CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-69159-8 - Civilizing Security
Ian Loader and Neil Walker
Excerpt
More information

Prologue
On writing about security today

> Citizens of western countries are too ready to take for granted the relatively civilized political conditions they enjoy, forgetting that politics in most times and places has been thoroughly predatory. Achieving a type of politics that is less predatory, and geared to some conception of the public good, is not easy under any circumstances, and may be impossible in the absence of certain preconditions. One of these preconditions seems to be a collective people, sustained by myths and capable of generating and monitoring political power. (Canovan 2005: 138)

There comes a moment in the historical development of any field of social enquiry, or at least in the formation of one's own thinking about its objects, when it seems necessary to return to basics; to dig up the foundations in order to subject to sustained reflection elements of the field, and the relations between them, that have come to be collectively taken for granted, treated as the unexamined presuppositions of research programmes. We believe that this moment has been reached in the social and political analysis of security and its relationship to the modern state.

Support for this judgement lies all around us today, both in respect of the profound and perplexing transformations that appear to be affecting the state's capacity to act as the pre-eminent guarantor of security to its citizens, and in the competing responses that these have provoked. On the one hand, there seems plenty of evidence to buttress the view that the modern state's place as not *a* but *the* security actor is being eroded under conditions of globalization and its neo-liberal thematization, such that commercial operatives, and non-state actors within civil, or uncivil, society, assume a far greater role in promising or providing security within, and across, contemporary societies (Johnston and Shearing 2003; Krahmann 2005). This, in turn, has generated reactions ranging from celebration, to cautious endorsement, to plain confusion, to cries of concern about the likely, inegalitarian and illiberal, consequences (Wood and Dupont 2006a; Zedner forthcoming). On the other hand,

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-69159-8 - Civilizing Security
Ian Loader and Neil Walker
Excerpt
More information

one can find no little – on the surface contradictory – evidence that, in the wake of 9/11 and the Bali, Madrid and London bombings, state authority is reasserting, reempowering and relegitimating itself under the sign of security in the face of the dangers posed to society by transnational political violence. Here debate is routinely joined today between those political actors and commentators who hold that liberal democracies confront unprecedented threats from 'Islamic terrorism' and that states must take urgent, decisive measures to do what they deem necessary to defeat it, and those who claim that under the cloak of a 'war on terror' governments are mobilizing and responding selectively to threats in ways that place hard-won democratic rights and principles in great peril. It is against this backdrop, one in which security has become a trope of everyday political discourse and exchange, that it appeared to us valuable to revisit one of modernity's most profound conundrums and reflect fundamentally on the idea of security, on what it means for individuals to be and feel secure, and on the complex, contradictory intersections that exist between security and the practices of the modern state. This book is the result.

The upshot of our reflections on this conundrum will become apparent soon enough. But it may perhaps be useful at the outset – so as to be precise about the book's purposes and avoid offering readers a false prospectus – to state clearly what we have *not* set out to accomplish. We have not, first of all, sought to offer a detailed empirical mapping of the plurality of actors and agencies who are engaged in practices of security across the world today or a 'state-of-the-art' survey of the theoretical paradigms and empirical enquiries that endeavour to make sense of them (cf. Terriff *et al.* 1999; Zedner forthcoming). It is now commonly accepted, and almost otiose to mention, that writing about contemporary security requires one to come to terms with much more than the nation state and its police, military and cognate security operatives. The private security industry – in forms ranging from small local companies to global corporations – now functions within and across national boundaries and is engaged in 'domestic' security, the protection of transnational economic interests, and the support and conduct of military operations. We must add to this the 'grassroots' policing and protective practices engaged in by non-state actors within civil society – especially but not only in poor communities in the developing world. We need to think about the development of the European Union as an 'internal' and 'external' security actor and about the role

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-69159-8 - Civilizing Security
Ian Loader and Neil Walker
Excerpt
More information

played by states, the EU, the UN and international NGOs in practices of post-conflict policing and social reconstruction. And so on and so on. Faced with such pluralized, fragmented, commodified and by no means state-dominated environments, we plainly require better empirical knowledge, whether of the operation and effects of new security actors on the ground, or their linkages with 'old' protective agencies within security networks, or of the overarching institutional pattern within different jurisdictions and across their territorial boundaries. This much cannot be gainsaid. But such descriptive mapping is not the only task that the pluralization of security confronts us with and it is not the one we have chosen to tackle in this book.

This is not, secondly, a book about the 'war on terror'. Since 9/11 the shelves of bookstores across the western world have been filled – in new, hastily arranged sections earmarked 'terrorism' – with text after text purporting to analyse some element of the apocalyptic danger posed to liberal societies and western interests by al-Qaeda and its offshoots, or to praise or censure the ways in which the American or other governments have defined and responded to that threat.[1] Many such texts can no doubt lay claim to being serious books on a serious topic written by serious journalists or academics, as recent efforts by, among many others, Benjamin Barber (2003), Jason Burke (2004), John Gray (2003), Michael Ignatieff (2004) and David Rose (2004) attest. But there is a standing danger in the publishing industry that has developed around the 'war on terror' of authors either chasing events in a manner that gives their work an all too imminent 'use-by' date, or else of falling prey to the kinds of spontaneous thinking that are, as Pierre Bourdieu was at constant pains to remind us, the enemy of the construction of social scientific knowledge and understanding. We will, as the book unfolds, have cause to make observations on the way in which the so-called 'war on terror' is permeating the contemporary politics and practice of security, just as we will at numerous points seek to describe the agents and agencies that comprise a pluralized security landscape that stands today in great need of more precise cartography and fuller explanation. But these are not, we want to emphasize, our principal purposes.

What follows then, and instead, is an essay on the idea of security and its relationship to political community. It represents an attempt,

[1] During a recent visit to the books section of Amazon.com (16 May 2006) a search under 'war on terror' unearthed no less than 1,177 items.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-69159-8 - Civilizing Security
Ian Loader and Neil Walker
Excerpt
More information

on our part, to take a step back from the practical immediacies and apparent security imperatives of the present in a bid to make better sense of the former and scrutinize the claims made in respect of the latter. It is as such, if one wishes to insist upon a disciplinary tag, an exercise in applied social and political theory, by which we claim no more than that it is an effort to think and write as coherently as we are currently able about the practice of security and its relationship to the practices of the state, in ways that are informed by relevant research and reflection in criminology, the sociology of policing and social control, political science, public law and international security studies. We shall, in substantive terms, outline and defend the idea that security – understood sociologically as a 'thick' public good – is an indispensable constituent of any good society and argue that the democratic state has a necessary and virtuous part to play in seeking to realize the good of security thus conceived – in seeking, in the words of our title, to *civilize* security and to release its *civilizing* potential. This, we believe, is an argument that has application and purchase not merely in 'settled' democratic societies with strong state traditions, but also in those settings where authoritarian states routinely act in ways injurious to the liberty and security of their citizens and in environments where 'weak' or 'failed' states lack the capacity to act as a security-enhancing political authority. By way of conclusion, we seek to extend and revise the argument still further by examining how best to conceptualize and promote security as a global public good.

In making this case, we remain acutely aware that we are writing about (and within), and in a modest bid to act upon, a world that is deeply inhospitable to the democratic, egalitarian and solidaristic security culture that it is our purpose to delineate and foster; one from which, as John Dunn (1993: 122) has argued, 'any reasonable and relatively concrete social and political hope' has been 'deleted'. It is a world in which the governments of liberal states increasingly accede to populist, xenophobic demands in ways that undermine the democratic liberties of their citizens. It is a world where neo-liberalism – and the 'order of egoism' that it champions (Dunn 2005: ch. 4) – has come to be ascendant in ways that have enabled policing and security resources to be captured by those with the greatest supply of economic and social capital and thereby distributed in inverse relation to risk, and hence need. It is a world replete with authoritarian regimes, and divided or

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-69159-8 - Civilizing Security
Ian Loader and Neil Walker
Excerpt
More information

post-conflict societies, where insecurities, inequalities and the absence of democratic governance go hand in hand. It is a world, in sum, in which the idea of politically constituted public authority recognizing the claims and seeking to coordinate the security interests of all its citizens appears remote and increasingly far-fetched.

Faced with such inhospitable conditions, one can easily lapse into fatalistic despair, letting events simply come as they will, or else seek refuge in the consolations offered by the total critique of securitization practices – a path that some critical scholars in criminology and security studies have found all too seductive (e.g. Bigo 2002, 2006; Walters 2003). Or one can, as we have done, supplement social criticism with the hard, uphill, necessarily painstaking work of seeking to specify what it may mean for citizens to live together securely with risk; to think about the social and political arrangements capable of making this possibility more rather than less likely, and to do what one can to nurture practices of collective security shaped not by fugitive market power or by the unfettered actors of (un)civil society, but by an inclusive, democratic *politics*.

Social analysts of crime and security have become highly attuned to, and warned repeatedly of, the illiberal, exclusionary effects of the association between security and political community (Dillon 1996; Hughes 2007). They have not, it should be said, done so without cause, for reasons we set out at some length as the book unfolds. But this sharp sensitivity to the risks of thinking about security through a communitarian lens has itself come at a price, namely, that of failing to address and theorize fully the virtues and social benefits that can flow from members of a political community being able to put and pursue security in common. This, it seems to us, is a failure to heed the implications of the stake that *all* citizens have in security; to appreciate the closer alignment of self-interest and altruism that can attend the acknowledgement that we are forced to live, as Kant put it, inescapably side-by-side and that individuals simultaneously constitute and threaten one another's security; and to register the security-enhancing significance and value of the affective bonds of trust and abstract solidarity that political communities depend upon, express and sustain. All this, we think, offers reasons to believe that security offers a conduit, perhaps the best conduit there is, for giving practical meaning to the idea of the public good, for reinventing social democratic politics, even for renewing the activity of politics at all.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-69159-8 - Civilizing Security
Ian Loader and Neil Walker
Excerpt
More information

These, of course, may prove to be naïve hopes, futile whistling in a cold and hostile wind. It is in addition true that the project of civilizing security is ultimately a question not of social theory but of political praxis. But if such a project is ever to be thematized as a politics it requires, or at least can be furthered by, some form of theoretical articulation; one which reminds us, as C. L. R. James (1963) might have said, that those who know only of security of security nothing know. It is with this overarching purpose in mind that we have been moved to write in the way that we have about security today.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-69159-8 - Civilizing Security
Ian Loader and Neil Walker
Excerpt
More information

1 *Uncivil security?*

OUR argument in this book is that security is a valuable public good, a constitutive ingredient of the good society, and that the democratic state has a necessary and virtuous role to play in the production of this good. The state, and in particular the forms of public policing governed by it, is, we shall argue, indispensable to the task of fostering and sustaining liveable political communities in the contemporary world. It is, in the words of our title, pivotal to the project of *civilizing security*.

By invoking this phrase we have in mind two ideas, both of which we develop in the course of the book. The first, which is relatively familiar if not uncontroversial, is that security *needs* civilizing. States – even those that claim with some justification to be 'liberal' or 'democratic' – have a capacity when self-consciously pursuing a condition called 'security' to act in a fashion injurious to it. So too do non-state 'security' actors, a point we return to below and throughout the book. They proceed in ways that trample over the basic liberties of citizens; that forge security for some groups while imposing illegitimate burdens of insecurity upon others, or that extend the coercive reach of the state – and security discourse – over social and political life. As monopoly holders of the means of legitimate physical and symbolic violence, modern states possess a built-in, paradoxical tendency to undermine the very liberties and security they are constituted to protect. Under conditions of fear, such as obtain across many parts of the globe today, states and their police forces are prone to deploying their power in precisely such uncivil, insecurity-instilling ways. If the state is to perform the ordering and solidarity-nourishing work that we argue is vital to the production of secure political communities then it must, consequently, be connected to forms of discursive contestation, democratic scrutiny and constitutional control. The state is a great civilizing force, a necessary and virtuous component of the good society. But if it is to take on this role, the state must itself be civilized – made safe by and for democracy.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-69159-8 - Civilizing Security
Ian Loader and Neil Walker
Excerpt
More information

But our title also has another, less familiar meaning – the idea that security *is* civilizing. Individuals who live, objectively or subjectively, in a state of anxiety do not make good democratic citizens, as European theorists reflecting upon the dark days of the 1930s and 1940s knew well (Neumann 1957). Fearful citizens tend to be inattentive to, unconcerned about, even enthusiasts for, the erosion of basic freedoms. They often lack openness or sympathy towards others, especially those they apprehend as posing a danger to them. They privilege the known over the unknown, us over them, here over there. They often retreat from public life, seeking refuge in private security 'solutions' while at the same time screaming anxiously and angrily from the sidelines for the firm hand of authority – for tough 'security' measures against crime, or disorder, or terror. Prolonged episodes of violence, in particular, can erode or destroy people's will and capacity to exercise political judgement and act in solidarity with others (Keane 2004: 122–3). Fear, in all these ways, is the breeding ground, as well as the stock-in-trade, of authoritarian, uncivil government.

But there is more to it than that. Security is also civilizing in a further, more positive sense. Security, we shall argue, is in a sociological sense a 'thick' public good, one whose production has irreducibly social dimensions, a good that helps to constitute the very idea of 'publicness'. Security, in other words, is simultaneously the producer and product of forms of trust and abstract solidarity between intimates and strangers that are prerequisite to democratic political communities. The state, moreover, performs vital cultural and ordering work in fashioning the good of security conceived of in this sense. It can, under the right conditions, create inclusive communities of practice and attachment, while ensuring that these remain rights-regarding, diversity-respecting entities. In a world where the state's pre-eminence in governing security is being questioned by private-sector interests, practices of local communal ordering and transnational policing networks, the constitution of old- and new-fashioned forms of democratic political authority is, we shall argue, indispensable to cultivating and sustaining the civilizing effects of security.

Security and its discontents

Raising these possibilities is, of course, to invite a whole series of obvious but nonetheless significant questions: what is security? What

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-69159-8 - Civilizing Security
Ian Loader and Neil Walker
Excerpt
More information

does it mean to be or to feel secure? Who or what is the proper object of security – individuals, collectivities, states, humanity at large? What social and political arrangements are most conducive to the production of security? It is also to join – in a global age that is now also an age of terror – a highly charged political debate about the meanings and value of security as a good, and about how it may best be pursued. It is these questions, and this debate, that we want to address in this book.

Security has become *the* political vernacular of our times. This has long been so in respect of 'law and order' within nation states. Authoritarian regimes are routinely in the habit of using the promise and rhetoric of security as a means of fostering allegiance and sustaining their rule – delivering safe streets while (and by) placing their citizens in fear of the early morning knock at the door (Michnik 1998). Democratic societies too have over the last several decades come to be governed through the prism of crime – a phenomenon especially marked in the USA, Britain and Australasia, though not without resonance in other liberal democratic states (Garland 2001; Simon 2006; see also Newburn and Sparks 2004). But security has also since 9/11, and the 'war on terror' waged in response to it, become a pervasive and contested element of world politics, impacting significantly on the 'interior' life of states and international and transnational relations in ways, as we shall see, that escalate the breakdown of once settled distinctions between internal and external security, war and crime, policing and soldiering (Kaldor 1999; Bigo 2000a).

Today, security politics is riven by disagreements over the pros and cons of self-consciously seeking security using predominantly policing and military means; by disputes about how and whether to 'balance' security with such other goods as freedom, justice and democracy; and by conflicts between a conception of security as protection from physical harm and wider formulations of 'human' or 'global' security. In the face of these debates we are aware that the title and ambitions of this text are likely to meet with one of three possible responses. They will be seen by some as offensive to the benign intentions and purposes of governments and security actors. They may be viewed, alternatively, as the naïve, wrong-headed pursuit of an oxymoron. Or they may be dismissed – by those who share our broad ambition to civilize security – as too limited in their grasp of what the idea of security can and should mean. We want to probe a little further into each of these anticipated reactions.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-69159-8 - Civilizing Security
Ian Loader and Neil Walker
Excerpt
More information

In so doing, we can begin to pinpoint the limitations of certain established dispositions towards, and public discourses about, security, as well as indicating how the debate about security can be moved to a different – we think more fruitful – place.[1]

The first – currently hegemonic – response issues from a lobby that seeks fairly unambiguously to *promote* security and that takes exception to the idea that security needs civilizing. Security, on this view, is an unqualified human good. The protection of its people from internal and external threats stands consequently as the first and defining priority of government. Far from needing to be balanced with democratic rights and freedoms, security is a precondition for the enjoyment of such goods. Far from needing 'civilizing', security is the foundation stone and hallmark of civilization. Security, moreover, can and should be directly and consciously pursued using what Joseph Nye (2002) calls 'hard power' – by enabling, resourcing and enthusiastically backing the military, intelligence agencies and the police. It is these agencies that will protect the state and its citizens, and these agencies whose purposes and effectiveness must not be hamstrung by excessive legal rights and safeguards that give succour to the enemy, or by forms of democratic deliberation that obstruct decisive executive action. This – stripped to its essentials – is the discourse that has animated countless 'wars on drugs' and 'crackdowns' on crime and disorder in both democratic and authoritarian states over recent decades, and which since 9/11 has fuelled and justified what may turn out to be a permanent 'war on terror'.

This disposition towards, and identification with, security has long antecedents dating back to Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes, and is

[1] Our concern in this section is not principally with paradigms of scholarly enquiry and exchange with all their characteristic caution and careful qualifications but, much more, with the dispositions towards security that find expression in contemporary public and political discourse. The positions we discuss – those we term the 'security lobby', the 'liberty lobby' and the 'human security lobby' – are clearly more internally complex than the brief typifications which follow allow; there are few 'security lobbyists', for instance, who do not make some room for rights-based limitations, just as few civil libertarians fit the political caricature of their opponents as complacent about the safety of their co-citizens. But what we seek to capture here are the overarching orientations of each worldview, the claims and contentions that their proponents instinctively 'reach for' and find emotionally compelling, those which consequently tend to constitute the broad contours of, and lines of division within, security politics today.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org