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The Fascist Moment: Security, Exclusion, Extermination

MARK NEOCLEOUS

Department of Politics & History, Brunel University

ABSTRACT Security is cultivated and mobilized by enacting exclusionary practices, and exclusion is cultivated and realized on security grounds. This article explores the political dangers that lie in this connection, dangers which open the door to a fascist mobilization in the name of security. To do so the article first asks: what happens to our understanding of fascism if we view it through the lens of security? But then a far more interesting question emerges: what happens to our understanding of security if we view it through the lens of fascism? Out of these questions it is suggested that the central issue might be less a question of “security and exclusion” and much more a question of “security and extermination.”

Security presupposes exclusion. Take the piece of legislation passed just a few weeks after the attack on the World Trade Centre, called the *Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act*. Coming in at over 340 pages and carrying twenty-one legal amendments, the Act was said to be necessary and essential to the new security project about to be unleashed on the world. It changed criminal law and immigration procedures to allow people to be held indefinitely, altered intelligence-gathering procedures to allow for the monitoring of people’s reading habits through surveillance of library and bookshop records, and introduced measures to allow for greater access to property, email, computers, and financial and educational records. But if the Act is about security, it is also immediately notable for the wordy title, designed for the acronym it produces: USA PATRIOT. The implication is clear: this is an Act for American patriotism. To oppose it is unpatriotic.

The Patriot Act is, unsurprisingly, intimately connected to ideological tropes that have been very much part of the discourse of security more generally, such as “our way of life” and “our values.” This emerged as a theme very quickly on the day of the attacks on the World Trade Centre. Bush made three statements or proclamations on that day. In his first speech Bush was simply concerned to state his overall control of the situation, but by the third and longest statement, delivered as an “Address to the Nation” just 12 hours after the attacks, he began to articulate the idea that the attacks were on “our way of life” (Bush, 2001a). A few days later, Bush delivered

Correspondence Address: Mark Neocleous, Department of Politics and History, Brunel University, Uxbridge UB8 3PH, UK. Tel.: +44 (0) 1895 266824, Email: mark.neocleous@brunel.ac.uk

some remarks at the national day of prayer and remembrance which sounded as much like a eulogy for America as for the dead, a hymn to the “national character” and “national unity” (Bush, 2001b). By September 20, the theme had been developed into the now famous rhetorical question “Why do they hate us? Answer: they hate our way of life” (Bush, 2001c). This trope was hardly an invention of Bush’s or the current “war on terror.” It had for example been present in the rhetoric of “humanitarian intervention” in the previous decade. The bombing of Serbian forces in Kosovo was conducted on the grounds of “upholding our values,” as Clinton (1999) put it, or for the “moral purpose [of] defending the values we cherish” as Blair commented, adding the obvious link with security: “the spread of our values makes us safer” (1999). Yet despite these precursors, it is the “war on terror” that has put this idea at the heart of the political debate around security.

This has led many people to suggest that one of the most notable features of the “war on terror” has been its grounding in “identity”: in the construction of both the “evil,” “alien” enemy and the “good” American, where what is at stake is something to do with values, a way of life, a national character or political culture. It seems to me that it is also very much about that logic which is so presupposed by security (and identity, for that matter): exclusion. This is why the Patriot Act and key speeches have sought to affirm the *inclusion* within the nation of its loyal Muslim-Arabic subjects against the need to *exclude* those who lack the required loyalty. “Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, and Americans from South Asia play a vital role in our Nation and are entitled to nothing less than the full rights of every American,” notes the Act, calling upon the Nation “to recognize the patriotism of fellow citizens from all ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds.” Likewise: “There are millions of good Americans who practice the Muslim faith who love their country as much as I love the country, who salute the flag as strongly as I salute the flag,” commented Bush a week after the attacks in September 2001 (Bush, 2001d). And the mechanism of exclusion is by no means limited to questions of identity or values. It extends, for example, to the realm of international law through categories such as “unlawful combatants,” “illegal belligerents” or “rogue/failed states,” all of which function ideologically as a means of excluding the people or states in question from the supposed standards through which international order is managed. In other words, the logic of security underpinning the “war on terror” requires knowing who or what should be included as part of the object to be secured and thus who might be excluded as a threat to the security of that object.¹

Security politics is a politics of exclusion, then; that much is clear. Security is cultivated and mobilized by enacting a set of exclusionary practices. Conversely, exclusion is cultivated and realized on security grounds. This mutual presupposition of exclusion through security measures and security through exclusion practices has a long history, underpinning as it does all the historic practices through which civil society and borders—both internal as well as external—have been policed: of how the class of poverty was originally excluded from the body politic, of how the dangerous classes, the urban poor, the racially inferior, the threatening immigrant, the sexually deviant, the politically oppositional, the colonial subject, have been administered in ways excluding them from certain spheres of civil society and the state, certain occupations and careers, certain powers and pleasures.

A number of writers have noted that such exclusions have been central to liberal politics—enacted “not in spite of liberal democracy, but as an integral part of it” (Curthoys, 2003, p. 9; also Lake, 2008, p. 23).² “Rather like the figure of Janus, liberalism presents us with opposed yet ultimately connected faces,” notes Barry Hindess (2001, pp. 365–366).

One, superficially more appealing, expresses the familiar liberal claim that government should rule over, and as far as possible rule through, the activities of free individuals. The other, less benign face reflects the equally liberal view that substantial portions of humanity consist of individuals who are not at present capable of acting in a suitably autonomous fashion.

Accordingly, along with the view of individuals at liberty to conduct themselves in rational liberal ways, the liberal gaze also falls on groups of others who cannot be trusted, those not “at home” in the liberal empire. The outcome, these writers suggest, is an integral relationship between liberalism and exclusion.

Yet the figure of liberalism begins to appear less Janus-like when one realizes that security, rather than liberty or inclusion, is in fact its key concept (Neocleous, 2008). If we recognize that liberalism is less a philosophy of liberty and more a technique of security, as Mitchell Dean puts it (1991, p. 196; 1999, p. 117), then liberalism’s supposedly Janus-like quality, in which it looks in one direction towards an inclusive conception of free individuals and in the other direction towards problematic categories of the population which need excluding in some way from the body politic, turns out to be far from two-faced as first appears. In fact, it turns out to be very single-minded in pursuit of its one key goal: security. It then becomes clear that liberalism *has* to exclude because the logic of security requires it. Picking up any recent book, article, or government document on security, and one is always reading about one liberal practice of exclusion or another. Texts on security simply *are* texts about exclusion, implicitly where not explicitly so.

Other articles in this issue of *Studies in Social Justice* explore some dimensions of this liberal practice of exclusion. In this article, however, I want to pursue a slightly different line, one that pushes this argument about security and exclusion to its limits. And those limits take us into the world of fascism.

A number of writers have noted that there is a real Schmittian logic underpinning security politics (for example, Williams, 2003). Casting an issue as one of “security” tends to situate that issue within the logic of friend and enemy. In so doing it ratchets up strategic “security” fears and dangers and so encourages a political decisionism concerning the “state of exception” (Neocleous, 2006a; 2008, pp. 39–75). Such political reason is the core of Schmitt’s concept of the political. “The political is the most intense and extreme antagonism,” says Schmitt, “and every concrete antagonism becomes that much more political the closer it approaches the most extreme point, that of the friend-enemy grouping.” The nature of friendship lies in a set of common values distinguishing the friend from the “other, the stranger” (Schmitt, 1932/1996, p. 29).

The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in

a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible (1932/1996, p. 27).

For Schmitt, this friend-enemy antagonism is the essence of the political, reaching its highpoint in a state of exception which allows sovereignty to be asserted and reinstated: “sovereign is he who decides on the exception” (Schmitt, 1922/1985, p. 5). This decision is conducted in defence of and with the support of the friend grouping. Now, this kind of argument has been a powerful undercurrent in a fair amount of recent thinking around security. For example, in their influential work aiming to develop security concepts away from classical and realist arguments centred on the security of the state and towards a wider range of “societal sectors,” Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde nonetheless still resort to Schmittian concepts and language. Something becomes a security issue “when [that] issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object.” In such a context, “by saying ‘security,’ a state representative declares an emergency condition” (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998, p. 21). For these writers, the broadening of the sphere of security does little to change the assumptions underpinning the existential threat.

Yet there is a problem here. For Schmitt is the thinker who was once described as “theorist for the Reich” (Bendersky, 1983) and, more recently, “Crown jurist for the Third Reich” (Stirk, 2005). I have no desire to rehearse the reasons why Schmitt’s work is fascist to the core (see Neocleous, 1996). But if there is a real Schmittian logic to much of the language of security, and if there is a fascist dimension to much of Schmitt’s work (of the 1920s and 1930s at least), then does this not demand a proper exploration of the relationship between the logic of security and fascism?

“Speaking and writing about security is never innocent,” says Jef Huysmans, “it always risks contributing to the opening of a window of opportunity for a ‘fascist mobilization’” (2002, p. 43). Events since September 11, 2001, bear witness to this. It is now clear that any revival of fascism will come through a political mobilization in the name of security (Harootunian, 2007). To push this idea I want to explore initially the thematic of security within the original fascist context. As far as I am aware, this has not been done, a fact that is especially odd when one considers that fascism is often understood in terms of the idea of a “police state” and that security is the core category of police (Neocleous, 2000). The initial question I want to ask, then, is: what happens to our understanding of fascism if we view it through the lens of security? But then a far more interesting question emerges: what happens to our understanding of security if we view it through the lens of fascism? These two questions point us to what we might call “the fascist moment.”³ At which point, the central issue might appear to be less a question of “security and exclusion” and much more a question of “security and extermination.” Or maybe we need to think the three together: security, exclusion, extermination.

“Anti-Semitism fused with security issues”

It is well known that the Nazis constantly used euphemism to mask the deeds of the Nazi state and played around with language in order to reframe political questions, as

Victor Klemperer (1946) has shown at length: “productive work” rather than slave labour or being taken into “protective custody” rather than being arrested, to give just two examples. In similar fashion, people who had been robbed of their valuables found that in fact the state had simply “secured” (*sichergestellt*) their property. And rather a lot of such “securing” went on. From the moment communists started being detained “for security reasons,” in Dachau in March 1933, security became integral to the glossary of Nazi ideas. As such, we need to examine the increasing “securitization” of German society from 1933 onwards.

In April 1933, a new “Secret State Police” (*Geheime Staatspolizei*, or *Gestapo*) was formed as part of the new Nazi state. The law creating this new body claimed that it was necessary “in order to assure the effective struggle against all of the efforts directed against the existence and security of the state” (as cited in Gellately, 1991, p. 29). Concerns had been widespread since the seizure of power at the end of January 1933 that not enough was being done in terms of security. For example, Adolf Wagner, *Staatskommissar* at the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior, wrote on March 13, 1933, to Hans Frank, *Staatskommissar* at the Bavarian Ministry of Justice, that “the order for the arrest of all communist officials and *Reichsbannerführer* [Social Democrat squad leaders] has not so far been carried out as thoroughly as necessary for the preservation of peace and security” (as cited in Broszat, 1968/1973, p. 144). The securitization of German society was afoot. Yet the feeling that the “security of the state” was not being properly defended was still in place three years later, and led to a huge reorganization of the security apparatus. In June 1936, major changes were made to the organization of certain aspects of the Nazi state. Hitler appointed Himmler as head of the German police, allowing him to combine this with his role as head of SS. Himmler divided the police into two sections: the Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei*, or Orpo) and the Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*, or Sipo). The latter was a new organization combining the Gestapo and Kripo (*Kriminalpolizei*; the Criminal Police). The Security Police was to be headed by Reinhard Heydrich, who was also head of the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD), the Nazi Party’s Security Service. Later, at the beginning of the war in September 1939 the Security Police and the SD were combined into a new Reich Security Head Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*; the RSHA).

Drawing together these complementary party and state agencies created a powerful new organizational tool which was to become crucial in the war against the communist-Jewish enemy, for a number of reasons. First, many Nazis believed that the project of extermination could be conducted only by those willing and able to undertake it. “Only the Security Police has the necessary experience in this area,” commented Franz Rademacher, head of the Jewish desk in the German Foreign Office (as cited in Browning, 2005, p. 85). Time and again the experience of the Security Police in “security matters” was used by the Nazis as an explanation for the institution’s role in dealing with the “Jewish problem.” To give just one further example, Eichmann’s close associate Theodore Dannecker commented in January 1941 on the importance of the “extensive experience” of the security services in carrying out the final solution (as cited in Browning, 2005, pp. 103–104). Second, just as the military is the least likely institution to resist a military coup, and the police the least likely institution to resist a police state, so the “security services” are the least likely to question, resist or refuse actions carried out in the name of security. And third, having such actions carried out by the Security Police gave the whole

project an air of legitimacy. For example, Rudolf Lehmann, Chief of the legal division of the Armed Forces High Command (OKW), commented in a document on the jurisdiction of military courts that to make the use of military courts “somewhat more palatable” he would omit references to “the carriers of the Jewish-Bolshevik worldview” and “Jewish-Bolshevik system” and would instead emphasize the rationale of security (Browning, 2005, p. 220).

Thus to point to the institutional mish-mash of police and security organizations—Sipo, Kripo, Orpo, Gestapo, SS, SD, and so on—as a way of highlighting “confusion about the nature and mission of the organizations charged with “security” in the Third Reich” (Gellately, 1991, p. 143), is in some sense to miss the point, which is that “security” was the *raison d’être* of the institutional framework as a whole. The institutional mish-mash is therefore somewhat irrelevant; indeed, is there any state which does *not* have an institutional mish-mash of institutions concerned with “security”? What is crucial is that security was the logic which underpinned the whole system. As Browder’s (1996) work has suggested, the institutional identity conferred by security work had a kind of elective affinity with Nazism. That this should be so should not surprise, since in *Mein Kampf* Hitler had referred many times to the importance of security: of economic security for the nation and the insecurity generated by trade unions; the security of the living space for the race and the security of the state within this living space; the security of Germany in the international system; the importance of a food supply and national honour to the nation’s security; the security of the means of executing a movement’s ideas; the list goes on and on (Hitler, 1925, pp. 50, 130, 131, 133, 136, 150, 177, 325, 601). By the time the Nazis came to power, and consolidated this power within the wider international system in the 1930s, a system in which the new ideology of security was becoming increasingly important, this thematic could very easily be used to underpin the whole system. Symptomatically, the SA often denied that they were a “storm section” (*Sturm Abteilung*), and preferred to present themselves in a guise more consistent with this *raison d’être*: as a “security section” (*Sicherheits Abteilung*); the initials “SA” conveniently stood for both (Heiden, 1944, p. 234).

Security thereby permeated the system of legal terror exercised by the Nazis. The *Sicherungslager* (security camp) was one of the main categories of the concentration camp system. But Nikolaus Waschmann (2004) has also shown that the regular legal system—that is, the system of trial and punishment that imprisoned people to such an extent that until August 1944 the numbers in the regular prisons outnumbered those in concentration camps—was also founded on the notion of security. The whole system was based on the notion of “security confinement” (*Sicherungsverwahrung*), derived from the Law against Dangerous Habitual Criminals of November 24, 1933, and aimed at excluding (that is, imprisoning) people said to be a danger to the security of the community—the *sicherungsverwahrter Krimineller*, who wore a triangle with the letter “S.” Judges made extensive use of security confinement sentences, which were eagerly carried out by prison officials committed to the notion, to the extent that both retrospective security confinements (even for people who had not actually been sentenced by the courts for anything) and the indefinite imprisonment of offenders even after the end of their original sentence became common. Security confinement was not just a weapon of criminal policy, but was explicitly political: it was central to Nazism’s

attempt to reorder the German polity and society by excluding “security threats”—“inferiors,” “outsiders,” “deviants,” critics and resisters—from the national community. Eventually *Sicherungsverwahrung* became a euphemism for concentration camp incarceration and “security confinement prisoners” (*Sicherungsverwahrungshaftlinger*), including Jews (often arrested for their political opposition to the regime rather than as “racial aliens”), trade unionists, communists and other problematic outsiders, were taken into “protective custody” (*Schutzhaft*). This term, *Schutzhaft*, was applied initially following the proclamation of the emergency decree of February 28, 1933, but became widespread from April 1933. (In the intervening weeks such arrests were often referred to as a transfer into *Polizeihaft* [police custody], and relevant orders throughout 1933 refer varyingly to “political protective custody,” “police custody for political reasons,” and “political custody” [Broszat, 1968/1973, p. 144; Caplan, 2005], reminding us of the extent to which security and police overlap as political concepts.) The key to such custody was that those taken into it were regarded as enemies of security—a term which in effect “provided the Gestapo with virtually unlimited powers of arrest and confinement” (Gellately, 1991, p. 13).

In other words, the logic of “security” helped not only legitimize the acts of exclusion on which Nazism was initially founded, but also led to the final acts of extermination. The Wannsee conference of January 20, 1942, taken by many to be the formal meeting to launch the Final Solution, was essentially a meeting of security police. Overall control of the Final Solution lay with the Reichsführer SS and chief of the German police (Himmler, with Heydrich as his representative). Indeed, it has been suggested that the purpose of the Wannsee conference was not merely to finalize the plans for the Final Solution, but “to reinforce the RSHA’s pre-eminence in all aspects of the Jewish question” (Roseman, 2002, p. 83). It might also be pointed out that the key administrative agency for supervising the concentration camps alongside the RSHA was the Office of Economic Policy (WVHA), giving us not only another nice euphemism—extermination as economic policy—but also another nice example of the conjunction between security and conceptions of economic order.

“What explains the decision to extend killing to the whole of European Jewry?” asks Michael Burleigh.

Warning bells began to sound in the autumn of 1941, when notice was dramatically served on the Jews of Western Europe too. It is important to grasp...that what follows had nothing whatsoever to do with rationalising economies or settlement plans, but involved anti-Semitism fused with security issues (2001, p. 645).

Whenever the extermination was to be stepped up, such as following the Warsaw uprising in April 1943, it was always as a “security threat” that Jews were depicted, a depiction which of course countervailed against any arguments concerning, say, their economic utility. As Christopher Browning puts it, “with the exception of artisans, Jews were not an important labour factor. Instead, they presented a security threat that had to be neutralized in the interest of the ‘absolutely necessary, quick pacification of the east.’” Thus, “in the eyes of German officials, especially outside the civil administration, the economic usefulness of Jews as forced labourers was far

outweighed by their being perceived as a threat to security” (Browning, 2005, pp. 285–286, 297).

Security was thus the major theme in managing the occupied states and the extermination policies carried out there, and for the measures carried out against other social groups for which “exclusion” wasn’t quite enough. Let me briefly discuss the case of the Lithuanian Jews as an illustration of the point about occupied states, and gypsies and homosexuals as illustrative of the point about social groups.

The initial pogroms and shootings of Lithuanian Jews in the summer of 1941 were understood in terms of the security of the region and conducted under the guise of security. Heydrich authorized the Lithuanian police to carry out “cleansing operations” to secure the movement of the *Einsatzgruppen* and *Einsatzkommandos*. The local understanding was that the project was a security measure: since the Jewish people were the active agents of Bolshevism, their initial exclusion and eventual destruction was necessary on security grounds. Asked under interrogation in 1958 about his role in the shooting of Jewish men in Kretinga in 1941, *SS-Untersführer* Krumbach from the police station in Tilsit commented: “It was explained to me then that according to an order from the Führer, the whole of eastern Jewry had to be exterminated so that there would no longer be Jewish blood available there to maintain a world Jewry, thus bringing about the decisive destruction of world Jewry. This affirmation was by itself not new at that time and was rooted in the ideology of the Party. The *Einsatzkommandos* of the Sipo and of the SD were instituted for this task by the Führer” (as cited in Diekmann, 2000, p. 246).

Once the pogroms against the Jews were set in place, a second dimension of the Nazi obsession with security could then be set into play. The leaders of the *Einsatzgruppen* had to give the pogroms the appearance of being carried out spontaneously by Lithuanians as revenge against the Jews for their supposed Bolshevik activities. In this way the responsibility of the Security Police for the killings would not become widely known—one of the many instances in which the exercise of violence is erased from the concept of security. The Sipo, as the agent of this particular security project, could thereby be protected from accusations of uncontrolled brutality. Diekmann (2000, p. 269) cites the report of *Einsatzgruppe A*, from October 15, 1941: “It was however not undesirable that they [the German Security Police] . . . did not give the appearance of using the clearly unusually harsh measures, which would certainly elicit a stir in German circles. It must be shown to the outside world that the native population itself took the first measures, of its own accord, in a natural reaction against centuries of oppression by the Jews and the terror of the Communists in former times.” This then served to facilitate a further dimension to the importance of security: that the Security Police could then be seen to step in as the guarantor of order—as some kind of institutional check on the “wild wrath of the people.” Thus the Security Police would be needed to restore order, reaffirming once more security’s “positive” role. Diekmann suggests that in terms of the solution to the Jewish problem in Lithuania, “National Socialist security policy was the most important element.”

The intent to exterminate the Jews was clear from the plans for deportations. The analysis of the policy as it actually developed makes it seem possible that further factors were also necessary. The modification of

the racist starvation policy . . . meant first and foremost the pauperization of the Jewish population, which was to be denied the right to live. The mass killings were in this connection legitimized on the grounds of National Socialist security policy (p. 266).

His point applies to the whole of the Third Reich, not just Lithuania.

In terms of social groups, Guenter Lewy (2000, pp. 70–77) has shown that the persecution against the Roma was conducted under a range of security measures. The notion easily spread that Roma were not merely “plague” or “nuisance,” the traditional ways of distancing them, but were also in fact working for foreign intelligence services. This was the reason given to explain why Roma liked to live in border areas. Thus on January 31, 1940, the High Command of the Armed forces requested from Himmler an order prohibiting on the grounds of “defence” Roma from living in the border zone. On April 27, 1940, Heydrich issued a decree on “Resettlement of Gypsies” which gave orders to begin transporting 2,500 Roma away from the western and north-western border zones and to the General Government. These requests and orders were gradually realized through 1940, during which period the security theme became prevalent. Lewy comments that the idea that the expulsion was based in the main on concern about military security is less than credible, for if it was then why did it take so long? And why limit the number to 2,500? Why send them to the General Government, which was also a border zone and where they could do as much damage? And why were foreign Roma excluded? These are fair questions, but they only make sense if one takes the security project at face value. But no security project should ever be taken at face value. Security always functions as an underlying rationale for some political project: an exclusion here, an extermination there; a partial solution here, a final solution there. Moreover, security could play this foundational role precisely because of the way it obliterates any distinction between inside and outside, domestic and foreign. The internal enemy needed to be exterminated because it was in fact integral to the external enemy—international communism. The external security project which identified the Soviet state as the key enemy could thus slide into an internal security project aimed at the supposed agents of the Soviet state, namely the Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy.

At the same time, and in common with many security forces in the West, the Nazis perceived homosexuals as a security threat, part of a broader range of “non-conformist” activities which were the basis for one security measure after another (Browder, 1996, pp. 65–66, 72). Gellately suggests that everyday life became so politicized in Nazi Germany that *even* the sphere of sexuality and friendship became an issue (p. 147) and the Nazis criminalized any behaviour that appeared oppositional (p. 157). Indeed, but that’s where the logic of security takes us. Forms of “deviant” or “perverse” sexuality have long been treated as a security problem in liberal democracy as well as under fascism (Neocleous, 2006c, 2008, pp. 123–141).

Another 6 million

“I have talked a good deal about Hitler,” says Aimé Césaire in his *Discourse on Colonialism* in 1955. Why? “Because he deserves it: he makes it possible to see

things on a large scale.” Césaire adds, “At the end of capitalism, there is Hitler. At the end of formal humanism and philosophical renunciation, there is Hitler” (1955/2000, p. 37). He may well have said: at the end of security, there is Hitler.

This is precisely why the Schmittian logic underpinning so much of the security discourse is so telling. For in Schmittian terms the question of security unveils the nature of the political, inherent in which is the idea of combat and annihilation (1932/1996, p. 32). “War is neither the aim nor the purpose nor even the very content of politics. But as an ever present possibility it is the leading presupposition which . . . thereby creates a specifically political behaviour” (1932/1996, p. 34). As much as the state presupposes the concept of the political, so the political presupposes the concept of war. To this end, Hobbes’s war of all against all becomes the “fundamental presupposition of a specific political philosophy” (1932/1996, p. 65). However, whilst Hobbes’s state of nature is a war of individuals, Schmitt’s account posits collectivities at war, albeit undefined: “An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity” (p. 28). And it is clear that this enemy may be domestic as well as foreign: the fight in question may be a civil war as much as war between nations, a war of extermination against internal as much as external enemies. This is the main reason Schmitt so despises liberalism: because it *demilitarizes* politics and reduces intensely political concepts such as combat to either economic competition or intellectual discussion (1932/1996, p. 71). In so doing “the decisive bloody battle” is transformed into a parliamentary debate (1922/1985, p. 63).⁴ For Schmitt, in contrast, the decisive bloody battle becomes the *defining characteristic* of the political, the key to the nature of the decision and to the identification of friends and enemies. Schmitt argues, “A world in which the possibility of war is eliminated, a completely pacified globe, would be a world without the distinction of friend and enemy and hence a world without politics” (1932/1996, pp. 35, 78).

For Schmitt, war is the pinnacle of great politics and the highest form of human behaviour: “What always matters is the possibility of the extreme case taking place, the real war” (1932/1996, p. 35). War therefore needs no real justification as such; or, rather, its existence *is* its justification: “the justification of war does not reside in its being fought for ideals or norms of justice, but in its being fought against a real enemy” (1932/1996, p. 49). Being at war with one’s enemy follows logically from the decision to identify the “other,” the “stranger,” as different and alien—an enemy and therefore geared for combat. But because Schmitt’s decisionism is an essentially existentialist politics, war is not just a perpetual phenomenon of the political, but is its *highest form*. “The high points of politics are simultaneously the moments in which the enemy is, in concrete clarity, recognized as the enemy” (1932/1996, p. 67).⁵ The concrete clarity of the enemy raises the possibility of “life” and the struggles surrounding it being accorded an existential meaning. In this context, the importance of the state of exception is that it breaks through the torpid, repetitive everydayness of bourgeois norms. Just as in existential philosophy moments of peril call forth individual “authenticity,” so the state of exception, as moment of *political* peril, calls forth a *political* authenticity. The state of exception—the clampdown in the name of security—is thus granted an existential significance. But because the enemy, as other, is existentially alien, *exclusion* is not enough. Rather, its *physical annihilation* takes on an existential meaning; extermination is necessary. “The

friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing” (1932/1996, p. 33). Extermination is thus beyond the requirement of any normative meaning; it is justified for its own sake, for the meaning it brings to the political.

Exclusion is not extermination. But the extermination exhibited by the fascist moment and legitimized in the work of a thinker such as Schmitt serves as a salutary reminder of the contiguities between them. It serves also as a salutary reminder of one of the fundamental lessons of history: that extermination has frequently been carried out in the name of security. Working out the figures here would be an impossible task of course. But take, as just one example, the calculation by John Stockwell. Stockwell had been part of a CIA project in Angola which led to the deaths of over 20,000 people but, reflecting more generally on the achievements of the security services in which he worked, he commented:

Coming to grips with these U.S./CIA activities in broad numbers and figuring out how many people have been killed in the jungles of Laos or the hills of Nicaragua is very difficult. But, adding them up as best we can, we come up with a figure of six million people killed—and this is a minimum figure. Included are: one million killed in the Korean War, two million killed in the Vietnam War, 800,000 killed in Indonesia, one million in Cambodia, 20,000 killed in Angola—the operation I was part of—and 22,000 killed in Nicaragua (1991, p. 81).

Note: the six million is a minimum figure; he omits to mention rather a lot of other interventions; he was writing in 1991; and his focus is solely on the security practices of one state. If we started factoring these into the picture the figure of 6 million would quickly be dwarfed, and would thereby quickly dwarf the 6 million estimated to have been exterminated by the fascist regime in Germany. The slaughter bench of history appears coated in the blood of those murdered in the name of security.

In 1953 Franz Neumann commented that the integrating element of liberal democracy purports to be a moral one, whether it be freedom or justice. However, he also noted that “there is opposed to this a second integrating principle of a political system: fear of an enemy.” Such fear, he notes, is a key feature of fascist political thought, which “asserts that the creation of a national community is conditioned by the existence of an enemy whom one must be willing to exterminate physically.” But Neumann adds that when the concepts of “enemy” and “fear” come to constitute the energetic principles of politics, democracy becomes impossible and the system is ripe for dictatorship (1953, pp 223–224). His reference is to Schmitt, and reflects also on his own experience of having lived through the rise of fascism in Germany. But it is difficult not to think that he also had in mind the security practices then being carried out by liberal democracies, such as the Loyalty Program being carried out in the pursuit of American security in which the fabrication of fear and insecurity was the crucial dynamic. This Program replicated and in some ways surpassed the practices for consolidating loyalty, national identity and political unity used by fascist and authoritarian regimes: lack of toleration of different political opinions in public life; police incursions into personal lives; the proscription of lawful associations; Star Chamber proceedings on the basis of anonymous testimony; persecution for political beliefs entailing no criminal conduct; and the enforcement

of rigid political orthodoxy through the use of vague and sweeping standards of loyalty. The fear of the enemy, and the equally substantive fear of being denounced as part of the enemy, meant the continual reiteration of patriot acts on the part of the good citizen-subjects. The Program was also being conducted at a time when the national security state was employing fascists in its struggle for security.⁶ Neumann clearly sensed that much of what he said about fascism could be used to point to dangers that actually lie within liberalism, dangers rooted in allowing a mythical security to become the only measure of political judgment and fear the basis of order.

Thriving in the crises of liberalism, the fascist potential *within* liberal democracy has always been more dangerous than the fascist tendency *against* democracy (Adorno, 1959/1998, p. 90; Neocleous, 1997). Bearing in mind that the crises of liberalism are more often than not expressed as crises threatening the security of the state and the social order of capital, and bearing in mind the extent to which fascism comes draped in its own security blanket and can speak the language of security as well as anyone else, it really is no exaggeration to say that were such tendencies to be realized now, they would do so in the name of security. This poses a very real political problem for those academics and activists who in recent years have sought to rethink, redefine, remap, and revamp security, since it is not clear that simply broadening the security agenda does anything to mitigate against the fascist potential that lies within security. For in constantly harping on about the need for a new security agenda these “solutions” might actually be part of the problem. Rather than yet another rethinking of security, then, the solution lies in moving away from “security” entirely; it lies in the critique of security.⁷

In the opening section of his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of its Reproducibility” (1936/2002), Walter Benjamin comments that as well as contributing to the creation of conditions which would make it possible to abolish capitalism itself, the essay also tries to develop concepts which “are completely useless for the purposes of fascism.” The critique of security is part of this project. But given the extent to which the ideology of security has become the dominant trope of contemporary politics, and given the ways in which ideology works by imposing an obviousness or naturalness on ideas (Althusser, 1969/1971, p. 161), which is nowhere truer than with security (a goal so “obvious” and “natural” that it can barely ever be questioned), the critique of security is not without its difficulties.

Faced with such difficulties, and in the context of the rise of fascism, Benjamin enquired in 1929 about “the conditions for revolution.” In bleak tone, he suggested that surrealism had come close to the Communist answer. “And that means pessimism all along the line. Absolutely. Mistrust in the fate of literature, mistrust in the fate of freedom, mistrust in the fate of European humanity, but three times mistrust in all reconciliation: between classes, between nations, between individuals” (Benjamin, 1929/1999, pp. 216–217). “Literature,” “freedom,” “humanity”: the slogans and clichés of a bourgeois liberal humanism always seeking a “reconciliation” of some sort or another.⁸ To which we should add: “security.” Mistrust in security, all along the line.

Notes

- ¹ Hence the prompt rounding up of some 1,200 immigrants and antiwar activists following the passing of the Patriot Act. The precise figure remains unknown, due to security's sister concept: secrecy.
- ² Curthoy's point is well made, and her historical material refreshing, but she pulls her punches in dramatic fashion at the end of her article, in which liberalism turns out to be the basis for freedom and equality after all (p. 32), as though she had forgotten the previous 20 pages of her own argument.
- ³ In his work on security and modernity, Robert Latham (1997) shows the central role of security in the process of international order-building following World War II, in which liberal order was achieved via a military-strategic strategy shaping both the international realm and the identity of the liberal state. This 'liberal moment', as Latham calls it, was the moment of security. In fact, the origins of this liberal moment lie a decade earlier, in the 1930s as the logic of social security comes to the fore as an explicit dimension of the administrative state (Neocleous, 2006b, 2008). But if the real moment of security was in fact between the wars, and if the period between the wars is remembered for the rise to power of fascism as much as anything else, then we might gain something from thinking of this as 'the fascist moment'—a fascist moment which was also part of the moment of security.
- ⁴ Schmitt is ridiculously wrong on this point. As any analysis of the history of liberalism shows, there's nothing that liberals like more than dealing out a good dose of slaughter against either external or internal enemies. That Schmitt chooses to ignore this dimension of liberalism is rather telling.
- ⁵ Interpretations of Schmitt which seek to play down the glorification of war are only possible if one ignores the existential nature of his conception.
- ⁶ The 1998 War Crimes Disclosure Act requiring the CIA, FBI and Army to declassify operational information has revealed the extent to which being a fascist was not a security problem for the US state: between late-1946 and December 1952 over 600 German scientists were brought from Germany to the US and placed in major universities and corporations (Breitman, Goda, Naftali & Wolfe, 2005; for the broader historical backdrop see Simpson, 1988 and 1993). It might also be noted that at the height of his power many people feared that Joe McCarthy's search for security would bring fascism to America, a fear founded in part on his early sympathy for Mein Kampf and an episode in his early Senatorial career in which his investigation of a Nazi massacre in Belgium gave rise to concerns of Nazi sympathizing (Kovel, 1997, pp. 118, 281).
- ⁷ This is distinct from critical security studies which, as I show elsewhere (Neocleous, 2008), has more in common with classical liberalism than with critical theory.
- ⁸ For an extended argument against the conservative nature of "reconciliation," see Neocleous, 2005, pp. 29–35.

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