

# CounterPunch

SHOCK AND AWE IN GAZA BY JONATHAN COOK

CALIFORNIA'S WATER CRISIS BY JOSHUA FRANK

HONDURAS: FIVE YEARS SINCE THE COUP BY NICK ALEXANDROV

FINANCE CAPITAL AND INEQUALITY BY ISMAEL HOSSEIN-ZADEH

BEYOND THE GRID WITH JIM JARMUSCH BY KIM NICOLINI



# CounterPunch

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## COVER IMAGE:

**"A. Cockburn, E. Said, R. Waters and J. St. Clair at the Wall. Who's next?" by Nick Roney**

In Memory of  
Alexander Cockburn  
1941-2012



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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## The Desert Blues

I just read Jeffrey's St. Clair's article "Field Notes from a Mirage" and wanted to let you know that it is the best thing I have ever read about Las Vegas. I have relatives in North Las Vegas and since adulthood have always found the town to be the most disgusting place I have ever been. Just last night I was discussing Martin Scorsese's *Casino*—another great work about Las Vegas. Gambling, the mob and water: a metaphor of the United States.

Regards,  
Stephen Slater  
Eugene, OR

## Inside HRW

Thanks for the article by Richard Falk and others about Human Rights Watch. In addition to the other people using the Revolving Door at HRW, they might have mentioned Suzanne Nossel, who at various times was the COO of HRW, Executive Director of Amnesty International, and also a high-ranking policymaker in the US State Department. I think she worked under Samantha Power. Protests shortened her stay at Amnesty International. Nossel authored a number of essays in *Dissent* magazine from 2003-2008, calling for a "muscular" (i.e., aggressive) foreign policy. She perhaps tried to use the *Dissent* essays to raise her visibility, in the same way that Jeanne Kirkpatrick used

an essay in *Commentary* a generation ago ("Dictatorships and Double Standards") to raise her visibility.

Best regards,  
John Farley

## Spain or Vegas

Dear Jeffrey:  
I must let you know how much I miss Mr. Cockburn and how much I enjoyed reading your article on Vegas. While hard to compare, somehow I live in a small Vegas, south eastern Spain, sometimes it gets up there temperature wise - I had to use a Fahrenheit Celsius converter, and yes, water is a big if which is only going to get bigger. It is a real pleasure to read *CounterPunch*, it is like a big soother, it makes me enjoy the english language and think positive about America, not an easy task any of them, the latter especially. Thanks for your work, keep it coming.

Francisco González López  
Garrucha - Almería, España.

## Middle East Goals

Thank you for the article on corporate bobblehead coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Gaza. I feel that the scenario of allowing an area to be relieved of the presence of a foreign enemy (ie, the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza) will be repeated throughout the Middle East. The solution of the West

neo-liberals to the increased presence of Muslim military and political power seems to be to allow the latter to redraw boundaries, and then to make conditions so intolerable and insecure in the newly formed area that competition with the Western power is out of the question. The chief goal of U.S. policy will continue to be the control of oil in the Middle East, and to compete with China for this fossil fuel resource. The Muslims, pundits from Wm ("armchair") Kristol to Bill O'Reilly opine, are not capable of political sophistication. We peacemakers (God wills It) must remain in control so the world can live in "peace" and "democracy."

Jay A Gertzman  
Edgewater, NJ

## What About Otis?

Isn't it odd that Kim Nicolini's review of the D.A. Pennebaker music films doesn't even mention Otis Redding? In fact, when she got to the part about a black man fronting a white man, I presumed that was where she was going (not that Booker T. & the MGs was all white, granted, but the two guys upright were). It's always odd to me how Otis, who represented something quite profound in that context-- as profound as Jimi and maybe more so -- virtually disappears from these discussions. After all, if we are going to complain about the absence of the Civil

Rights Movement (and I am glad we are) shouldn't the marginalization of soul and the erasure of blues from the picture be important to mention, too? I'm not really complaining about the piece, which is fine as far as it goes (though I am hardly as gaga about Bowie, but then, I preferred T. Rex and still do), just pointing out a contradiction, in the knowledge that we've all got 'em.

Dave Marsh  
Norwalk, Conn.

## A Work Reprieve

Dear Everyone at *CounterPunch*,  
Thank you for the outstanding print magazine, Volume 21, Number 6. I found it on the kitchen table after a long day at the office, and sat down and didn't get up till I'd devoured the whole thing. Cover to cover, every piece was well done. From the LTEs, to Jeffrey St Clair's acid take-down of HRC, and Peter Lee's fascinating history of Chinese military evolution, to Kristin Kolb's sad litany of gun violence in US schools, and JoAnn Wypijewski's poignant story about Bowe Berghdahl, and more, this was outstanding journalism. Reading Paul Krassner's memories of his brother was a laugh-out loud joy. Thank you all so much for carrying on with *CounterPunch*. Alexander Cockburn is surely smiling.

All the Best,  
Sue Skinner  
Astoria, Oregon



## ROAMING CHARGES

# Tunnel Vision

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Is Gaza is in a terminal enclosure or is Israel? Certainly Gaza, that im-miserated sliver of land, is encaged: its borders sealed; its coastline patrolled by Israeli gunships; its skies streaked with drones.

Gaza has a population of nearly 1.8 million and rising, jam-packed into a landscape about the size of Detroit. Roughly, 90 percent of the residents of Gaza are refugees, stranded by nearly unceasing Israeli wars since 1948.

Gaza is poor. That is what we are told. And there are facts to back it up. The territory barely has an economy, especially since the tunnels, those subterranean streams of commerce, to Egypt were sealed after the coup against the Morsi government. A phony pretext for war, the tunnels delivered goods, from medicines to clothes and spices, interdicted by Israel. The tariffs imposed on this trade also provided funding for essential government services in Gaza, from sanitation to ambulances.

Gaza's per capita GDP was only \$876 in 2012. It is almost certainly lower now, as the Israeli blockade strangles Gazan commerce. Only eight nations in the world rank poorer by that dismal standard. Israel, in contrast, boasts a per capita GDP of \$31,000; it's economy hums, growing even as the missiles fly.

More than 30 percent of Gazans have no jobs and no prospects, living in a kind of permanent limbo. When the power plants haven't been bombed by the IDF, most Gazans only enjoy electricity for 12 hours a day. Gaza's natural water sources are severely limited, much of it appropriated by Israel, and the 80 percent of the Strip's groundwater is dangerously contaminated.

Gaza is weak. Its government is bankrupt, riven by internecine tensions between Hamas and the Palestinian

Authority, which have been deviously exploited by the U.S. and Israel. It has no army, no air force, no navy. It has no tanks, no anti-aircraft batteries, no armor-piercing weapons. Gaza has a few primitive rockets, mortars, rusty firearms, rocks.

Gaza has no allies. The Arab monarchies fear Hamas more than the Israelis. Mahmoud Abbas, the Marshal Petain of the Palestinian Authority, has helped the Israelis target Hamas leaders. Turkey and Qatar, once reliable sponsors of Hamas, seem to have been bought off. As the death count mounted, most of the world simply turned its eyes from the carnage, cringing only when UN schools were obliterated by Israeli airstrikes. Out of indifference? Out of shame? Out of guilt?

Everyone seemed to be getting in on the action, even Google, which was selling a "Bomb Gaza" game, an app for Android phones which allowed players to target their missiles strikes in Gaza City. Points deducted for civilian casualties. But is that kind of blood sport really any worse than the gaseous outbursts of Bill Maher, America's most bombastic atheist? Maher regularly asserts that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East and defended the bloodbath in Gaza by Tweeting: "Dealing w/ Hamas is like dealing w/ a crazy woman who's trying to kill u - u can only hold her wrists so long before you have to slap her." He says this without once addressing the fact that Israel is a religious state, where the full-rights of citizenship are accorded only to Jews. Maher is a prime-time bigot whose popularity with progressives is a bracing measure of the moral decline of the American left.

Meanwhile, the U.S. has played its accustomed role of dishonest broker, by

secretly sabotaging the unity government between Hamas and the PA and failing to make any effort to restrain Netanyahu's most savage inclinations. In his Middle East diplomacy, John Kerry doesn't shuttle so much as flutter, every tedious conversation monitored by Israeli intelligence to assure he doesn't deviate from the script. There is, naturally, some karmic justice in the wiretapping of a serial wiretapper.

There's more dissent against the war in the Knesset than in the U.S. congress, which now functions as a fully-programmed automaton of the Israel lobby. When it comes to Israel, even Rand Paul snaps to attention, distancing himself from his father's heresies.

So Gaza stands against the Israeli behemoth: poor, weak, alone.

All of this may be so and yet one can't help but conclude that Israel's dominion is fragile. That, in fact, Israel is losing. Israel is losing, but is not yet conscious of the fact. Why? Because it is Israel, which has surrounded itself with walls and covered itself with an Iron Dome, which is truly isolated, which exists in a hothouse of its own design, exposed to the merciless law of moral entropy.

With Netanyahu strutting like a blow-dry Pompey Maximus, the IDF feels compelled to assert its power every four or five years with fusillades of rockets and bloody ground incursions. The nation has become seduced with its own technological omnipotence: it's sophisticated weaponry, it's drones, it's Iron Dome. Israel has now gone beyond blaming the victims. The goal now seems to be one of annihilation. First of Palestinian identity, then the Palestinians themselves from Gaza.

There is a bloody dialectic at work. The path that Israel has chosen, one of separation and isolation enforced by eruptions of extreme violence, will lead inexorably to its own ruin. As for the people of Gaza, the tenacity of their resistance, their unshakeable will to be free, is an affirmation of their humanity—and that is the most decisive rebuke of Israel's revolting cruelties. **CP**



## EMPIRE BURLESQUE

# Trapped in a Mad World

BY CHRIS FLOYD

Madness reigns. Madness, and a malevolent will. A virus in the mind, mutating, spreading, growing ever-more virulent, devouring its host. It's as if it has already eaten away huge tracts of the collective mind, destroying neural networks that once kept that mind in balance. Memory, capacity for empathy, regulators of anxiety and aggression, sustainers of higher-order thinking (reason, reflection, self-awareness, imagination)—all are atrophied, diminished, blunted. Madness encloses and constricts; the field of consciousness narrows, and rote reactions – the deepest grooves cut by the most primitive processes—take over.

The dispassionate observation required for insight and wise choices—and the emotional courage necessary for a genuine, open engagement with others—are impossible to achieve in the disorder of this madness. Instead we have robotic repetition of habitual behaviors; hysterical, aggressive projections of panic and fear onto demonized others; and a regression to barbaric, animalistic drives for dominance and submission.

We see it on all sides, on nearly every front, across regions, nations, cultures. We see it in politics and government, in religion, in business, the same dynamic everywhere: primitive savagery and hard-hearted stupidity behind a guise of savvy expertise, noble ideals, technological sophistication. We see it increasingly in populations fracturing along cultural lines—lines defined largely by shallow media tropes and commercial interests—as the disordered collective mind loses its understanding of such highly evolved notions as the common good, the common humanity of all – or, in the words of Arthur Silber, “the in-

finite worth of a single individual life”—and instead retreats, fearfully and blindly, into tribalism, sectarianism and “exceptionalism.”

The current catastrophes shaking the world—Gaza, Ukraine, Syria, Iraq – give ample evidence of the disorder. In each case, witless elites blunder on and on in their automatic responses. Take the Iraq-Syria hydra. Barack Obama—self-proclaimed bringer of hope and change—sends troops and drones and planes back to Iraq to defend a corrupt and authoritarian American-installed regime against an Islamic insurgency ... while demanding \$500 million to arm and train the same insurgency in Syria: the identical insanity of violent intervention and “savvy” geopolitical gaming that has led the country, and the world, from disaster to disaster, year after year. Like a robot, he doesn't know what else to do. Afflicted with the madness, he literally cannot think straight. He just keeps doing what the system has programmed him to do: kill people, force them to do your will, keep the War Machine expanding and churning, making big money for the few while plunging the many into fear, chaos and death.

You will find the same in each crisis. Historical amnesia wipes out any lessons that might be learned from the past, while the drives of the lower brain, blindly seeking short-term gain, know nothing and care nothing about future consequences. Instead we are trapped, like the mad, in an “Eternal Now,” an airless, depthless present, where horrible things just “happen,” seemingly springing up from nowhere—like ISIS in the Mesopotamian desert—for no clear reason.

For example, the downing of the

Malaysian airliner over Ukraine was a tragedy 20 years in the making, starting with the Western elite's insane decision to desolate Russia with “Shock Doctrine” tactics and support for a corrupt regime, hoping to leave the country supine and ripe for exploitation. Meanwhile, they pushed NATO to the very borders of Russia, betraying solemn promises not to do so. In this desolation, which drove millions of people to premature deaths, a turn to authoritarianism and distrust was virtually inevitable.

But that was not all. Still heedless, still driven by short-term gain, Washington spent billions to destabilize Ukraine and oust the elected government for a more amenable one. From this followed the annexation of Crimea and the civil war in eastern Ukraine—and an airplane blown from the sky. Again, no knowledge of the past, no thought for the future.

This is not to say that there isn't calculation and deliberation behind the madness. The Israeli slaughterfest in Gaza is the result of many months of planning and careful deception to “justify” it in the world's eyes. But the attack itself is just another robotic repetition of habitual behavior. Israel cannot solve its “Palestinian problem” with these repeated assaults, no matter how bloody. It cannot “secure the realm” or build a stable and secure future with these policies. But afflicted with the madness—nationalism, sectarianism, short-term profit for elites – it plunges recklessly on.

Madness rules. Wisdom has fled, empathy is hiding. Some malevolent *spiritus mundi* is in ascendance. We must resist it in every way we can. We must keep a higher idea of humanity alive, even if, like a Chekhov character, we have to look hundreds of years ahead to see the chance for a better world. We must do our flawed and finite bit to build that future. And in this way, we will enact, in some small measure, the humanity we hope to preserve. **CP**



## GRASPING AT STRAWS

# What Recovery?

BY MIKE WHITNEY

It's amazing that Obama can keep hammering away at the recovery trope when things have only degenerated for working people.

Did you know that per-capita income has barely risen by a lousy 1.2 percent for the last two years? Or that the U.S. labor market still has a deficit of more than 7 million jobs? Or that there are more than one million fewer people working today than six years ago in 2008? Or that the real growth of the U.S. economy has been less than 1 percent per year for the last seven years? Or that 10 million borrowers are still underwater on their mortgages? Or that the homeownership rate just hit a 19-year low?

I could go on and on, but why bother? Everyone knows the economy stinks, which is why retail spending and personal consumption are in the tank. It's because people have started socking away more money so they have something to fall back on when the roof caves in again. According to TrimTabs Research, "more than twice as much money has gone into checking and savings accounts instead of stocks and bonds this year." People no longer trust the market, so they've started putting more of their hard-earned cash into risk-free investments, like U.S. Treasuries and cash, and given up on stocks altogether. They don't care that savings accounts are the equivalent of sticking money in a mattress. They'd rather know that their money is safe than roll the dice on another Wall Street flimflam. Those days are over.

So why do stocks keep rising when the average "Joe" has stayed on the sidelines?

It's because 85 percent of equities are owned by institutional investors.

Mom and Pop investors don't really matter anymore. What matters is the big boys, and the big boys are going to keep loading up on stocks until the free money (QE) runs out and the zero rates go away. Until then, it's party time. And a big part of that party is stock buybacks.

When a corporation buys back its own shares, it pushes the price of the stock higher without adding any real "productive" value to the company. According to the Wall Street Journal: "Last year, the corporations in the Russell 3000...repurchased \$567.6 billion worth of their own shares... (bringing) total buybacks since the beginning of 2005 to \$4.21 trillion—or nearly one-fifth of the total value of all U.S. stocks today" (Wall Street Journal)

So, you see, stock buybacks, exploding margin debt, which just hit another peak last week, and the Fed's ballooning balance sheet, are the main reasons why stocks have continued to climb higher. The higher prices have much less to do with steadily eroding earnings, over-stretched valuations, or the state of the economy, which is barely growing at 1 percent in the first two quarters of 2014.

This helps to explain why we are presently experiencing "the greatest bull market in 85 years" while, at the same time, the economy is undergoing the "the worst recovery of the post WW2 era." It's the policy, stupid. If the Fed's low rates and easy money didn't create incentives for overinvestment, then the stock prices would more closely reflect conditions in the real economy. But when the Fed floods the financial system with trillions in liquidity, well then, there's going to be some distortions.

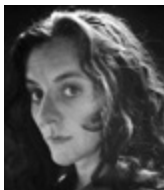
Of course, it didn't have to be this

way. Had Congress and the president done what they needed to do and doubled the amount of fiscal stimulus to \$1.6 trillion in 2009, then everything might have been hunky-dory. As more money circulated through the real economy, hiring would have increased, economic activity would have picked up, investment would have improved, confidence would have been restored, and the economy would have rebounded. But since the emphasis was on deficit reduction, fiscal spending was kept at a minimum. The intention was to create the precise conditions that we see today, that is, a hobbled, slow-growth economy where the high-paying jobs have vanished, where savers and retirees cannot make ends meet on their low-yielding investments, where public funding for essential safety net programs is maxed out, and where the federal government is forced to slash the size of its workforce due to shrinking tax receipts. President Obama has successfully implemented the GOP's "strangle the beast" strategy without as much as a peep of protest from his devoted supporters. It's extraordinary.

Naturally, the Fed has spared no expense for the investor class even though Main Street has taken it in the stern-sheets. The Fed has shrunk the supply of financial assets by \$4 trillion pushing stock and bond prices into the stratosphere doubling or tripling the wealth of everyone heavily invested in equities.

Meanwhile, the media continues to praise the Fed's policies as a vital part of the fictitious recovery; a recovery in which "95% of income gains from 2009 to 2012 have gone to the top 1% of the earning population"; a recovery in which American household wealth has plunged by 36 percent since 2003; a recovery in which more than 100 tent cities have sprung up across the country in the last year as more families fall out of the dwindling middle class and try to deal with grinding poverty, unemployment, and hopelessness.

Some recovery, eh? **CP**



DAYDREAM NATION

## **Appetite for Destruction**

BY KRISTIN KOLB

Since we last met, the hair on my head and pubis has vanished. But the worst of it has been the loss of my gnarly nose hairs and bushy unibrow, so when I venture out to buy groceries or parade to medical appointments, I prefer the look of hijab and sunglasses to protect myself from germs and appear swarthy. No matter, on the public transit of Vancouver, everyone is on their own iCloud.

"No, just a lady with Stage 3 breast cancer, undergoing neoadjuvant chemo—that means BEFORE surgery—look at all these bleeding organic beets and here is my health file number."

No one asks.

Cancer is lonely and it is shameful from the perspective of a healthy North American. I live in THE city where fitness is religion, after hosting the 2010 Olympics and electing a gap-toothed, cyclist mayor and organic juice baron.

Still, I live with the cancer that is probably the bougie-est and white-est. Who gives a lab rat's ass about the breast cancer industry, and pink ribbons—well-documented as the mall of medical America by feminists like Audre Lorde and Barbara Ehrenreich (who both dealt with breast cancer)? I didn't.

In July, a plane-full of AIDS scientists died in a crash and a major Ebola researcher caught that horrific disease. Gaza, of course, is an unspeakable graveyard.

As cancer is not caught, or shot or warred—it emerges from deep within—I still wrestle with why anyone but the afflicted would care about such a boring disease. Susan Sontag called it the tuberculosis of our times, in the 1970s, in her brilliant essay, *Illness as Metaphor*. "Now it is cancer's turn to be

the disease that does not knock before it enters, cancer that fills its role as a ruthless, secret, invasion."

Sontag battled three different cancers before expiring, exuberantly, 30 years later. In her essay, she noted that TB was romantic, sexual, and creative, and guides us through a literary history of this orgasmic illness, contrasting it with crappy old cancer.

"I look pale," said [Lord] Byron, looking into the mirror. "I should like to die of consumption."

"Why?" asked his tubercular friend, Tom Moore.

"Because all the ladies would say, 'Look at that poor Byron. How interesting he looks dying.'"

However, the literary record cites cancer as a disease of repression and inhibition: the small-souled people get it. It's the body vengefully attacking itself for not fulfilling its potential.

"Verlaine shot Rimbaud," as young singer Lydia Loveless reminds us, "because he loved him so." He didn't spend years hairless and deteriorating in a "chemo lounge" in between the surgeon's hungry knife.

The cancer tome of our times, Dr. Siddhartha Mukherjee's *The Emperor of All Maladies* digs nearly 600 pages into a "biography" of cancer, symbolically, the crab. Tumors can live, even outside our bodies, with cellular growth uncontrolled in pathology lab. I'd love to see mine under a microscope. Some describe cancer as the perfect disease of capitalism, selfish and fulfilling both the excesses of life and aggressive death in its appetite for more. Now, PBS' hallowed documentarian, Ken Burns, has taken a liking to Mukherjee's book and a mini-series about it will air in Spring 2015.

Expect all the typical melodrama, and historical trivia, of Burns' other "epics." Also, note it's one big advertisement for the promise of a cure in these times, as exulted in the trailer and the list of sponsors, including: Genetech, the Cancer Treatment Center of America, Siemens, Bristol Meyers-Squibb, the American Association of Cancer Research, the American Cancer Society (my favorite source for daffodils, walkathons and cheery "survivors," i.e. "I just did whatever my doctor told me to do and I had five wigs so I would change my hair color every day! Cancer is fun!"), etc.

That's a lot of cash that could help women who can't fly to M.D. Anderson in Houston, or Dana Farber in Boston for clinical trials. I suppose that's the point. Give money to support charities that will publicize and thus prevent cancer, and give good cred to Big Pharma, while ignoring the plight of suffering and dying women right now.

Mukherjee's book is worthy of the praise received—I'm a third of the way through and I'm fascinated, if depressed. Because treatment, at least for breast cancer, hasn't changed much over the centuries: cut and burn, either from the inside or out. Medieval surgeons would perform a mastectomy using fire, acid, while strapping the woman down. Is that much different from chemo, surgery, and radiation?

Lorde was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1978, and underwent a mastectomy, eventually dying from the disease 14 years later. She wrote, in her *Cancer Journals*: "The only really happy people I have ever met are those of us who work against these deaths with all the energy of our living, recognizing the deep and fundamental unhappiness with which we are surrounded, at the same time as we fight to keep from being submerged by it. ... It is a wonder we are not all dying of a malignant society. The idea that happiness can insulate us against the results of our environmental madness is a rumor circulated by our enemies to destroy us." **CP**

# Shock and Awe in Gaza

## How the Media and Human Rights Groups Cover for Israeli War Crimes

BY JONATHAN COOK

On July 8, as Israel officially launched its most recent attack on Gaza, the BBC published an online report noting that some of the graphic images trending on social media were not in fact the result of the latest air and sea strikes battering the Palestinians' besieged coastal enclave. Its analysis "found that some [images] date as far back as 2009 and others are from conflicts in Syria and Iraq."

The implication, amplified by pro-Israeli websites, was that social media activists were trying to deceive the watching world into believing that Gaza was suffering a greater onslaught than was really the case. This was more "Pallywood", as Israel's supporters like to deride the increasing visual documentation of Israeli war crimes in an age of smartphone cameras.

Probably unthinkingly, the Huffington Post echoed these sentiments, arguing that the BBC report suggested "images shared across social media purportedly showing death and destruction caused by Israel in Gaza were fake." But in truth, the images covered in the report were not "fake" in any meaningful sense of the word.

The misattributed explosions and crushed bodies showed the real suffering of Palestinians in Gaza during earlier Israeli attacks—Operations Cast Lead of winter 2008-09 and Pillar of Defence four years later—or of victims caught in recent fighting in Syria and Iraq.

Nor were the solidarity activists who shared these images resorting to them because there was a dearth of horrifying visual evidence from Israel's latest bombardment of Gaza.

It was simply that Gaza's "shock and awe" destruction by an almost invisible Israeli aerial presence, and the effects on Palestinian bodies of missile blasts and collapsing homes, looked much as it did in 2008 and 2012. The names of the operations may change—Israel dubbed this latest one "Protective Edge" in English, avoiding a literal translation of the more menacing Hebrew title "Solid Cliff"—but the toll on civilian lives were inevitably the same.

The images, however misattributed, were a far more honest record of Israel's latest orgiastic bout of slaughter in Gaza than the media's obfuscatory references to an ongoing "cycle of violence".

### Israel's missing arsenal

There was a rich irony to the BBC, which has done so much to veil the realities of Israel's ritual war-making, criticising social media users. To take just one example of many,

the corporation's diplomatic correspondent, Jonathan Marcus, promised in an online article to explain "What weapons are being used in the Israel-Gaza conflict".

At length he enumerated the kinds of rockets in Hamas' hands and their range. But what of Israel's massive offensive arsenal? This was the extent of his disclosure: "The full panoply of Israeli air power has been used in a steadily escalating series of attacks against rocket launch sites, weapons stores, and the command elements of Hamas and other groups." Note there was no mention, despite documentation, of strikes on civilians.

He then quickly switched to Israel's "defensive" weapons. "As important in determining Israel's strategic outlook as its offensive operations is the reliance that it places on missile defence—the Iron Dome system—to defend its civilian population." The rest of the article continued in the same vein.

Marcus could hardly have done a better job of promoting the idea of the Palestinians as aggressors and Israelis as the victims had he been paid to do so by Israel's ministry of hasbara (propaganda). The article concealed the fact that by the time of its publication, on July 10, dozens of Palestinians, including many children, had been killed by Israel's "defensive" operation.

Meanwhile, Hamas' fearsome arsenal had by this time killed precisely no Israelis—and barely any had been harmed, excepting the reports of numerous Israeli victims of "anxiety", many of them presumably provoked by reports like Marcus'. (During these operations no one has the time or resources to record the vast number of Palestinians in Gaza suffering from anxiety.)

As the explosions and disfigured bodies from Gaza blurred into an almost indistinguishable collage of suffering for social media activists, I too watched the coverage and analysis of the past weeks' events with a weary sense of *deja vu*.

When Hamas was not being presented as the aggressor, forcing Israel to "respond" and "retaliate", it was apparently a military leviathan. With its lightly armed cadres and the off-the-back-of-a-truck rockets, Hamas "exchanged fire" and "traded blows" with one of the most powerful armies in the world. A headline on yet another "balanced" BBC story declared: "Israel under renewed Hamas attack".

The dissembling, as ever, reached its apotheosis in the U.S. media. *The New York Times*, for example, offered headlines that stripped Israeli atrocities of their horrific import while invariably removing Israel from the scene entirely. A missile strike on July 10 that wiped out a family of nine Palestinians watching the World Cup was titled "Missile at beachside Gaza cafe finds patrons poised for World Cup", as if the missile itself took the decision to "find" them.

Similarly, when four children were hit by a missile on July 16, as they played football on a beach in full view of international correspondents in a hotel nearby, the *Times* editors changed an already weak headline—"Four young boys killed

playing on a Gaza beach”—to the downright mendacious: “Boys Drawn to Gaza Beach, and Into Center of Mideast Strife”. No blast, no deaths or injuries and, of course, no Israeli responsibility in sight. All of it whitewashed with that weasel word “strife”.

And what was the seemingly innocuous word “drawn” supposed to convey? Did it not hint that the boys had gone somewhere forbidden; that, in short, it was their fault for being in the wrong place, as though in Gaza there was a right place to be under the rain of Israeli missiles? Or maybe the *Times* editors hoped we would infer that they had been lured there by a more sinister, local hand.

Interventions by U.S. media organisations were not restricted to word games. NBC’s experienced Gaza reporter Ayman Mohyeldin, who has been the most even-handed of the U.S. correspondents, was told by studio executives he was being pulled from Gaza because of “security” concerns. The decision happened the same day he landed possibly the biggest scoop of his career: he had been playing ball with the boys moments before they were slaughtered. He never got to file his horrifying exclusive.

Strangely, however, Gaza was safe enough for Richard Engel, NBC’s correspondent in Tel Aviv, who immediately took Mohyeldin’s place in the tiny enclave. A storm of protest from viewers forced NBC to relent a few days later, allowing him back as inexplicably as they had required him to leave.

Diana Magnay also felt the long arm of the executives at CNN. During a live link located on a hill in Israel overlooking the Gaza Strip on July 17, the CNN correspondent had talked to anchor Wolf Blitzer as a missile slammed into Gaza behind her. As the explosion lit up the night sky, loud cheers could be heard just off-camera. A visibly discomfited Magnay was forced to explain as delicately as she could that crowds of Israelis came to watch and celebrate Gaza’s suffering.

A short time later she tweeted behind-the-scenes information. The mob had threatened her and her crew if they broadcast “a word wrong”. She described them, not ungenerously, as “scum”. Her tweet survived 10 minutes, suggesting just how closely U.S. correspondents are being policed by station executives. Shortly afterwards, CNN announced that she had been reassigned to Moscow, apparently the US media’s equivalent of a Siberian re-education camp.

But the treatment of Mohyeldin and Magnay doubtless served a larger purpose, reminding the US media corps of the limits of acceptable discourse when it comes to Israel.

## Abductions set the scene

For much of the media, the starting-point for the latest “escalation” was the abduction on June 12 of three Israeli teenagers while hitch-hiking from a seminary located in a notoriously violent settler enclave in the Palestinian city of Hebron. For nearly three weeks, Israeli troops scoured the West Bank, raiding thousands of homes and making hun-

dreds of arrests, on the pretext of searching for the youths. Their bodies were eventually found in a shallow grave near Hebron, on June 30.

(In turn, though largely ignored by the media, the inciting cause of the abductions was most likely the execution by Israeli soldiers of two unarmed Palestinian youths taking part in a protest on May 15, Nakba Day, near Ramallah. The moment of the boys’ deaths was caught on film from various angles, showing they had posed no threat to the soldiers stationed nearby. Israel again suggested that the video evidence—some of it provided by CNN—was faked.)

Opportunistic as ever, Israel’s prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, imposed a gag order on reporting a phone call made to the emergency services by one of the Israeli youths shortly after the abduction. Gunshots can be heard. The abandoned car, found the next day, had eight bullet holes and the teenagers’ blood on it. In short, Israeli officials knew from the outset that the three youngsters were dead.

Israel also quickly determined who they thought were the suspects: two or three young men from Hebron, who went underground almost immediately afterwards. They were from a family loosely affiliated with Hamas but also with a history of being, in the words of one Israeli analyst, “trouble-makers”. This tenuous link appears to have been the sole evidence for Netanyahu’s strident and oft-repeated claim that Hamas had ordered the abductions and that it alone would be held accountable—first in the West Bank, then in Gaza.

Mass raids across the West Bank, dubbed Operation Brother’s Keeper, rounded up hundreds of Hamas activists, most of them with no ties to the movement’s military wing. Netanyahu had good reason to wish to exploit the teenagers’ deaths as a way to eradicate Hamas’ infrastructure—from charities to newspapers—in the West Bank and turn the screws on the Islamic group in Gaza.

## Scuppering Palestinian unity

After the collapse in late April of the U.S.-imposed peace talks—for which Israel, unusually, had taken most blame—the endlessly accommodating Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas had partially reversed course, launching initiatives without Netanyahu and Washington’s prior approval.

It had applied to join a handful of international bodies, hinting that it might go so far as to join the International Criminal Court in the Hague, thereby exposing Israel to possible war crimes trials. Equally significantly, Abbas’ Fatah party, which dominates the West Bank, had signed a reconciliation agreement with Hamas, its chief political rival in Gaza, after seven years of bitter discord. The two groups set up a unity government of technocrats in early June and promised to arrange national elections for the first time since 2006.

Israel’s assault on Hamas in the West Bank—and, by stepping aside, the PA’s security forces’ implicit assent—were the first prong in Netanyahu’s plan to undermine the unity gov-

ernment. The attack on Gaza the second.

But the Israeli public's thirst for revenge—stoked by incitement from the prime minister down – was not slaked by the ransacking of the West Bank. Israeli mobs patrolled the streets of Jerusalem seeking out Palestinians to attack. One group went a step further: on July 2, they grabbed a 16-year-old boy, Mohammed Abu Khdeir, close to his home in the Shuafat neighbourhood, and drove off with him to a forest. On the way, they beat him and made him drink flammable liquid. At their destination, they set him on fire.

conventions, which is the vast majority—to interpret and enforce as best it can their provisions on behalf of the victims of armed conflict.

Its role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been notoriously difficult, given that Israel signed the conventions early on but has refused to accept that their provisions apply in the occupied Palestinian territories.

To the causal observer, an ICRC statement issued on June 15 appeared routine. It expressed concern for the three Israeli teenagers abducted three days earlier and called for their



CASUALTIES FROM IDF STRIKE ON UN SCHOOL IN GAZA. PHOTO: AFP

## Red Cross urges release

Into this medley of deceptions and bad faith stepped the guardians of our moral scruples: the international human rights organisations. They are beholden to the system of international humanitarian law that is supposed to govern the relations between states, and offer guidance in circumstances of war and occupation. Our politicians and media may not be trusted, but surely these exponents of an ethical global order can be.

The foundational statutes of international law—the Geneva Conventions—are upheld by the Swiss-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). It has been given the responsibility—at least by those states that have signed the

“immediate and unconditional release”, noting that international law prohibits abductions and the taking of hostages. The ICRC also offered to act as a “neutral intermediary” to achieve the youths’ release.

But in practice, the statement was an exceptional departure from the ICRC’s customary behaviour, at least towards Palestinians.

In the wake of the three youths’ abduction, as already noted, Israel launched a wave of raids in the West Bank, effectively kidnapping anyone with the faintest connection to Hamas, including journalists, charity workers, students and politicians. Within days, dozens of Palestinians had been seized and transferred out of Palestinian territory into Israel, in violation of international law. Soon the number would

reach more than 500. Most were held without charge or access to lawyers.

These prisoners joined thousands of others in Israel's jails, including some 200 inmates held without charge. Many of them were in the midst of a protracted hunger strike that was endangering their lives.

Further, Israel had in its jails a similar number of Palestinian children—all illegally held in Israel—who were rarely able to see their families. As groups like Defence for Children International had observed, these children were routinely abused. They were often seized from their beds in the middle of the night, and then once in detention subjected to torture and solitary confinement. What did the ICRC have to say about their condition? Had it called for their immediate release or offered to act as mediator?

Asked about this by Ali Abunimah of *Electronic Intifada*, an ICRC spokeswoman said: "ICRC doesn't usually call for the release of detainees in general. We monitor their condition and if we have any concerns we discuss with the authorities issues regarding their treatment."

That fitted with the kinds of statements more usually associated with the ICRC. Relating to Israel's rampage through the West Bank and its mass arrests, ICRC tweeted dryly on June 18: "Military operations in the West Bank and Gaza: ICRC steps up its activities." Regarding the hunger-strikers, the ICRC's concern amounted to nothing more than a supremely disinterested humanitarianism. On June 17, the Red Cross offered a typical update: "We visited 27 hungerstrikers so far this week in Assaf Harofe, Poriya, Tel Hashomer and Wolfson hospitals."

## Secret prison comes to light

The ICRC's traditional justification for such studied detachment was explained to me back in 2003, when I investigated a secret prison in Israel, known as Facility 1391.

The role of 1391 was to disappear Arab prisoners that were not covered by Israel's responsibilities as an occupying power. Many of the inmates were from Lebanon, seized by Israel during its long occupation of the country that ended in 2000. It was Israel's Abu Ghraib, and as in its Iraqi counterpart torture as common.

During my research I was told that the ICRC were aware of the prison. When I called the office in Jerusalem to find out what they knew, a spokesman refused to say anything on record. In fact, he refused to say anything apart from confirming that they knew of the prison's existence and location, although he claimed they had not had any access.

The ICRC's justification to me for refusing to speak further or to criticize Israel for what amounted to a gross violation of international law was that they believed it was essential to maintain a position of "absolute political neutrality". I was told it was in the vital interests of the Palestinian prison population that the ICRC keep Israel's trust so that Red Cross

access would not be withdrawn.

But the principle of "absolute political neutrality" that was so crucial to the ICRC back in 2003—and has directed their policy for decades, given their almost complete silence on Israel's belligerent occupation—had been jettisoned with shocking alacrity in defending the rights of the three Israeli teenagers. Did the ICRC not also owe "absolute political neutrality" towards the Palestinians?

## Power-friendly humanitarians

The truth is that the ICRC's role in safeguarding international humanitarian law is subject to its careful assessment of where power resides in the international system. Making an enemy of Israel is extremely risky for an organization that relies on the support of major western powers. Making an enemy of the Palestinian people, a nation-in-waiting that needs every scrap of help it can get from the international community, is cost-free. Moral scruples can go hang.

That was also presumably why Navi Pillay, the United Nations' respected high commissioner for human rights, adopted the stale language of diplomacy rather than an expression of moral outrage over the attack on Gaza. An anaemic statement issued on July 11 carefully avoided identifying Israel's actions as war crimes, as they clearly were.

Instead Pillay noted that the reports of civilian casualties "raise serious doubt about whether the Israeli strikes have been in accordance with international humanitarian law". It was a familiar soundtrack of muted disapproval, one that for decades has endorsed international inertia.

Human Rights Watch, based in New York, performed no better. It issued a statement on the fighting on July 9 that was barely distinguishable from press releases published by the organisation during Israel's operations in 2009 and 2012.

I have had run-ins with HRW before, not least in 2006 when I took issue with its lead researcher Peter Bouckaert. In the immediate wake of Israel's attack on Lebanon that year, Bouckaert opined to the *New York Times*: "I mean, it's perfectly clear that Hezbollah is directly targeting civilians, and that their aim is to kill Israeli civilians. We don't accuse the Israeli army of deliberately trying to kill civilians. Our accusation, clearly stated in the report, is that the Israeli army is not taking the necessary precautions to distinguish between civilian and military targets."

This seemed a grossly presumptuous statement, as I observed at the time. Bouckaert made his claims, even though Israel's precision strikes had killed many hundreds of Lebanese, a majority of them again civilians, while Hizbullah rocket attacks had killed only small numbers of Israelis, a majority of them soldiers. This is what I wrote:

How does Bouckaert know that Israel's failure to distinguish between civilian and military targets was simply a technical failure, a failure to take precautions, and not intentional? Was he or another HRW

researcher sitting in one of the military bunkers in northern Israel when army planners pressed the button to unleash the missiles from their spy drones? Was he sitting alongside the air force pilots as they circled over Lebanon dropping their US-made bombs or tens of thousands of “cluster munitions”, tiny land mines that are now sprinkled over a vast area of south Lebanon? Did he have intimate conversations with the Israeli chiefs of staff about their war strategy? ...

He has no more idea than you or me what Israel’s military planners and its politicians decided was necessary to achieve their war goals. In fact, he does not even know what those goals were.

### **In bed with the State Dept**

In its July 9 statement, HRW trod the same ground, beginning: “Palestinian rocket attacks on Israel appear to be indiscriminate or targeted at civilian population centers, which are war crimes.” Meanwhile, the Israeli offensive was characterised in the following terms: “Israeli attacks targeting homes may amount to prohibited collective punishment.”

So for HRW, Palestinian rocket attacks that had killed no one were “war crimes”, while Israel’s massive assault on Gaza, which quickly led to the deaths of dozens of Palestinians, many of them women and children, was simply “collective punishment”. Both were violations of international law, of course. Put another way, both were war crimes. But, as so often before in this conflict, HRW could only find the courage to articulate the accusation when it referred to Palestinians.

Similarly, in an outrageous mangling of international law, the statement also suggested that Hamas leaders were legitimate military targets even when not involved in combat. Israel, on this reckoning, was entitled to strike Hamas figures even as they slept or ate in their family homes. The problem was that, were such an interpretation to be consistently applied by HRW, it would sanction Hamas to target any home in Israel where a family member serves in the armed forces or is a reservist—that is, most Israeli homes.

As Helena Cobban, a Middle East expert, noted of a subsequent report by HRW, published on July 16, that made the same error:

How many times do we have to spell this out? The essential distinction in international law is not between ‘fighters’ and ‘civilians’ – which are the categories used throughout this HRW report – but between “combatants” and “noncombatants”. A fighter who is not currently engaged in either the conduct, the command, or the planning of military operations is not a combatant. ...It is quite illegal to target such an individual.

### **Dragging their heels**

HRW’s July 16 report was at least an improvement on its earlier one, not least because it included actual case studies in Gaza, in which the evidence of war crimes was indisputable. But this is a pattern too: groups like HRW wade in at the beginning of an Israeli attack with equivocations, only finding their moral backbone later on, as the mounting evidence of Israeli war crimes starts to discomfort the international community. HRW does not lead the opposition to war crimes, as it should; it merely provides the excuse to seek a way out, but only after nearly everyone is agreed that it is time to bring things to an end.

In short, HRW is not the voice of a global moral conscience; it is an organisation keen to keep its access to, and credibility with, policy elites.

That is hardly surprising given that HRW, while styling itself as “one of the world’s leading independent [human rights] organizations”, has a virtual revolving door policy with the foreign policy establishment, especially the US state department.

The cosy ties between the U.S. administration and HRW have become so glaring that it prompted a recent letter of complaint signed by more than 100 public figures, including Nobel peace prize laureates Adolfo Perez Esquivel and Mairead Maguire, and the former UN Assistant Secretary General Hans von Sponeck.

They noted that HRW’s recently departed Washington advocacy director, Tom Malinowski, was a former special assistant to President Bill Clinton, and speechwriter to former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Last year, he left HRW to become an assistant to the current Secretary of State, John Kerry. But not before he had used his role at HRW to justify “under limited circumstances” the legitimacy of extraordinary renditions – the kidnapping and smuggling of individuals to torture sites out of official U.S. oversight.

Meanwhile, the vice-chair of HRW’s board of directors is Susan Manilow, who describes herself as “a longtime friend to Bill Clinton”. Also, HRW’s Americas’ advisory committee includes Myles Frechette, a former U.S. ambassador to Colombia, and Michael Shifter, a former director for the US government-funded National Endowment for Democracy. A recent member of the committee was Miguel Diaz, a CIA analyst in the 1990s who now works at the State Department.

Similarly, Suzanne Nossel, an exponent of pre-emptive war, left her senior position at HRW in the late 2000s to join the State Department. She later went on to join another leading human rights group, Amnesty International USA, this time as its executive director.

The rest of HRW’s board may not be so tainted by direct political connections, but most are hardly champions of the common man either. A significant number are millionaires who made their fortunes in the financial industries.

This incestuous relationship between the elite policy-

makers and the elite human rights community is endemic. Consider Unicef, the humanitarian children's fund of the UN. It has been virtually silent on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite masses of evidence of systematic abuse of children by Israel. Local watchdogs have tried to raise a cry about Israel's imprisonment and torture of children, and about the blockade of Gaza that has led to widespread and chronic malnutrition. Unicef has uttered barely a word in support.

Might that have anything to do with the fact that Anthony Lake is its executive director? That is the same Lake who served as National Security Advisor to Bill Clinton in the 1990s; and the same Clinton who has repeatedly declared his fealty to Israel.

International human rights monitors have adopted a bland, risk-averse "humanitarianism" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a way to avoid engaging with the conflict's more profound, and urgent, political dimensions. Like the media and the politicians, the great fear of international human rights groups is running foul of the Israel lobby.

### Shaping the elite discourse

Nonetheless, Israel is in difficulty. It is gradually losing the battle for public opinion. Grandly, Israel calls this development "delegitimization", but in truth it simply a growing popular awareness of the realities of Israeli occupation, fueled by the more plentiful opportunities for the public to bypass official sources of information.

The task of Israel's lobbyists is to slow down this awakening as much as possible and to insulate policy-makers from its effects. That is the stated mission, for example, of Britain's fledgling pro-Israel media lobby, known as BICOM or the Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre. BICOM is a product of Israel's concern at the increasingly globalized nature of English-language media.

For decades, the Israel lobby focused its work almost exclusively on the United States, expecting its super-power patron to keep it out of diplomatic, military and financial trouble. It developed a political lobbyfuelled—AIPAC, or the American Israel Public Affairs Committee—that worked to intimidate the U.S. Congress and, alongside it, the White House. No U.S. president, certainly not one up for re-election, dares turn down an invitation to speak at AIPAC's annual conference.

Less visible but just as important are Israel's lobbying organisations targeting the US media. The best known, the Anti-Defamation League, is led by Abraham Foxman, whose own bigotry should have discounted him from the job were the ADL really interested in defamation. But Foxman is an arch-exponent of defamation as long as it is directed at Israel's opponents.

In early July, for example, he wrote a commentary for the Huffington Post berating Palestinians for a culture "that espouses pure hatred of Israelis, and often Jews, regardless of their actions, and is wholly uninterested in living at peace

with its neighbors".

But the ADL has two other major allies in its campaign of intimidation of the U.S. media: Honest Reporting and Camera, the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting. The latter has a journalists' "hall of shame" on its website that documents its run-ins with most of the major journalists who have covered the region for U.S. audiences.

I should disclose that I have a small place of honor there too for my brief flirtation with the *International Herald Tribune* after it was taken over by the *New York Times*. My two entries for supposed "inaccuracy" pale next to the current 33 listings for Jodi Rudoren, the *New York Times*' correspondent. Her appearances reflect neither a documented failure of accuracy (or rather, not in the way the lobby claims) nor a pro-Palestinian bias in her reporting. In fact, Rudoren has been almost as much of an Israel partisan as her predecessor, Ethan Bronner.

Rather, Camera's relentless campaign against Rudoren is a measure of the *New York Times*' critical role in shaping elite opinion. The lobbyists' goal is either to hound her into submission—to encourage her to self-censor more effectively than she already does—or to pressure her editors into moving her elsewhere, on the assumption that her replacement will find their room for journalistic integrity even further circumscribed.

### Breach in the dam

With the U.S. Congress and media bullied into submission, Israel was largely able to shape elite opinion in the U.S. But a breach in the dam has grown over the past two decades. With the rise of the internet and social media, Americans enjoy access to a much more diverse media than they once did, including to liberal—at least by U.S. standards—publications in Britain such as the BBC and the Guardian.

Israel's lobbyists identified this danger early on, shortly after the outbreak of the second intifada in late 2000. Soon Israel had started to replicate the U.S. lobby in Britain, creating BICOM in 2002. It and other Israel lobby groups have over the years battered the BBC into submission, turning it into another mouthpiece for Israeli propaganda.

The extent of the corporation's capitulation became impossible to ignore in early 2009, when it refused for the first time in its history to broadcast adverts for the disaster emergencies committee's appeal, because the selected charitable cause was Gaza, which had just been laid waste by Israeli bombing. Even British politicians lambasted the BBC for its craven decision.

The lessons learnt by BICOM were no doubt derived from the lobby's long experience in the U.S. In 2010 BICOM staff joined Israeli strategists in drafting a paper called "Winning the Battle of the Narrative". In it, they made the following observation:

The political elites in Europe and in the U.S. are much more tolerant towards Israel's policies than [sic] the

wider public in those same countries; however, the public's mood and the media's coverage (especially in the U.K.) determine the government's leeway to pursue a pro-Israeli foreign policy agenda.

Jonathan Cummings, the former director of BICOM's Israel office, noted the same year that British media were influencing elites outside the U.K., presumably a reference to the U.S. "With media outlets like the BBC, the Guardian, and the Financial Times playing an increasingly significant part in framing the issue well beyond its own borders, British attitudes carry far."

He suggested that pro-Israel lobbyists should therefore reinvigorate their efforts to "create barriers to delegitimation, insulating policy-making environments" from public opinion.

This activity is effective. It is the reason why the policymakers, the media and the most influential international human rights organisations still consistently fail to convey the shocking reality of what Israel is doing on the ground to Palestinians. It is why public opinion is still rarely reflected in foreign policy decisions affecting Israel.

This assault on Gaza, like the earlier ones, will leave hundreds of Palestinians dead, a majority of them civilians. It will end neither the siege nor the resistance to it. It will outrage public opinion around the globe. But our elites will carry on giving Israel financial, military and diplomatic cover, as they have now done for more than six decades. **CP**

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## Let's Stop Calling It a Drought

### The Crisis Over California's Water

BY JOSHUA FRANK

*"Whiskey is for drinking, water is for fighting over."*  
- Mark Twain

It doesn't take long once you've left the greater Los Angeles area, away from all the lush lawns, water features, green parkways and manicured foliage to see that California is in the midsts of a real, and potentially deadly water crisis. Acres and acres of abandoned farms, dry lake beds, empty reservoirs—the water is simply no longer there and likely won't ever be back.

What's happening here in California is far more than a 'severe drought' as the media has dubbed the situation. The

word 'drought' gives the impression that this is all short-lived, an inconvenience we have to deal with for a little while. But the lack of water isn't temporary, it's the new norm. California's ecology as some 38 million residents know it is forever changing—and climate change is the culprit. At least that's the prognosis a few well-respected climatologists have been saying for the last two decades, and their predictions have not only been accurate, they've been conservative in their estimates.

UC Santa Cruz Professor Lisa Sloan co-authored a 2004 report in which she and her colleague Jacob Sewall predicted the melting of the Arctic ice shelf would cause a decrease in precipitation in California and hence a severe drought. The Arctic melting, they claimed, would warp the offshore jet stream in the Pacific Ocean. Not only have their models proved correct, Prof. Sloan recently told Joe Fromm of *ThinkProgress* she believes "the actual situation in the next few decades could be even more dire" than their study suggested.

As they anticipated ten years ago, the jet stream has indeed shifted, essentially pushing winter storms up north and out of California. As a result, snowpack in the Sierra Nevadas, which feeds water to most of Southern California and the agricultural operators of the Central Valley, have all but disappeared. Winters are drier and springs are no longer wet, which means when the warm summer months roll around there's no water to be cultivated.

The Los Angeles basin is a region that has long relied on snowmelt from mountains hundreds of miles away to feed its insatiable appetite for development, but that resource is rapidly evaporating. It is, perhaps, a just irony for the water thieves of Southern California that their wells are finally running dry. Prudence and restraint in water usage will soon be forced upon those who value the extravagant over the practical. It's the new way of the West as climate change's many impacts come to fruition.

Not that you'd notice much of this new reality as you travel L.A.'s bustling streets. Pools in the San Fernando Valley remain full, while tanned Californians wash their prized vehicles in the streets and soak their green lawns in the evenings. A \$500 fine can be handed out to residents who don't abide by the outdoor watering restrictions now in place, but I've yet to see any water cops patrolling neighborhoods for water wasters. In fact, in Long Beach, where I live, water managers have actually admitted they aren't planning to write any tickets. "We don't really intend to issue any fines, at least right now," said Matthew Veeh of the Long Beach Water Department.

Meanwhile up in Sacramento, Gov. Jerry Brown has called on all those living in the state to reduce their water use by 20 percent. That's almost one percentage point for every California community that is at risk of running out of water by the end of the year. Gov. Brown's efforts to conserve water

have fallen on deaf ears. A report issued in July by state regulators shows a one percent increase in water consumption across the state over the past 12 months, with the biggest increase occurring in Southern California's coastal communities.

"Not everybody in California understands how bad this drought is...and how bad it could be," said State Water Resources Water Control Board Chairwoman Felicia Marcus when the report was first released. "There are communities in

prices, as well as the demise of agriculture."

While it's clear that the decline in the state's water reserves will have a very real economic and day-to-day impact on Californians in the near future, it's also having an inexorable and devastating effect on the environment.

\* \* \*

The distinctive, twisted trees of Joshua Tree National Park are dying. The high desert is becoming even hotter and drier

than normal, dropping nearly 2 inches from its average of just over 4.5 inches of annual rainfall. The result: younger Joshua Trees, which grow at a snail's pace of around 3 inches per year, are perishing before they reach a foot in height. Their vanishing is a strong indicator that the peculiar trees of the park will not be replenished once they grow old and die.

After analyzing national climate data *The Desert Sun* reported, "[In] places from Palm Springs to Tucson, [we] found that average monthly temperatures were 1.7 degrees Fahrenheit hotter during the past 20 years as compared to



THE DWINDLING OF LAKE SHASTA. PHOTO: JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

danger of running out of water all over the state."

Perhaps there is a reason why people don't understand how bad the water crisis really is—they're daily lives have yet to be impacted. Unless the winter and spring of 2015 bring drenching rains, California only has 12-18 months of reserves left. Even the most optimistic of forecasts show a rapid decline in water reserves in the state in the decades to come. To put it in perspective, California hasn't seen this drastic of a decline in rainfall since the mid-1500s.

"This is a real emergency that requires a real emergency response," argues Jay Famiglietti, a senior water scientist at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory. "If Southern California does not step up and conserve its water, and if the drought continues on its epic course, there is nothing more that our water managers can do for us. Water availability in Southern California would be drastically reduced. With those reductions, we should expect skyrocketing water, food and energy

the average before 1960."

This increase in temperatures and the decrease in yearly rainfall are transforming the landscape and vegetation of California. Sadly Joshua Trees aren't the only native plants having a rough time surviving the changing climate. Pinyon pines, junipers and other species are being killed by beetle infestations as winters become more mild. Writes Ian James in *The Desert Sun*, "Researchers have confirmed that many species of trees and shrubs are gradually moving uphill in the Santa Rosa Mountains, and in Death Valley, photographs taken decades apart have captured a stunning shift as the endangered dune grass has been vanishing, leaving bare wind-rippled sand dunes."

Plants aren't the only living organisms being dealt a losing hand. "[California's] Native fishes and the ecosystems that support them are incredibly vulnerable to drought," Peter

Moyle, a professor at the UC Davis Center for Watershed Sciences, noted at a drought summit in Sacramento last fall. “There are currently 37 species of fish on the endangered species list in California – and there is every sign that that number will increase.”

Of those species, some eighty percent won’t survive if the trend continues. Scientists have also attributed the decline in tricolored blackbirds to the drought, which are also imperiled by development and pesticide use.

Salmon runs, however, may be taking the brunt of the drought. According to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, coho salmon may go extinct south of the Golden Gate straight in San Francisco if the rains don’t come quick. As environmental group Defenders of Wildlife notes, “All of the creeks between the Golden Gate and Monterey Bay are blocked by sandbars because of lack of rain, making it impossible for salmon to get to their native streams and breed. If critically endangered salmon do not get to their range to spawn this year, they could go extinct. This possible collapse of the salmon fishery is bad news for salmon fishermen and North Coast communities. California’s salmon industry is valued at \$1.4 billion in economic activity annually and about half that much in economic activity and jobs in Oregon. The industry employs tens of thousands of people from Santa Barbara to northern Oregon.”

And it’s not just the salmon fisheries that may dry up, so too may the real economic backbone of California: agriculture.

\* \* \*

If you purchased a bundle of fresh fruits or vegetables in the U.S. recently, there’s nearly a 50 percent chance they were grown in California. And while we’ve become accustomed to paying very little for such goods compared to other Western countries, that may soon change.

A study released in July by the Center for Watershed Sciences at the University of California reported the ag industry in California in the first six months of 2014 has lost \$2.2 billion and nearly 4% of all farm jobs—some 17,000 workers. As we’re only three years into what many believe is just the beginning of the crisis, those numbers are sure to increase.

“California’s agricultural economy overall is doing remarkably well, thanks mostly to groundwater reserves,” said Jay Lund, who co-authored the study and directs the Center for Watershed Sciences. “But we expect substantial local and regional economic and employment impacts. We need to treat that groundwater well so it will be there for future droughts.”

The pumping of groundwater, which is being treated as an endless and bountiful resource, may be making up for recent water loss, but for how long remains to be seen. California is the only state in the country that does not have a framework for groundwater management.

“We have to do a better job of managing groundwater basins to secure the future of agriculture in California,” said

Karen Ross, secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. “That’s why we’ve developed the California Water Action Plan and a proposal for local, sustainable groundwater management.” Currently Gov. Brown’s administration has allocated \$618.7 million to fund the Water Action Plan for 2014-2015.

Nonetheless, without significant rainfall, groundwater will not be replenished, and the state’s agribusiness and the nation’s consumers will most certainly be hit with the consequences.

Rigid conservation and appropriate resource management may act as a bandaid for California’s water crisis, but if climate models remain accurate, the melting of Arctic ice will continue to have a severe impact on the Pacific jet stream, weakening winter storm activity in the coastal U.S.

It’s a precarious situation, not only for millions of people and the nation’s largest state economy—but it could be the death knell for much of California’s remaining wildlife and iconic beauty as well. **CP**

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## Honduras: Five Years Since the Coup Heaven for Criminals, Hell for the Rest

BY NICK ALEXANDROV

The 2009 Honduran coup marked its anniversary June 28, the day when—a half-decade ago—the army raided President Manuel Zelaya’s house at 5:00 AM, forcing him onto a Costa Rica-bound plane. At least four School of the Americas graduates oversaw what U.S. Ambassador Hugo Llorens recognized immediately as an “illegal action,” a judgment many of the coup’s perpetrators and supporters shared. The military lawyer charged with legitimating the overthrow, for example, acknowledged the event was “a crime.” And WikiLeaks cables reveal that top Honduran businessmen, as well as the Supreme Court, considered it illegal.

In the *New York Times* version, meanwhile, Zelaya was the lawbreaker, his removal “capping months of tensions over his efforts to lift presidential term limits,” Elisabeth Malkin claimed. Her colleague Simon Romero cited Zelaya’s “call for a referendum intended to clear the way for term limits to be eased” as the central factor precipitating the coup; “the Supreme Court of Honduras said that the military had acted in accordance with the Constitution to remove Mr. Zelaya,” he continued, taking the deposed leader’s enemies at their word. Mary Beth Sheridan’s *Washington Post* reporting drew

similar conclusions, as did the coverage Paul Kiernan, José de Córdoba and Jay Solomon provided for the *Wall Street Journal*.

But on this planet, “Zelaya had agreed to hold a national referendum” on the Constitution “[i]n response to broad-based organizing by social movements,” Tanya Kerssen explains in *Grabbing Power*, her excellent study. “The coup occurred on the morning of the referendum, sending a clear message about the oligarchy’s disdain for popular consultation,” she points out. U.S. officials were equally alarmed by the potential democratic turn in their “backyard,” to borrow

contest. Assassins picked off at least 32 Honduran journalists as these events unfolded—the equivalent U.S. figure, as a percentage of the total population, would be well over 1,200. “Reporters who cover corruption and organized crime are routinely targeted for their work and attacked or killed with almost complete impunity,” PEN International reported in January, indicating how the repressive state tries to deflect journalists’ attention from their society’s core problems. The country is a “narco-storehouse,” Honduran Defense Minister Marlon Pascua stated in September 2011, noting that 87% of U.S.-bound cocaine shipped from South America passes



HONDURAN MILITARY DURING COUP. PHOTO: GRANMA.

Secretary of State Kerry’s preferred term for the region. “Zelaya and his allies advocate radical reform of the political system and replacement of ‘representative democracy’ with a ‘participatory’ version,” Ambassador Llorens wrote five days before the ouster, describing the nightmare. Llorens also observed that “public support” for the president “currently hovers in the 55 percent range” with “55-75 percent popular support for” the referendum, and admitted that “we have no hard intelligence suggesting any consideration by Zelaya or any members of his government to usurp democracy and suspend constitutional rule”—the charges respected U.S. press outlets leveled, on cue, at Zelaya.

The U.S. media thus played a crucial role in justifying the overthrow, which was followed by a marred, Washington-approved election in November 2009; Obama’s proclamation two years later that Honduras had again become a democracy; and, last November, another fraudulent presidential

through his country. Pascua’s observation reinforces consultant James Bosworth’s finding “that organized crime had benefited from the political situation in 2009, particularly the months following the coup.”

The connections linking the Honduran state and illicit organizations—to the extent the two can be distinguished—date back decades, to the early 1980s for example, when in-country DEA agent Thomas Zepeda “rapidly came to the accurate conclusion that the entire Honduran government was deeply involved in the drug trade,” as Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair tell the story in their book *Whiteout*. Washington rewarded Zepeda’s diligence by removing him from the country and shutting down the DEA’s Honduran office in June 1983. “If we move against [the Hondurans] on drugs, they can screw us on the Contras,” one U.S. official remarked, laying bare his government’s priorities.

Another Reagan-era achievement, Laurie Freeman and

Jorge Luis Sierra explain in *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America*, was shifting cocaine smuggling from the Caribbean to Mexico. After “a major U.S. interdiction effort shut down Florida as an entry point for Colombian cocaine,” they write, “Colombian traffickers turned to Mexico, with its porous 2,000-mile border with the United States, and began working with their Mexican counterparts to supply U.S. demand.” The Mexican cartels, seizing these new opportunities, grew into the monstrous organizations familiar today, and supposedly it was to battle them that Washington handed over roughly \$2.4 billion to Mexico from FY2008 to FY2014. But the aggressive approach had the predictable effect of pushing cocaine routes into Central America: “the importance of the region to this flow increased dramatically after 2000 and again after 2006, due to an escalation in Mexican drug law enforcement,” a 2012 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime study concluded. This escalation also coincided with Mexico’s transformation into a slaughterhouse, with some estimates placing the national death toll at 120,000 under President Calderón (2006-2012).

Today’s Honduran law enforcement officials “have become allies of drug-traffickers and organized crime,” according to the Honduran newspaper *El Herald*, which last February “leaked the report of an internal affairs investigation that reveals a long list of felonies committed by members of the national police,” Marcela Estrada wrote for *PanAm Post*. The investigation’s findings recall remarks Marvin Ponce, a Vice-President of the Honduran Congress, made three years ago, when he suggested that “up to 40 percent of [police] officers are involved in organized crime.” But neither the officers’ drug smuggling nor police implementation of a “social cleansing” policy—effected via death squads—could stanch the flow of U.S. aid, as Hillary Clinton’s State Department stuffed millions of taxpayer dollars into the killers’ pockets. Foreign affairs decision-makers promised “Congress that money only [went] to specially vetted and trained units,” but all operated under accused murderer Juan Carlos Bonilla’s purview, Alberto Arce and Katherine Corcoran reported for Associated Press. Funding these self-appointed executioners appears not to have been among the “hard choices” Clinton faced as Secretary of State, given her recent memoir’s failure to address the issue.

The current Honduran president, Juan Orlando Hernández, ostensibly dealt with police corruption while head of the National Congress, when he “pushed through a new law in August creating a military police force,” Kevin Lees wrote for McClatchy. “Military involvement in policing duties had been prohibited under the Honduran constitution,” Alexander Main points out, “but in January 2014 the country’s legislature amended” it accordingly. It’s hardly worth mentioning that both Washington’s officials and its propaganda arm—*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, etc.—failed to call out the Honduran elites who tossed Zelaya for

his alleged affronts to the Constitution, and now force the law into conformity with their decisions.

Or consider the “model cities” case, which further exposes Honduran rulers’ views on constitutional legitimacy. These privatized urban zones, the brainchild of NYU economist Paul Romer, would have “their own police, laws, government and tax systems,” all geared towards developing an attractive investment climate, Alberto Arce reported. They’re the Honduran answer to British-controlled Hong Kong, Romer assured skeptical audiences, citing the supposed benefits of English rule. His assertions helped persuade the *Atlantic*’s Eli Sugarman and NPR’s Adam Davidson, both of whom wrote favorably of the scheme. “But no one seems to remember how Hong Kong came to be a British possession,” Ha-Joon Chang protests, reminding us that England acquired it “after the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, the result of the Opium War. This was a particularly shameful episode, even by the standards of 19th-century imperialism,” when “the self-proclaimed leader of the ‘liberal’ world declar[ed] war on another country because the latter was getting in the way of its illegal trade in narcotics.”

Four out of five Honduran Supreme Court justices concluded the “charter cities” entailed a similar violation of sovereignty, writing in October 2012 that “the foreign investment expected to be received by the state of Honduras implies transferring national territory, which is expressly prohibited in the constitution.” Two months later, the Honduran Congress fired the four judges working to uphold the law, and in their place installed “jurists who were amenable to massive privatization schemes” through a “process rife with procedural irregularities that many called a technical coup,” Lauren Carasik noted. But this coup failed to inspire the Honduran military to act against the country’s legislators, and elicited no condemnation from Washington, for obvious reasons.

Returning to the topic of Honduran police militarization, we can recognize that here, too, there was little reason to expect U.S. officials to protest an expanded role for one of their main allies in the country. Ambassador Charles Ford, for example, identified “assisting the HOAF [Honduran Armed Forces] in transforming into a more flexible organization” as a U.S. foreign policy cornerstone in February 2008, and Ambassador Llorens, a year later, described the military as an essential “defender of the constitutional order.” Recall that the army defended this order by committing what its legal adviser deemed “a crime,” toppling a president some 55% of the public backed, specifically on the charge that his referendum, enjoying “55-75 percent popular support,” violated the Constitution—though there was zero “hard intelligence suggesting any consideration,” let alone effort, on his part to “suspend constitutional rule.” More recently, Obama and other top officials ignored a U.S. Congressional letter calling for the suspension of Washington’s assistance to the Honduran military. The letter, sent in March 2012, mentioned

“serious violations of human rights attributed to the security forces”—but the Nobel Peace Laureate was undeterred, proposing a sharp increase in aid for the following year.

*New York Times* columnist Nick Kristof wondered in 2007 whether, “as a result of his background,” Obama would exhibit “sensitivity to other people’s nationalism,” citing the aspiring president’s “great instincts” as a sign of hope. One way to gauge his sensitivity is to look to the U.S.-Mexico border, where “over 50,000 children, many Honduran, are detained in detention centers and warehouses,” as Suyapa Portillo Villeda and Gerardo Torres Zelaya depicted the bleak scene for *CounterPunch* on June 27. Zelaya’s ouster “exacerbated local violence against women” and the young, with femicide reaping 606 lives in 2012 and 617 last year, as child murder escalates, ending 92 lives violently in 2010, and 146 in 2013. In San Pedro Sula, the largest city after Tegucigalpa, some 5,000 children live on the streets, trying not to waste away from starvation; this figure includes 3,000 girls, aged 12-17, roaming the roads as prostitutes. The Honduran regime doesn’t just expel children, a human rights organization, COFADEH, explains on its website: it also stigmatizes, smuggles, and eliminates them. Portillo and Torres conclude that the post-coup climate delivers “a message to young people: there is no future in Honduras.”

Obama’s “great instincts,” meanwhile, led his administration to announce on July 7 “that it expects to deport most of the unaccompanied minors entering the country illegally”—Washington wouldn’t want to support anything illicit—“across the southern border,” according to the *Washington Post*. A week later, U.S. officials flew a group of Honduran women and children from New Mexico to San Pedro Sula, the world’s murder capital, signaling that Central American migrants “will not be welcome to this country with open arms,” White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest announced. It’s an appalling policy, but by no means a departure from normal liberal practice in the U.S.

In 1939, for example, President “Roosevelt ordered the Coast Guard to prevent” the *St. Louis*, with Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany on board—“most of whom had U.S. quota numbers that should have permitted them entry”—from landing, historian Robert Michael writes. Many of its passengers later died in the Holocaust, during which “FDR’s State Department continued to block attempts to transfer Jewish children to the United States,” Michael relates, adding that William Dodd, U.S. ambassador to Germany from 1933-1937, admitted he had “told the Germans ‘unofficially’ that ‘they had a serious [Jewish] problem but that they did not know how to solve it.’” FDR shared this assessment of the “problem,” suggesting “that the French government in North Africa discriminate against the Jews” by limiting “the number of Jews in the professions” there, while proposing “the same plan for Germany.”

There’s a similar callousness in Washington’s treatment

of refugees fleeing Haiti, a source of alarm for U.S. officials since its origin. When it won its independence from France in 1804, after a slave rebellion, it became “the first nation in the world to argue the case of universal freedom for all humankind, revealing the limited definition of freedom adopted by the French and American revolutions,” historian Patrick Bellegarde-Smith comments. After the U.S.-backed opposition toppled elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in September 1991, hundreds of thousands tried to escape the post-coup bloodbath.

President “Bush refused, however, to allow the refugees into the United States,” Aviva Chomsky notes, quoting Paul Farmer, who remarked that “Haiti resembled more and more a burning building with no exits.” Bill Clinton, during his presidential run, swore to reverse what he described as a “cruel policy of returning Haitian refugees to a brutal dictatorship”—supported by Washington, he forgot to mention—“without an asylum hearing.” But the promise evaporated when he assumed office. And Farmer’s critique is still relevant, as Obama effectively locks Central American children in a house he helped ignite, while fanning the flames. **CP**

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## Parasitic Finance Capital and Inequality

BY ISMAEL HOSSEIN-ZADEH

It is now common knowledge that the U.S. economy has in recent years been experiencing extremely uneven developments. While the financial sector has been enjoying enormously high rates of growth, the real sector is mired in stagnation or dismal growth rates. Accordingly, while the financial oligarchy is reaping the lion’s share of this fantastic growth of asset-price inflation, the overwhelming majority of citizens are suffering from the systematically declining standards of living.

For example, a recent report by the Federal Reserve Bank shows that while aggregate national wealth in the U.S. rose by \$1.49 trillion during the first quarter of 2014, the real economy (as measured by GDP) actually contracted by 1 percent—according to the Department of Commerce, the decline in GDP was actually 2.9 (not 1) percent. In a similar report, the *Financial Times* recently noted that household wealth as a whole is up 43 percent since the depths of the economic slump in 2008, despite the slow or nonexistent recovery in the labor market and an actual decline in median household income, down 7.6 percent since 2008.

This obvious and growing gap between the rise of financial wealth in the absence of real growth is, of course, explained by the fantastic asset-price inflation of the past several years—a

financial bubble bigger than the one that burst in 2008. Of the \$1.49 trillion increase in the national wealth in the first three months of 2014, some \$361 billion were due to stock price appreciation while \$758 billion were due to real estate inflation. Not only has the stock price bubble largely benefited the wealthy, who disproportionately own the major bulk of stocks, but also “the increased home values were concentrated in the mansions of the super-rich, not the modest homes of working people.” According to figures published by Redfin, a real estate group, from January through April 2014, “sales of the top 1 percent of US homes, those priced at \$1.67 million or more, have risen 21 percent, while sales of the remaining 99 percent of homes have fallen 7.6 percent”.

The *Financial Times*, which published the Redfin figures, noted similar trends in consumer sales:

Sales by luxury retailers such as LVMH (Louis Vuitton, Bulgari) and Tiffany rose by 9 percent; sales by retailers with mainly working class customers declined. Walmart was down 5 percent, Sears’ sales fell by 6.8 percent. At the lower end, only cut-rate outlets where more and more Americans must shop to stretch their dollars saw increased sales. Dollar Tree, the largest such retailer, recorded a sales increase of 7.2 percent. . . . The newspaper observed, the gains show the effectiveness of policy in recreating the wealth lost in the recession, but its effect in boosting the economy is limited, because much of the benefit has gone to wealthy households that own stocks and large houses.

The simultaneous enrichment of the financial oligarchy, on the one hand, and the impoverishment of the masses of the people, on the other, is akin to the growth of a parasite in the body of a living organism at the expense of life-sustaining blood or nourishment of that organism. What is more, this parasitic transfer of economic blood from the bottom up is not simply the outcome of the workings of the invisible hand of market mechanism, or the blind forces of competition in a capitalist economy. Perhaps more importantly, the transfer is the logical outcome of insidious but carefully crafted economic policies that are designed to entrench neoliberal austerity economics.

### **Supply-Side Monetary Policy: Asset-Price Inflation as Economic Stimulus**

Governments of the core capitalist countries have since the Great Depression of the 1930s applied two major types of economic stimuli: demand-side, or Keynesian, and supply-side, or neoliberal. Demand-side policies aim at boosting the purchasing power of workers and other masses of the people directly: injecting buying power into the economy through large scale investment in infrastructural projects and other employment-generating undertakings. Policy measures of this sort, which lasted from the immediate aftermath of the

Great Depression and/or WW II until the late 1970s and early 1980s, served as the cornerstone of New Deal economics in the U.S. and Social-Democratic policies in other major capitalist economies.

Champions of supply-side economics also purport to offer stimulus measures to revive a stagnant economy. However, they do this in an indirect, roundabout or two-step process. The first step aims at further enriching the rich, either through fiscal policies of tax cuts for the wealthy or monetary policies of asset-price inflation, which also largely benefit the wealthy. The second step consists, essentially, of a hope or wish: it is hoped that, following the injection of additional resources into the coffers of the 1% in the first step, the 99% would then benefit from the ensuing trickle-down effects, thereby boosting aggregate demand and economic activity.

Formally, this policy was ushered in when Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980. Initially, the architects of supply-side economics focused on fiscal policy. After successfully carrying through their project of drastic tax breaks for the wealthy, which came to be known as Reagan’s supply-side tax cuts, they then directed their attention to monetary policy as the next major redistributive tool in favor of the 1%.

Starting with Alan Greenspan as chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank to his successors Ben Bernanke and now Janet Yellen, this policy has essentially meant granting unlimited interest-free or nearly interest-free money to major banks and other Wall Street players. Although not discussed publicly, monetary policy makers of Wall Street at the head of the Federal Reserve Bank and the Treasury Department have come to view the bestowing of cheap money upon Wall Street as a monetary stimulus measure that would work through asset-price inflation and the subsequent trickle-down mechanism.

The official rationale for the injection of cheap money into the financial system is still justified, publicly, on the same grounds as the traditional Keynesian monetary stimulus: that such infusions of money into the financial sector would prompt enhanced lending to the real sector, thereby encouraging productive investment, employment and growth. This justification of unwarranted and excessively cheap money supply is, however, premised on three major conditions: that manufacturers face a tight and expensive capital/money market; that manufacturers face or envision a strong demand for what they produce, or would produce; and that there is something akin to a partition between real and financial sectors of the economy, as it was more or less the case when the Glass-Steagall Act was in force (from 1933 to 1998), which strictly stipulated the types and quantities of investments that banks and other financial intermediaries could undertake.

None of these conditions are, however, present in today’s U.S. economy. To begin with, there is no shortage of cash in the real sector; the sector seems to be, indeed, sitting on a mound of cash but not expanding production because of the

austerity-generated weak demand.

“While at least 25 million Americans are unemployed or working only part-time when they want and need full-time work, corporate America is sitting on a cash hoard of more than \$2 trillion, refusing to invest in new production or hiring new workers, and instead engaging in speculation and stock buybacks that are more profitable for the corporate CEOs. Stock buybacks by non-financial corporations occurred at an annual pace of \$427 billion in the first quarter, according to the Fed”.

Secondly, since players in the financial sector are no longer constrained by regulatory restrictions on the types and quantities of their investment, why would they look or wait for borrowers from the real sector (who, as just mentioned, have plenty of cash of their own), instead of investing in the more lucrative field of speculation. Not surprisingly, as the regulatory constraints have been gradually removed in the past several decades, financial bubbles and bursts have become a recurring pattern.

Indeed, not only do Wall Street banks and other beneficiaries of monetary policy use the nearly interest-free money for speculative investment, but also increasingly real sector corporations divert more and more of their profits to speculation instead of production—they seem to have come to think: *why bother with the messy business of production when higher returns can be garnered by simply buying and selling titles*. The lure of speculative profits, greatly facilitated by the extensive deregulation of the financial sector, is obviously strong enough to induce capital to abandon manufacturing in pursuit of higher returns in the financial sector. This steady transfer of money from the real to the financial sector is the exact opposite of what monetary policy-makers—and, indeed, the entire neoclassical/mainstream economic theory—claim or portray to happen: flow of money from financial to the real sector.

Capital flight from the real to the financial sector, and the divergence between corporate profitability and real investment were highlighted in an article by Robin Harding that was published in the *Financial Times* of July 24, 2013. Headlined “Corporate Investment: A Mysterious Divergence,” the article revealed that, in the past three decades or so, a “disconnect” has developed between corporate profitability and real investment; indicating that, contrary to previous times, a significant portion of corporate profits is not reinvested for capacity building. It is diverted, instead, to financial investment in pursuit of higher returns to shareholders’ capital. Prior to 1980s, the two moved in tandem—both about 9% of GDP. Since then, and especially in the very recent years, whereas real investment has declined to about 4% of GDP, corporate profits have increased to about 12% of GDP!

Financial big wigs at the helm of monetary policy in the U.S. and other major capitalist countries cannot be unaware of these facts: that most of the generous cash they inject into

the financial sector is used for speculative transactions in this sector without any perceptible positive impact on the real sector. So, the question is: why, then, do they keep pumping more money into the financial sector? The answer, as mentioned earlier, is that in place of traditional Keynesian monetary policy, they seem to have now discovered a new (supply-side) monetary stimulus: trickle-down effects of asset-price inflation.

Portraying asset-price inflation as a monetary tool of economic stimulation, policymakers in the United States and other core capitalist countries are no longer averse to creating financial bubbles; as such bubbles are viewed and depicted as fueling the economy through demand enhancement effects of asset-price appreciation. Instead of regulating or containing the disruptive speculative activities of the financial sector, economic policy makers, spearheaded by the Federal Reserve Bank since the days of Alan Greenspan, have been actively promoting asset-price or financial bubbles—in effect, also further enriching the rich and exacerbating inequality.

Aside from issues such as social justice and economic security for the masses of people, the idea of creating asset-price bubbles as vehicles of economic stimulation is also unsustainable—indeed, destructive—in the long run: financial bubbles, no matter how long or how much they may expand, are ultimately bound by the amount of real values that are produced (by human labor) in an economy. Proxies of the financial oligarchy at the helm of economic policy making, however, do not seem to be bothered by this ominous prospect as they have apparently discovered something akin to an insurance protection scheme that would shield the market and major financial players against the risks of financial bubbles.

### **Insuring Financial Bubbles: Creating a New Bubble to Patch-up a Burst one**

Champions of the policy of asset-price bubbles as economic stimuli do not seem to be worried about the destabilizing effects of the bubbles they help create, as they tend to believe (or hope) that the likely disturbances and losses from the potential bursting of one bubble could be offset by creating another bubble. In other words, they seem to believe that they have discovered an insurance policy for bubbles that burst by blowing new ones. Professor Peter Gowan of London Metropolitan University describes this rather perverse strategy in the following words:

“Both the Washington regulators and Wall Street evidently believed that together they could manage bursts. This meant that there was no need to prevent such bubbles from occurring: on the contrary, it is patently obvious that both regulators and operators actively generated them, no doubt believing that one of the ways of managing bursts was to blow another dynamic bubble in another sector: after dot-com, the housing bubble; after that, an energy-price or emerging market bubble, and so on”.

Randall W. Forsyth of *Barron's* likewise points out, “Greenspan always contended that monetary policymakers can . . . clean up the after-effects of the bust—which meant reflating a new bubble, he argued.” It is obvious that this policy of effectively insuring financial bubbles would make financial speculation a win-win proposition, a proposition that is aptly called “moral hazard,” as it encourages risk-taking at the expense of others—in this case of the 99%, since the costs of bailing out the “too-big-to-fail” gamblers are paid by austerity cuts. Knowing that “the Fed would bail out the markets after any bust, they went from one excess to another,” Forsyth further points out. “So, the Long-Term Capital Management collapse in 1998 begat the easy credit that led to the dot-com bubble and bust, which in turn led to the extreme ease and the housing bubble”.

The policy of protecting major financial speculators against bankruptcy shows, among other things, that the neo-liberal financial architects of recent years have jettisoned not only the New Deal–Social Democratic policies of demand management but also the free-market policies of non-intervention, as advocated, for example, by the Austrian school of economics. They tend to be interventionists when the corporate-financial oligarchy needs help, but champions of laissez-faire economics when the working class and other grassroots need help. Prior to the rise of big finance and its control of economic policy, bubble implosions were let to run their course: reckless speculation and mal-investments would go bankrupt; the real economy would be cleansed of the deadweight of the unsustainable debt; and (after a painful but relatively short period of time) the market would reallocate the real capital to productive uses. In the era of big finance and powerful financiers, however, that process of creating a “clean slate” is blocked because the financial entities that play a critical role in the creation of bubbles and bursts also control policy. **CP**

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# At the Center for the Whole Person

Summer of Love 1967

BY KATHY DEACON

There is a towering crystal cat.  
Her mother suddenly changes into a lion.  
People stare.

High up in the sky, shadowy archetypal beings observe the humans living down on the earth—and casually work their strings.

*Find the window in the middle:* These words may hold the power to restore the universe to how it was before.

At the Center for the Whole Person, the “therapist” lying on top of her says, “You should want to fuck the trees, the grass, the entire universe.”

On the 12<sup>th</sup> floor of the Pennsylvania Hospital, the psychiatrist with a pot belly takes off his belt, and places it on the bed. The next day three doctors come in. One claims she tried to hit him; another chuckles and rolls his eyes; and a third says there is a good private hospital near Baltimore that specializes in treating adolescents.

At the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital, the attending physician in keeping with the patient's status speaks only to her parents. He wears black loafers and black glasses. They proceed through high-ceilinged lounges, the cruise-line atmosphere numbing her dread—with one exception: a woman in a crisp uniform turning a large key.

A patient is escorted over from another ward, her hair in rollers. She says, “I want to welcome you on behalf of the patient committee.” Her voice is flat and singsong. The next day she hangs herself.

The hallways are whitewashed and breezy, patients marched in informal lines—first to occupational therapy—breakfast is optional; sleep in if you like.

Much of the time is spent playing pool; the girls put their leg up on the table and push the cue through their toes. At the “socials,” the attendants keep a discreet eye on the patients but one boy manages to sneak off the hospital grounds to a local bar.

An elderly woman with huge, myopic blue eyes paces the dayroom complaining there is dust in the air, dust on everything. After a while, D. arrives; a Quaker boy who stopped performing his alternative civilian service job, he says he will commit suicide if sentenced to jail and the judge sends him here.

Saturday is steak night. The rule is just one steak per patient. But later you can have a sandwich at the canteen, then ham and white bread as a snack before bedtime.

Once in a while she sees—only momentarily—a small psychedelic design. Otherwise, she is back to her former mental

state--which had passed for normal. Her mother notes that she is gaining weight.

Fortunately her psychiatrist, Dr. O., doesn't use psychiatric drugs or electroshock.

She keeps asking what her diagnosis is but he refuses to say.

He has an elfin quality, a rich, jovial laugh. She says pretty much anything that comes to mind:...*J. gave me his Hare Krishna beads; does this mean J. likes me? . . . Am I a paranoid schizophrenic?* (No reply.) *What job do you think I'll have when I get out?* (He sees her selling "beautiful things." What kind, she wonders. Jewelry? Statues?) *I am a kind of vegetable.* Grab a jar of Accent. Sprinkle a little bit on to wake it up, bring it to life. Wake up those tired vegetables! (Laughter.)

There is something about T. that suggests he considers himself a failure—with the air of a well-dressed dinner guest on his best behavior. He is convinced he is getting better--though he does not seem the least bit disturbed or even depressed.

His deep eyes convey an understanding that there are certain timeless and indelible rules and he has found someone now who shares this understanding.

He proposes they go up to Nantucket and start a business together.

*Was it to be right now or sometime in the future?*—an important detail probably. But the whole point of it for him is the place—perhaps later he will figure out what type of business it will be.

Ruth, a patient married to an official in the Johnson administration, has the inside dope on every patient at the hospital (perhaps she doesn't realize that T. is a descendant of Cornelius Vanderbilt—albeit a grandson of a lowly granddaughter).

In the dining room, a delicate girl mechanically spoons food into her mouth, as if eating were a test of obedience or form of punishment. Ruth explains she is the daughter of a famous Second World War general. Some very wealthy families park their relatives at the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital.

The patients call it by the acronym. "SEPH" also stands for "the things we do here"—Shit, Eat, Piss, and Hibernate—and don't forget to tack on an M for Moses (Sheppard).

After an escape attempt—begun as a lark with another patient—she is straitjacketed and thrown into a bare room—white floors, walls, and ceiling—and realizes for the first time she is in a kind of jail (and it is nothing less than punishment in therapeutic guise). Many here stumble around on psychiatric drugs and are repeatedly electro-shocked; they will have you certified insane if you try to get out. Pacing in a tiny circle around her mattress, she begins to understand why many patients here refuse to speak to their doctors.

But Dr. O. is like a friend, cool and fun to talk to. He used to teach English at Howard University and knows Stokely Carmichael. Though he lives in Washington, D.C., now, he is

originally from Philadelphia.

T. is perturbed and in his usual blunt way explains: "Dr O. asked me 'Why would you select *her* to go with you to Nantucket? Of all the patients here, why would you want to go to Nantucket and start a business with her?' I told him, 'I don't like what you're saying. I don't like your attitude.'"

*Why would Dr. O. say a thing like that?* She immediately asks for an explanation (but he is the doctor and doesn't answer questions—generally doesn't even ask them--except when she poses a question, and then only to hint that--rather than ask if--there may be an underlying reason why she wanted to know). Of course she doesn't get a satisfactory answer.

During an appointment, Dr. O eats a sandwich—wrapped in white plastic paper containing a pickle. He is listening to her—and also enjoying his lunch.

"You're eating a sandwich."

"Want some?"

A famous psychiatrist—Dr. Szasz—visiting the hospital, remarks that she looks like a deer caught in the headlights and he demands to know *Why are you looking at the center of my forehead?*

One evening, shortly after the lights go out, she hears the thrashing of bed sheets and then moaning coming from a nearby bed. She runs out into the hall. An attendant rushes in, flashes on the light, and tries to cover her eyes, but it is too late. The middle-aged woman lying in the next bed--who once worked at Doubleday bookstore in New York, the sort of thing a smart unmarried woman with literary interests might do—is gazing sightlessly out from the center of her blood-soaked bed.

Over the course of several months, B. has drowned herself in the swimming pool; N. hanged herself in a closet; and L. thrown herself in front of a truck during a picnic. Long-term patients completely incapacitated by psychiatric drugs are led through the halls, they walk in circles, listen to the same record over and over. She has turned 19 and is losing control of her life and fears the power of despair may drive her to do something drastic like this—even against her own will.

After this incident, she is moved to a private room on an open hall. But time is nearly up on her father's Blue Cross policy—it won't cover any further treatment.

Dr. O. cancels their last appointment.

There are things she has gleaned about her parents through therapy—actually it is Dr. O. who tells her—that her mother is "emotionally constipated," her father "a warm man." But in a dream, Dr. O. is a great friend of her mother. His pale green Volkswagen becomes the new color of the iris of his eye—the same color as her mother's--which is shattered into tiny fragments. **CP**

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# CULTURE & REVIEWS

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## The Aesthetics of Jim Jarmusch Beauty Beyond the Grid

BY KIM NICOLINI

What do two white stylish vampires in Detroit have to do with one black stylish assassin in Spain? Jim Jarmusch's two recent movies—*Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013) and *The Limits of Control* (2009)—span countries (United States, Spain, Tangiers) and seem to operate on entirely different planes. Yet these two films share a single heart: a love for beauty and the aesthetic subsurface in a material world increasingly lacking in spirit. The lovers left alive in these films are rare artifacts who unveil beauty that exists beyond the information grid, the Internet, and news streams of worldwide violence.

Though set in the 21st century, the films seem out of time, like cinematic spectres inhabited by the aesthetic details of life at the fringes of the post-industrial “wired” world. Odes to times lost, they luxuriate in beauty so rich and abstract that we have no choice but to vacate our conscious occupation of the now and surrender to their timeless seductive aesthetics. Coming from different places, both films end up at the same destination—a place where art, music, poetry, and Spirit reign over 21st century technology. While *Limits* immerses us in the abstracted precise limits of modernism in a post-modern world, *Lovers* indulges in Romantic excess and nostalgia for the authentic.

Both films are singular objects of beauty. Each frame comprises a precise image and another layer of beauty in which we can indulge our senses. When combined—the visuals, sound,

people, geography, music, color, architecture, and objects—all mesh into a cinematic hallucinogenic concoction. Jarmusch uses the material of the real world—objects, people, and places—to open a portal where we can transcend the ordinary through the aesthetically extraordinary.

Both films have threadbare plots which propel us forward in an altered state. *Only Lovers Left Alive* is about two vampires (the very white and beautiful Tom Hiddleston and Tilda Swinton—Adam and Eve, respectively) whose love has spanned centuries. They now occupy the polluted world of “zombies” (mortal humans) and are trying to survive by avoiding contact with the contaminated human blood supply (a metaphor for how much humans have fucked up the planet in general). Adam resists 21st technology and collects vintage musical instruments—guitars, amps, keyboards, anything with tubes and strings. Eve reads history with her hands and collects books of all languages and ages. Both are aesthetes who wax poetic with their friend Christopher Marlowe (John Hurt) about the Romantics, Shakespeare, and the travesties of human history. They sip black market pure blood in fine glassware and fall into an opiated high where the world around them becomes a kaleidoscope of sensation, sound, color, and beauty. The way it's supposed to be!

*Limits of Control* is about an unnamed assassin (the exotic, well-carved and finely-suited Isaach De Bankolé) simply identified as “The Lone Man.” He is on a mysterious mission that involves the exchange of diamonds and handwritten notes in beautifully crafted old matchboxes. He may as well be a vampire as he drifts through the film like a spectral being. Barely speaking, his body moves like

an art object as he blends with the environment, architecture, and space. He repeatedly visits a modern art museum and studies individual works while he himself is an image of enticing otherness. He gazes at a painting of a naked woman as we gaze at him.

Though situated firmly in the 21st century, both films resist the present. Cell phones are largely forbidden. Computers only exist in archaic form or in the office of the “bad guy.” “No mobiles,” states the Lone Man. Tilda Swinton's Eve wields an iPhone, but it is out of necessity for survival not out of desire. Her iPhone is like an appendage she has grown for survival and adaptation in a Darwinian sense. Adam lives in economically gutted Detroit. His home is stuffed with vintage guitars and powered by a hand-built D.I.Y. Tesla-style generator. The Lone Man seems to possess one single impeccable silk suit. Everything he does is with precise aesthetic intent. Paz De La Huerta presents her naked body to him, but he looks on her like a distant object of beauty, no different than the paintings he studies at the museum. He is a man of no attachments and “no mobiles.” Adam is a man of many aesthetic attachments but “no mobiles.”

Certainly these films operate as object fetishism packed with luxuriously rendered detail: furniture, velvet curtains, mysterious cities, slick escalators, modernist architecture, decaying buildings, swimming pools, table lamps, guitar cables, reel tape, vinyl records, white cowboy boots, and blue suits. But these aren't just things. They are objects that project an aura of ghostly beauty, the lingering invisible contained in the visible. They are objects of mass production but also objects that are obsolete and therefore unique and authentic. They are not the New New, but stand out as rare in a world of sameness. Their value is in aesthetics and aura not functional purpose.

In the middle of all these beautifully rendered things are beautifully rendered people. Besides De Bankolé

in *Limits of Control*, we are graced with cameos by Swinton, Hurt, and Gael García Bernal attesting to the powers of film, art, music and peyote. Bill Murray shows up as a corporate mogul, and Paz De La Huerta offers her nude body. In *Lovers*, John Hurt's aged face is like a beautiful ragged Romantic manuscript.

Every moment is precisely filmed, as if Jarmusch himself is exercising the "limits of cinematic control." Every note

delivers a hypnotic performance for both Adam and us in *Lovers*.

Detroit in *Lovers* is shot entirely at night. Eve and Adam cruise the dark streets which are eerily beautiful, haunted by the ghosts of failed Fordist capitalism. They drive past the desolate Packard Plant "where they once built the most magnificent automobiles." They stand in the gutted Michigan Theater, a majestic building where

vival is the art of survival. Adam and Eve are aesthetic artifacts and survivors who collect aesthetic artifacts that have survived.

The Spain of *Limits of Control* is exotic and slick. Architecture merges with sunlight, streetlights and people. Airports and desert landscapes are equally rendered in beautiful minimal expanses. Interior spaces are sparse yet rich with exquisitely placed blocks of



Jim Jarmusch. Photo by Jesse Hill.

of music corresponds to the movement of bodies, the way light falls on fabric or moves across surfaces. When words are spoken, they are echoes and reverberations like the hum from guitars in haunting soundtracks by art rock bands such as Sun O))) and Boris (*Limits*) and Sqürl and Jozef Van Wissem (*Lovers*). Both films contain scenes with exotic performances that rupture the narrative and insert an aural layer of timeless Mystery. A Flamenco dancer in *Limits* holds The Man captive, while Lebanese singer and songwriter Yasmine Hamdan

films were once projected. It is also the site of Ford's first prototype. The place where art and Capitalism collided is now an abandoned theater and car park. The film location certainly is precisely linked to the obsolete objects Adam and Eve collect. These characters preceded capitalism, and perhaps they are the ones who will survive it. When the film moves from Detroit to Tangiers, Adam and Eve resort to old barbaric ways to survive, yet they inscribe their act with Romantic poetic and scientific rationale. The art of sur-

color, shiny surfaces, and radiant lighting. The Man drinks two espressos side-by-side as if this act of precision can maintain limits in a world where economics are killing art. The Man is the embodiment of art itself. He is part of the landscape, an organic merging of the human body with geography yet envisioned through sparse modernist minimalism.

Both films depict the assassination of culture and art as a tragedy. They are calls for indulging in aesthetics for aesthetics sake. In *Lovers*, Eve's younger

sister Ava (a bubbly and reckless Mia Wasikowska) represents the shallow consumer interests of Hollywood. She smashes a beautiful Gresch guitar played by Chet Atkins and greedily drinks Ian—Adam's source for vintage instruments. In *Limits*, The Man's mission is to assassinate the assassin of culture (Bill Murray), an American businessman whose helicopter continually disrupts the quiet aesthetic continuity of the film. Murray's character thrusts us into the offensive 21st century world of surveillance cameras, computer screens and cell phones,

a world where money supersedes art. The Man strangles Murray with a guitar string, using art to kill the Economic System that wants to kill art.

Both films are more seductive experiences than narrative stories. They lure us into their beauty, and we succumb to it, just like we would succumb to a drug. Some may see these films as self-indulgent exercises in cinematic fetishism, but both films left me invigorated and wanting more. They fulfilled my thirst for art and beauty in a world full of ugliness and

artless violence. One of humankind's saving graces is the ability to create beautiful things even during times of great ugliness. Jarmusch has done that with these two films. **CP**

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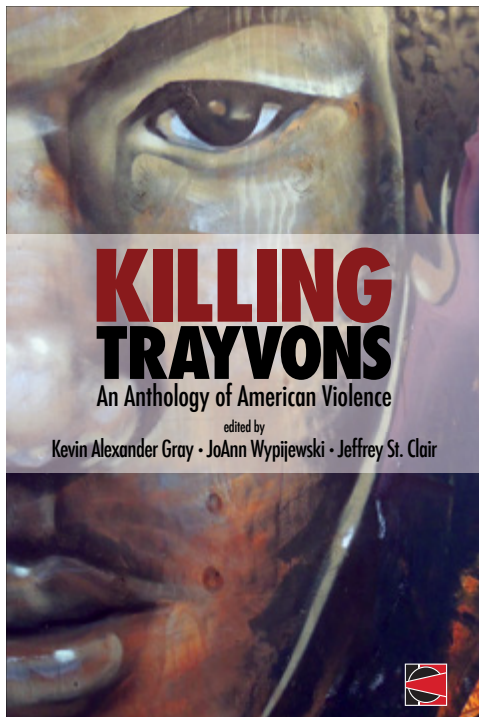
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