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STATE-AIDING, EMPIRE-BUILDING OR MULTITUDE FULFILLING? AN ANONYMOUS ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

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"Hackers create the possibility of new things entering the world. Not always great things, or even good things, but new things" (McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto*, .004)

GhostSec is out there, fighting. The Anonymous cell is hack-attacking politically violent Islamic groups, including Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and the Islamic State (IS). GhostSec is intent upon exposing extremist twitter accounts and taking down their web face presence. The goal seems to be to prevent the "bad guys" from using cybertools to perpetuate their violence in Somalia, Nigeria, Libya and Syria. As such, GhostSec is a humanitarian cause that prevents the territorialization of cyberspace by groups who are against a liberal ideology of freedom of the individual. It is a noble cause, a cyber battle, almost mythic. Is it so simple, though--good vs. bad? And what is the desired outcome? On one level, it would appear that GhostSec is doing its part to curb potential violence, at least by severing an extremist group's networking tool, effectively "neutering...[their] ability to use Twitter to broadcast its message outside of its core audience...reducing the organization's ability to manipulate public opinion and attract new recruits (Berger and Morgan, 2015: 56). But do these actions address the deeper problem of why Al-Shabaab and others exist? These Islamic fighter groups are against the Western post-Westphalia liberal state. So, is it possible that GhostSec's actions are merely reproducing the same state structures that Al-Shabaab et al so adamantly oppose and thereby are providing further justifications for why violence is necessary? Or, has GhostSec found a new way, that is, political action that sheds state thinking (Bourdieu 2014) and enters the international political arena as a nomad (Deleuze and Guattari 1987)? It could be that GhostSec is effectively de-territorializing communication that has been territorialized for violence. As such, GhostSec is a piracy movement, carving out openings, a.k.a. temporary autonomous zones (Bey 1985) in the name of human rights.

This article explores the role of GhostSec in international politics, specifically examining whether the Anonymous group is State-Aiding, Empire-Building or Multitude-Fulfilling (Hardt and Negri 2000). The amorphous movement known as Anonymous has

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executed a wide range of actions on the net, from Operation Avenge Assange to Project Chanology to #OpTunisia to Operation AntiSec. As anthropologist Gabriella Coleman has detailed in her book, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous* (2014), Anonymous has utilized multiple tactics as well as multiple ideological stances. While the overriding premise of the movement seems to be "Anonymous is not unanimous" (p. 106) and information should flow freely, it has "no consistent philosophy or political program"(p.3). Nevertheless, it is vulnerable to grander socio-political forces that attempt to capture the movement for its/their own needs.

I argue that we can see such a struggle between the exogenous forces of the State, Empire and the Multitude (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004), as GhostSec stages its sql injections, XSS and DDOS attacks. This struggle to envelop GhostSec's power can be seen most readily in the split that occurred in the group fall 2015 (Auerbach 2015). The apparent success of GhostSec in its efforts to deter ISIS and others, enticed the United States government to ask for intel help from the Anonymous cell. According to GhostSec member, TorReaper, the US government helped funnel funding to GhostSec (Raincoaster 2015). Here we see the group torn by competing socio-political forces of the State, Empire and the Multitude. It is a triad of the Weberian, hierarchical, bureaucratic apparatus vs. "the decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm" (Hardt and Negri 2000: xii) vs. the autonomous force that "has the capacity to create society on its own" (Hardt and Negri 2004: 225). The tug-of-war resulted in the creation of the splinter faction, the Ghost Security Group. The now non-profit organization was pulled into the fold of the State. As for the original GhostSec, will it acquiesce to the transcendental right of Empire, a right that still sees violence and war as legitimate when "being in the service of right and peace" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 15)? Or, will GhostSec move towards the Multitude and sail off as a nomad and "remain plural and multiple", an example of what could be for a new democratic form (Hardt and Negri 2004: 99)?

In order to tease out the socio-political dynamics of GhostSec actions, this study utilizes discourse analysis of news stories about, and interviews with, GhostSec and the Ghost Security Group. Primary sources include participant observation in twitter discussions and IRCs as well as direct interviews with GhostSec members.

Beyond the political theory value that this study provides, the analysis also offers socio-political, cyber-movements reflective insights into the grander forces vying for the power that they generate. Even though the trickster lulz Anonymous may jump out and raspberry the world while it "takes down" a terrorist group's web face, it still must consider who benefits from its antics. Are you feeding the State? Boosting Empire? Or, are you entering the Multitude, "the only social subject capable of realizing democracy, that is, the rule of everyone by everyone" (Hardt and Negri 2004: 100)?

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