

Book Review

Memory and the Wars on Terror: Australian and British Perspectives

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Memory and the Wars on Terror: Australian and British perspectives.
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The 21st century has seen the rise of a new climate of geopolitical relations, where, following 9/11, terrorism became the highest priority for most established democracies in the West. In parallel, academics of all stripes devoted their efforts to expanding knowledge on terrorism, and over recent years the US has monopolized this knowledge production in terrorism fields. Hence, a book that considers the perspectives of other English-speaking nations (specifically the UK and Australia) deserves attention. In *Memory and the Wars on Terror*, the editors present fourteen chapters that attend to this, producing an interesting and high-quality work which will be useful for both academics and policy-makers in security fields.

The introductory chapter, by editors Gildersleeve & Gehrman attends to the question originally formulated by Huntington, who proposed the thesis of the “clash of civilizations.” Avoiding the polemics of this thesis, the authors acknowledge that the so-called rivalry between East and West is rooted in a much deeper social memory that constitutes both identities. As the US-led invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan unleashed a new form of violence, resulting in the formation and expanse of ISIS (Islamic State), including in the core of European cities, it is important not to lose the sight of the fact that these events remained in the collective memory of other nations, including the United Kingdom and Australia. The authors argue that memories not only derive from a previous trauma, but they are re-elaborated and re-negotiated in a circular manner at the micro-level, in order to account for new events.

The second chapter, by Kevin Foster, examines the relationship between the mass media and military forces. Employing the example of the Vietnam War, Foster demonstrates how journalists echoed the reports of leaders, published fake news or simply gathered contradictory information. Foster argues convincingly that the role played by US journalists during the Vietnam War was

mirrored in Australian reporting of the War on Terror, who often consulted top-ranking commanders in Afghanistan before going on air.

Amanda Laugesen's chapter considers the belief that Australia adopted the US stance towards 9/11 in particular and terrorism in general. Laugesen demonstrates how the archetype of 9/11 was emulated by Australian media, which replicated similar discourses following the attacks in Bali, where more than 80 Australian tourists were killed. As the author puts it, "memory has played an ambiguous role in the construction of Australian understandings of the War on Terror" (50). Taking her cue from Richard Jackson's works, Laugesen indicates that 9/11 was situated as a meta-discourse, where victimhood inaugurated a new ideological climate of politics and the ends justified the means. This was illustrated by the successive humanitarian crises in the region just after the Bali attacks, which saw thousands of asylum-seekers attempt to gain entry to Australia. As these events unfolded, an ethnocentric discourse was nourished, which linked illegal migration to terrorism in the collective imagination.

The fourth (Gehrmann) and fifth chapters (Van Raalte) consider the world of cinema and its connection with the War on Terror. While Gehrmann concentrates on how cinema portrayed the Iraq war, the British researcher, Van Raalte, reviews the plot of *Zero Dark Thirty*. In both cases it is argued that the cinema industry replicates already-existing allegories within the US, which have imposed particular interpretations of the war and terrorism. Gehrmann emphasizes the controversy between the support for the government and support for the troops in the battlefield, while Van Raalte considers the hyper-reality of terrorism generated through the film-making process. Moving from film to literature, Gildersleeve's sixth chapter reminds us that literary fiction tends to re-appropriate the trauma that terrorism engenders, but in so doing the tragic past looms in the present. In this sense, 9/11 as a founding event not only shifted the narratives of war but also the ways Australians symbolically understood previous wars (including the First World War, via Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy*). She argues that society is left in an ambiguous atmosphere, where the individualism of civilians contrasts with the collective sacrifices of military forces at war, creating a moral dichotomy that serves to normalize violence.

In the seventh and eight chapters, Kezia Whiting and Belinda McKay respectively deal with the influence of the Iliad in the Western conception of the war, and the instability of memory in Janette Turner Hospital's fiction. With a focus on children's trauma, McKay contends that the post 9/11 landscape contains a combination of an apocalyptic climate, where the end is near, and the possibility of empowerment of historically marginalized peoples. Metaphorically linked to the fall of Troy, we are reminded not only that one day the empire will burn, but that the psychological fear instilled by terrorism enables the rise of radicalised discourses that place democracy in jeopardy. McKay argues that, at least for some, 9/11 was an "unprovoked attack", which activated a just response to the enemies of democracy. The false memory is conducive to the needs of repetition in order for the trauma to be anthropomorphized. McKay calls false memory to those historical facts which are politically manipulated or tergiversated to rememorate an idealized landscape of the past. Society keeps united through the articulation of these false memories. The problem lies in the fact when the lesson of history is not correctly learnt the disaster recurs.

The tenth chapter, by Robert Mason, proposes an interesting reading of the coup that ousted Salvador Allende (Chile's own 9/11) and the allegories circulating around September 11th, 2001. This chapter considers the experiences, hopes and fears of Latin Americans, who arrived in Australia requesting political asylum and protection. Focusing on the ways in which terrorism has aligned with an unspoken panic directing hate and hostility against the non-western 'Other', the author unravels the work of Australian nationalist discourses to tighten social cohesion, and the pathological results, where alterity and ethnic minorities were daily undermined. In Latin America, older Cold War discourses, molded by the struggle against communism, were re-signified to meet the new enemy of terrorism, resulting in the dogmatic acceptance by Latin American governments of dominant security narratives originating in the global North.

The eleventh chapter considers the importance of memory within the Jewish community in Australia, and its relationship with the War on Terror as Jews understood themselves as potential targets of jihadism. The author, D. Lawrence, draws attention to the tendency to link the ongoing dispute between Israel and Palestine to a longer history of anti-Semitism, which continued the European tradition. In this sense, the trauma of the Holocaust was renegotiated by Australian Jews, who articulated Jewishness as a position of vulnerability. The remaining chapters, by Rebecca Te`o and Frank Biongiorno, reflect on the problem of genre in the configuration of “collective memory” and its relationship with 9/11 and terrorism.

The present book is somewhat different to what we are accustomed to in the Academy simply because it exhibits the voices of scholars coming from Australia and the United Kingdom which situate as an alternative viewpoint to Americans. The authors shed light on the old/dormant discourses created during the Cold War, and their relationship with the War on Terror, but also present voices illuminating perspectives beyond the hegemony of American scholarship in this field. As the editors argue, the events of 9/11 led the US to develop a specific understanding of terrorism, which sometimes contradicted and silenced other voices. This book seeks to articulate these other perspectives, and to explain how the past interrogates the present in contexts of uncertainty and fear. As such it is a must-read project for those with an interest in the role of memory in war and terrorism.

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