violence—despite questions of legality—and are becoming increasingly involved in the management of violence according to that which they deem morally legitimate. By extension, they are also reshaping body politics through a rethinking of contemporary sovereignty (see Brotherton 2012; Agathangelou, n.d.).

It is clear that a retrospective on sovereignty as it relates to the development of anthropological futures should highlight the importance of returning our focus to the body as an important analytic for making sense of new forms of mediation. Such a focus on the body opens up a space for a robust interrogation of how new technologies are being witnessed, used to document and to expose events that, through a series of transformations, can serve as evidence for those intent on claiming the authority to demand justice at any cost. Today, when the guarantee of rights, fairness, and equality for some is resulting in the retraction of rights for others, we see new possibilities for understanding how the securing of new entitlements requires reflection on the way that political authority is claimed in the contemporary period. Here, following the lead of scholars such as Sheila Jasanoff (2011), I examine the ways that fresh reflections on sovereignty demand a shift in the way we understand governance not just through categories of the

state and the nonstate, or individual and community actors, but through new ways of constituting bodies of persons through technological forms of bodily mediation. In this case, I reflect on the role of social media in bringing to the fore modalities through which new protections of the social body are taking shape.

The foregoing considers the relationship between new forms of technological mediation and their significance in foregrounding new ways of understanding the relationship between bodies, sovereignty, and the shifting technological domains for the management of violence. Here, I suggest that we rethink sovereignty as a way to reconceptualize the social contract, especially in relation to new bio-constitutional arrangements of the contemporary period (see Jasanoff 2011; Aga-thangelou, n.d.). Cultural anthropology has not been quick to study these chang-ing technological assemblages as a way to rethink sovereignty. Classical anthropological studies of sovereignty tended to focus on issues of political au-thority, especially as it related to various recognizable models of governance. But how, we now need to ask, are everyday citizens using biomediated technologies of mass surveillance to transform their social worlds? And what are the domains of authority through which they operate? For example, how are witnesses of police violence in the United States and elsewhere using social media to transmit singular evidence to legal officers or to document mass atrocities? As significant openings for change and possibility have been created by the users of these tech-nologies, as well as scientists, defense attorneys, and members of civil society, how is the introduction of new tracking technologies transforming sovereignty now and into the new millennium? The answers to these questions raise consid-erations about the consequences of such new technologies—especially as we spec-ify which bodies, and through what body politics.

Since the early 2000s, various scientific and legal experts have deployed a new assemblage of technical domains ranging from medicine, science, religion, human rights, and law to facilitate the protection of the human body. The uses of digital and automated technologies for gathering and preserving evidence about bodies under the threat of violence and death highlight recalibrated values around governance and citizen responsibility and are leading to new social arrangements. These arrangements, reshaped by experts such as lawyers, judges, civil-society workers, and governmental officials, are contributing to the reformulation of body politics in the contemporary period (Clarke, forthcoming). For even as the rights revolution has led to particular forms of rights consciousness, digital technologies today point to questions not only about the technological representation of the body but also about how we know the body, how we read it in its particular

landscapes, what our assumptions are about its entitlements, and what our expectations are about its protections.

During the past three decades, scholarship on the body and its related arenas have concerned themselves with the role of scientific evidence and its complicated place in the wider epistemological domains of science as a mode of power, social ordering, and knowledge production (Agathangelou, n.d.; see also Foucault 1977, 1978). Made real through their contribution to the genealogical study of institutions, such approaches to scientific findings have focused on knowledge, culture, and power. Attention is only now turning to studies concerned with the role of biomediation in assessing the basis on which bodies are seen as needing protection, and their links to satellite and drone technologies, the related production of scientific and legal claims, and the relationship between violence and conflict. Yet average citizens engaged in justice-capture projects are now deploying new surveillance technologies that were once under the control of states. Armed with a discourse focused on a responsibility to protect as the basis for their moral call, these citizens' uses of technology differ in form and content and call on us to reckon with the nature of the body politic's transformation. The literature on biomediation has proven productive in this regard, especially in its attention to the relationship between the body and technology when technology enables the body to "produce an image that is larger than itself" (M. Hansen 2004, 6). Such cases require that we clarify the way in which technologies serve as social mediators of perceived threats.

GENEALOGIES OF SOVEREIGNTIES

The introduction of Michel Foucault's work into the interdisciplinary social sciences opened a way for imagining different notions of political authority, sovereignty, the state, and power. Foucault's work revolutionized anthropological thinking about culture, power, and the social processes that shape political authority. Many interpreted Foucault's analysis of government as one that removed the sovereign as an element of analysis. Instead, we saw an approach to sovereignty reconceived as a tentative process grounded in violence. This notion of sovereign power acts against its subjects with force and violence. Yet Foucault described power as diffuse and operating through various institutions and state mechanisms, rather than simply as a centralized state apparatus. He famously called attention to "its ultimate destinations, [to] those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions" (Foucault 1980, 96). Shortly after the publication of *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1977), Foucault revisited

his views on sovereign power in his 1978 lectures at the Collège de France. There, he introduced the idea of governmentality as allowing for a complex form of "power which has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument" (Foucault 2007, 107–108). Using the term both as the Western processes that led up to those transformations, as well as the forms of governance themselves, Foucault expanded and decentralized a view of sovereignty and power that had led to many decades of writing about how power is produced and how it produces certain effects. Departing from a Hobbesian sovereign who rules subjects with absolute power, Foucault described the transformations of the early eighteenth-century modern state in Europe as the formation of an *art of government*, allowing him to explore the techniques and technologies of centralized authoritarian power. However, it was the notion of governmentality as the ideal of a self-regulated society that proved to be his transformative observation: in this light, subjects are disciplined through state mechanisms such as biopower and biopolitics. Biopower thus became the modality through which disciplinary power was made to penetrate the constitution of bodies at the level of the entire population, allowing politically peripheral subjects to emerge (Humphrey 2007, 419).

At the core of Foucault's work lies a tension between sovereign authority and individual freedom. This binary was established through the relationship between monarchs and their subjects and was maintained in various forms until the period of economic and imperial expansion between the eighteenth and the twenty-first centuries. Foucault's contribution allowed anthropologists to map out political authority through multiple dimensions of power, and this approach radically transformed the contours of the discipline. Even so, critiques of Foucault resounded just as clearly: not only was his approach dismissed for decentering sovereign power and law, but he was also taken to task for his inability to manage questions of violence and its scale—especially in relation to the coercive force of state authority.

As anthropology entered the post–9/11 moment and the U.S. war on terror took off, the relevance of the authorial power of state violence returned anthropology to questions of ultimate decision-making. Here, Giorgio Agamben emerged to remind us with lucidity of state violence. Agamben (1998, 6) argued that biopower and sovereignty are fundamentally interrelated, to the extent that the production of "a biopolitical body" can be seen as "the original act of sovereign power." Here, he articulates the politics of the ban as a fundamental activity of sovereign power that shapes the production of bare life as an originary political

element for social politics. Indeed, we have seen in the post–9/11 period that traditional state forms have become increasingly powerful and relevant, prompting scholars of sovereignty to concern themselves with themes such as security borders and customs regimes. Agamben's contribution to anthropological debates made us see how sovereign power works: its location and domain of engagement are not the biopolitical paradigm of the West, but rather that of the camp (Agamben 1998, 181). This approach to sovereignty through spaces of omission and exclusion redirected the nature of existing debates and, today, calls on us to rethink the basis of forms of contemporary citizen participation.

RESITUATING POLITICAL AUTHORITY THROUGH BIOMEDIATED POLITICS

In their important review essay "Sovereignty Revisited," Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (2006) move us from the global North and its genealogies and histories to differently configured fields of power and authority. They argue that among anthropological studies of sovereignty and power are studies of a range of zones of exclusion in which we see ruthless local strongmen establishing sovereignty over some parts of the state. A second strand of sovereignty that interests them is comprised of various zones of informality, which include secrecy and magic. Their work highlights studies of the postcolonial or postsocialist state and details the role of state officials in the "de facto exercise of sovereign practices in the interstices of laws and formal procedures, between the real and the legal" (T. Hansen and Stepputat 2006, 307–308). These studies complicate the state–society binary, showing that the relationship between control and regulation, on the one hand, and complete autonomy, on the other, varies in different cases and contexts. They also show that these forms of internal sovereignty do not demonstrate a weakness of the state, highlighting instead the way that particular practices may be seen as examples of zones never effectively governed in the first place. This insight points to a body of new work that seeks to explore the workings of various informal economies characterized as *zones of exception*.

The sites of these informal spaces of exception are widespread, and they produce fissures in state standardization processes. From black markets to paramilitary operators to illicit webs of circulation, twenty-first-century anthropology has concerned itself with analyses of sovereignty that make sense of the way that individuals within and in relation to the state engage in diffuse forms of authority and power. Today we are witnessing a new era of deliberations whereby the unleashing of violent harm to bodies has led to the mobilization of new strategies

to capture the multiple iterations of bodies under siege, as well as to compel various constituencies to view such violence and act on it. The lived material and/or sentient body, the violated body, the social body, and the body politic—each of them coproduced and intersecting—are mobilized through affectively propelled technologies, with repercussions for how we make sense of bodily, structural, and juridicial violence. These mobilizations are not driven by state actors, but by everyday citizens. They are appropriating capture technologies—formerly used for purposes of state surveillance—and posting them on social media to produce moral outrage and incite affects for social action.

Under the language of "the responsibility to protect," we have seen the emergence of legal rights for victims under international law. Alongside such shifts have been citizens' use of geo-satellite and drone technologies to capture digital information and to do the work of surveillance and protection. These realities call on us to contend with the changing force of the sovereign individual and the way that new forms of political authority are realigning in the contemporary period. By examining the role of popular moral outrage, sentiments of protection, and social action to protect the human body, we see how the body can be deployed as a grounded analytic that does real work in the world. These spheres range from humanitarian pleas to protect the body to the recent emergence of the human-rights category of the victim around which a new body politics is emerging. These newly constituted communities and their mobilizations have necessitated, in the absence of the identification of the sovereign with the state, a new figure producing the moral right to engage. It is the category of the *victimized body* that has emerged as the new rallying cry of the twenty-first century. Through new forms of social action organized around it, new publics have begun to intervene in the domestic affairs of states.

The mobilization of these new publics is compelling us to make sense of an entirely new level of bodily engagement with violence through the language of morality. These realities have consequences for bodies and body politics, and they call for a reorientation of how we understand anthropological approaches to sovereignty—especially in relation to the complexities of the forms of social change that are underway. Such complexities ultimately shape the protection of bodies under threat. This terrain represents one of the many sites for the reallocation of contemporary forms of sovereignty, which are key to anthropological futures.

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