

Book Review

Academic Freedom After September 11

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Academic Freedom after September 11.

Beshara Doumani

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The attacks on World Trade Center and the subsequent War on Terror has changed not only the US, as well as its check and balance forces, but also the relation of democratic institutions and intellectuals. While some voices were co-opted to support openly the War on Terror, others more critical focused on the effects of terrorism in daily life. This point is in-depth reviewed by the present book, which is entitled *Academic Freedom after September 11*. The importance of intellectuals and writers in achieving an accurate diagnosis of terrorism has gradually brought into the foreground in the six chapters that form this book. Senior lecturers as Judith Butler, Joel Beinin, Robert Post, Phillipa Strum, Kathleen Frydl and Amy Newhall theorize on the negative effects of governmental intervention curtailing the academic freedom. As the editor of this interesting product, Beshara Doumani puts it, the War on Terror introduced a new culture, she dubbed as “be careful culture” which undermined the role of political activists and dissidents. This was not new, as she noted, because the US faced a similar climate during McCarthyism, but in McCarthy era, the private sector was subordinated the professional politicians. Today, the private corporations play an active role in the construction of prisons, which leads them to adopt new technological surveillance oriented to “dominate” the debate in the public opinion:

The role of private groups in exerting external pressures on the academy may have been energized by the events of 9/11, but it is rooted in a four-decade-long, massive investment by right-wing groups in a national network of institutions, think tanks, policy institutes, grassroots faith-based organizations, law firms, social advocacy groups, corporate lobbying outfits, media outlet, tracking organizations and pressure groups of various kind... (p. 25)

As the previous argument given, the institution inveighed to follow up this in the name of homeland security is ACTA. Doumani argues convincingly that 9/11 not only accelerated some chauvinists and fundamentalist-based reaction but also allowed the synergy of right-wing organizations which saturated the media with stereotyped discourses and narratives. In view of this, in the first chapter, Robert Post explores the dichotomies of Academia which was created to alternate efficiently between the demands of the market and the training of new professions at the universities. Over years, this autonomy was gradually vulnerated and today, the private sector intervenes directly in the knowledge production process. The first amendment ensured the independence of scholars respecting other external intruders. This was recently vulnerated just after 9/11. Judith Butler, in the second chapter, reviews Post's comments considering the philosophical and legal background that protect the liberty of academicians to make their jobs. There is a culture of "preemptive censorship" intended to curtail the activity of intellectuals. As she reminds, Post is correct in one thing, academic freedom seems not to be an individual right, but a collective right which enthrones the critical thinking as the touchstone of a more cooperative democracy. Butler sees with serious concern the intromission of private capital-funders in the scholarship. While over past centuries, universities prepare for the new workers to be recruited in the firms, today the markets mandate to what should be thought. This is exactly the philosophical dilemma open after 9/11. The third chapter, authored by Philippa Strum, suggests that the Academy introduces free inquiry as for its tug of war, improving the lives of lay-citizens. The Patriot Act not only places this right in jeopardy, but the academic freedom was totally subordinated to the needs of security or externally-designed process of securitization. As Strum dangles, it represents a serious risk for the democracy in the US. The second part of the book, which contains the contributions of Kathleen Frydl, Joel Beinin, and Amy Newhall. The chapters in this section deal with the transformation suffered by the formal high-education and in universities. Based on rich-empirical study cases, the involving authors look to respond to the question to what extent the source of funding, the organizational culture, and the social demographic determine what is learned in universities and their educational programs. It is of real interest the work conducted by Joel Beinin, who studied amply the effects of the War on Terror on the Middle East fields. He names this new process as a new "McCarthyism" oriented to domesticate the non-Western alterity.

To the impression of this reviewer, *Academic Freedom after September 11* should be considered a must-read book because of two main reasons. On one hand, it combines and deals with six pungent chapters that remind the philosophical worry many ancient philosophers had revolving around the integrity of the republic and its intersection with the fear. Secondly and what is more important, each chapter continues the questions that the former left, which led readers to an all-encompassing view of the issue. Paradoxically, as B. Doumani brilliantly acknowledges, the academic freedom was originally thought in a moment when universities kept some tendency from corporate firms. The liberty of scholars to study the themes that affect society would be of paramount importance to foster an accurate diagnosis of the social maladies. More interested in protecting their profits than in understanding the reality as it stands, the private market alludes to distorted visions of risks, i.e. terrorism- which far from preventing their negative effects, potentiate them. Terrorism today, despite all efforts against it, has transformed in a "spectacle" which is ideologically utilized to discipline the public opinion. In view of this, we do recommend the present book for all curious minds who are worried by the central place that occupies terrorism in the political agenda.

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