

Book Review

Globalization of American Fear Culture: The Empire in the Twenty-First Century

Reviewed by Maximiliano Emanuel Korstanje, Department of Economics, University of Palermo, Buenos Aires Argentina,
& CERS, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

Geoffrey R. Skoll

© 2016 by Palgrave Macmillan

226 pp.

\$109.00

ISBN 978-113757033-8

The idea that capitalist system reproduces by the growth of inequality and poverty is not new since it has been discussed widely by Marxism and post-marxism in the four corners of the world. However, the intersection of terrorism and capitalism seems be a heated discussion which today retains considerable concern from scholarship. In his recent book, *Globalization of American Fear Culture*, Geoff Skoll continues a much deeper discussion instilled by former work, *Social theory of Fear*. At a closer look, the act of governing through fear is used by US to create a culture of mistrust. From the onset, US was based on the belief that the world as a dangerous place to live. Over recent decades in XXth century, fear was used to enhance the legitimacy of elite, sometimes oriented for the workforce to accept policies otherwise would be rejected. At the time, capital and American Empire expanded to colonize new worlds, a much deeper sentiment of fear accompanied the politics. Therefore, it is safe to say we live in a world characterized by a “global fear” which is functional to a particular way of making politics. One of the aspects facilitated the expansion of capitalism was the idea that citizens live in the best of the possible worlds. Beyond the boundaries of consuming society, of course, any change represents a threat for popular parlance, a barrier to overcome.

In the first chapter, Skoll traces the historical roots of the culture of fear in America. In retrospect, the capitalist system and theories of economy showed widely that accumulation only is feasible if we introduce exploitation as a key factor to produce and distribute wealth in few hands. The monopolization of surplus value, as Marx puts it, resulted not only from human creativity but by the means of elite to commoditize labor into exchangeable goods. The number of rank-and-file workers involved in a process of production affects directly the profits of capital owners. From that moment on, the capital reproduction seems to be always in detriment of workforce. In this mayhem, when conflict rises, fear undermines the possibilities of claimers and protesters to impose their views. Two major instruments were used by privileged classes to keep the control, ideology and repression. While the latter appealed to surveillance to exert violence against the pathological agents, the latter one was enrooted in a process of fear-mongering that limited the negotiation of worker unions. After 9/11, total forms of control were established in private life subordinating individual rights to the collective well-being, which means a more secure society. Leisure industries were witness of obstructive methods of surveillance over lay citizens. It was unfortunate that this trend makes from US a fascist state. This is a very interesting introductory section where author combines his erudition pitting historical cases

where governments used fear in their favor against US and its Anglo-allies in the war on terror. In the second chapter, Skoll discusses to what extent elite in America devoted its resources to forge a culture of fear which passed from communism towards terrorism. The organization of labor conjoined to profit maximization is two key factors behind the manipulation of fear. Though actors changed, the dynamic are the same. Doubtless, this is one of the merits place Geoffrey Skoll now as a must-read author in terrorism issues. Chapter 3 explores the model of four wars as it was formulated by Skoll where he confirms a polemic thesis. From its inception, US was always an imperialist power which struggled in four major events, Philippine War, Korean War, Cold War and Vietnam War. Though the two total world wars involved US as well, no less true is that in these events US played the role of an empire inspiring a model that situates United States as the “administrator” of capitalism. The management of exploitation centers in a genocidal campaign by disciplining communists. In the chapter 4 and 5, the problem of identity and liberal consumerism are placed under the lens of critical scrutiny. The period 1968-1973 not only encouraged a liberalization of human relationship, it induced substantial changes in economies worldwide. During this age the exegetes of capitalism precaritized the power of workers paving the pathways for the rise of neoliberalism during 90s decade. As this backdrop, the expansion of US as the unique imperial power was possible after the collapse of Soviet Union, but without the legacy of UK in financial leadership, it would have never taken place. One mantle passed from one power to other as US enthralled as the center of manufacture and trade. The globalization of fear is assessed in chapter six, seven and eight. The direct intervention or full-scale led wars are ideologically legitimized by the needs of bringing the ideals of American democracy, liberty, freedom and mobility. However, at the bottom, this globalized culture of fear hidden dark interests associated to exploitation. Paradoxically, these types of interventions suggest that terrorism needs the use of force, but in so doing, impotence and deprivation surface. To set an example, Skoll adds, whilst US supported by financial investors, IMF or ONG arrives to Middle East to take the local politics on its hands, a state of chaos and political instability dominates the environment. The allegory of war on terror leads governments not to tackle off real dangers produced by capitalism as pollution or global warming. Last but not least, eight and nine chapters formulate ground-breaking suggestions to stop with the discourse of fear. Unless otherwise resolved, the question whether US and its domains pays attention to terrorism as the main threat of West covering other most terrible risks, one dangles that the probabilities our civilization collapses are higher than thought. Anyway, citizens are prone to develop sustainable practices of consumption that encourages a real democracy from the bottom to the top.

After further review, I feel professor Skoll presents a well-argued book which is a result of years of academic maturation and research. Starting from the premise post-Marxian studies have a lot to say in terrorism issues, most of them discriminated by academy, Skoll exerts a radical and illustrative criticism on the “culture of Fear” in US. It gives us an impressive snapshot of America so that readers may expand their understanding of what capitalism is. To my end, this is one of those books which are a must-read reference ...

In future approaches, Skoll should resolve what Korstanje dubbed as “Hobbesian dilemma of politics”, which means that Marxism was wrong respecting to the role of power in societal fabric (reproaching the argument more to Max Weber). To put this in bluntly, with Thomas Hobbes we learned that fear underlies in the worlds of politics even during democracy. Although economic production plays a vital role in the formation of society, it is not determinant. There is nothing like a progress towards an end of class struggle, which advances through history. This suggests that society is not affected by fear but it results from the imposition of mechanisms oriented to discipline fear. In other terms, society is created by the fear. The problem with wayward Puritans lies in the fact they have developed a cosmology of conflict where sublimation is only affordable by the imposition of sacrifice. The sense of predestination closed their future in order for Anglo-worker to demonstrate he deserves salvation. In this stage, social Darwinism did the rest. Capitalism worked not only by

the culture of fear or consumption imposed to citizens, but by the fact that they enter in competence with others with an exaggerated idea about their real probabilities of success. Because of Americans feel special, superior or even supermen, narcissism undergirds the social trust. The survival of the strongest is the final goal, but behind this, only one is the winner. Scenes of this nature may be very well observed in main reality shows as Big brother or even in films as Hunger Games, where the glory of few entails the ruin of the rest. This is a normal ideological resource to normalize the precaritization of workforce. Inevitably, the war of all against all emulated by Darwinism allows the reproduction of material asymmetries by means capitalism expands (Korstanje, 2015).

REFERENCES

Korstanje, M. E. (2015). *A Difficult World: Examining the roots of Capitalism*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Maximiliano Emanuel Korstanje is an Associate Professor at University of Palermo, Argentina. He is the Editor in Chief of the International Journal of Safety and Security in Tourism. With more than 650 published papers in peer review journals, Korstanje is concerned in the study of risk, capitalism and mobility. He co-edits 10 journals, and takes part of editorial board list of other 25 specialized journals. Since 2010 his biography has been a point of entry in Marquis Whory in peer review journals, Korstanje Outstanding reviewer 2012/2013 from Emerald Group Publishing, UK. Because his contribution to the sociology of tourism, Korstanje has been nominated to three honorary doctorates.