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The symbolic politics of the state of exception: images and performances

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Abstract This article discusses selected examples of the state of exception's symbolic embeddedness and symbolic performances related to it. After suggesting a revision of a simplistic understanding of the term "symbolic politics" as developed by Murray Edelman and others who confine symbolic action mainly to the realm of deception and manipulation, the symbolic force of rhetoric in exceptional times will be demonstrated by looking at recent examples from the French context. In a next step, the article will shed light on typical rituals of community-building, reassurance, and resilience after terrorist attacks before turning to the staging of political leadership in times of emergency. Moreover, the ambivalent and controversial use of images in the course of the "War on Terror" will be addressed. Lastly, the symbolic side of securitization animated by emergency narratives, which comes to the fore in the building of new security walls and especially in the military reconstruction of large cities, will be discussed.

Die Symbolpolitik des Ausnahmezustands: Bilder und Handlungen

Zusammenfassung Dieser Artikel widmet sich ausgewählten Fällen, in denen die symbolische Einbettung des Ausnahmezustands und ihn begleitende symbolische Handlungen zur Geltung kommen. Nach einem Plädoyer für eine Revision traditioneller Vorstellungen von „Symbolpolitik", die im Anschluss an Murray Edelman und andere Autoren häufig ins Reich der Täuschung und Manipulation verwiesen wird, analysiert der Artikel zunächst zwei jüngere Beispiele aus Frankreich, die die symbolische Kraft der Rhetorik im Ausnahmezustand demonstrieren. Anschließend sollen typische Rituale der Gemeinschaftsbildung, kollektiven Selbstvergewisserung und Selbstbehauptung nach Terroranschlägen beleuchtet werden, bevor die Insze-

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nierung politischer Führungskompetenzen in Ausnahmesituationen in den Fokus rückt. Der Analyse des ambivalenten und kontroversen Einsatzes von Bildern im Laufe des Kriegs gegen den Terror folgt schließlich ein Blick auf die symbolische Dimension der häufig auf den Ausnahmezustand rekurrierenden gegenwärtigen Sicherheitspolitik, die sich in neuen Mauern und Schutzwällen, aber auch besonders der militärischen Umgestaltung großer Städte zeigt.

1 Introduction

Reflections on the state of exception and the conferral of emergency powers have been part of political and legal thinking since the days of the Roman Republic, which established the office of "commissary dictator" in times of crisis (Lemke 2017, pp. 52 ff.; Rossiter 1948, pp. 15 ff.; Schmitt 1978, pp. 1 ff.), and have been intensively pursued in the framework of the modern constitutional state and democratic rule. The state of exception's frequent application in various countries since the attacks of 9/11 has further animated the discourse and analysis of contemporary and historical instances of the state of exception. In this far-reaching and well-developed debate, however, there is a peculiar gap, as the symbolic side of the suspension of normality has thus far only rarely been scrutinized by philosophers, legal scholars, and social scientists. Therefore, this article will present and analyze several examples of the state of exception's symbolic embeddedness and symbolic performances related to it in order to argue in favor of a general sensitivity to this cultural dimension of politics. As important as theoretical reflections, legal structures, public justifications, and narrative foundations of the state of exception are, the politics of exception cannot be sufficiently addressed without comprehending its symbolic form as expressed in specific images, rituals, and other symbolic actions. The analysis of this complex is an interdisciplinary task that a mode of political culture research, which focuses not only on mentalities and civic attitudes towards political objects, but is also aware of the importance of symbols, rituals, and aesthetic condensations for the study of political (and legal) culture (Rohe 1996; Suntrup 2018, pp. 411 ff.), should not evade.

Thus, in the second section, this article will begin by correcting a simplistic, but still influential understanding of the term "symbolic politics" as developed by Murray Edelman and others who confine symbolic action mainly to the realm of deception and manipulation. Without accepting the distinction between the symbolic and the real as well as the traditional dichotomy of the ruling elite and manipulated masses, this article develops a concept of "symbolic politics" that is directed at the deliberate and strategic use of images and performances. Part 3 will discuss several instances of the symbolic politics of exception. The symbolic force of rhetoric will be demonstrated by looking at recent examples from the French context, namely a speech by then President François Hollande in front of Congress after the Paris attacks in 2015 and Nicolas Sarkozy's infamous rhetoric during the state of emergency in 2005 (3.1). The next section (3.2), which will shed light on typical rituals of community-building, reassurance, and resilience after terrorist attacks, is followed by part 3.3, which will analyze the staging of political leadership in times of emer-

gency by George W. Bush, Gerhard Schröder, and Helmut Schmidt. Part 3.4 will shortly address the ambivalent and controversial use of images in the course of the "War on Terror". Lastly, part 3.5 will focus on the symbolic side of securitization, which comes to the fore in the building of new security walls and especially in the reconstruction of large cities, a development Stephen Graham has referred to as "new military urbanism". While this article does not aim at a conclusive typology of the symbolic politics of exception, these various examples shall show some paths the analysis of states of exception in particular and the study of political culture in general could follow in future research.

2 Some tenacious misconceptions of symbolic politics

Searching for a universal theory or at least a cross-disciplinary conception of the symbolic is a vain endeavor in light of the highly heterogeneous perspectives and research foci in the philosophy of language, epistemology, semiotics, and aesthetics as well as in the multiple discourses of the social sciences. For a long time, political science has persistently operated with a purely negative understanding of the symbolic, with symbolism confined to the realm of deception and delusion contrasted with the "real" and "factual" world of political decision-making. Such a rather coarse dichotomy culminated in the conception of "symbolic politics"—in line with a popular view often upheld by the media—according to which political elites use symbols to manipulate the masses, distract them from substantial problems, and secure their own authority.

While this assessment certainly shows a Machiavellian influence, it was Walter Bagehot, a renowned British economist and constitutional theoretician, who developed a theory of the delusional world of the symbolic in his work *The English Constitution* (Bagehot 1873). This theory was based on the implicitly social-Darwinist conception of seducible masses from the lower social strata that were not impressed by facts and real problems but by aristocratic or institutional ornament (Bagehot 1873, p. 326).

In the 1930s, American political science further developed this instrumentalist model of symbolic politics from above, inspired by a crude psychology of the masses on the one hand and an elitist conception of political leadership on the other. Thurmond Arnold's and Harold Lasswell's writings from this period evidently reflect impressions from the emerging fascist movements (Dittmer 1977, pp. 559 f.; Gebhardt 2001, p. 587). Several decades later, Murray Edelman's observations on politics' symbolic dimension still reproduce the conceptual dichotomy of the real world of political decisions by the elite as well as the emotional, irrational, and illusionary worldviews of the political subjects formed by media manipulation. Within this framework, symbolic political action mainly serves to suggest the political capabilities of acting and deciding and produce citizens' acquiescence (Edelman 1971).

Ulrich Sarcinelli, who introduced the term "symbolic politics" to German political science, was critical of Edelman's model, as he accepted the symbolic as an essential part of political communication. Nevertheless, he occasionally succumbed to the conceptual schemes of his academic predecessors when relating symbols, at least

in certain political times such as election campaigns, to the "superficial structure" of politics (Sarcinelli 1987, p. 6), thus nurturing clichés of the inauthenticity of symbolic action. Such an assessment of political communication also shines through contemporary diagnoses of post-democracy, which lament the staging of politics and contrast the real decision-making power of politicians and experts with the apathetic role of medially sedated citizens (Crouch 2004).

Later writings by Sarcinelli, however, analytically distinguish between "politics of representation/staging" (*Darstellungspolitik*) and "politics of decision" (*Entscheidungspolitik*) (Sarcinelli 2009, pp. 115 ff.). In doing so, he simultaneously underlines the general substantial conjunction of instrumental and expressive elements in political action and rejects the conception of "pure politics" (Sarcinelli 2009, p. 139). This concession accommodates new orientations in the research of political culture that try to overcome this misleading dichotomy of "essence" and "appearance" by pleading for a more refined understanding of symbolic representation and construction (Diehl and Steilen 2016; Göhler 2002; Suntrup 2018, pp. 411 ff.). Moreover, cultural anthropologists, such as Arnold Gehlen, Helmuth Plessner and Clifford Geertz, as well as phenomenological sociologists and the pioneers of symbolic interactionism have revealed that social reality is an essentially symbolic and ritual construction. These fundamental approaches help to conceive the whole field of politics and political structure as a symbolically "negotiated order" (Hall 1972) and demonstrate the obsoleteness of a negative view on symbolism.

Consequently, it seems useful for political scientists to be aware of the multiple symbolic and ritual embeddedness and presuppositions of political institutions, roles, hierarchies, and collective self-conceptions that manifest themselves not only in everyday social practices, but also in aesthetic forms, many of which vary decisively in different political cultures (Rohe 1994, p. 166 f.). In face of this broad field of political symbolism, a conception of "symbolic politics", however, should preserve at least some of the intuitions of the scholars who originally shaped the concept of symbolic politics and reject several misleading implications at the same time. Hence, when this article speaks of "symbolic politics" with regard to the state of exception, there are three main implications: Firstly, this term signifies the deliberate and strategic use of images and performances, but does not imply the classification of the symbolic into the realm of deception. Secondly, it should become clear that images and scenes cannot always easily be designed at will because they are controversial and evoke different reactions. Thirdly, contesting the simplistic dichotomy of the ruling elite and the manipulated masses also means looking for different actors of symbolic politics in civil society, the media, or elsewhere, even though the prominent role of leading politicians cannot not be denied. Declared or (at least formally) undeclared states of exception are usually critical situations in which crisis managers resort to various symbolic action strategies aimed at gaining perceptual and affective control, and capitalizing on the opportune moment to frame the crisis situation ('t Hart 1993, p. 41).

The following discussion of different instances of symbolic politics does not claim to develop a final systematics; it attempts, however, to analyze some images and performances of the state of exception that have become iconic insofar as they

(often visually) condense what is at stake in emergency politics without, generally, prescribing a definite interpretation.

3 Instruments and aims of symbolic politics in exceptional times

3.1 The symbolic force of rhetoric

On November 13, 2015, a group of Islamist terrorists attacked in a coordinated effort several symbolically charged places and locations in the City of Paris: the outside of the Stade de France, where a friendly football match between France and Germany was being played; the Bataclan theater, where a rock concert was underway; and several popular cafés and restaurants. The attackers killed 130 people and injured several hundred more. In an immediate public statement, then President François Hollande declared a state of emergency, which was eventually prolonged in several steps until October 2017.

Several days later on November 16, 2015, Hollande addressed the Congress of the French Parliament in Versailles. The frame, style, and content of this speech constitute a highly useful example for the analysis of different dimensions and aims of the symbolic politics of the state of exception. First of all, this speech underlined that symbolic politics can involve factual political measures: Hollande announced the will to expatriate terrorists (provided, with respect to international law, that they are in possession of dual citizenship) even if they were born French citizens. Although this project failed due to a dissent between the National Assembly and the Senate, it conveyed the desire to symbolically exclude terrorists and demonstrate that their acts were not compatible with the values of the French Republic. Hence, after qualifying the attacks as "an act of aggression against our country, against its values, against its young people, and against its way of life" (Hollande 2015), Hollande pointed to the social contract expressed in the French Constitution: "Our Constitution is a collective agreement. It unites all our citizens. [...] The Constitution is a common charter. It is a contract which unites all the citizens of the same country. And if the Constitution is a collective agreement, an essential agreement for living together, then the Constitution should include responses for combating those who want to undermine it, in the same way that groups and associations that incite hatred or incite others carry out terrorism should be dissolved." (Hollande 2015).

This announcement of a constitutional revision was evidently accompanied by rhetoric that drew new boundaries of the French community, mainly by placing France, as a brave "country of freedom" and the "birthplace of human rights", up against the "cowardly", "barbaric", and uncivilized terrorists (Hollande 2015). However, the political rhetoric, of which Hollande availed himself, also served other means than community-building by accentuating the dichotomy of friend/enemy and civilization/barbarism: In the very first sentence of the same speech, then President Hollande declared France to be at war. There are a multitude of reasons to discuss if this framing of the aggression was appropriate, given the fact that it implicitly followed George W. Bush's infamous declaration of the "War on Terror", a war which—in contrast to conventional warfare—can never be won because there can

never be an ultimate prevention of terrorist attacks. This explains why the "War on Terror" can be read as the most illustrative example of a constellation in which the state of normalcy and the state of exception overlap, as the latter persistently interfuses the former (Beck 2009, pp. 67 ff.; see also Frankenberg 2014).

While Bush's rhetoric—which should not be reduced to manipulation since it has often been read as the expression of a genuine Manichaean worldview opposing good and evil—served to win support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Hollande's words were sometimes deemed misplaced, given the fact that most of the terrorists were from France or Belgium (Klonk 2017, pp. 80 f.). Hollande's bellicose rhetoric, however, served a different purpose, namely trying to revamp his public image, which was notoriously weak after several scandals and an unlucky political agenda. *The Guardian* commented on his Versailles speech with the title "Hollande completes transformation from 'marshmallow' to 'chief of war'" (Chrisafis 2015), describing his personal reinvention from a feeble and indecisive politician, whose aversion to conflict once earned him the nickname "marshmallow" by fellow politicians of the Socialist Party, to a fierce political and military leader. As the disastrous numbers in opinion polls at the end of his presidency have shown, this attempted reinvention did not sustainably succeed.

Another prominent example of the symbolic force of rhetoric, again from France, stems from the 2005 riots in several Parisian suburbs (and later also in other French cities) which ultimately led to the declaration of a state of emergency by President Jacques Chirac. The unrest stemmed from the death of two youths who were electrocuted when hiding from the police in an electricity substation. This incident triggered exceptional violence, which was highly charged with symbolism. It was no surprise that the uprisings occurred in certain suburbs that were "symbols of poverty, the decline of public services, the relegation of ethnic minorities and poor whites, unemployment and stigmatization, and 'inter-communal' tensions." (Balibar 2007, p. 48) As many residents of these quarters did not partake of the virtues of inclusion and social ascension promised by the official political narrative of republicanism, the rioters, in addition to inciting undirected outbreaks of devastation, regularly attacked symbolic manifestations of this republican model, such as public schools and libraries. Moreover, when the riots spread, this symbolic struggle was directly focused on its medial impact: "Very shortly after the first episodes a 'national competition' arose between *cités*, towns, and regions to appear on French and even international television with the most spectacular scenes of 'civil war'." (Balibar 2007, pp. 51 f.).

French politicians responded to the upheaval with concrete political measures not only by declaring a state of emergency, but also by symbolically framing the riots in various manners. Nicolas Sarkozy's public performance, in particular, comes to mind because his rhetoric outlasted the duration of the spectacle of violence. The then Minister of the Interior strategically used the riots, in anticipation of the presidential elections in 2007 which he managed to win, to cultivate his image as a rigorous guarantor of law and order. Part of this plan, which was largely meant to attract voters and sympathizers of the right-wing extremist Front National, was to react to the violent acts with the fierce symbolic degradation of the population in the respective suburban quarters. Even before the riots, he spoke of a "gang of

scum" (*bande de racaille*) that he would get rid of, a formulation he repeated several times after the revolt had broken out. In addition, his infamous announcement in another speech in La Courneuve, also shortly before the riots, to cleanse the city with a "Kärcher" (a high pressure washer) was considered by many commentators as being close to fascism, even insinuating practices of "ethnic cleansing" (Gondola 2009, p. 162). Moreover, with these words, Sarkozy triggered a larger political and societal debate which positioned the decent, civilized French citizens on one side and the barbarian, subhuman creatures in certain quarters on the other, thus revitalizing clichés from colonial times (Lemke 2017, pp. 244 f.).

Besides the symbolic action of the rioters and the symbolic rhetoric by Sarkozy and other politicians, the declaration of a state of emergency in November 2005 was heavily laden with a specific symbolic connotation itself. While every declaration of a state of exception is not only a speech act with political and legal consequences but also a symbolic act that suspends normality in a performative way, the 2005 declaration revived memories of the Algerian War, as this very action was established in a law from this exact period. This decision was obviously extremely delicate considering a substantial number of rebels from the suburbs were likely to be the grandchildren of persons having witnessed the brutal disaster of this war (Lemke 2017, pp. 242 ff.). Hence, multiple layers of symbolic politics were involved in this intricate situation of exception.

While much more could be said about this concrete political conflict and the identity effects of the involved symbols and narratives, the remaining part of the article will instead focus on selected images and sceneries that have accompanied different states of exception.

3.2 Symbols of community, solidarity, and resilience

Some of the rhetoric effects of François Hollande's speech at the Congress of the French Parliament in November 2015 have already been examined above; the setting of his speech, however, cannot be neglected when trying to understand its full symbolic force. The pompous venue of the Versailles castle certainly reinforced the gravity of the situation and gave Hollande's address a solemn character. Furthermore, the gathering at Versailles underlined the exceptionality of the situation, as the assembly of the Congress of Parliament is not a ritual demonstration of national unity that is regularly resorted to: On the contrary, this body convenes only on very rare occasions, usually when constitutional amendments are adopted. Hollande's speech marked merely the second time that a French president seized the opportunity to address Congress (Nicolas Sarkozy was the first), a decision which had been made possible in the wake of the constitutional reform in 2008. While this move to speaking at Versailles has traditionally been a symbol of exceptionality, Émmanuel Macron announced after his presidential victory his will to annually address Congress and outline his policy.

At the time of Hollande's speech in 2015, however, this uniqueness and rarity of speaking directly to Congress was still recognizable. The former president was not only aware of this, but also emphasized in his speech that "at this exceptionally solemn moment, I wanted to address a joint session of Parliament to demonstrate

our national unity in the face of such an abomination" (Hollande 2015). Admittedly, demonstrating national identity, unity, and solidarity was no exceptional measure but a very common strategy of communal self-assurance after a terrorist attack. Contemporary terrorism is in most cases an act of both physical and symbolic destruction, the most prominent example being the iconoclastic assault on the Twin Towers in New York, the orchestration of which involved a sharp-witted calculation of media representations (Paul 2013, pp. 567 ff.). Terrorist acts of this kind generate ritual reactions of coping with this disturbance of symbolic order. Gatherings and collective mourning at the sites of the attacks are measures of community-building (Schicha 2002, pp. 100 f.) that receive considerable media attention. In general, media coverage often resorts, deliberately or not, to pre-established schemes of representation in face of terror. As Charlotte Klonk has argued in her recent book on the battle of images inherent to terrorism and the reaction to it, images distributed by the media usually follow the same logic: The display of disturbing pictures and sequences of the attacks is followed by the broadcast of surviving victims and the large-scale operation of the rescue service (Klonk 2017, p. 86 f.). Thus, images of paramedics taking care of those wounded in the Bataclan massacre and of the Eiffel Tower lit in France's tricolor are, in essence, not different from pictures of flag-waving Americans and especially the efforts of the firefighters at Ground Zero, even if the photos of the latter have become particularly iconic. The frequent heroizing of these firefighters on television and in the newspapers was also fueled by leading politicians, such as President George W. Bush, who regularly gave a eulogy to the rescue workers in his speeches and visually highlighted their role by wearing a firefighter's uniform when opening a baseball game in October 2001 (Schicha 2002, p. 100).

In Paris, the image of the Eiffel Tower became a symbol of resilience. Illustrator Jean Jullien created a popular image of the shape of the Tower framed by a circle, which resembled the iconic peace sign. Moreover, in addition to being illuminated in the national colors, the actual Eiffel Tower also displayed the phrase "Fluctuat nec mergitur: Tossed by the waves but does not sink", Paris' motto as depicted in the city's coat of arms. This motto became a symbol of resistance and defiance in France in the days after the attacks, just as Americans rallied behind the slogan "United we stand" in 2001, which was first addressed to the American people in 1942 after the attack on Pearl Harbor (Schicha 2002, pp. 102 f.). Furthermore, the collective memory of Pearl Harbor was revived when firefighters hoisted an American flag at Ground Zero, a scene that was redolent of an iconic picture taken by Joe Rosenthal on February 23, 1945, that depicted three U.S. Marines doing the same action on the newly reconquered Pacific island Iwo Jima. Thus, such flag-hoisting on September 11 could not only be read as sign of resilience and national pride, but also—at least by those familiar with the canonic visual heritage of the United States—as a symbol of military mobilization and retaliation that fit George W. Bush's subsequent rhetoric on the "War on Terror" (Klonk 2017, pp. 77 ff.).

3.3 Demonstrating leadership in times of crisis

Other images do not serve the purpose of creating a feeling of communality and solidarity but are used to reinforce political leadership. While François Hollande, as discussed above, availed himself of a militaristic rhetoric, he was reluctant to underline this through personal self-staging. This, however, stands in contrast to George W. Bush's behavior: After 9/11, his emergency policy entailed a War on Terror that would be conducted abroad in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as on American soil with the "Homeland Security Act", with the latter implying a deep intrusion into the sphere of fundamental rights. A substantial amount has been written on the "war of images" during the Iraq War, including on iconoclastic measures like the occupation of Saddam Hussein's palace, the careful staging of the destruction of the Saddam statue in Bagdad, and, lastly, the symbolic destruction of the real Saddam as he was pulled out of a hole in the ground and arrested (Paul 2005). Gerhard Paul is certainly right when asserting that this war was not waged entirely, or perhaps even primarily, for military reasons (and neither just for economic ones, as is sometimes claimed) but that the fight in Afghanistan and Iraq involved "operations of symbolic politics to overwrite images of America's defenseless and unprotected condition, overcome American trauma, and 'heal' the hurt body of the nation" (Paul 2013, p. 592, my translation). In general, terrorism as well as the military and political response to it have meanwhile reached the status of a world war of images, a "Bilderweltkrieg" as described by Horst Bredekamp (2015, pp. 223 ff.).

A specific episode of this "visual war" will now be analyzed in order to demonstrate the symbolic staging of leadership involved in the War on Terror. On May 1, 2003, then President George W. Bush was flown to the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* to give a televised speech declaring "mission accomplished"—pictorially emphasized by a large banner to his back. Interestingly, he never used these exact words in his speech, even stating that the American "mission" (a word that Bush not only mentioned with regard to military tasks but used with religious zeal) had to continue, but did state that "in the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed" (Bush 2003). In the aftermath of this speech, Bush and other officials claimed that the message "mission accomplished" had only been meant either to refer to the concrete deployment of the aircraft carrier, which had just returned from a ten-month mission, or the first step of the military intervention; the banner, however, clearly conveyed the message that the Iraq War was over—an act of symbolic politics which backfired when insurgencies and civil war spread in Iraq in the following years and the number of dead Americans likewise increased.

But at the time of his visit to the carrier, Bush's speech was rather well-received in the United States (at least with certain parts of the population), thus helping him reaffirm his image as a determined, successful leader and commander-in-chief. For this purpose, his performance on the carrier was carefully staged. He landed on the carrier with a jet instead of his usual helicopter, which would have been a much cheaper, but admittedly less theatrical, way to arrive. Bush taking a jet, accompanied by him wearing a pilot uniform, had two advantages: Firstly, it contributed to the impression that the aircraft carrier still floated somewhere in the Persian Gulf and not, as it actually did, near the coast of California; secondly, it fed the illusion that

Bush had piloted the jet himself, especially given the fact that he had served as a jet pilot in the Air National Guard. Many spectators were, however, unaware that Bush had not been trained to land on a carrier and mistook him for the pilot. All in all, these images were meant to show the deliberation of a president who did not limit himself to giving orders but led the way with his own military experience and courage in exceptional times. Finally, his posing in uniform neatly fit the symbolism of the exception, which Günter Frankenberg has critically described as a "moment of raw masculinity" in which force prevails over law and normal politics (Frankenberg 2017, p. 3, my translation).

There are many other instances aside from terror attacks or war, such as in the face of natural catastrophes, in which states of emergency are declared and politicians strive to present themselves as "men of action". One example of this arose in August 2002 as heavy rainfall culminated in an aggressive flood that devastated larger parts of Middle and Eastern Europe. In many German cities, an emergency alert was issued; in Germany, the management of natural disasters is legally assigned to the states, while the federal government can take a supportive and coordinating role if necessary. The government, led by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder from the Social Democratic Party, initiated the largest domestic deployment of the *Bundeswehr* since the Second World War, a means which had been made possible by the German Emergency Acts (*Notstandsgesetze*) passed by the first Great Coalition in Germany in 1968. Schröder provided the affected communities and households with generous relief assistance and visually underlined his actions by repeatedly appearing in the flooded areas.

Such site visits can be regarded as important rituals that are meant to express compassion with the victims ('t Hart 1993, p. 43) and demonstrate leadership capabilities by showing the urge to get firsthand information on the crisis at hand. Images of Schröder, dressed in rubber boots and a slightly oversized green raincoat, marching through the flooded city of Grimma, climbing on dikes, and talking to local politicians and citizens, found their way onto the news and front pages of many newspapers. While these mediatized performances were later often ironically commented on—the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* looked back on this episode ten years later under the heading "Der gestiefelte Kanzler" (Dausend 2012; a play on words with the fairy tale "Der gestiefelte Kater", or "Puss in Boots")—they proved very effective in 2002 (Bytzek 2008). Just a few weeks before the national elections, they helped Schröder overtake his contender Edmund Stoiber, who had been leading considerably in polls before the flood, and earn another term as chancellor. Stoiber's loss, on the other hand, could partly be explained by the fact that he did not have incumbency advantage which the confronting of states of exception (if managed successfully) often produces, but also by his initial unwillingness to appear on the emergency scenes. When he finally interrupted his summer vacation and visited the affected regions himself, his public performance was still often considered unfitting and misplaced. Dressed in Armani Jeans and a pale blue polo shirt, he seemed, despite his dialogue with the local citizens, detached from the emergency scene, especially in contrast to Schröder, whose outfit deliberately conveyed the message that aesthetic questions were not on the agenda.

Perhaps even more memorable is the performance of one of Schröder's predecessors as chancellor, Helmut Schmidt. In 1962, the City of Hamburg and other regions were struck by a storm surge, the destructive force of which caused the death of hundreds of people and further severe damage. Schmidt, Hamburg's then young Senator of the Interior, made a name for himself as an effective crisis manager who did not care about legal, or even constitutional, provisions by giving commands independent of the usual procedural paths, hierarchies, and separation of powers (e. g. the very important separation between the police and the military—just as Schröder would later do, he sought help from the then newly established *Bundeswehr*, which was without constitutional backing at that time). Schmidt's pragmatic mastering of the situation earned him the reputation of being a reliable and resolute man of action, which later paved the way for the chancellorship. While this reputation can certainly be attributed to his effective orders, it was also fostered by the media coverage (and his knowledge of how to play the media game) which had its share in cementing Schmidt's image as the "master of realpolitik" (Birkner 2015).

Rather startling from a democratic point of view, regardless of Schmidt's merits, was the issue of *Der Spiegel* from that time, which conferred the lasting title of "Herr der Flut" to Schmidt, praising the former Wehrmacht officer's brisk-militaristic rhetoric towards his inferiors and his decisions that were unconcerned with orderly procedure. The magazine even went as far as, without visible reservation, calling him a "Führer who appointed himself" (Der Spiegel 1962, p. 26). With the help of this cultivation and celebration of a military style of decision-making, which would have hardly been conceivable during the flood catastrophe forty years later, Schmidt, to some extent, came to personify emergency or exceptional politics, an image he would maintain during the Red Army Faction crisis in the late 1970s.

3.4 Symbolic battles and ambivalences in the "War on Terror"

All instances of symbolic politics mentioned so far should not, however, convey the impression that such images can always be produced at will, as they are often contested and can sometimes change their message in the course of time. The case of George W. Bush has already been discussed, and there are many examples that support the thesis that the U.S. government's media strategy during the "War on Terror" has often been misconceived.

When the Pentagon published images from the alleged terrorists imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay, the reasoning behind it may have been to demonstrate resoluteness and superiority as part of a larger strategy of expressing the retrieval of sovereignty. Showing kneeling prisoners in orange overalls, however, rather evoked sympathy for the humiliated captives regardless of their deeds (Bredekamp 2015, p. 225). Public humiliation of the enemy is a visual strategy that could also be observed after the terrorist attacks in France in November 2015. The alleged wirepuller of the terrorist group, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, was killed without public documentation during a large-scale raid some days after the assaults. This visual gap was filled by pictures of another suspect circled by police forces who had unclothed him due to security reasons. Nevertheless, the public image of the detainee's nude buttocks was a classical gesture of humiliation serving instincts of revenge (Klonk 2017, p. 161).

Thus, these pictures have become icons of the arbitrariness to which states of exception can easily succumb. Moreover, in the case of Guantanamo, they have, often unconsciously, framed all further discussions and opinions about this prison complex. Hence, all American attempts to point out the ameliorated conditions of detention at Guantanamo Bay were overshadowed by the initially published images. Even more disastrous were the images from the Abu Ghraib prison that have become public bit by bit since 2004 and demonstrate the abyss of the politics of exception; these pictures not only depicted prisoners tortured by the threat of electric shock, rape, or being put on a leash like a dog (which is even more humiliating for Muslim inmates, as dogs are considered impure in Islam), but also showed prison guards posing happily beside the corpse of an inmate tortured to death (Bergem 2006). These pictures had to be interpreted as signs of a totally demoralized U. S. Army and severely damaged the remnants of legitimacy of the Iraq War. Hence, the disclosure of these images, which were subject of an internal military investigation before ending up in the press, was a decision with far-reaching political implications. The picture of an inmate in a blue cape standing on a box, with his electro-wired arms outstretched and head entirely covered by a hood, became an icon of American torture practices and of a fully misconceived and brutal intervention policy in the Islamic world in general (Bergem 2006, p. 13).

The dehumanizing acts themselves could not be convincingly attributed to individuals' misdemeanor but were instead the result of strategic instruction by the military and especially the Secret Service (Bergem 2006, pp. 7 f.). Stealing every last bit of personal integrity from the inmates was meant to break their will and gain useful information. But why did the guards document these atrocities by taking pictures? This documentation underlines the impression that the guards were entirely disinhibited because they did not even try to hide their torturous deeds, suggesting the routineness and presumed normalcy of their acts (Bergem 2006, p. 8). Furthermore, the images could be a product of the contemporary selfie culture that only accepts that that has been documented by picture as being real. Finally, Horst Bredekamp views the images as apotropaic protection against the unseizability of the enemy, a cultural technique known from the Second World War when German soldiers carried a large amount of pictures showing the execution of guerrilla fighters in their pockets (Bredekamp 2015, p. 225). In any case, these images have become iconic of the state of exception and its danger of ultimately leading to the production of "bare life" (in Giorgio Agamben's words), detached from all legal rules and the most basic moral and human conventions.

3.5 Images of security

In a last step, some symbolic manifestations of the security paradigm to which the state of emergency is closely connected shall be addressed. In her book *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, Wendy Brown scrutinizes the proliferating construction of new walls and security fences around polities, which are, as is in the case of the Israeli wall, often not legitimized as routine acts of border control but as temporary remedies made necessary by a state of emergency (Brown 2014, pp. 28 ff.). According to Brown, these walls have material as well as theatrical effects, symbolizing the will

to demonstrate security and sovereignty; in fact, however, they have become icons of waning sovereignty, signifying "the ungovernability by law and politics of many powers unleashed by globalization and late modern colonialization, and a resort to policing and blockading in the face of this ungovernability" (Brown 2014, p. 24). This iconography is condensed in the case of the border between the United States and Mexico as follows:

"[T]he U.S.-Mexico barrier stages a sovereign power and control that it does not exercise, is built from the fabric of a suspended rule of law and fiscal nonaccountability, has multiplied and intensified criminal industries, and is an icon of the combination of sovereign erosion and heightened xenophobia and nationalism increasingly prevalent in Western democracies today. The state of emergency out of which the wall's construction is authorized also gives it political standing independent of its material functions" (Brown 2014, p. 38).

Even more iconically striking than the creation of new state borders is the securitization of cities. In Paris, increased surveillance as well as heightened military and police presence at public sites have accompanied the state of emergency since 2015, and there is little doubt that this ostentatious presence affects public life and civic behavior. According to Stephen Graham, this is part of general reconstruction of Western metropolises, which can be witnessed even in large cities that have not recently been struck by a terrorist attack. In his study *Cities Under Siege* (Graham 2011), he asserts that the preventive orientation that the security paradigm dominant in anti-terror policy entails has led to a widespread "new military urbanism". Graham convincingly shows how "contemporary warfare and terror now largely boil down to contests over the spaces, symbols, meanings, support systems and power structures of cities" (Graham 2011, p. 36), thus blurring the classical distinction between the inside and outside of nation-states as well as between the military and civil spheres by regarding citizens and non-citizens as a potential threat (Graham 2011, p. 21). Big Western cities would be turned into fortresses by using military techniques and material found in war-torn cities like Kabul or Bagdad, such as barbed wire, walls, checkpoints, and comprehensive surveillance. Similar to this diagnosis, Martin J. Murray observes in his book *The Urbanism of Exception* a "fragmentation of urban space" into "fractured [...] microgeographies", where the rise of securitized places is confronted with "zones of generalized insecurity" (Murray 2017, p. 117). Murray is especially focused on the economic rationality behind this urban reconstruction, which results in "postpublic places" that challenge conventional notions of public interest and the public sphere (Murray 2017, pp. 19 f.). Nevertheless, he also points to the symbolic effects of this urban reconfiguration, e. g. when discussing the "spectacular diffusion of siege architecture" (Murray 2017, p. 117).

As necessary as some preventive measures may be in dealing with terrorism, Graham argues that the excessive will to securitize ironically leads to an assimilation of terrorism and political counterstrikes with regard to the political demonization of cities. Hence, while images of this military pervasion of cities may be a necessary symbolic demonstration of state power, sovereignty, and security for some spectators, others—like Graham—see them as dangerous symbols of "urbicide" and ask: "What becomes of the 'right to the city' and the politics of urban citizenship in a world

of ubiquitous borderings that threaten to render urban life increasingly passive, consumerized, surveilled and algorithmically marshalled?" (Graham 2011, p. 149).

There are certainly various normative positions with regard to this question, which deserves greater attention by political scientists in the future, not least by theoreticians of democracy or civic culture who focus all too often solely on political institutions or modes of public argumentation. In addition, it should be clear that these urban developments with all their material and symbolic effects must also be analyzed empirically in order to get a more nuanced understanding of the multiple effects and social struggles related to securitization.

4 Conclusion

These various examples are meant neither as an exhaustive typology of symbolic politics with regard to emergency situations nor as a conclusive analysis of the discussed cases. Their heterogeneity, however, shall serve to illustrate multiple strategies and effects of symbolic action typically used during states of exception: community-building by common rituals and rhetorical drawings of the friend/enemy line, symbolic degradation of the presumed enemy, public reassurance, expression of compassion and solidarity, signs of resilience and unyieldingness as well as the staging of leadership between decisive and pragmatic action and military glorification. Moreover, there are structural manifestations of the symbolic side of emergency situations, such as ritualized abuses of torture in detention camps or, in an even more material way, the reconstruction of metropolises, which are affected by (in addition to often barely visible surveillance techniques) visual and demonstrative expressions of protection, sovereignty, and preventive securitization.

These multiple symbolic instances amply support the theoretical reflections on the shortcomings of traditional conceptions of symbolic politics in the second part of this article. Symbolic actions and manifestations are neither some kind of delusive ersatz for real politics, nor can they be reduced to the function of manipulation or singly be attributed to the ruling class. Impression management and visual politics from above are but one mode of symbolic politics, as various protagonists from the media and civil society are also involved in the complex and contested struggle for symbolic representation of authority, community, government techniques, legal validity, etc.

Further empirical case-centered analyses, which this article wishes to inspire, should look more closely at the relationship of political action and medial distribution in order to understand the social conditions and frames of symbolic performances and images as well as the reception of symbolic politics. Moreover, as exemplarily shown above, those undertakings should scrutinize the connection of this symbolism with the collective reservoir of rituals, narratives, historiographies, iconic condensations and the like, which all political cultures boast, even if this canon might be highly controversial (Diehl 2016). Using such a contextualization, general patterns of symbolic action as well as culturally specific modes in exceptional situations may become more identifiable.

While the constitutive and performative force of symbolic politics deserves greater attention in political science in general, an awareness of the symbolic dimension of the state of exception and emergency politics could enrich the extensive debate by political scientists and legal scholars on the state of emergency, which has often focused too narrowly on the assumedly imageless relation between political empowerment and constitutional provisions.

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