

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The post-politics of public-private security governance: An ideology critique of the complaints about Facebook

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Abstract

How do public protests emerge and become impotent? Inspired by Žižek's ideology critique, the article examines the ideological underpinnings of contemporary public-private security governance and suggests that worried, complaining subjects are a product of a dominant discourse of expert knowledge and technification. It then introduces three Žižekian dynamics that prevent protests from challenging the prevailing discourse – particularisation, ultra-politics, and cynicism – and illustrates these dynamic through a case study of the history of public complaints about Facebook. The article suggests that Facebook communicates through a discourse of technification whereby it constantly invents technological fixes unable to satisfy the complaints. The article further suggests that Facebook turning into a national security partner in the fight against terrorism online prevents complaints from becoming universalised by rendering even particularised privacy contestations illegitimate. This is reinforced, the article argues, by the subject's cynical enjoyment; that is, the 'letting off steam' on Facebook while criticising it.

Keywords: Critical Security Studies; Public-Private Relations; Slavoj Žižek; Facebook; The Complaining Subject

Introduction

Facebook has an incredibly successful but also tumultuous history. Since its creation, Facebook has faced a range of public criticisms from users and concerned citizens about the company's disregard for privacy, about the facilitation and promotion of terrorism on the platform, and most recently about the failure to prevent fake news and micro-targeting campaigns by foreign governments seeking to meddle in US elections. Facebook was regulated by the US government on privacy grounds early on but became a trusted security partner in the US government's fight against radical and dangerous ISIS content online. With the public outcry over 'Russian election meddling', Facebook was suddenly perceived as a serious threat to democracy, but it did not prompt the government to regulate or alter its security partnership with Facebook. The shifting approaches to Facebook makes an interesting case for studying why and how public complaints occur while failing to bring changes to the current security political arrangement of private companies as national security partners.

Critical security scholarship has highlighted the ideological rationales that underpin the increasingly dominant state security practice of contracting and partnering with private companies,¹ and it

¹Anna Leander, 'The power to construct international security: On the significance of private military companies', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 33:3 (2005), pp. 803–25; Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams, *Security beyond the State: Private Security in International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Karen Lund Petersen and Vibeke Schou Tjalve, '(Neo) Republican security governance? US homeland security and the politics of "shared responsibility"', *International Political Sociology*, 7:1 (2013), pp. 1–18; Lene Hansen and Helen Nissenbaum, 'Digital disaster, cyber security, and the Copenhagen School', *International Studies Quarterly*, 53:4 (2009), pp. 1155–75.

has traced the security implications of the constant renegotiation of the blurred lines between public and private.² Other critical security contributions have analysed the political contestation that – despite a depoliticised and technocratic security governance regime – have emerged as challenges to the categories of ‘public’ (as state) and ‘private’ (as enterprise).³ Yet, while the existing critical security literature on public-private relations has made significant advantage to our understanding of the complex security assemblages today, the literature has so far not examined the affective elements that tie together the continuous ideological production of various public-private security practices and the production of an uneasy, insecure subject.

The article draws on the increasingly popular turn to Lacanian psychoanalysis in IR and security studies⁴ to demonstrate how complaints against Facebook is not only produced by the dominant ideology today but also reproduces this very ideology, and thus ultimately the existing public-private security arrangements.⁵ The article finds inspiration in Slavoj Žižek’s ideology critique of contemporary post-political society. The turn to Žižek in critical security studies is not a rejection of existing approaches that draw on, for example, securitisation, depoliticisation, governmentality, and assemblage theory. On the contrary, Žižekian ideology critique echoes several critical security observations concerning the underlying security rationalities, but the foundation in Lacanian psychoanalysis adds an analytical sensitivity to the subject as something that cannot be reduced to a subject position within a particular security discourse. A Žižekian-Lacanian analysis approaches the subject as a divided subject that never fully identifies with the positions (such as the public-private categories) offered by the socio-symbolic order, and it studies how this subject finds expression in different socio-political contexts.

The article turns to Facebook as the case study for examining the (re)production of complain-ing subjects in our current public-private security arrangements. Like many big tech companies, Facebook offers services that are currently deemed to be essential for users’ social interactions, for government’s national security practices, and for the national economy. And like other

²Joakim Berndtsson and Maria Stern, ‘Private security and the public-private divide: Contested lines of distinction and modes of governance in the Stockholm-Arlanda security assemblage’, *International Political Sociology*, 5:4 (2011), pp. 408–25; Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams, ‘Security beyond the state: Global security assemblages in international politics’, *International Political Sociology*, 3:1 (2009), pp. 1–17.

³William Walters and Anne-Marie D’Aoust, ‘Bringing publics into critical security studies: Notes for a research strategy’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 44:1 (2015), pp. 45–68; Valentin Gros, Marieke de Goede, and Beste İşleyen, ‘The Snowden files made public: A material politics of contesting surveillance’, *International Political Sociology*, 11:1 (2017), pp. 73–89; Linda Monsees, ‘Public relations: Theorizing the contestation of security technology’, *Security Dialogue*, 50:6 (2019), pp. 531–46.

⁴See, for example, Ty Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity in American Foreign Policy Discourses* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015); Moran M. Mandelbaum, ‘State, nation, society: The congruency fantasy and in/security of the body-national/social’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 4:2 (2016), pp. 187–201; Charlotte Heath-Kelly, ‘Forgetting ISIS: Enmity, drive and repetition in security discourse’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 6:1 (2018), pp. 85–99; Nadya Ali and Ben Whitham, ‘The unbearable anxiety of being: Ideological fantasies of British Muslims beyond the politics of security’, *Security Dialogue*, 49:5 (2018), pp. 400–17; Marco A. Vieira, ‘(Re-)imagining the “Self” of ontological security: The case of Brazil’s ambivalent post-colonial subjectivity’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 46:2 (2018), pp. 142–64; Andreja Zevnik, ‘A return of the repressed: Symptom, fantasy and campaigns for justice for Guantánamo detainees post-2010’, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 20:1 (2018), pp. 206–22; Catarina Kinnvall and Ted Svensson, ‘Misrecognition and the Indian State: The desire for sovereign agency’, *Review of International Studies*, 44:5 (2018), pp. 902–21; Charlotte Epstein, ‘The productive force of the negative and the desire for recognition: Lessons from Hegel and Lacan’, *Review of International Studies*, 44:5 (2018), pp. 805–28; Jakub Eberle, ‘Narrative, desire, ontological security, transgression: Fantasy as a factor in international politics’, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 22:1 (2019), pp. 243–68; Jeppe Teglskov Jacobsen, ‘From neurotic citizen to hysteric security expert: A Lacanian reading of the perpetual demand for US cyber defence’, *Critical Studies on Security*, First View (2020), pp. 1–13, available at: {<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21624887.2020.1735830>} accessed 10 March 2020.

⁵In this article, the public-private security governance regime/arrangement refers to the ways in which different forms of insecurity or unease – from lack of privacy, over the online presence of terrorist propaganda to the facilitation of fake news in democratic elections – are managed and dealt with by governments and private companies (through, for example, regulation, tech fixes and partnerships, whether uncontroversial or contested).

companies, Facebook has come under criticism for having become too powerful and too intrusive.⁶ Empirically, the article zooms in on Facebook's public communication, primarily by CEO Mark Zuckerberg,⁷ in response to the different criticisms that the company has faced since its creation in 2004; that is specifically, the response to users' criticism of Facebook's 'great [privacy] betrayal',⁸ the response to public commentators' concern that 'ISIS is winning the social media war' on the platform,⁹ and the response to citizens who have started to perceive Facebook as an 'existential threat to democracy'.¹⁰ These three Facebook controversies exemplify different tensions and negotiations of the categories of 'public' and 'private'. Methodologically, the article is not a content analysis of Facebook users' individual complaints, but offers a theoretically driven analysis that shows how the complaining subject (within the broader depoliticised security discourse of technification) is reproduced through the responses to its complaints, but also how the Facebook controversies – although they expose the inherent tensions in the public-private categories – fail to challenge the broader security discourse.

The article makes three arguments. First, it argues that Facebook's communications about privacy solutions echo Lacan's University Discourse, which produces a divided, complaining subject. As a result, the subject – whether in the form of users, public commentators, civil rights groups, or concerned citizens – turns to the government to resolve the tension in the meaning of 'private' (as market versus right to privacy) and get it to regulate or punish Facebook, but does so in a way that sustains a political status quo. Second, the article follows Žižek's observation that a post-political discourse at the societal level *generates* radical and violent outbursts, and argues that such outbursts work to create a hyper-securitised environment that not only is conducive to security governing through public-private (that is, government-market) partnerships but also delegitimises the privacy complaints about Facebook. And third, the article argues that the criticisms of Facebook is sustained by a cynical enjoyment; that is, the user enjoys 'letting off steam' and procrastinating on Facebook while simultaneously criticising Facebook's exploitation of its users. Together, the three arguments demonstrate the analytical relevance of paying attention – through Žižek's Lacanian psychoanalysis – to the role that the complaining subject plays in our attempt to understand the reproduction of security politics.

The article consists of three sections. First, it introduces the existing critical security literature on public-private security relations, particularly with the view to the underlying security rationalities and the space for political contestation. Second, the article introduces Žižek's ideology critique of our post-political society as a strategy for adding the divided subject to the existing study of public-private security governance. The third section illustrates the subject-centric strategy by analysing Facebook's changing relationship with the US government.

The politics of public-private security governance

The increasing involvement of private companies in (inter)national security issues over the past decades has been noticed in critical security studies. Critical security scholars have contributed with valuable insights into various aspects of the public-private security relations and particularly

⁶Here, social media platforms and Facebook in particular are the most discussed cases because they are characterised by being most explicitly in its promise of happiness and a sense of self (through connections and online interaction). Scott Galloway, *The Four: The Hidden DNA of Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google* (New York, NY: Portfolio/Penguin, 2018); Franklin Foer, *World without Mind: The Existential Threat of Big Tech* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2017).

⁷The article collected the statements primarily through the database, *The Zuckerberg Files*.

⁸Ryan Tate, 'Facebook's great betrayal', *Gawker* blog (14 December 2009), available at: {<http://gawker.com/5426176/facebook-great-betrayal>} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁹Brendan I. Koerner, 'Why ISIS is winning the social media war – and how to fight back', *Wired* (29 March 2016), available at: {<https://www.wired.com/2016/03/isis-winning-social-media-war-heres-beat/>} accessed 18 October 2019.

¹⁰Jeff Nesbit, 'This is only antidote to the poison of fake news', *Time* (16 December 2016), available at: {<https://time.com/4605146/fake-news-antidote/>} accessed 18 October 2019.

the underlying rationalities that govern these relations. Three dominant rationalities are worth highlighting.

Many critical security scholars have paid attention to the Private Military and/or Security Companies (PMSCs) and the way these companies challenge the idea of the state as the sole security provider.¹¹ The critical security studies of PMSCs have shown, for example, how an underlying neoliberal governmentality that depoliticises security while bolstering the expert status of security contractors, dominates public-private military relations.¹² And it has shown how neoliberal economics, shifting ‘mentalities’ of security and risk-based security technologies are inter-related aspects of the current global public-private security assemblage that constantly contests, negotiates, and redraws security authorities and forms of security governance.¹³

Other critical security scholars have looked at companies and how these are called upon to collect and share security knowledge, not through privatised contracting but through informal partnerships.¹⁴ Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Manuel Suter identify the neoliberal foundation in these public-private security partnerships, and they underline the tensions arising from it; that is, for example, that private companies perceive security through global and business administrative rather than national security lenses.¹⁵ Similarly, Daniel McCarthy argues that the security partnerships work to secure the private property rights of few and already powerful corporations rather than the security for all.¹⁶ Karen Lund Petersen and Vibeke Schou Tjalve suggest that the ‘responsibilisation’ of private companies is a state security politics through supervision, and they argue that the underlying rationality, rather than neoliberal, is based on a ‘neorepublican’ politics of collectivism and obligation – but without the classical republican virtues of dissent and doubt.¹⁷ Kristoffer Kjærgaard Christensen and Petersen show how obligation and loyalty are defining characteristics in the relationship between public and private sector experts working in the field of cybersecurity.¹⁸

Echoing Lene Hansen and Helen Nissenbaum’s observation about a dominant security discourse of technification,¹⁹ Christensen and Petersen also identify a dominant technological rationale at play as public-private partnerships involve technical solutions that ‘are generally seen as neutral and apolitical, while simultaneously requiring a certain level of technical expertise to understand them’.²⁰ Attention to the depoliticisation and diffusion of security that have become the result of today’s technocratic or technologised logic of security governance, has pre-occupied many critical security scholars.²¹ These scholars have shown how the logic of

¹¹Anna Leander, ‘The power to construct international security: On the significance of private military companies’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 33:3 (2005); Abrahamsen and Williams, *Security beyond the State*; Rita Abrahamsen and Anna Leander (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Private Security Studies* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

¹²Anna Leander and Rens van Munster, ‘Private security contractors in the debate about Darfur: Reflecting and reinforcing neo-liberal governmentality’, *International Relations*, 21:2 (2007), pp. 201–16.

¹³Abrahamsen and Williams, ‘Security beyond the state’, pp. 1–17; Berndtsson and Stern, ‘Private security and the public-private divide’, pp. 408–25.

¹⁴Karen Lund Petersen, *Corporate Risk and National Security Redefined* (London: Routledge, 2012).

¹⁵Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Manuel Suter, ‘Public-private partnerships are no silver bullet: An expanded governance model for critical infrastructure protection’, *International Journal of Critical Infrastructure Protection*, 2:4 (2009), pp. 180–1.

¹⁶Daniel R. McCarthy, ‘Privatizing political authority: Cybersecurity, public-private partnerships, and the reproduction of liberal political order’, *Politics and Governance*, 6:2 (2018), pp. 5–12.

¹⁷Petersen and Tjalve, ‘(Neo) Republican security governance?’.

¹⁸Kristoffer Kjærgaard Christensen and Karen Lund Petersen, ‘Public-private partnerships on cyber security: A practice of loyalty’, *International Affairs*, 93:6 (2017), pp. 1435–52.

¹⁹Hansen and Nissenbaum, ‘Digital disaster, cyber security, and the Copenhagen School’, p. 1171.

²⁰Christensen and Petersen, ‘Public-private partnerships on cyber security’, p. 1449.

²¹Ayse Ceyhan, ‘Technologization of security: Management of uncertainty and risk in the age of biometrics’, *Surveillance & Society*, 5:2 (2002); Gary T. Marx, ‘Rocky bottoms: Techno-fallacies of an age of information: Rocky bottoms’, *International Political Sociology*, 1:1 (2007), pp. 83–110; Louise Amoore, *The Politics of Possibility: Risk and Security beyond Probability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 164–5.

technification enacts security practices that are embedded in everyday routines and relations and cut across the public-private and local-global divides.²² Such practices combined with the notion of technology as neutral, empower the involved security agents to act ‘behind the scene’ where it becomes increasingly difficult to assign responsibility and legitimacy, ultimately preventing democratic contestation.²³

The critical security contributions on public-private relations have effectively examined the neoliberal, neorepublican, and technologised underpinnings of the current security governance regime. Yet, despite acknowledging the ambivalent and negotiable lines between ‘public’ and ‘private’,²⁴ the existing critical security engagements with public-private relations continue to refer almost exclusively to the categories as the government (state) and corporations (market) respectively. A few security scholars have started to employ the concept of ‘the public’ as the sphere, modality, or community that is mobilised, for example as the people with the right to be protected, and which holds a potential for political contestation both to institutional politics and to fundamental political categories.²⁵ William Walters and Anne Marie D’Aoust, for example, point to the 2012 Montreal protest against increasing tuition fees, which was met by state violence, as a demonstration that – through devices such as pots and pans, fake pandas, and naked bodies – exposed the ridiculousness of invoking protestors as a ‘public’ (state) security threat.²⁶ And Monsees argues that the 2016 Apple-FBI encryption controversy challenged political categories of ‘public’ (as state) and ‘private’ (as enterprise) by questioning the role of the state, the meaning of security and the legitimacy of multinational companies’ security claims.²⁷ Such openings force new questions upon the critical security studies of public-private security relations – questions that still need to be answered. How are subjects, for example, mobilised to contest the dominant meanings of categories such as ‘public’ and ‘private’ in the first place? And how do these contestations successfully challenge or fail to challenge the security discourse?

The next section develops a strategy for approaching these questions. Rather than turning to the ‘materiality of publics’, which is taking hold among some critical security scholars,²⁸ the article takes a different also increasingly popular theoretical route: Lacanian psychoanalysis, particularly as it is utilised by Žižek in his ideology critique of contemporary post-political society. In this theoretical edifice, Lacan’s divided subject and his ‘University Discourse’ are useful conceptual points of departure for locating and analysing the subject’s potential for contesting politics – or lack hereof – when mobilised within different social contexts. Žižek’s ideology critique has many similarities with the critical security contributions on public-private security partnerships, but also moves beyond these contributions by taking the affective subject and its relationship to the dominant discourses as the analytical point of departure. This brings new light to the different negotiations of the public-private distinction.

²²Jef Huysmans, ‘What’s in an act? On security speech acts and little security nothings’, *Security Dialogue*, 42:4–5 (2011), pp. 377–8; Zygmunt Bauman et al., ‘After Snowden: Rethinking the impact of surveillance’, *International Political Sociology*, 8:2 (2014), pp. 121–44.

²³Hendrik Hegemann and Martin Kahl, ‘Security governance and the limits of depoliticisation: EU policies to protect critical infrastructures and prevent radicalisation’, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 21:3 (2018), pp. 552–79; William Walters, ‘Drone strikes, *Dingpolitik* and beyond: Furthering the debate on materiality and security’, *Security Dialogue*, 45:2 (2014), pp. 101–18; Mikkel Flyverbom, Ronald Deibert, and Dirk Matten, ‘The governance of digital technology, big data, and the Internet: New roles and responsibilities for business’, *Business & Society*, 58:1 (2019), pp. 3–19.

²⁴Berndtsson and Stern, ‘Private security and the public-private divide’.

²⁵Vibeke Schou Tjalve, ‘Designing (de)security: European exceptionalism, Atlantic Republicanism and the “public sphere”’, *Security Dialogue*, 42:4–5 (2011), pp. 441–52; Walters and D’Aoust, ‘Bringing publics into critical security studies’; Monsees, ‘Public relations’; Kristoffer Kjærgaard Christensen and Tobias Liebetrau, ‘A new role for “the public”? Exploring cyber security controversies in the case of WannaCry’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 34:3 (2019), pp. 395–408.

²⁶Walters and D’Aoust, ‘Bringing publics into critical security studies’, pp. 16–23.

²⁷Monsees, ‘Public relations’, pp. 11–12.

²⁸Walters and D’Aoust, ‘Bringing publics into critical security studies’; Gros, de Goede, and İşleyen, ‘The Snowden files made public’; Monsees, ‘Public relations’.

The University Discourse as ideology critique in security studies

Slavoj Žižek is a fierce critic of capitalism and liberal ideology. He can come across as provocative and extreme to many readers and viewers, however his diagnostic reading of contemporary society – largely based on the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan – offers a rich conceptual toolbox useful when assessing forms of power relations. Contemporary society, according to Žižek, is *post-political*: We are told that old ideological divisions are dead and replaced by collaborations of enlightened technocrats and expert knowledge that administer our lives by taking our concrete needs and demands into account.²⁹ To offer theoretical substance to this observation, Žižek often turns to Lacan's discourse theory, particularly his 'Discourse of the University'.³⁰

Lacan defines a discourse not through its content but through its form. A discourse, according to Lacan, is not structured through what is being written, said, or practiced, but through four conceptual positions: the speaking agent, the repressed 'truth' that drives the agent to speak, the 'other' being addressed, and the product/remainder of the performance.³¹ In the University Discourse, it is 'objective', 'neutral', or 'scientific' knowledge that is the speaking agent. We rely on the professor, market analyst, technician, or bureaucrat to transmit knowledge to us and to administer and optimise our lives while disavowing the performative political dimension of such work. In doing so, the knowledge introduced by the experts who communicate through the University Discourse represses a 'truth'. Žižek illustrates this with the market expert who in his 'objective' analysis conceals the active role that the state plays in sustaining the 'neutral' market mechanism.³²

When Christensen and Petersen suggest that technical solutions of the public-private partnership are seen as requiring certain levels of expertise, and that this contributes 'to the hiding of the politics of cyber-security partnerships', which leaves ordinary politicians and citizens with no chance of assessing the validity of security practices,³³ the two scholars provide an excellent example of what a University discursive social bond between the 'speaking agent' and repressed 'truth' looks like in the context of contemporary security practices. McCarthy gives further substance to this hidden politics by emphasising the 'truth' that is currently being repressed, namely that public-private security partnerships reproduce a politics that protects intellectual property of large corporations and enables the continuation of an unequally distributed, market-led technological innovation.³⁴ In similar fashion, Anna Leander and Rens van Munster show that depoliticised 'objective' benchmarks and cost measurements in the conflict in Darfur rest on an unspoken logic of neoliberal governmentality that fosters increasing reliance on private contractors.³⁵

However, a Žižekian ideology critique through the University Discourse takes a step beyond uncovering the politics underpinning what is articulated as neutral, objective, and necessary (security) practices. It also focuses on how depoliticised knowledge speaks to what is currently lacking in the subject. To understand exactly what this means and the implications hereof, two key Lacanian concepts and their relation must be thoroughly introduced: *objet petit a* and the divided subject.

When interpreted in the context of the University Discourse, *objet petit a* refers to the fact that knowledge does not 'set things straight' but speaks to our enjoyment. In Žižek's ideology critique, *objet petit a* takes two forms: It is the knowledge that offers endless solutions without providing any guidance as to their application except that we (as consumers) should enjoy them in

²⁹Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 198–9.

³⁰Slavoj Žižek, 'The structure of Domination today: A Lacanian view', *Studies in East European Thought*, 56:4 (2004), pp. 383–403; Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII (London, New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 2007).

³¹Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity in American Foreign Policy Discourses*, pp. 51–62.

³²Žižek, 'The structure of domination today', p. 395.

³³Christensen and Petersen, 'Public-private partnerships on cyber security', p. 1449.

³⁴McCarthy, 'Privatizing political authority', p. 10.

³⁵Leander and van Munster, 'Private security contractors in the debate about Darfur'.

whichever way we prefer. And it is the knowledge that objectifies us (as citizens) and treats us as bundles of desires that do not know what we need, and therefore, must be taught, administered, protected, and nudged. This makes our contemporary society contradictory, Žižek observes: We are told that everything is permitted and that we should enjoy our individual lives in the ways that are just right for us. But we are bombarded with expert knowledge about the dangers of life and how we should cope with them: stop smoking, eat less fat, exercise.³⁶ What unites the two meanings is the promise that enjoyment awaits when we – in the context of security, for example – consume new risk management solutions to mitigate the effects of an unpredictable catastrophic event,³⁷ or when we cope with the threat from terrorism by following the Department of Homeland Security mantra ‘If you see something, say something.’³⁸

Importantly, however, a key assumption in the Lacanian edifice is that full enjoyment is never achievable. The assumption ties to Lacan’s notion of the divided subject. The Lacanian subject is different from that of, for example, Agamben and Foucault. While much Foucauldian scholarship approaches the subject as the subject position given to it through the performance of biopolitics or capitalism, the Lacanian subject is the remainder of this performance: it is that which does not fit into the biopolitical objectification, and it is that which makes the object of enjoyment offered by capitalist innovation ‘not quite it.’³⁹ Because the political dimension being performed by the knowledge agent remains unspoken in the University Discourse, the subject has no clear guidance to organise the knowledge provided: It has no guidance as to how best to enjoy or assume a symbolic identity and no excuse as to why enjoyment or identification with different positions and categories is never ‘it’. Thus, the subject in the University Discourse is, according to Žižek, ‘hystericised’, always questioning and demanding reassurance and direction.⁴⁰

The ‘hystericised subject’ finds expression in our post-political society in different ways, each of which provide important theoretical background for this article’s case study. Žižek exemplifies, for example, the hystericised subject as the desubjectivised patient who the ‘pure objective knowledge’ of the medical discourse has reduced to ‘object of research, of diagnosis and treatment’, and who – worried and anxious – addresses the doctor as the master who can provide reassurance.⁴¹ This subject is also echoed in some critical security contributions. Here scholars introduce the anxious, neurotic, and ‘uneasy’ citizen as the result of today’s governing of uncertainty; that is, a citizen that demands ‘zero risk’ and ‘absolute safety.’⁴² Importantly, the two dominant dynamics today of, on the one hand, the subject’s inviolable right to enjoy in whatever way it prefers (individualisation) and, on the other hand, the subject as a bundle of malleable characteristics/desires to be administered (objectification), works to particularise the subject’s complaints and demands. Problems are situated in ever more specific subgroups; it is no longer ‘just homosexuals but African-American lesbians, African-American lesbian mother, African-American unemployed lesbian mother’.⁴³ And experts are mobilised to reduce the complaint of these particularised groups

³⁶Žižek, ‘The structure of domination today’, pp. 399–402.

³⁷Marieke De Goede, ‘Beyond risk: Premediation and the post-9/11 security imagination’, *Security Dialogue*, 39:2–3 (2008), pp. 155–76.

³⁸Karen Lund Petersen, ‘The corporate security professional: A hybrid agent between corporate and national security’, *Security Journal*, 26:3 (2013), pp. 222–35.

³⁹Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (2nd edn, London: Verso, 2008), pp. 198–9; Charlotte Epstein, ‘Who speaks? Discourse, the subject and the study of identity in international politics’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 17:2 (2011), pp. 327–9.

⁴⁰Žižek, ‘The structure of domination today’, pp. 394–5.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 395.

⁴²Didier Bigo, ‘Security and immigration: Toward a critique of the governmentality of unease’, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 27:1 (2002), pp. 63–92; De Goede, ‘Beyond risk’; Philippe Fournier, ‘The neoliberal/neurotic citizen and security as discourse’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 2:3 (2014), pp. 309–22; Emmy Eklundh, Andreja Zevnik, and Emmanuel-Pierre Guittet, ‘Introduction: Politics of anxiety’, in Emmy Eklundh, Andreja Zevnik, and Emmanuel-Pierre Guittet (eds), *Politics of Anxiety* (London and New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017).

⁴³Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, p. 203.

to that one particular complaint.⁴⁴ Suggestive of this dynamic is the descriptions by critical security scholars of how individualised complaint about the lack of respect for privacy online currently is met with new technical fixes, encryption standards, or privacy-by-design solutions, which claim to solve the individual consumer's particular concern.⁴⁵

The subject in the post-political society that cannot find comfort in particularised solutions has no room for 'proper political contestation'.⁴⁶ To Žižek, a 'proper political contestation' is described as the moment the subject's particularised demand is universalised; that is, the moment our demand starts to function as a 'metaphoric condensation' of the opposition against those in power.⁴⁷ The lack of political space to challenge those in power through universal demands gives rise to a radicalisation of the hystericised subject, and 'irrational' violent and extremist outbursts become the only way to express a dimension beyond the particularised demands. However, violent outbursts also provide the excuse as to why the subject is currently not fully in enjoyment. In this way, post-politics *generates* a securitised ultra-politics: The violent extremist occupies a necessary ideological position as the enemy figure that contributes to the displacement of actual political contestation by becoming the equivalent of all social evils, which prevents our full enjoyment/identification.⁴⁸

The 'hystericised subject' does not have to become radicalised in our post-political society. Instead, when frustrations about the particularised solutions offered continue to haunt the subject, it might respond not with violence but with cynicism. Here, Žižek breaks with the famous dictum on how ideology functions: 'they do not know it, but they are doing it'. He introduces cynicism as an inherent component to any ideology, insisting that ideology is reproduced not by successfully creating a distorted version – a false consciousness – of 'the real state of things'. Rather, 'the ideological subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and social reality, but he nonetheless still insists upon the mask. The formula ... would then be: "they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it."⁴⁹ The key to understanding why we cynically disidentify with the neutral ideology of Facebook but continue to practice it, is partial enjoyment: Our unconscious, conformist identification with the existing post-political society is supported by the pleasure we get in pointing out corruption or incompetence of our leaders,⁵⁰ or in the satisfaction we find in constantly missing our desired object; that is, what Žižek – with Lacan – calls *drive*.⁵¹

The above has outlined the common foundation for Žižek's ideology critique through Lacan's University Discourse, particularly with the view to the ways in which the subject finds expression in this discourse. The next section will show what a security analysis that pays specific attention to Žižekian-Lacanian affective subject could look like, as well as what such an analysis adds to our understanding of the public-private security relations.

The complaining subject and Facebook

Since its creation, Facebook has faced a range of criticisms, three of which will be dealt with here: the company's disregard for privacy, the platform's facilitation of radicalisation and terrorism, and its inability to prevent fake news and micro-targeting campaigns by foreign entities. The

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 204.

⁴⁵Monsees, 'Public relations', pp. 11–12; Gros, de Goede, and İşleyen, 'The Snowden files made public', pp. 82–3.

⁴⁶Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, p. 204.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 204–05; Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real! Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 110–11.

⁴⁹Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 25.

⁵⁰Matthew Sharpe and Geoff Boucher, *Žižek and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 98.

⁵¹Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, p. 297.

former line of criticism dominated the debate around Facebook in the first decade of its existence, before the company became a security partner. The second ties to the emergence of ISIS and is what made Facebook a security partner in the fight against terrorism. The last criticism severely strained the security partnership, as Facebook not only faced a reinvigorated public criticism of the handling of private data, but also had to navigate a public narrative in which the company was increasingly seen as an accomplice in undermining US democracy. The ideology critique introduced above offers an affective answer to why the complaining subject emerges and how it fails to change the role of Facebook as a national security partner.

The first empirical section below shows that Facebook's communications resemble a University discursive configuration, which fosters a hystericised user/citizen whose particularised complaints over lack of security on the platform (here, in the form of privacy) led to particularised government regulation. The second section shows that violent outburst and ultra-political fantasies of radical otherness that emerged in the debate over ISIS on Facebook are not only conducive to maintaining a neutral big tech government security partnership but are also a *consequence* of the dominant discourse of technification. The final section shows that even if the disavowed politics (the 'truth') of the University Discourse is exposed, the cynical practices of the subject reproduce status quo. In other words, we are well aware that Facebook is a private company that profits at the expense of public (state) security and privacy.

From apology and fixes to privacy regulation (2004–14)

Privacy has been a constant issue between Facebook and its users, and the privacy controversies illustrate the tension between 'private' as the right of companies and 'private' as people's right to privacy. When Facebook introduced the News Feed in 2006, users were concerned that non-friends could see too much.⁵² Facebook's 2007 Beacon Program posting user activity on third-party websites back on Facebook led to a class action lawsuit.⁵³ And in 2010, there were protests against Facebook's disclosure of information to advertisers.⁵⁴ Facebook's privacy breaches ultimately led to a 2012 Federal Trade Commission (FTC) settlement that ordered Facebook to improve its privacy practices.⁵⁵ This section suggests that the privacy criticism is a result of Facebook's own communication with its users including its response to criticism, or in other words, to the (divided) subject left behind in a University discursive social bond.

Facebook's way of addressing its user is a prototypical example of the speaking agent of knowledge in the University Discourse. Facebook offers a platform and makes it available for everybody. They do so without placing themselves as the authority that decides how individual users should engage with the platform. This is why, as *Wired* journalists Nicholas Thompson and Fred Vogelstein put it, '[the] notion that Facebook is an open, neutral platform is almost like a religious tenet inside the company.'⁵⁶ Zuckerberg often refers to a broader openness and connectivity agenda: 'We thought that giving people better tools to communicate would help them better

⁵²Mark Zuckerberg, 'Calm Down. Breathe. We Hear You', Zuckerberg Transcripts, Paper 114 (6 September 2006), available at: {http://dc.uwm.edu/zuckerberg_files_transcripts/114} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁵³Pete Cashmore, 'RIP Facebook Beacon', *Mashable* (19 September 2009), available at: {<https://mashable.com/2009/09/19/facebook-beacon-rip/#9WDHhYQzx5qk>} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁵⁴Mark Zuckerberg, 'From Facebook, answering privacy concerns with new setting', *Washington Post* (24 May 2010), available at: {<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/23/AR2010052303828.html>} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁵⁵Federal Trade Commission, 'Federal Trade Commission: In the Matter of Facebook INC., Decision and Order' (27 July 2012), available at: {<https://www.ftc.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cases/2012/08/120810facebookdo.pdf>} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁵⁶Nicholas Thompson and Fred Vogelstein, 'Inside Facebook's two years of hell', *Wired* (2 December 2018), available at: {<https://www.wired.com/story/inside-facebook-mark-zuckerberg-2-years-of-hell/>} accessed 18 October 2019.

understand the world, which would then give them even greater power to change the world.⁵⁷ Worth pointing out is the fact that Zuckerberg never specifies what change should entail nor prescribes how users should use new tools offered by Facebook. It is the user's individual responsibility to determine how to like, post, and share. If users complain, then Facebook offers a solution in the form of a new tool. Zuckerberg's 2010 *Washington Post* response to the criticism of how the company handled privacy in relation to advertisers is telling. He reduces the problems to a technical fix: '[If] people want easier control over their information ... [then] we will add privacy controls that are simpler to use.'⁵⁸ However, the technological fixes and the empowerment of users were never linked to Facebook's business model.

Thus, the unspoken 'truth' beneath the constant stream of knowledge, tools, and technical fixes is the thing that is not confronted and questioned but which sustains Facebook's practices. John Lanchester suggests that unspoken truth of Facebook is its business model: 'Facebook's customers aren't the people who are on the site: its customers are the advertisers who use its network and who relish its ability to direct ads to receptive audiences.'⁵⁹ Yet there is more to the 'truth' about Facebook than earning profits from collecting and selling ads based on users' personal data. Facebook's neutral empowerment of users through constant technological modification conceals the political dimension that surrounds it; that is, for example, the way Facebook and the US tech sector is supported by a US government that continues to build an economy reliant on accelerated growth and innovation in the tech sector,⁶⁰ it is the very active role Facebook and other Silicon Valley allies play in lobbying for an anti-regulatory policies in Congress,⁶¹ and it is the political consequence of Facebook's algorithms, namely that they reinforce existing biases in the company's endeavour to maximise clicks and likes.

The object of desire reveals itself in Facebook's perception of the individual user. Facebook allows you to be whoever you want to be, but only as long as it is who you *really* are.⁶² To Zuckerberg, 'people just have this core desire to express who they are'.⁶³ Zuckerberg's naïve and 'ridiculously short-sighted' description of the Self as the unidimensional, authentic individual is not only conducive to the market for advertisement.⁶⁴ It also represents a dominant Silicon Valley ideology wherein humans are nothing but the data points we leave behind, and where collecting these will expose the numerical patterns that tell us who we really are and *ought to be*.⁶⁵ As Evgeny Morozov shows, this ideology is driven by a solutionism, the eternal processes of algorithmic optimisation.⁶⁶ Thus, when Facebook addresses its users, it does so as if these are lost objects

⁵⁷Mark Zuckerberg, '200 Million Strong', Zuckerberg Transcripts, Paper 21 (2009), available at: {http://dc.uwm.edu/zuckerberg_files_transcripts/21} accessed 18 October 2019; Anna Lauren Hoffmann, Nicholas Proferes, and Michael Zimmer, "Making the world more open and connected": Mark Zuckerberg and the discursive construction of Facebook and its users', *New Media & Society*, 20:1 (2018), pp. 199–218.

⁵⁸Zuckerberg, 'From Facebook, answering privacy concerns with new setting'.

⁵⁹John Lanchester, 'You are the product', *London Review of Books*, 39:16 (2017), pp. 3–10.

⁶⁰Barack H. Obama, *A Strategy For American Innovation* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2015).

⁶¹Saleha Mohsin, 'Silicon Valley cozies up to Washington, outspending Wall Street 2-1', *Bloomberg* (18 October 2016), available at: {<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-10-18/outspending-wall-street-2-to-1-silicon-valley-takes-washington>} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁶²Kevin Healey and Richard Potter, 'Coding the privileged Self: Facebook and the ethics of psychoanalysis "outside the clinic"', *Television & New Media*, 19:7 (2018), pp. 660–76.

⁶³Mark Zuckerberg, 'Charlie Rose – Exclusive Interview with Facebook Leadership: Mark Zuckerberg/Sheryl Sandberg', Zuckerberg Transcripts, Paper 45 (11 January 2011), available at: {http://dc.uwm.edu/zuckerberg_files_transcripts/45} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁶⁴Jay Baumann, 'Zuckerberg has always believed that we're only entitled to one identity', *Sfist* (19 September 2014), available at: {http://sfist.com/2014/09/19/zuckerberg_has_always_believed_that.php} accessed 18 October 2019; Healey and Potter, 'Coding the privileged self'.

⁶⁵Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2013), pp. 232, pp. 312–17.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 5.

that become whole through the mere aggregation of a set of characteristics: gender, age, location, and preferences in movies, food, clothes, etc.

Easily discerned beneath Facebook's constant production of new technological fixes is the worried, hysterical subject. As Facebook refuses to be the authority that defines how the subject *should* use its technologies to rid themselves of the feeling of incompleteness, the company ends up producing anxieties that morph into a constant stream of protests and complaints in the forms of demands for the reassurance of one's privacy. The constant production of new objects of consumption is unable to fob off the worried subject. Yet, users and concerned citizens did not turn the criticism of Facebook's privacy tools into the 'metaphoric condensation' for a broader political struggle against the powerful, depoliticising tech monopolies. The only political response to the privacy complaints was the FTC Consent Order in 2012, which ordered Facebook to give clear notice and to obtain consent before sharing user information. However, by imposing a few extra measures on Facebook, the Order represents a particularised response to a particular concern and not a fundamental challenge to the societal role and power of big tech companies.

In sum, during the first decade of its existence, Facebook's communication towards its users resembles the University Discourse. It is a discourse where neutral knowledge is introduced for the user to enjoy in whatever way it prefers but based on an underlying assumption that the collection of all the quantifiable attributes about the user will reveal who the user really is and what his/her ultimate desire is. The political dimension of Facebook is repressed, and the discursive configuration leaves a worried subject behind that – despite Facebook promises – cannot find itself on the platform. However, as the subject's complaints remain particularised ('I want my privacy!'), the government regulation does not force fundamental changes to Facebook's business model or challenge the political neutrality that the online platform claims to represent. In short, even though the privacy controversy exposes a tension between private tech companies and private users, political change does not necessarily emerge.

Building security partnerships in an ultra-political environment (2014–17)

In 2014, ISIS burst onto the scene as a top national security threat. This included online. One could have expected Facebook's hands-off-approach to the content on their platform to come under even more pressure with the emergence of ISIS. Facebook faced some initial criticism for the ease by which terrorist groups spread extremist content, including from the US government who wanted to 'engage with social media sites when appropriate to flag postings or material that may have national security implications'.⁶⁷ Quickly, however, a well-functioning partnership between Facebook and the US government in the fight against terrorist-related content online emerged. Then FBI-director James Comey explained at a hearing in the Senate Intelligence Committee that US technology companies like Facebook in terms of terrorist activities were 'pretty good at telling us what they see'.⁶⁸ Facebook also partnered with the Department of Homeland Security in the P2P project against extremism and Digital Forum on terrorism preventions.⁶⁹

Facebook's response to the call for partnerships with the US government followed its established (neutral, technological) recipe for dealing with the initial worries and complaints from users and citizens. Facebook updated its terms of services, introduced new technological fixes

⁶⁷White House spokesman Ned Price, quoted in Tom Risen, 'Twitter, Facebook, YouTube grapple with Islamic State censorship', *U.S. News & World Report* (5 September 2014), available at: {<https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/09/05/twitter-facebook-youtube-navigate-islamic-state-censorship>} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁶⁸James B. Comey, 'Encryption Technology and Terrorism', Hearing at the Senate Intelligence Committee (2015), 1:38:55, available at: {<https://www.c-span.org/video/?326953-1/hearing-threats-encryption-issues&start=5919>} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁶⁹George Selim, 'Identifying the Enemy: Radical Islamist Terror', available at: {<https://www.dhs.gov/news/2016/09/22/written-testimony-dhs-office-community-partnerships-house-homeland-security>} accessed 18 October 2019.

and empowered users: They clarified their community standard to explicitly prohibit posts that celebrate terrorist organisations; they introduced artificial intelligence to make sure that ISIS and al-Qaida-related posts and videos are not reposted; and they made it easier for users to flag suspected terrorist-related content.⁷⁰ Facebook, however, remains vague on the criteria they apply when they take down extremist content.⁷¹ Thereby the company avoids confronting the fact that every Facebook employee reviewing flagged content and every algorithm distinguishing extremist content from non-extremist content constitute a political decision, that is, the approach allows Facebook to avoid confronting the politics it performs.

Critical security scholars have shown how the process of securitisation works by constraining issues within the already accepted criteria of a specific political order, and how a technical, expert discourse works well alongside the hypersecuritised articulations of existential threats.⁷² Žižek's ideology critique draws similar conclusions, but further elaborates on the relationship between the discourse of technification and a hypersecuritised environment, what he calls ultra-politics. According to this analysis, in the context of post-political technification where there is no space for universalised demands, the only way to express a dimension beyond particularised, post-political politics is through 'irrational' violence and extremism.⁷³ And, Žižek continues, such affective 'irrationality' gives rise to an ultra-political enemy figure that displaces actual political contestation.⁷⁴

In the context of Facebook, the terrorism online – which to Žižek is generated by the post-political society – serves ultimately as the ideological support that enables the disavowed politics that Facebook performs, by diverting the subject's frustration that is produced from Facebook's refusal to communicate a clear direction (a higher universal purpose) for its users. In other words, the ultra-politics of 'either-you-are-with-us-or-against-us' makes it more difficult for any political opposition such as privacy advocates to gain political momentum when voicing their concern, without being accused of supporting the terrorists' agenda. The political implication was obvious: The 2013 Snowden revelations, which presented a powerful argument for a more universal rethinking of the public-private surveillance regime, including the political role of, for example, Facebook and its partnership with the government, lost its momentum when ISIS's presence online became evident in 2014.⁷⁵ There is less room for universalising the users' privacy protests and hence turning them into broader political contestations. Silencing the subject through ultra-politics enables Facebook to navigate the call for partnership without being held to account for the political criteria they apply in limiting freedom of expression, censoring, or sharing private data with third parties. Only when another private company, Apple, took an overt political stand and refused to cooperate with the government after the San Bernardino shooting, did a more universalised privacy debate reignite.⁷⁶

In sum, post-politics provides the space for an ultra-political enemy to emerge – an enemy, which closes the legitimate space for criticism and minimises the space in which calls for regulation can take place. In such an environment, the public-private (when understood as market-state) partnership is reinforced as companies can comply with the call for partnership without

⁷⁰Reuters, 'Facebook and YouTube use automation to remove extremist videos, sources say', *The Guardian* (25 June 2016), available at: {<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/jun/25/extremist-videos-isis-youtube-facebook-automated-removal>} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁷¹Natalie Andrews and Deepa Seetharaman, 'Facebook steps up efforts against terrorism', *The Wall Street Journal* (11 February 2014), available at: {<https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-steps-up-efforts-against-terrorism-1455237595>} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁷²Hansen and Nissenbaum, 'Digital disaster, cyber security, and the Copenhagen School'.

⁷³Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, p. 204.

⁷⁴Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, pp. 110–11.

⁷⁵Jon M. Garon, '2015 cyberlaw year in review seeking security over privacy, finding neither', *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2015), available at: {<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2707756>} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁷⁶Monsees, 'Public relations', pp. 11–12.

having to defend the handover of consumer data or needing to justify the politics underlying their determination of what counts as threatening data. Yet, recently Facebook has come under increasing criticism over fake news and propaganda on its platform.

Relationship status: It's cynical (2017–)

Since the 2016 US presidential election, stories on fake news, information campaigns, and election meddling have become everyday occurrences. The threat from information online no longer comes only from terrorist recruiters and radicalisers. Rather, it is a threat to democracy from Russian troll farms, morally dubious election campaigns, and economically driven clickbait factories. Common for all these threats is the social networking sites they utilise – sites that have been criticised for not preventing these threats. Zuckerberg's initial response to the allegations against Facebook was denial. He called it 'crazy' to think that fake news on Facebook got Donald Trump elected, but then moved towards his usual apologetic formula and ended up admitting that Facebook should have taken fake news more seriously.⁷⁷ This led to the publication of a 5,700-word blog post, which laid out several technical fixes. To deal with filter bubbles, Facebook offers users a spectrum of different viewpoints to choose from. Fake news will be dealt with through fact checkers. And sensationalism and polarisation will be fixed when Facebook introduces new and better technologies.⁷⁸

With the increased attention to Russia's targeted use of the platform, the pressure on Facebook did not go away with the proposed tech fixes. In fact, the solutions proposed were widely criticised for being a showcase of 'Zuckerberg's tendency to suggest that the answer to nearly any problem is for people to use Facebook more.'⁷⁹ It culminated at hearings in the House and Senate intelligence committee in the late 2017 where Facebook, Google and Twitter executives testified on Russian election interference. Senator Diane Feinstein went so far as to threaten Facebook: '[Y]ou have to be the ones to do something about [the misuse of the platform]. Or we will.'⁸⁰

With the threat of government regulation, Zuckerberg altered his approach and publicly stated that he is 'dead serious' about fake news and propaganda, and that he has directed 'teams to invest so much in security ... that it will significantly impact our profitability going forward'.⁸¹ Not only was it the first time Zuckerberg alluded to the fact that there is a potential trade-off between his business model and having a secure site for the users, but Zuckerberg also became more explicit in directing how users *should* use the platform: '[N]ot all time spent is created equal ... [W]hat we really want to go for is time well spent.'⁸² Following this line of thinking, Zuckerberg altered the News Feed to encourage 'meaningful interactions' between friends, family, and groups, which means less posts from businesses, brands, and media.⁸³ After the 2018 Cambridge Analytica controversy, where it became known that personally identifiable data of millions of Facebook users had been collected for political marketing purposes, Zuckerberg took more political responsibility: Appearing at hearings in the Senate and House, the Facebook CEO acknowledged that 'we need to now take a more active view in policing the ecosystem ... and mak[e] sure that all of

⁷⁷Kurt Wagner, 'Mark Zuckerberg admits he should have taken Facebook fake news and the election more seriously: "Calling that crazy was dismissive and I regret it"', *Recode* (27 September 2017), available at: {<https://www.recode.net/2017/9/27/16376502/mark-zuckerberg-facebook-donald-trump-fake-news>} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Thompson and Vogelstein, 'Inside Facebook's two years of hell'.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Mark Zuckerberg, 'Facebook Q3 2017 Earnings Call', Zuckerberg Transcripts, Paper 287 (1 November 2017), available at: {https://dc.uwm.edu/zuckerberg_files_transcripts/287} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Mark Zuckerberg, 'One of Big Focus Areas for 2018 Is ...', Facebook (11 January 2018), available at: {<https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104413015393571>} accessed 18 October 2019.

the members in our community are using these tools in a way that's going to be good and healthy'.⁸⁴

Zuckerberg's attempt to take more responsibility has not prevented continuing public criticism of Facebook's business model and of insufficient government regulation of tech companies. The increasing number of bestselling books criticising Facebook and the Silicon Valley ideology indicates that the public criticism has taken hold.⁸⁵ Yet, such a persistent criticism does not necessarily lead to the end of Facebook's status as a national security partner. As it was shown in the above, ultra-politics works alongside and reinforces the post-political security partnership between the government and private companies. Thus, it would be conducive to the partnership that, for example, Russia rises as the evil that threatens 'our way of life'; that is, to US democracy and the openness and technological progress of the US. Facebook has yet to come out openly as an ultra-political critic of Russia. Although, Zuckerberg called it an arms race between Russian trolls and Facebook, he presented the challenge from Russia as one currently being managed sufficiently by Facebook: Rather than describing the trolls as evil 'others', they are employees doing their job for the Russian government.⁸⁶ In fact, Facebook, according to Zuckerberg, is not 'at war' with Russia but 'at war' with those legislators who push for regulation.⁸⁷

It is far from certain that Facebook will lose its status as national security partner despite the company not embracing an ultra-politicised narrative towards Russia. To make this argument, the section turns to another key concept in Žižekian ideology critique, cynicism, and particularly the (partial) enjoyment associated with acting cynically.

Cynicism is an inherent component of ideology and works through the dictum: 'they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it'.⁸⁸ In the context of Facebook, the articulation of neutral, objective knowledge is no longer taken seriously – we do not believe in Facebook's neutral call for global connectivity as a benign attempt to help us find ourselves. We understand very well that the company earns its money from getting us to share more and more data. Nevertheless, 68 per cent of adult Americans keep using the technology, a figure that has remained unchanged since April 2016.⁸⁹

The Lacanian answer to why we cynically disidentify with the neutral ideology of Facebook but continue to practice it, is enjoyment: Our unconscious, conformist identification with our current post-political society is supported by the *partial* enjoyment we take in pointing out corruption or leadership incompetence.⁹⁰ The abundance of mocking memes of Zuckerberg or of the technological ignorance of the senators questioning him at the 2018 hearing in Congress is just one example.⁹¹ More broadly, Facebook allows for its users to indulge in the transgressive practices

⁸⁴US Senate, 'Transcript of Mark Zuckerberg senate hearing', *Washington Post* (11 April 2018), available at: {<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/04/10/transcript-of-mark-zuckerbergs-senate-hearing/>} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁸⁵Galloway, *The Four*; Foer, *World without Mind*; Jonathan T. Taplin, *Move Fast and Break Things: How Facebook, Google, and Amazon Cornered Culture and Undermined Democracy* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2017); Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019).

⁸⁶US Senate, 'Transcript of Mark Zuckerberg Senate Hearing'; US House Committee, 'Transcript of Zuckerberg's appearance before house committee', *Washington Post* (11 April 2018), available at: {https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/04/11/transcript-of-zuckerbergs-appearance-before-house-committee/?utm_term=.ae85c8d7a209}.

⁸⁷Leighton Andrews, *Facebook, the Media and Democracy: Big Tech, Small State?* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), p. 109.

⁸⁸Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 25.

⁸⁹John Gramlich, '10 Facts about Americans and Facebook' (Pew Research Center, 1 February 2019), available at: {<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/01/facts-about-americans-and-facebook/>} accessed 18 October 2019.

⁹⁰Sharpe and Boucher, *Žižek and Politics*, p. 98.

⁹¹Brian Koerber, 'The best part of Mark Zuckerberg appearing in front of Congress was the memes', *Mashable*, available at: {<https://mashable.com/2018/04/10/the-funniest-reactions-to-mark-zuckerberg-congressional-hearing/>} accessed 11 March 2020.

that are usually not tolerated in public life, paranoid fantasies about conspiracies, stalking, and sexist and racist slanders. Or as Oliver Mannion argues in his Lacanian analysis of Facebook: 'Facebook is a guilty addictive pleasure that goes beyond any biological need and is symptomatic of excessive enjoyment.'⁹²

Furthermore and importantly, full enjoyment constitutes itself as 'stolen' and not just by an evil 'other' such as terrorists.⁹³ As Jodi Dean notes in relation to blogs and could equally be applied to Facebook posts: '*I would have read a serious novel, cultivated an organic garden, driven senior citizens to the polls if I hadn't gotten caught up in those stupid blogs. Why are all those people blogging, anyway? What makes their lives and experiences so much more interesting than mine? If bloggers weren't inflicting their stupid stuff on the rest of us, the rest of us would be enjoying.*'⁹⁴ While enjoyment makes us criticise Facebook, the fact that it is perceived as stolen also, on the other hand, 'displaces the fact that we are already enjoying, that we get off, just a little bit, in and through our multiple, repetitive, mediated interactions'.⁹⁵ Žižek uses the Lacanian notion of drive to describe the way subjects 'find satisfaction in the very circular moment of repeatedly missing the object'.⁹⁶ The subject gets stuck in the same thing repeatedly because it 'turns failure into a triumph ... [and] generates satisfaction of its own'.⁹⁷ scroll, like, comment, scroll, like, comment. Adrian Meier, Leonard Reinecke, and Christine Meltzer offer empirical evidence to support this point in their quantitative study of procrastination on Facebook as they locate a simultaneous enjoyment and decreased well-being when using the platform while having other 'more important things' to do.⁹⁸

In sum, Facebook offers us the opportunity to cynically reproduce the discourse. Whether in the context of ISIS, Russian trolls, or 'stupid blogs', we criticise Facebook for depriving us of our enjoyment (of being 'whole' and secure subjects), but in practices we enjoy the way it allows us to 'let off steam' in humorous, racist, sexist, etc. transgressions or simply in the mindless, repetitive interactions and procrastinations that are the very opposite of the productive, self-realisation or flagging of fake and radical content we are expected to practice. In this way, despite being well aware that Facebook is a private company that profits at the expense of public (state) security and privacy, we continue to use and make ourselves dependent on Facebook by staying in the passive, repetitive loop of enjoyment (in failure) that is 'drive'.

Conclusion

The article offers a subject-centric lens through which to study complaints and criticisms in the context of public-private security governance. Thinking about the tumultuous history of Facebook through Žižek's ideology critique of contemporary post-political society, enables us to capture the affective elements that tie the production of a complaining subject, private sector responses to criticism, and the government's security policies together. Three arguments demonstrate the analytical relevance of the ideology critique.

First, Facebook's communication is characterised by a desire for constant technological fixes, while disavowing the political dimension the company performs and relies upon. This produces a subject with no guidance as to what is right use of the platform. As a result, the user subject is

⁹²Oliver Mannion, 'Reading Facebook through Lacan', *New Zealand Sociology*, 26:1 (2011), pp. 143–54 (p. 152).

⁹³Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 203–06.

⁹⁴Jodi Dean, 'Affective networks', *MediaTropes*, 2:2 (2010), p. 20, emphasis in original.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 297.

⁹⁷Slavoj Žižek, 'Concesso non Dato', in Geoff Boucher, Jason Glynos, and Matthew Sharpe (eds), *Traversing the Fantasy: Critical Responses to Slavoj Žižek* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 249.

⁹⁸Adrian Meier, Leonard Reinecke, and Christine E. Meltzer, "'Facebocrastination'? Predictors of using Facebook for procrastination and its effects on students' well-being', *Computers in Human Behavior*, 64 (2016), pp. 65–76.

hystericised – constantly complaining that something is wrong. It makes demands (privacy now!) to overcome the sense of unease, and turns to the government when Facebook's fixes are insufficient. However, the privacy demands and the government's privacy regulation remain particularised and do not fundamentally alter Facebook's claim of political neutrality.

Second, to Žižek, only demands that are universalised and function to mobilise a general opposition to those in power are believed to contain a transformative potential, but in post-political societies, this universalisation takes its form primarily as 'irrational' extremist outbursts. The outbursts serve to reinforce the ideology through an ultra-political enemy figure that diverts internal political contestation and criticism. ISIS terrorism is a case in point. Here, the ISIS presence online silences the subject's particularised privacy criticism preventing it from becoming universalised.

The article argues, thirdly, that the ideological discourse that sustains private sector tech fixes as the dominant security solution is also reinforced through cynicism and the partial enjoyment associated with cynical practices. We know very well that Facebook exploits all our data and is not politically neutral, and we are likely to remain critical of these facts. Yet, we continue to enjoy the transgressions that the platform permits us. Thus, the question remains: Why would anyone be willing to move beyond talk of regulating Facebook and embrace a legislative push that seriously restrict practices that the users – including policymakers and public commentators – ultimately enjoy?

Taken together, the three arguments offer a bleak conclusion for those security scholars who see a potential for more fundamental political change in public protests. Particularised demands that lead to particularised fixes, delegitimisation through fantasies about an ultra-political 'other', and cynical enjoyment are all social dynamics that work to reproduce existing ideological discourses and, ultimately, the current public-private security arrangements. When that is said, the article's attempt to direct the analytical gaze towards the subject and its affects is simultaneously a modest attempt to inspire critical security scholars to start to think about political contestation in new ways.

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