

# *Introduction: death and security – the only two certainties*

In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes. (Benjamin Franklin quoted in Meister 1952: 163)

## **Life and death in security**

**T**HIS BOOK reworks the proverb of Benjamin Franklin, quoted above, so that it reads, ‘in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and security’. Mortality is, of course, the epitome of inevitability. We are all aware of our individual impermanence. But what are the political consequences of this certainty?

This book argues that death is ontologically coupled with state security practice. Security responds to, and functions to displace, the anxiety of mortality – which would otherwise disrupt the performance of sovereignty. Why is death a problem for political authority? Sovereignty only exists if it is recognised by the population made subject (Edkins and Pin-Fat 1999) – consider, as counterpoint, the sudden collapse of sovereignty when recognition is removed during revolutions. To maintain the recognition, and thus constitution, of sovereignty, the state performs itself as omnipotent within a given territory. It *performs* itself as a God. But death is beyond control and exposes an aporia within the performance of sovereign authority. We can see this disruption in the hysterical traumatic response to terrorist attacks. Death is a force beyond mastery. It is an excess, a problem, that disrupts the carefully managed illusion of sovereignty and power. Death disrupts the performance and recognition of sovereignty.

To maintain the performance of sovereignty, then, states ritualistically efface mortality through security practices. Security protects sovereignty by creating objects of threat, called ‘risks’ or ‘enemies’, and then acting to overcome these totems to simulate collective permanence through the nation. These threat-objects are stage props in a performance that functions to alleviate a much broader death anxiety: that of inevitable mortality.

In the reading used in this book, mortality is a generalised condition to which the state responds. The book does not directly equate mortality or death with 'killing', but rather the knowledge of inevitable impermanence. When I argue that death and security are ontologically coupled, I mean that secular politics struggles to efface the challenge of foreknown death when compared to its religious predecessors. It lacks the means to promise a heaven and to alleviate our anxieties about dying. This makes secular sovereignty vulnerable to exposure and disruption. The salience of mortality can impinge upon the subject, separating them from their usual immersion in hegemonic discourse and causing the recognition of omnipotent sovereignty to cease. Security is one way of many by which the challenge of death anxiety is mediated, as I will explain.

Why explore the connection between death and security? There is a critical purchase to analysing security in this way. If we begin with mortality as foundational anxiety, we can displace the state from its position as supposedly omnipotent actor. By looking at security practices as the desperate response to a place beyond the state's control (mortality and its inevitability), we figure the state as a frightened child rather than a coherent powerful actor. If security is the flight from mortality and a responsive barricading of sovereignty, then this performance is responsive to something more powerful than the state, something that cannot be properly controlled but only encircled and effaced: death.

By exploring how this works in theory and practice, we can disarm the state of its sovereign armoury as omnipotent actor. This is an important responsibility for critical thought, given that resistance and protest is becoming increasingly paralysed by the extension of bureaucratic control. Edward Snowden's revelations have clarified the extension of intelligence gathering beyond anything previously seen in history and the effect of this panopticon is to induce a feeling of hopelessness in those who desire political change. How can one effect political change when all moves are anticipated in advance? Simply outlining the biopolitical manoeuvrings of the state is not enough. Knowing how repression works through assemblages is not enough. Instead, critical philosophy after Snowden requires, I will argue, a different approach. By exploring and explaining the apparatuses that protect hegemony in the present day, we can inadvertently induce further hopelessness with regard to the sheer size of the obstacle. Instead, we should take a step in the direction of exposing the masquerade of security. Security and sovereignty are not omniscient or omnipotent; they merely pretend to be. They actually fail hard, fail often and – as this book will argue – rest upon a foundation of failure. They can never achieve total control, only simulate it. So let us look at failure and the impossibility of sovereignty rather than contributing to the theorisation of omniscience and omnipotence.

Secular sovereignty makes impossible claims to authority. It appropriates omnipotence from previous religious articulations of divine sovereignty, but cannot remedy the death anxiety implicit within human existence (Agamben

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1991; Bauman 1992; Becker 1973; Heidegger 1962: 279–311, 1971; Oberst 2009). The emergence of ‘security’ during the slow secularisation of rule in Europe can be understood as the replacement of one technology of immortality (the promise of divine salvation) with another (collective perpetuity through the nation).<sup>1</sup> Security protects the recognition of the sovereign as authoritative by banishing mortality from the polity and ensuring the immortality of the nation. Security, I will argue, is the attempt to pretend that secular, popular sovereignty is coherent and complete, in the face of a mortality that can no longer be pacified through appeals to God.

Interestingly, International Relations (IR) and security studies are largely silent with regard to mortality and death anxiety. This silence is striking, given the violent and morbid topics studied within the discipline of IR: war, terrorism and genocide, to name a few. Of course, it is true that contemporary IR literatures of biopolitics and thanatopolitics focus on death in their own way, as ‘killing’. Here death is deployed to distinguish qualified life from unqualified life. But interpreting death as ‘killing’ puts mortality in the control of the state. *It doesn’t get to the heart of the issue of death and sovereignty.* The state ‘kills’; the state is the actor that deploys life and death. The state is thus always in control in these literatures. This book reverses the direction of analysis to analyse *security as a response to the condition of mortality*. It is important to do this to contextualise the relationship between state and security, to challenge the claim to omnipotence and omniscience and to problematise the assumption that security is a naturalised function of the state.

The exclusion of mortality, as inevitable impermanence, from IR is also surprising because much has been written in philosophy concerning the political and social significance of death. Mortality, as confirmed by thinkers including Agamben, Heidegger, Schopenhauer, Sloterdijk, Bauman, Derrida and Hegel, is central to, and extremely problematic for, the rationalist paradigm. It sits beyond the limits of thought. It is disruptive to the imagination of meaning and politics as permanent, consistent and objective. As such, these philosophers argue that mortality drives the development of cultural and political techniques that efface the inevitability of death by performing stability and permanent meaning.

I develop this philosophical trajectory here by reading security practice as sociology of death. Security, and the state that deploys it, are *responsive* to the aporia of mortality. The state does not just deploy death, as IR and security studies suggest; rather it is desperately trying to outpace the significance of mortality. Death undermines the rationalist foundation of secular politics. This is not simply a metaphysical question for philosophers to reflect upon. In practical terms we see the disruption caused to politics during, for example, the spectacle of terrorist attacks. The fraud of sovereignty is exposed when horror comes into our supposedly safe cities and towns. Traumatic events show the secular sovereign to be a discount, limited God who cannot control that which really matters.

The modern sovereign's authority is conjured through the protection of the popular body (rather than the royal body) (Santner 2011). Explosions and public massacres suddenly remind us that death is beyond control. Sovereignty, and the subjectivity constituted in relation to it, are shaken. The excess temporarily takes hold – and requires retrospective security practices (such as post-terrorist reconstruction and memorialisation) to re-narrate and secure the trauma, reasserting the fiction of perpetuity, continuity and authoritative control.

This is not meant to be an ahistorical claim; rather I argue that the relationship between security and mortality is one of modernity and postmodernity. Their coupling speaks to the gradual removal of divine foundations for political ordering associated with the 'Death of God'. By replacing God with science and nation, and reconstituting political authority around democratic participation rather than divinely ordained kingship, politics created the need for a new method with which to appease death. Sovereignty was no longer anchored in God through its appropriation of Christian mythology (Agamben 2011; Debrix 2015; Kantorowicz 1957; Santner 2011); rather the population became the 'flesh' from which sovereign authority is derived. In democracy, the demos are framed as the source of political authority. But what effect did the Death of God have upon the salience of mortality? What of the promise of heavenly immortality that had, until then, assuaged the fears of the populace? As I will argue in this chapter, the Death of God unleashed mortality as a force capable of disrupting sovereignty. In response, the state attempted to assuage this newly salient death anxiety through the articulation of eternal national community – embedding individual lives in the perpetual national 'body'. But this is a vulnerable equation of the individual with the social body, given the concurrent processes of individuation at work during mortality. The individual is not subsumed within the frame of the national community, so the individual is still vulnerable to the distress of mortality – a distress that could compromise their recognition of the sovereign as omniscient. And, as this book will argue, practices of retrospective security are required to mitigate the spectre of death, in order to reconstitute the subject's recognition of the sovereign as sovereign.

Neither do I wish to make a universal geographical claim of this ontological coupling. It is peculiar to the development of Judaeo-Christian societies and the emergence of the modern secular capitalist state. My field research in Bali after the 2002 bombing suggests that this particular Buddhist community understands the role of commemoration, and its entanglement within discourses of mortality and security, very differently. I am unable to comment on other societies outside the bounds of my fieldwork, which took place in the United States, Europe and Indonesia, so this book should be understood accordingly.

Within these necessary restrictions, I will argue that security is a responsive performance. It functions to elide the knowledge of human mortality – that place and time beyond the limits of rational comprehension – by compartmentalising

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and objectifying it into threat-objects, and then vanquishing it through security action (military action, scenario planning, risk governance). The secular state is the inheritor of the Judaeo-Christian architecture and mythology (Agamben 2011; Foucault 1983; Kantorowicz 1957; Santner 2011), but one that makes do with limited tools. It can't promise individual immortality so it performs national perpetuity. Security functions to simulate an earthly heaven, articulating the permanence of collective life and concealing the inevitability of our impermanence. Whereas religion and religiously derived sovereignty conquered mortality through the allusions to heavenly salvation, modernity and postmodernity rework this technique as the promise of the population's security. But this always inevitably fails to completely silence death. And we should pay attention to these moments of failure because they are moments where we can dispel the illusion that states are omnipotent. Instead, their performance of sovereignty is a simulation riddled with holes.

### **Chapter structure**

Given that this book explores a new conception of security, as ontological counterpart to mortality, this introductory chapter focuses only on setting up the book's theoretical model. It begins by highlighting the reduction of mortality to 'killing' in IR literatures. If death is understood solely as killing disqualified life within the biopolitical management of population, then we are left with an impression of the state as a totalising and omnipotent actor. We face a God. However, if we utilise the philosophical insights of scholars who analyse death as the anxiety-provoking condition of mortality, we can obtain a very different starting point for thinking about sovereignty. If mortality is taken seriously as the inevitable barrier to reason and sovereign control, we no longer face a God when we resist the state. Instead, we are facing a force that is desperately trying to conceal its own impotence through the performance of security. By focusing on the difference between death as 'killing' and death as the 'condition of mortality', we can highlight how biopolitical research in IR sometimes accidentally reifies the performance of sovereignty.

This introductory chapter turns to the philosophical literatures on mortality to construct a new theory of security, situating them in a socio-historical analysis of death practices. These sociological treatments highlight how death only took on its contemporary problematic form in the era of secularism and rationalism. Death was not a problem when sovereignty rested upon divine foundations prior to modernity: it was tame, accepted as a natural feature of life (Aries 1974, 1983). But the advent of modernity created the problem of mortality through its secularisation of churchly authority and constitution of individualised subjectivity. Without God, there was no promise of eternal salvation to mitigate the knowledge of mortality. Death became terrifying.

In response, institutions promise collective security to assuage some of this anxiety – but individuals, once constituted by politics, can never be totally subsumed within the identity of the collective. They are still vulnerable to mortality even if the nation is supposedly permanent. As such, the relationship of sovereign and subject is vulnerable to the incursion of death anxiety. Security is an imperfect reimagination of earlier political theology.

To explain this, early modernity slowly appropriated the Church's self-authorising discourse of Christ's 'two bodies' (one body of Christ is consumed during Mass, and the other is present within Church apparatus) into one of kingly sovereignty. This founded a bureaucratic authority for the state based upon the transformed mythology of Christ's duality as secular sovereign duality (the king has two bodies: one mortal, the other the body politic) (Kantorowicz 1957; Santner 2011). But the secularisation of sovereignty cast aside the promise of eternal salvation. Individual subjects were constituted as 'recognisers of' political sovereignty, and thus the source of political authority for the modern state (its 'flesh', to borrow from Santner 2011), but individuals are also cognisant of their own deaths. Without the promise of heaven, mortality remained prone to disturb and terrify these subjects and thus disrupt their recognition (and thus constitution) of sovereignty as omniscient authority. The potential for disruption lurks in this performance of politics. As such, we see the responsive creation of 'security' as a totemic performance of collective immortality – to defeat death anxiety. Security steps in to bridge the mortality gap left by the Death of God in the balancing of authority, recognition and the exclusion of mortality.

After I explore this theoretical model, I introduce (in Chapter 1) the radical rethinking of security and mortality that has occurred during the era of resilience. Building upon the analysis already undertaken in the Introduction, I turn to address the contemporary shift in the ways in which mortality is effaced. Resilience in contemporary security policy undertakes a cynical move whereby death is supposedly admitted into the polity. The polity appears to make peace with death. Resilience directly addresses the inevitability of 'death' by refiguring security around unpreventable events and the resulting socio-infrastructure recovery. It performs life. But this performance does not mean that we now witness 'honest dealings' with mortality. Not at all. Rather resilience continues the work of the previous era of security, effacing the salience of mortality to conceal the aporia within sovereignty. It does this, paradoxically, by highlighting the visibility of unpreventable events so that inevitable recovery can be performed. Security is reconceptualised in the resilience era to signify adaptive vitality in the face of danger, rather than protection from danger. In this recalibration, life is systemically operationalised to defeat death.

Chapters 2 to 6 then address the practices of emergency response, memorialisation and reconstruction performed at bombsites as methods of death effacement. These, I will argue, are all practices of *retrospective security*. Terrorist



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attacks are so feared by security actors (despite their low-frequency occurrence) because they expose the aporia at the heart of sovereignty: they prove that the sovereign's claims to omnipotence and authority are merely simulated, and that death escapes the grasp of sovereign control. They show that the contemporary sovereign is a discount God. Retrospective security measures are deployed to conceal this incursion of mortality and its disruptive effects: for example, emergency management performs the end of the 'emerging emergency' through the application of pre-determined steps that stop the emergence of uncontrolled force. Measures are deployed to contain the excess and force it back underneath the architecture of society.

But the evidence of the encounter with mortality lives on at the bombsite. Destroyed space is extremely problematic for politics for this reason. The physical evidence of death, as it broke through the illusion of sovereign mastery, provokes extensive efforts to conceal mortality through architectural reconstruction. In Chapters 2 to 6, I explore emergency response, architecture and memorialisation upon post-terrorist space as *retrospective security practices* – they efface the remnants of the death that has already happened, closing the visibility of the aporia within sovereignty. This retrospective orientation proves that security is ontologically connected to mortality and its effacement, because a retrospective security practice cannot be assumed to prevent future threat. Security is thus oriented towards the mitigation of mortality.

The case studies I utilise to argue that security is performed retrospectively are drawn from terrorist attacks against 'Western' sites between 2001 and 2011. I have specifically chosen major attacks on 'Western' sites because they sit within the Judaeo-Christian heritage of secular politics, where death became a problem upon the transformation of religious authority into politics. These spaces were incorporated within the performance of secular sovereignty before they were attacked (indeed, this is probably why they were attacked), and thus the efforts to reconstruct them speak to the relationship between secular sovereignty and the effacement of mortality.

To produce the material for this analysis, I have travelled to sites of reconstruction and memorialisation at the World Trade Center in Manhattan, the London bombings, the Bali bombing and the multiple sites associated with Anders Breivik's attacks in Norway of 2011. I studied the architectural renderings made upon such sites to reclaim 'security' (as the absence of mortality from public life) and interviewed the multiple stakeholders involved in designing memorials and museums, curating post-terrorist space, judging memorial design competitions and, when possible, activists who contest the memorial representations made upon such sites – including relatives of the deceased.

The reader will note that the Balinese case study does not, at first glance, fit within my justification of case study selection. Indonesia is not usually

considered a 'Western' state. However, the stories of reconstruction and memorialisation after the Bali bombing speak, in very interesting ways, to the 'Western' (re-)colonisation of the island region through practices of tourism by Australians, in particular. The bombings targeted a Westernised club and bar on the tourist strip that forbid entry to local Balinese/Indonesian patrons. This particular tourist strip (Jalan Legian) is also firmly interwoven into performances of Australian Westernised identity and sovereignty within the East Asian region. Tourism to Bali is a ritualised performance of Australian 'place' within the region, undertaken by young travellers and families. Furthermore, Australian activist groups and politicians have dominated the campaign to buy the bombsite so that a 'peace park' might be constructed to honour the memory of the dead, rather than a commercial construction. The Balinese discourse on death is, as one might expect, associated with Hinduism and reincarnation – and locals often expressed bewilderment and frustration with commandeering Australian efforts to obtain the site for a pointless endeavour.

Given these considerations, my Balinese case study does not strictly fit the criteria of an attack upon the 'West' but it is very useful for highlighting the ways in which secular cultures of death operate, juxtaposed against religious alternatives. The physical reminder of mortality upon destroyed space is only problematic for 'Westernised' performances of sovereignty and security (given the removal of divine mitigations of death through salvation). The Balinese were not worried about creating a marker to the dead because their everyday religious practice involves placing floral offerings on the street to appease gods and demons. The dead have already taken their place within the reincarnation system. As such, the main concern articulated to me by Balinese people was the need not for a memorial, but for the restoration of the tourist income upon which they depend and, occasionally, articulations of the need for a more balanced 'cultural tourism' rather than the excesses of the party tourism currently associated with the Kuta region.

The unmarked memory of public death is not as problematic for the Balinese as for the Australians. The need for permanent post-terrorist commemorative markers seems to be a secular endeavour. Without God, states require performances of 'retrospective security' (where deathly events are mitigated through discourse and architecture) to conceal the aporia at the heart of their supposed omnipotence. They can't rely on divinity to efface mortality, so the performance of security is used (anticipatorily) to create objects of death that can be ritually destroyed, and retrospectively to conceal the salience of mortality within memorial forms.

This introductory chapter now turns to explore the ways in which we might explore the ontological relationship between death and security, and the critical purchase we should attain by doing so.



## Beyond biopolitics

Death is simultaneously silent and very loud in contemporary political discourse. Security discourse screams about potential threats lurking around every corner, but academic discourse neglects mortality. Life is everywhere in theorisation of security, but death is nowhere. We live in a political era where life is remorselessly deployed, measured and controlled as the subject of governance. As Foucault has shown us, the biopolitical state rules through the technologies of medicine, statistics, incarceration and militarisation associated with making life live. Life is totalised; life is made functional; and most recently, life is rendered by resilience discourse as the self-ordering complexity present within systems, structures and populations. Resilience is the most contemporary step taken within the extension of biopolitical governance. Critical debates rage around how to frame the particular distinguishing motif of resilience (Aradau 2014; Chandler 2014; Dillon 2007; Dillon and Reid 2009; Evans and Reid 2013; Joseph 2013; Lentzos and Rose 2009; Walker and Cooper 2011), but all agree that the operationalisation of emergent and self-ordering life against the possibility of disruption and emergency is central to understanding the contemporary security climate.

One would think death had been effectively silenced, given the discursive prominence of 'making life live' in policy and academic literatures. There is no theory of mortality in IR, contra multiple theorisations of life<sup>2</sup> – albeit necropolitical and thanatopolitical approaches do operationalise a specific (and limited) understanding of death. Necropolitics and thanatopolitics interpret death as 'killing', rather than mortality. Death is conceptualised as a method of killing deployed within the project of making life live.

But what about the great abyss of mortality? Carol Cohn first noted the strange absence of death from IR when confronting the sanitised abstraction of nuclear discourse (1987), and since then, very few works have interrogated the role of death within politics.<sup>3</sup> Yet death is politically functional. We are governed through the rhetorical invocation of the spectacular catastrophic event of death: the terrorist attack, the enemy invasion and the pandemic. Politicians and security practitioners talk about death all the time, *yet they sublimate it within the promise of security*. Death is the terrible spectacle that is fleetingly introduced in order to underwrite the protective mandate of the state. Death is both silent within security, and loud.

As during the religious era, practices of dying are bound to salvation: security, as provided by the benevolent sovereign, is the answer to death. Death and security are an ontological couplet. Imaginaries of spectacular, sudden violence are the frame of reference against which security claims are made. But in the contemporary era, perhaps more than any other, the deathly content of such material sits awkwardly against the resolute deployment of vital metaphors within security. How do you situate massacre and horror within a clean,

functional discourse about the self-ordering, irrepressible vitality of critical systems and populations? How are deathly events deployed alongside resilient security? Death sits very awkwardly alongside the functionalisation of life.

Critical security studies have not dealt with the role of mortality. But let it be clear that I am in agreement with the multitude of critical security theories which argue that dangers are not objective features of life, but rather constituted threats that serve the project of statecraft. For example, David Campbell's seminal work of critical security studies, *Writing Security* (1992), deftly explores the practice of US foreign policy to show that the function of security involves the constitution and maintenance of an external Other against which state identity can be propagated. Similarly, biopolitical readings of security also argue that the claims of security policy should not be taken at face value. Building upon Foucault's delineation of historical shifts in the methods of political rule, biopolitical studies of security explore the ways in which population is managed as a living, calculable object (Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008). Circulations that increase the productivity of species life are maximised, while those that threaten this capacity are monitored and suppressed.

It must be expressly stated that I agree with these theses and do not intend to argue against them. Rather I will argue that the situation for these variegated functions of security is broader in nature. Security indeed functions through the facilitation of capitalist circulations and to consolidate national identity against the threatening Other, but both practices are components within a broader response to mortality.

To situate biopolitical and social constructivist readings of security within a broader response to mortality, we must broaden the scope of our questions. Quite simply, let us begin by asking: *why death?* Why are death and survival the discursive tableau against which security is articulated and performed? Why are the management of circulation and the performance of state identity undertaken against the spectre of deathly potentials like terrorism, pandemics and war?

Asking this question allows us to perceive, and question, the alignment of traditional and critical security theories around the framing association between insecurity and death. Traditional and critical security theories are actually in tacit agreement with each other, despite their many disputes. Whether security is something that can be objectively attained à la traditional studies or is discursively performed to serve the ends of biopolitics or identity, it is framed against deathly potentials. And no one questions this.

What work is this morbid association doing? This frame is reconstituted everywhere in security theory and state theory. Social contract theories, for example, base their arguments about the foundation of the liberal state upon an illusory moment whereby people accepted subjecthood by exchanging their natural capacities (to kill and steal) for the right to protection. They find the foundation of sovereignty in the organised protection of life – in the provision of

security against chaos and death (Hobbes 1991; Locke 1821). Traditional security studies also accept the association between insecurity and death, between security and the prevention of death. The entire discipline of strategic studies is organised around the study of forces, enemies and scenarios that are constituted as threats to security given their deathly potential. On the other side of the field, critical security theories advocate different readings of *how* security functions (through the function of identity constitution against the Other (Campbell 1992), or through the discursive rendering of an emergency, accepted by an audience, that legitimates exceptional measures (Buzan *et al.* 1998)), but are *similarly unquestioning of why security should take life and death as its rhetorical medium*.

More recently, the emerging field of ontological security studies appeared to have the potential to intercede on this question. Ontological security studies, as the name would suggest, understands security as an ontological practice. However, rather than question security's ontological performance against death, the field has largely explored questions of identity consolidation in international practice (Kinnvall 2004, 2006; Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008) – deepening the social constructivist position. The ontological foundation of security itself still goes unquestioned.

Why is insecurity linked to the frame of death? Because security is a responsive performance that acts upon the disruption posed by mortality to modern, rationalist forms. If we open this question of discursive association, we open the potential to see security differently. In the rest of this chapter, I will explore how the silence in security theory about the association between insecurity and death extends to a suspicious silence on mortality more generally. Subsequently I will build the argument that death and security form an ontological couplet – a discursive bind forged in the birth of rationalism, and the death of God. It is no coincidence that the demise of divinely ordained kingship and the emergence of rationalism and individualism occurred simultaneously with the birth of security. The work of religion was involved in the consolidation of authority, meaning and futurity against the knowledge of mortality. But the problem of mortality once alleviated by the promise of immortal salvation has become antagonistic in its removal, prompting the creation of a secular, earthly salvation: security.

At present, there is not an easily identifiable literature with which to address these concerns. While biopolitical analysis dominates the IR literature through its exploration of questions pertaining to species-life, there is no equivalent for death. The question of mortality is ignored by International Relations, to a large extent. The discipline that lays claim to the conceptual territories of war and security, to distinguish its remit from that of political theory, does not explore mortality despite its 'academic ownership' of violent terrain. Instead, the experience and salience of death is made silent while the business of international politics is described through abstracting discourses

of ‘collateral damage’, bomb ‘footprints’, ‘coercion’ and ‘shock and awe’. This studied avoidance of death might come as a surprise, given the fundamental occupation of security practice and study with issues related to killing and survival. However, it is not uncommon. Mortality is purposely effaced across many spectrums of life, especially within those practices established to manage bodies that have ceased, or are ceasing, to live. Death industries, for example, function to efface the spectre of mortality. In her seminal text on the sociology of death, Jessica Mitford has excoriated the American funeral industry through an exploration of the multiple ways in which the death industries have externalised the end of life, removing it from view, while making pretence of life’s altered continuation (through processes, names and sites that give the appearance of continuation in another form) (Mitford 1963). Funeral industries act upon death to mitigate mortality – effacing the inevitable while, paradoxically, taking death as the referent object of practice. Similarly, I will argue here that security practices and literatures function to efface mortality by performing a prospect of ontological immortality juxtaposed against objects of insecurity. In reading security as sociology of death, I will explore the practices performed to alleviate the ontological disruption of death, destruction and mortality. Like the funeral director performing rituals upon the deceased body, security mediates the incursion of death. It performs the masquerade that death doesn’t destabilise our rational systems, upset the continuation of the capitalist economy or disrupt the imagination of perpetual communities.

Much of the existing IR-related literature that touches upon death is interested in the biopolitical significance of killing, rather than the ontological coupling of mortality and security. Biopolitics has a deathly undercurrent – one understood by Giorgio Agamben as the state of exception and Achille Mbembe as necropolitics. Both theses explore the creation of death-worlds by biopolitical structures and the killing of life deemed unqualified. Killing is undertaken by the state within the broader remit of making life live, as so succinctly expressed by Michael Dillon and Julien Reid (Dillon and Reid 2009). The state kills to secure and consolidate its project of life.

This literature replicates the discursive association between security and life, insecurity and death – even if killing is the means by which security is attained. The reason I am not using a necropolitical or biopolitical inspired approach to interrogate death and security is that both *put the state first*. Their argument is that the state utilises killing and death to assert itself and to consolidate its vital management of population through disposing of unqualified life. As a result, the state appears to be in control of its relationship with mortality. Yet philosophical treatments of mortality accord far more significance to mortality. Mortality, for Bauman, Heidegger and Agamben (in his early work), represents the void that stimulates the constitution of language and politics. Knowledge of mortality,

specific to humans, constitutes knowledge of a domain beyond the control of the state or society. Mortality comes first.

In the post-Snowden era, it is important for critique to avoid consolidating the image of the state as omnipotent and contributing to the illusion of power. To work towards any potential for change, we must first disarm the state of its simulation of omnipotent sovereignty. The compelling reading of sovereignty made within the psychoanalytic trajectory enables us to do this by way of incorporating mortality into an understanding of politics. Psychoanalytic readings of sovereignty draw from Lacan's assertion that master signifiers (such as sovereignty, freedom or God) cannot be defined without tautology or circularity (Derrida 1990; Edkins and Pin-Fat 1999; Žižek 1989). Instead, they function to underpin the symbolic ordering of signifier and signified while they themselves remain unfixed. They hold the realm of representation together. When this psychoanalytic frame is used to understand sovereignty (Edkins and Pin-Fat 1999; Heath-Kelly 2014), we find that the mystical power to command is actually co-constituted through upwards and downwards glances between sovereignty and subjectivity: the sovereign is made ruler through the subjection of subjects, and the subject exists because there is something to subject her. Authority and politics, then, are not stable or quantifiable; instead, they are products of subjection and recognition. When recognition of authority fails, during a political revolution, so does sovereignty. It ceases to be.

How does this necessitate the inclusion of mortality into the theorisation of sovereignty and security? Because mortality threatens the state's claim to authority and omnipotence. Subjects are conscious of their mortality – and thus conscious of the limit of the state's power. We know we are going to die and that it will be the end. *This threatens the recognition accorded to the sovereign as sovereign and omnipotent.* The performance of sovereignty must *respond* to mortality to maintain the constitution of authority. This is the function of security: the objectification and mitigation of death. To be sovereign, the state must banish death.

I will first outline the dimensions of three popular theories that supposedly deal with death in IR, before offering a different perspective: one that begins with mortality as an ontological problem created by the birth of rationalism, and to which the modern state attempts to respond. The problem with existing theories is that they begin with the state as actor, rather than the state as responsive.

For those drawing from Agamben's influential *Homo Sacer* thesis, politics consists of the perpetual performance of distinction from bare life. This performance of distinction often takes the form of negation through the infliction of death (Norris 2005). Death, here, should be understood as 'killing' rather than mortality. The reception of Agamben's thought in critical security studies has explored the production of bare life within the international domain as the regrounding of law through its constitutive outside. Agamben himself has argued that the most perfect example of the rendering of *homo sacer* occurs

during the War on Terror, at Guantanamo Bay (2005: 3–4; see also Butler 2004). As a concept, bare life is very useful for explaining the deployment of exceptional violence upon *external* others because it produces ‘qualified’ life within the polity through the negation of ‘unqualified’ life. The state kills and creates bare life to produce qualified life inside the polity. But, unlike in his early work, this reading places death firmly in the hands of the state – rather than the state in the hands of death. The state is an actor of sovereign proportion, presented as omnipotent rather than responsive.

Other recent texts in IR suggest a surge of interest in deathly matters, and a similar theoretical perspective, including Finn Stepputat’s anthropological edited collection on the governance of the dead (2014) and Jessica Aughter’s *The Politics of Haunting and Memory in International Relations*. Aughter’s (2014) work explores the practice of statecraft through the performance of a life/death distinction via sites of memorialisation. She expands upon traditional explorations of memorialisation, which tend to focus on the fixing of historical narrative and national identity, by using ‘hauntology’ to explore the performance of qualified and unqualified lives. Like Agamben, she understands statecraft as primarily ontological – creating and distinguishing viable lives from those that are unwanted, unworthy and unqualifiable. Using Derrida’s comments on ‘haunting’ as the excess beyond the life/death binary, she explores the implicit excess and contestation present within memorials to genocides, border-crossing and 9/11. The performative distinction between life and death made at the memorial site leaves things silent – and exploring those silences allows one to challenge the practice of statecraft.

Again, in this Derridean reading of death and politics, her methodology treats the life/death binary as part of statecraft. Once again, death is placed in the hands of the state rather than vice versa. It is for similar reasons that this book does not utilise the necropolitics approach, made popular by Achille Mbembe (2003). Mbembe explores the deployment of the space of living-death as corollary to biopolitics. Using Agamben, Schmitt and Foucault, Mbembe argues that the instrumentalisation of life under biopolitics requires a simultaneous destruction of human bodies and populations. It is through the infliction of death that qualified life is produced through juxtaposition and distinction. Mbembe’s particular focus takes the colonial subjugation of populations, modern and historical, as the epitome of this tendency.

Again, the rendering of death and security in ‘necropolitics’ hangs upon the process of statecraft as it creates an ‘Other’, then subjugates it to the form of bare life. We again encounter the privileging of the state in this model – where life/death is a performance of statecraft rather than that which always already situates the state.

But not all literature within IR follows this trajectory. The notable exception can be found in the work of Michael Dillon, who offers a very different treatment



of death and security – even if he doesn't address mortality by name. In his article of 2011, Dillon uses the political theology of Roberto Esposito to rethink security as the 'katechon' posed against the threat of the end-times (the eschaton). Exploring the transition from ecclesiastical terminology to that of the sovereign state, Dillon finds convergence between the worlds of Judaeo-Christian religion and security. He deploys some Agambenian/Schmittian themes, noting that the constitution of the eschaton is a performance that functions to embed the state through contrast, but there is a realisation of the ontological significance of 'end-times' and its coupling with security. Here security is a necessary ontological technology to counteract the unthinkable end.

### Thinking against biopolitics: security as sociology of death

Much has been written by philosophers on the salience of mortality that has not been taken up in security studies, despite the exception of Dillon's utilisation of Heidegger and Esposito. Despite differing treatments of the subject, there is some commonality of opinion between major thinkers of the twentieth century that mortality is fundamentally connected to the emergence of systems of thought, language, culture and ethics. These systems respond to the challenge of fore-known death; indeed mortality stimulates cultural efforts to produce meaning and ethics, in spite of inevitable negativity. Peter Sloterdijk dedicates a chapter of his *Spheres* trilogy to the foundational negativity of death and absence that propels human societies into the articulation and constitution of places. In his reading, the development of culture has thanatological origin:

The omnipresence of images depicting ancestors and Gods, of amulets, fetishes and charged symbols in older cultures shows how great the need is to round off the present world with pointers to substantial absent things, to augmenting and encompassing elements. The necessity of images stems from the coercion of the intelligence by death and absence [...] Is culture as a whole not an overreaction to absence? When missing things become conspicuous, morphological pressure ensues: empty spaces want to be filled again [...] Death is the first sphere stressor and creator of cultures. (Sloterdijk 2014: 142–3, 164)

Here death motivates and stimulates the constitution of ethical, geographical, cultural and political paradigms. These discourses then mitigate and sublimate death anxiety through their assertion of perpetual realities. The emergence of rationalism during the demise of religious mediations of death in 'Enlightenment' Europe should be no surprise to us, given this line of analysis. Where one elixir faded, another remedy was constructed so that our mortality and impermanence might be obscured once more.

What I will call 'mortality philosophy' argues, utilising insights from Heidegger and Hegel, that mortality is foundational of projects that make life, culture, politics and discourse. Death comes first; death must then be effaced by

intellectual and political activity because mortality exposes reason's lie – and the lie of the sovereign. As Zygmunt Bauman expresses this paradox: reason cannot think death. Thought cannot grasp its own non-existence. Mortality is beyond knowledge and exposes the charade of knowing. But, its negativity simultaneously provides a constitutive outside. Our knowledge of our unresolved mortality necessitates a huge cooperative effort from systems of human culture and society to live life as if mortality were not around the corner, as if life were meaningful when it will all amount to nothing (Bauman 1992: 7). Ernest Becker agrees, stating that: 'All culture, all man's creative life-ways are in some basic part of them a fabricated protest against natural reality, a denial of the truth of human condition [...] Society everywhere is a living myth of the significance of human life, a defiant creation of meaning' (Becker 1973: 33–7). This contention has been explored by philosophers and literary figures including Hegel, Heidegger, Sloterdijk, Schopenhauer, Sartre, Camus and Agamben, among many others. For existentialist thinkers such as Camus and Sartre, mortality was represented as the absurdity that plagues existence – disrupting all attempts to behave meaningfully or to find meaning. Their solution was act in 'good faith', always in cognisance of absurdity rather than taking part in the charade that it can be effaced.

Heidegger approached mortality through language, and language through mortality. He argued that the unique human awareness of mortality is intimately linked to the unique human propensity for language (Heidegger 1971, 2000). Language functions to place an illusory stability and permanence onto our experience of the world; it responds to the nothingness inherent within mortality. As Oberst interprets Heidegger: 'The urge "simply to tell" points at intrinsic connections between language and death [...] Death's factual reality drives humans into speech to overcome the nothingness' (Oberst 2009: 45).

Dasein is Dasein, for Heidegger, because it exists in relation to death. In contrast, animal life does not die but simply ceases to live. Heidegger states: 'Mortals are they who can experience death as death. Animals cannot do so. But animals cannot speak either. The essential relation between death and language flashes before us, but remains unthought' (Heidegger 1971: 107–8). It is the knowledge of mortality that constitutes Dasein's unique potentiality, and its capacity for language. This capacity for language, according to Hegel, Heidegger and Agamben, is structured around negativity. Death shows what language can never say, but simultaneously throws humanity into an unresolvable conflict by stimulating language to efface this limit point (Norris 2005: 6). Language functions to conceal negativity through its attribution of names that assert identity against difference, distinguishing objects through negativity (*this* becomes *this* because it is not that). The negative foundation of politics and knowing is endlessly and traumatically repeated through identity distinction. This practice encircles negativity rather than locating it in ontology. This particular deceit of language in the concealment of negativity has been exposed by Agamben

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in relation to the function of pronouns. Modern linguistics classifies pronouns not as the 'I' or 'you' they signify, but as *indicators of utterance* – they are indefinable outside the instance of discourse (Agamben 1991: 23). They are empty signs that relate only to instances of discourse taking place. 'I' and 'you' are not attached to speakers. Instead, they function to conceal the absence, lack and negativity at the heart of language. Pronouns, and language more broadly, are forms *that mitigate negativity, lack and mortality*.

Contrasted with biopolitical and necropolitical theory then, mortality philosophy makes a bold claim that everything starts with mortality/negativity and the subsequent need to efface. However, this book shies away from Bauman and Becker when they argue that all human culture, everything, always, is a response to human knowledge of mortality. Instead, it steers a path between the extreme positions of biopolitics (where the state is the primary actor) and mortality philosophy (that everything comes from its relationship with death) by engaging sociologies of death practice. Because, of course, death is not stationary. Understandings of death shift over time, constituted through their representation in society. The contemporary security context is a temporary stage of modernity and postmodernity, where secular politics had to respond to the implications of the death of God.

First let us briefly consider shifts in deathly practices so that we might see their evolution in correlation with biopolitics. Historical sociologies of dying point to an interesting finding: death that was once 'tame', accepted peacefully in society, has become savage (Aries 1983: 614). Death has *become* a problem. Philippe Aries has undertaken an exploration of representations of death and dying across the history of 'Western' culture (Aries 1974). He identifies the trope of the 'tamed death' in the ancient world, where works of literature portray the business of dying without taboo or fear. Death was simple in these works; the dying person would receive prior knowledge that the end was upon them, usually while confined to bed, take steps to prepare their affairs and then simply die. Aries comments that:

The old attitude in which death was both familiar and near, evoking no great fear or awe, offers too marked a contrast to ours, where death is so frightful that we dare not utter its name. This is why I have called this household sort of death 'tamed death'. I do not mean that death had once been wild and that it had ceased to be. I mean, on the contrary, that today it has become wild. (Aries 1974: 13–14)

Aries shows across his broad study that the ancient death was simply a fact – not to be escaped or glorified. It didn't matter. So how has death become wild? Aries points to multiple shifts in the Middle Ages that made death problematic. Across the Middle Ages, social practices around the Reformation and Counter-Reformation began to affect the business of dying. The deathbed scene, once central to the salvation (or otherwise) of the soul, was replaced. Death once

meant the physical agonies of passing and a 'good death', faced without hysterical emotion, was praiseworthy. This 'good death' was itself a development in death custom: the ancient tame death (likened to sleeping) turned into an individualised encounter with celestial observation. This representation of death as the deathbed scene developed alongside (from the eleventh century onwards) the practice of individualised tombs to house the dead. Shifts in the sociology of dying reflected the growing awareness of individualised identity (Aries 1974: 51). An ancient collectivised acceptance of a tame death shifted towards an understanding of 'one's own death', with the advent of individualised subjectivity.

Running in parallel with the development of capitalism, rationalism and modern subjectivity, dying becomes personal – and takes on dimensions of being terrible. By the time that mind–body dualism came to intellectual prominence, the interpretation of death as the physical deathbed scene changed – becoming more akin to the metaphysical breakdown of that which makes us human (Aries 1983: 300). The sting of death shifts from physical disintegration to the form of metaphysical loss, separation and disappearance. Death, in reflection of the uptake of rationalism in the late Middle Ages, becomes terrible. It destroys the self.

By the eighteenth century, Aries shows how death becomes macabre in its representation across art and literature. Rather than a natural, tame occurrence it becomes the transgression that rips the subject from 'daily life, rational society and monotonous work' (1974: 57). The death of the Other becomes the supreme rupture of mourning at the same time as intellectual positivism and nationalism reach their zenith in the nineteenth century, and, as Aries puts it, the cult of remembrance was born. As capitalist politics moved towards the era of biopolitics and the fostering of life and circulation, the threat of mortality took on ever more sinister and terrible connotations. By the mid nineteenth century, death was shameful and forbidden – hidden from public view. People no longer died at home, but in the hospital. This culmination is closely connected to the transition from early forms of capitalism and nationalism to biopolitics, and Aries' work can be read to mirror Foucault and Agamben when he describes how:

Death in the hospital is no longer the occasion of a ritual ceremony, over which the dying person presides amidst his assembled relatives and friends. Death is a technical phenomenon obtained by a cessation of care, a cessation determined in a more or less avowed way by a decision of the doctor and the hospital team [...] Death has been dissected, cut to bits by a series of little steps, which finally makes it impossible to know which step was the real death. (Aries 1974: 88)

Death, in the era of biopolitical governance, has been hidden from view – and so too has everything that reminds us of death. Practices of dying have clearly shifted alongside practices of living and the secular rational era has no answer

to mortality except medicalisation and effacement. Death, in this era of life, has become terrible, wild and untamed.

Deathly practices and representations have shifted across history, reflecting the shifts whereby economic, political and societal structures constitute the meaning of life. Death has not stayed static across history. However, there is something remarkable about the conception of mortality that accompanies the rationalist era. *Mortality is defiant without the figure of god*. Secular rationalist authority cannot defeat death; instead, it is riven with contradictions: the omniscience of reason cannot penetrate the experience of dying; the omnipotent sovereign cannot prevent the inevitable; we have knowledge of our own mortality and yet we are still compelled to act and live. *Security is the response that reaffirms the symbolic order of sovereign and subject*.

Zygmunt Bauman, in particular, explores wide-ranging philosophical literature on the function of rational, cultural and linguistic systems as effacing death. Drawing from Schopenhauer, Becker and Freud he argues that a multi-directional relationship of encirclement connects such systems with mortality. Human cognisance of death provides the impetus for religious and philosophical systems that then prove incapable of signifying death-in-itself. Death, Bauman states, 'is the ultimate defeat of reason, since reason cannot "think" death' (1992: 12–13). It is a non-object, a void, both traumatic and absent. As such, mortality gives rise to cultural and philosophical systems but those systems can only encircle death – they are unable to represent or signify death because it is beyond their bounds.

Multiple strategies are then developed by societies to mediate the void, or 'lack' to use a psychoanalytic term, of mortality by breaking death into component parts and then acting upon them, making a pretence and masquerade of life as continuous and un-plagued by absurdity. These strategies primarily include the development of rituals around the disposal of bodies that function to expel them from the sight of the living, the development of medical sciences to both postpone the inevitable and then scientifically explain it when it occurs, and the deployment of religious and spiritual rituals to efface the existential horror that confronts the bereaved (Aries 1974; Bauman 1992). These strategies are all aimed at the living – those left behind who are confronted with death, and its disruption of rational security and mastery. These strategies mediate the sudden reappearance of mortality from its suppression.

Security, as the object of warfare and policing, is also a compartmentalisation of the mortality problem (Huysmans 1998). While security research is dominated by theories that explore the deployment of life, only Jeff Huysmans has pointed to the potential connection between death and security in his 1998 article 'Security! What Do You Mean?', arguing that security can be understood as the responsive practices by which political communities alleviate mortality anxiety by making, and then disposing of, objects of threat (1998: 237–8). In

its response to the negating presence of mortality, the state becomes arbiter of life and death, performing 'security' to keep mortality outside the domain of the polity – alleviating the void.

Functionally, security acts to efface the problem of mortality by constituting threat-objects that threaten the existence of the community, acting against those totemic objects, and performing the prospect of secure existence as defined against death. Security and warfare exorcise death from political consciousness, despite their use of its tools, through their totemic performance of threat mitigation upon objects classified as dangerous. Death is banished through processes of locating danger and fixing it. So while David Campbell's work (1992) has shown how the discourse of danger is functional for the performance of national identity, rather than representing objective dangers that threaten the community, we might develop the performative security thesis around the philosophy of mortality in two ways. First, by arguing that the reproduction of identity through foreign policy is an imagination of immortal political community that mitigates the salience of death; and second, that the discourse of danger creates objects that represent mortality and can be acted upon and exorcised – once again, performing the immortality of political community through ritualised sacrifice.

The conventional approach of modernity to mortality, within the remit of security, has involved the creation of standing armies that can march against threats, and weapons that can be fired to suppress our mortality by inflicting death upon others. But it is important to note that the security masquerade is kept fully intact during this performance – death is rarely spoken about and security is an exceptionally serious business that cannot be questioned. It is indeed an exceptionally serious business – the void that plagues rationality, sovereignty, culture and capital must be filled at all costs – but this is kept hidden beneath the performance of really existing dangers and terminology that abstracts from what is really at stake in warfare. Mortality is kept silent through the refusal to discuss war and security in terms of death. Here we should note Carol Cohn's seminal exploration of the abstraction in strategic discourse (1987), but also the numerous contemporary critiques concerning the immortalisation of 'our' war-dead relative to the refusal to count 'their' war-dead as anything but estimated collateral damage (Butler 2004; Gregory 2012; Zehfuss 2009). This unsavoury calculus of mourning goes hand-in-hand with the identification of *our* violence as morally justified and abstracted intervention, while others wage deathly terror against us. In both examples, language sanitises the infliction of death so that our soldiers live on in immortality while their 'dead' were never fully entitled to life in the first place. Death never really 'happened', as such. Our killing is abstracted from mortality in its technocratic discussion as intervention or nuclear technology (Cohn 1987) rather than the infliction of searing pain and terrible deaths, whereas the violence inflicted towards us is called 'terror' to objectify it as a 'danger' that can be suppressed. Effacement



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of mortality occurs here through the targeting of such dangerous objects with war: they are ritually dispatched to perform the immortality of political community vis-à-vis objects of threat.

As such, we might consider the security–mortality relationship to operate through objectification and silencing in the era of modernity. Objects of danger ('threats') are produced with which to invoke and resolve issues of mortality, whereas the deathly capacity of war-making is silenced within this process to maintain the illusion of death effacement.

## Notes

- 1 John Hamilton has written an excellent genealogy of security that traces the development of the Roman *securitas* through the Renaissance era and the major thinkers of the Western philosophical canon, up to the present day. His careful exegesis shows that while the ancient Roman and Greek societies had a notion of *securitas*, this was not employed as a political or philosophical concept in any sustained manner before (at least) the late fourteenth century. Rather, ancient meanings of *securitas* lean towards the care for one's inner being through enactment of moral precepts and social performances (Hamilton 2013). Franz-Xaver Kaufmann interprets this sudden shift in the deployment of security to the weakening of Church and imperial institutions and the ascendance of the rationalist paradigm. When the individual human subject becomes the primary producer of knowledge, and is not overawed by sovereign institutions that claim to provide protection from death and sin in exchange for loyalty, the era of security claims begins (Kaufmann 1970). Mortality, we can therefore argue, was held back by a new performance of perpetuity.
- 2 Although François Debrix and Alexander Barder have written of the need to reach beyond biopolitics to engage with horror, in relation to violence, terror and death (2012).
- 3 This introductory chapter will address research undertaken at the intersection of death and politics by Jessica Auchter (2014), Jeff Huysmans (1998) and Finn Stepputat (2014). However, it is important to note the scattered and limited existence of such texts, and the lack of research trajectory around death, contra the dominance of vital approaches like resilience and biopolitics.