**Rethinking Space and Place After September 11th
*Dr. Steve Wiley***

It is very difficult to know what to say about the September 11th plane bombings, acts of mass murder, suicide, and destruction so devastating and so horrifying that we are left struggling over what to feel, let alone how to make sense of the emotions that wash over us.  Anger, fear, astonishment, horror, rage, vulnerability, defiance, disbelief, disorientation, paranoia, disgust, anger again...and then deep sadness, profound heartache, empathy for those who perished, and for their loved ones who survive and must go on in the face of incredible loss...Solidarity, unity, pride, anger again, and indignation...purposefulness, commitment, and direction, the desire for punishment and revenge...but also questioning and arguing, searching for answers and explanations...weighing options, trade-offs, potential implications...working out what we believe and what we don't believe, what we want and don't want, who we are and who we are not, what we will not stand for, and what we will stand for, and stand against, in the months and years to come.

These are some of the things I've felt since that Tuesday.  Perhaps some of you have been through a similar experience, or perhaps your trajectory has been a bit different - more anger and less sadness, or less anger and more vulnerability. But whatever our individual responses, we have all been affected deeply.  And whatever differences there may be in our explanations or in our proposals for action, there is a common emotional experience of shock, pain, fear, and anger, and an equally broad sense that something important has changed...that in some profound sense we can never see the world the same way again.

I want to suggest that one important change has been a deeply unsettling alteration of our sense of space and place.  We are experiencing an individual and collective reworking of our cognitive and emotional maps - a complex and disconcerting reorganization of our sense of where we are in relation to the rest of the world, a redefinition of the borders and boundaries between "here" and "there," a reconsideration of what it means to be "here," and still-unfinished remapping of the location and identity of our enemies and our allies.  Both publicly and privately, in government pronouncements and in non-stop radio and television programs, in emails, web site, conversations, individual reflection, and even dreams, we are rethinking, and thereby reconstructing, America as a place.  This is important work - the cultural and political work that will shape a pivotal moment in history and guide our future actions.

I want to briefly sketch three areas in which public and private communications are redrawing the map: first, our understanding of America as a place; second, our understanding of the sources and locations of terrorism: and third, our understanding of the relationship between these two spaces.  Finally, I will propose an alternative view of both organized violence and our response to it.  Our ability to identify and punish the architects and organizers of the September 11th attacks and our capacity to rebuild security and peace depends in large part on the way we draw the new map.

The September 11th bombings were an attack on many things, but in one sense they were an attack on the *place* called "America," and on the way in which we understood, and lived, that place and its relationship to the outside.  The attacks on civilians in Manhattan and on U.S. military officials in Washington, as well as the destruction of the World Trade Center buildings and part of the Pentagon - two central icons of the U.S.-led global capitalism and American military power - inflicted a double blow to that sense of place.  On the one hand, by striking at the symbols of world military and financial power and at the actual organizational nerve centers of that power in New York and Washington, the suicide bombers showed that the emerging U.S.-led global order is neither a historical inevitability nor a finished military, political, and economic triumph; it is, instead, a contested worldwide structure of power and culture that is vulnerable at its center.  On the other hand, killing thousands of defenseless civilians in the heart of our largest and most important city, the suicide bombers shook our experience of America as a place of stability and security - our assumption that, regardless of the conflict and upheaval that we glimpse in other parts of the world via the international news, here, in the United States, it is a relatively safe and stable place.  On both of these levels - the level of the global balance of power and the level of ordinary, everyday life - our sense of place has been deeply altered.

So the first map we need to think about is our understanding of America as a homeland - as a secure domestic space.  If America is not the place we thought it was - if it is not invulnerable, and if its leadership of the world is not unchallenged - then what kind of place is it?  Must we rethink our sense of place and learn to live in a new space with radically different rules, relationships, and risks?  Or can we put it back the way it was, recovering and rebuilding that place of undisputed power and that protected space of peaceful, self-confident everyday life?  It seems to me that the September 11 attacks have in many ways shattered the illusion that there is a border between domestic space and foreign territory.  We now need to rethink what we mean by "here" - to recognize that the domestic sphere is built out of, made up of, a multiplicity of global networks and flows of money, crime, military power, environmental changes, people, technology, institutions, and culture.  In the wake of September 11, we have seen some disturbing remapping of America as a racially- or religiously-defined space, as some of today's presentations have shown, but we have also seen some encouraging responses to that view - a concerted effort by many to reaffirm our pluralism, diversity, and openness.

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Second, there is the question of how to map the enemy.  I want to suggest that the networked nature of today's global society requires us to rethink the place from which the threats come.  We have been thinking of the enemy as an external threat to our domestic space - as an attack on a particular nation (the United States) by a particular organization ("Al Qaeda") led by an identifiable individual (Osama bin Laden) and originating in a particular foreign territory (Afghanistan).

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| A picture of Osama bin Laden |  |

But the evidence from sources, including the CIA and a number of people who have had contact with Osama bin Laden in the past, suggests that there is no single terrorist organization, but rather many small, diverse, and loosely-affiliated groups located all over the world, including, as we now know, people based in Florida, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, and Minnesota.  It is likely that bin Laden's role in the recent attacks, if any, was indirect, that they could have - and probably would have - been organized without his involvement, and that finding and killing or capturing him would do little to prevent future organized terror.  According to several sources, bin Laden is little more than a celebrity created by the media and the Clinton and Bush administrations - a "new North Star," according to a former CIA agent in Afghanistan and Sudan, "the new motivating factor that will bring us together, replacing...the Soviet Union," (Milton Bearden, quoted in Frontline, 2001).  In our desire to identify, locate, and punish those responsible for the attacks, we may have vastly oversimplified the problem.

I want to propose an alternative map of the anti-American, or anti-Western, forces that may have carried out the September 11 attacks, and of the globally-organized response that is required from us if we are to prevent such violence in the future.



Rather than a problem of nations and territories, I want to suggest that we see the issue in terms of transnational networks and what some theorists have proposed as an alternative kind of structure, the rhizome.  A rhizome is an organizational form without any controlling center or hierarchy, a kind of self-reproducing multiplicity that cannot be understood as a single organization or localized in a particular territory.  A familiar example of a rhizome is crabgrass, a plant that sends out runners in all directions, which then put down roots, grow, and send out runners of their own.  When you pull up crabgrass, even if you find and completely destroy the original plant, you have done nothing about all the others, which are now independent organisms.  Some well-informed sources argue that the organizers of the September 11 attacks were part of a transnational, loosely-affiliated chain of small groups, not a single organization based in Afghanistan and led by Osama bin Laden.  If this is the case, then we need to think differently about both the sources of organized violence and the usefulness of national territory as a way of drawing the map and localizing the enemy.

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Third and finally, if this is the case, we must also rethink the space of our response - the map of the type of alliance that could effectively prevent such attacks and promote peace and security.  It seems clear to me that the transnational, rhizomatic nature of terrorism requires a globally-networked response.  Instead of a unilateral or nation-based effort, we need to build a multilateral network involving all of those around the globe who abhor such violence.  We need a network of power that is capable of preventing such acts, but also a social network, a global public to which that power is accountable.  I don't have any clear or settled answers about how that can be done, but I am convinced that we need to think carefully about the ways in which our maps condition the questions we can ask, and the sorts of strategies we can imagine.  I invite you to help me think about what that map should look like, and how we might go about drawing it.

Souce: http://www.ncsu.edu/ncsu/chass/communication/www/alumnicircle/cwt/wiley.htm

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