

Book Review

Terrorism and The State: Intra-State Dynamics and the Response to Non-State Political Violence

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Terrorism and the State: Intra-State Dynamics and the Response to Non-State Political Violence

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For specialists and colleagues of all pundits one of the most worrisome aspects of terrorism associates to a much deeper moral connotation. The attacks to non-combatants often violate the laws of war. Non-combatants are not considered direct targets in the battleground but as some experts agree, there are collateral damages. The paradox of terrorism may be very well explained following this axiom: though the considerable financial investment of governmental agencies to enhance security, less is known of terrorism as an object of study. This happens not only because the discipline went through a methodological fragmentation but also the rise of a process of demonization which defined terrorism as a crime against humanity. Those fieldworkers who are in contact with terrorist cells are pressed to reveal their informational sources. (Howie, 2012; Stampnitzky, 2013; Korstanje, 2017).

In this context, Kieran McConaghy presents a more than interesting book which is entitled *Terrorism and the State*. By toying with the belief that social scientists should cooperate to get an all-pervading model, he argues convincingly that the meaning of terrorism varies according to culture and time. In the first three chapters, he examines the different reactions of governments to terrorism. This begs a more than pungent question: is history a valid instrument to understand terrorism?

While the first chapter signals to the attempts of the Spanish state to suffocate the Basque Guerrilla, the second refers to the military-based intervention of France in Algeria. The third one is reserved for the complex interplay between the British state and IRA. Instead, the second part of the book, which is formed by four chapters, explains in-depth the over-exaggeration in the counter-terrorism policies at the same time the inter-governmental cooperation is ignored. One of the goals of this editorial project, as McConaghy adheres, associates to understand the emotional reactions of states as well as the necessary steps to avoid a populist demand in the fields of security. In the quest of a zero-risk

society, the state fails to resolve all citizens' demands. To some extent, the policies and security-related programs widely designed by the authorities do not succeed in the struggle against terrorism. The fact is that there is little information available that improve the decision-making process in contexts of emergency or before an imminent terrorist attack without mentioning the lack of understanding on the psychological reasons that motivate terrorist to kill innocent people.

To put this in other terms, to struggle against terrorism, specialists should convene what terrorism is. McConaghy departs from the needs of comparing different study-cases (as objects) to provide empirical-basis explanations that confront the stereotypes of popular opinion or with the dominant narratives circulating in the media. In so doing, he dates back to terrorism as a political issue emerged just after the mid of twentieth century. The history of the twentieth century shows how the counter-terrorism policies originally designed and implemented to reduce political violence recreated the borders to the rise of new neo-romantic discourses aimed at radicalizing some minorities. As he puts it, historians are well-familiarized about the political background of the UK, France and Spain as well as their different political cosmologies. While the UK evinced some political stability, Spain was torn between authoritarian governments and temporal democracies. The case of France seems to be pretty different. The country faced serious challenges which certainly placed its political system in jeopardy. Although in different conditions, ETA and IRA looked for some territorial segregation, whereas the Algerian guerrilla claimed to the liberation of the country from an occupying force. IRA, needless to say, constructed to a great Irish allegory (dream) which is symbolically opposed to the Anglo-Saxons' culture. Still further, the violence in Algeria was greater than in the UK or Spain. This book, readers who want to buy it will see, concentrates efforts in describing the contradictions and limitations of counter-terrorism agenda in the US today. The nation-state occupies a central position in the constellations of modern politics, so to speak, in the homeland security. The figure of the nation-state should protect citizens from any external threat. In Hobbesian terms, Lay-people delegate the temporal authorities to the state to protect them, making everything –within the limits of Constitution- what should be done. However, this conception which was originally thought in the former centuries should at least re-considered. For some reason, the figure of the state has changed in the threshold of time. The chapters integrating this book gives a clear insight into history as a valid instrument to understand that there is nothing like new and old terrorism.

As the previous argument is given, critical terrorism studies amply showed not only the conceptual limitations of state-sponsored policies but also unearthed the history of terrorism as an efficient toolkit to unpack the archived stories. As peripheral voices relegated from the knowledge-production, which is monopolized by the state, these *archived story* gives a clear response to the neoliberal narrative, as well as the human right violations committed by states in the name of security. The archiving method, as he calls the attention, allows comparative models helping to unite the fragmented pieces into a coherent and all-encompassing conceptual corpus. After all, terrorism should be defined as a subfield of political violence involving a vast range of actions, targets and audiences. What lays beyond terrorism is the needs of instilling terror to create political instability.

At least for this reviewer, one of the most valuable merits of the present book relates to debate terrorism as an act of political violence where both parts (the state and the insurgents) impede a genuine dialogue. In this way, the escalation of violence is often accompanied by over-reactions –headed by the state- that violates the individual human rights. It is safe to say that terrorism should be contemplated as something more complex than an act of state, or from a private group. The history of terrorism reveals two important assumptions. On one hand, each case should be analyzed in comparison to its background. On another, the archive method allows more coherent models to understand emotional-based policies that lead invariably towards ethnocentrism and fear.

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