

Book Review

Counter-Terrorism and the Prospects of Human Rights: Securitizing Difference and Dissent

Reviewed by Maximiliano E. Korstanje, University of Palermo, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Reviewed by Geoffrey Skoll, SUNY at Buffalo, Buffalo, USA

Counter-Terrorism and the Prospects of Human Rights: Securitizing Difference and Dissent

Ipek Demirsu

© 2017 by Palgrave Macmillan

284 pp.

\$169.00

ISBN 978-331950801-6

September 11 of 2001 and the bloody attacks perpetrated against Pentagon and World Trade Center changed not only the rules of international relations but the ways non-western “Others” were depicted. David Altheide (2017) eloquently observes that the aftermath of 9/11 still affects the existent legislation, especially in migratory matters paving the way for the rise of radicalized discourses. Donald Trump reached the US presidency after promising to build a wall to stop illegal migration coming from Mexico. This raises a more than a pertinent question: is democracy at risk?

In his book, which is entitled *Counter-Terrorism and the Prospects of Human Rights*, Professor Ipek Demirsu argues that contemporary society is based on the confrontation between two different needs: security and democracy. While the former gradually escalates into a popular climate where citizens often ask for further controls over migrants and surveillance technology at borderlands, the latter refers to the constitutional liberties the government should ensure as the precondition towards a peaceful coexistence. The English-speaking countries unilaterally imposed a process of securitization which is adopted in many underdeveloped nations. Here a paradoxical situation surfaces. In the Global South, academics, activists and officials voice a radical criticism of the inhumane treatment of inmates suspected of terrorism in Guantanamo Bay as well as others in US supermax prisons; but at the same time, the same draconian tactics of torture designed and practiced by the US and the UK are adopted by their governments. Demirsu argues this happens because the fear terrorism creates a climate of political instability in the Global South that may affect the credibility of officialdom.

One of the chief goals of nation-state aims at protecting citizens through deployment of repressive means which are legally legitimated. Since terrorism, which appeals to an illegal violence, hides in the population, some states use torture to gather vital information to prevent the next blow. The point of entry of this discussion seems to be that the advance of terrorism as well as the repressive counter-terrorism policies leads sooner or later to threaten basic rights and democracy. One of the most troubling aspects that precede violence seems to be the state of exception, in which case, the government is given wide powers to cope with a temporary, major threat. If the state of exception is not regulated, the executive branch runs the risk of intervening in independent branches of government, the legislative and judicial, and thus harming the essence of the check and balance powers.

Most likely there is no better example of how a state can threaten individual rights than Nazi Germany. The state of exception given to Nazis which resulted into the concept of Superman as well as the decision of other European states not to intervene early in their internal politics allowed the horrendous crimes against civilians and other ethnic minorities. Without the declaration of war, Demirsu adds, human rights or at the best the well-being of citizens is monopolized by the state. At a closer look, this suggests that the discourse of human rights collides directly with the doctrine of the state's sovereignty. Differences aside, some voices claimed the risks of counter-terrorism policies to threaten the individual human rights of some minorities, while the process of securitization not only justifies such violations, but also introduces a much deeper logic of instrumentality where the end justifies the means. It seems that in modern Western democracies, the norms and rules lagged behind the needs of further security. This is exactly what happened the United Kingdom and Turkey, two notably-different nations that share similar experiences regarding terrorism. The present book is divided in two sections, which is formed by a couple of chapters in each. The first part reviews the historical conditions of human rights as well as the philosophical discussion revolving around the needs of intervention in other states ostensibly to save lives, the coordination of humanitarian aid, or even in preventing an imminent genocide. If one state has accurate information respecting to the formation of terrorist cells to what extent is a preventive attack against a sovereign country the best alternative to follow. Demirsu's argument through these chapters leads to the second section, where Demirsu presents UK and Turkey as two significant case studies. While the former may be seen as a mature democracy, the latter vacillates between political instability and some attempts to preserve democracy as a durable form of government. Based on the review of documents and speeches at the parliamentary debate, he finds that Turkey accepts and replicates the same counter terrorism policies which are sanctioned in the UK. This point suggests some important assumptions. On one hand, the War on Terror homogenizes the same counter terrorism programs no matter the the form of government. Some new-born democracies allied to the UK and the US mimicking the same checks at border and crossing-point surveillance as well as the treatment to foreigners. On another, Turkey admires the UK as the cradle of liberal democracy and an example in the struggle against terrorism. Not surprisingly, the current counter-terrorism policies enthusiastically embraced in the Third World corresponds with the programs fostered by Copenhagen School.

To cut the long story short, one of the more valuable merits of this research validates the assumptions that developed nations disseminated a specific narrative around "terrorism" worldwide and probes how, under some conditions, counter-terrorism policy may very well affect democratic life. This reviewer toys with the belief that in the middle of a vast growing literature and studies which are pragmatically oriented to say the "good practices" or "what ought to be", which means how states should organize their resources to make a safer world, *Counter-Terrorism and the Prospects of Human Rights* explains the risks by keeping on the march in this direction. At least for this reviewer this valuable book exhibits a more than interesting effort to discuss critically the future of democracy in the years to come while interrogating further on the manipulations often suffered by democracy in the hands of populism.

REFERENCES

Altheide, D. (2017). *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Maximiliano E. Korstanje is Editor-in-Chief of International Journal of Safety and Security in Tourism (UP Argentina) and International Journal of Cyber Warfare and Terrorism (IGI Global). With more than 700 published papers and 25 books, Korstanje was awarded as Outstanding Reviewer 2012. International Journal of Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment. University of Salford, UK, Outstanding Reviewer 2013. Journal of Place Management and Development. Institute of Place, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK and Reviewer Certificate of Acknowledgement 2014. International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management (IJCHM), University of Central Florida, US. Now he co-edits almost 10 specialized journals in such themes as human rights, mobility, tourism and terrorism. Korstanje has been a subject of biographical records for Marquis Who's Who in the World since 2009. He was nominated for 5 honorary doctorates for his contribution in the study of the effects of terrorism in tourism. In 2015 he was awarded as Visiting Research Fellow at School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, UK and Visiting Professor at University of La Habana Cuba, in 2016.