

WAR ON TERROR

Nine Eleven and the Manufacture of Consent

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IF, TRADITIONALLY, WAR IS A hallmark of sovereignty, so it is with war on terror, but in this case it is not an act of sovereignty abroad only, but also at home, to control populations. It is both an aggressive act and a police operation, an action against “rogue States”, with the possibility of crimi-nalizing social movements. Indeed, statutes (written laws) make it possible to prosecute any act the objective of which is to influence governmental policy or to exert pressure on an international organization.

Anti-terrorist laws give the executive the capacity to suppress all forms of opposition and to reject all forms of differentiation, even the difference between an act and the mere eventuality of this act. The law is no longer codified, a shield against the arbitrary. On the contrary, it is now written in the law that there is no limit any longer to the exercise of power.

In all European countries, the rights of legal defence have been weakened. In the US they have been done away with completely for foreigners who have been designated as terrorists by the executive. On both sides of the Atlantic citizens are submitted to measures of surveillance that used to be reserved for counter-intelligence. Civilians can be submitted to measures that deprive them of their freedom, measures that are more constraining than those imposed on war prisoners.

The war on terror does away with the distinction between the enemy and the criminal. It fuses the law code of war and criminal law. Populations can appear to be enemies in the eyes of their own governments. This situation has already been codified and legitimized by the US criminal law. The 2006 Military Commissions Act inscribed in the text of the law the notion of “illegal combatant enemy”, which became “unprotected belligerent enemy” in 2009. The US executive power can designate as “enemy” any citizen of a country with which it is not at war, and even its own citizens. The administration need not motivate its decision nor bring the slightest element of proof.

This shows a deep political and legal mutation since it reverses the relations established between populations and their governments, the relation between the institutive agent and the instituted. It is no longer the populations that institute the political power, but the political power that determines, among its nationals, who is a citizen and who is an enemy who must be banned from society. The mutation is so dramatic that society’s symbolic order is undermined.

A person is a terrorist because he or she has been branded such; legal texts thus establish an identity between the word and the thing. They place people beyond language, outside its discriminating power, and consecrate the realm of the image. They confine people in

psychosis. The substitution of the image for language brings people back to an archaic stage of fusion with the mother's figure, in this case, that of the mothering State.

Nowadays, the symbolic mother, as opposed to the paternal forms of power, no longer obliges people to obey, but to consent. The current social structure is one where individuals are seized with terror and give themselves over to the State. They accept the destruction of their liberties and give up the right to decide for themselves, in exchange for a protection that annihilates them.

Being a form of motherly fusion with power, war on terror evacuates all possibility of conflict. The mothering figure of power produces a denial of politics. It rejects conflicts and difference. It addresses itself lovingly to homogenized monads with which it establishes a relation of virtual intimacy.

The objective of war on terror is to take the place of the sacred, to found a new Real in the place of the symbolic. As in Husserl's phenomenology, the image of Nine Eleven demands of people that they suspend all knowledge derived from the perception of facts. The laws of physics must be put in brackets. All question, all reference to objects, is disqualified as pertaining to the theory of great conspiracies, for their materiality runs in opposition to the image that has been given to be seen. It is a screen against the tyrant's gaze, against its capacity to impose a meaning without having to refer to things. The Nine Eleven icon affords a direct vision of the invisible. It blinds people and in most cases they look without seeking. The real is imposed upon people without the mediation of reason, without the interposition of Perseus' shield, that screen that makes it possible for all to see, while being protected against the fire of the gaze.

In such a world everything works to produce images. The different notions that specify the terrorist act and organizations are presented in the form of abstract constructs. They are not aimed at addressing a particular form of crime. Criminal codes contained all the provisions necessary to confront the materiality of crime. □□□

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