


Differences and Commonalities Between Terrorism and COVID-19: Globalization in Ruins

Maximiliano Emanuel Korstanje, University of Palermo, Argentina*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5149-1669>

ABSTRACT

In the present essay review, the authors have placed the notion of the war on terror under the critical lens of scrutiny. Far from being a foundational event, the global pandemic affirms a trend that originated after the war on terror. In both, the idea of living with the enemy persist. The modern nation-state, which is supported by the health system, deploys disciplinary instruments to detect, trace, and isolate the undesired guest. In the days after 9/11, surveillance technologies were used to spy on different citizens who were suspected to be terrorists. In the post-COVID-19 context, we are all suspected to be terrorists (carriers) who place the social order in jeopardy. Of course, terrorism and the virus have certain differences which merit being mentioned. Terrorism is moved by political and psychological aims while COVID-19 is simply a virus (disposed of any reasoning and will). Nevertheless, the reaction of society that exacerbates the instrumentalist gaze seems to be the same.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19, Fear, Globalization, Lockdown, Precautionary Doctrine, Terrorism, Western Nations

1. INTRODUCTION

Without any doubt, terrorism is today one of the major threats Western nations face. Some political authorities referred to the scourge of terrorism to denote the urgency of governments to thwart some active radicalized groups which today operate in the core of western democracies (Harmon & Feldman, 2007; Hoffman, 2003). Terrorism not only has mutated in the threshold of time but changed its tactics and strategies. Since 2001, terrorism has targeted laypeople, civilians, global travelers and tourists worldwide. Whether classic terrorism historically planned their attacks against celebrities, Chief Police Officers or even authorities, now the targets include luxury tourist destinations and leisure hot-spots (Korstanje 2017; 2019). As Lisa Stampnitsky (2013) puts it, terrorism research has evolved to become a matured sub-discipline of political science, but paradoxically, terrorist cells have embraced a more radicalized cosmology of the world. At the same time, we have abundant information on their psychological motivations. It is difficult to resist the impression that the attacks on the World Trade Center on 11 September of 2001 inaugurated a new epoch of fear where the check and balance

DOI: 10.4018/IJCWT.297859

*Corresponding Author

institutions gradually deteriorated, if not undermined (Altheide 2019; Skoll 2016; Howie 2012). Terror was commoditized, packaged and exchanged as a new media product that is globally consumed by a vast audience (Chaturvedi & Doyle, 2015). Through the stimulation of a culture of terror, liberal policies that otherwise would be rejected were unilaterally accepted by citizens. Terrorism, since 9/11, forged a serious moral crisis openly crystallized in the fear for the “Other” an aspect vivid in the post COVID19 context. The rise of a new outbreak known as COVID19 opened the doors to similar answers and counter-strategies adopted by the government just after 9/11. In this vein, some studies focused on the interconnection of the enemy living within and the outbreaks of the COVID19 virus originally reported in China (Korstanje & George 2021). Cohen-Louck and Levy (2021) coin the term viruism to denote the multifaceted consequences of COVID19 in the citizens’ life. These include not only a sentiment of victimization compared to 9/11 and global terrorism, as well as many narratives originated in a manifest fear to the “Other”. This moot point suggests there are many similarities between COVID19 and the climate of fear ignited by terrorism. Viruism, comparable to terrorism, rests on the belief the “Other” is seen as a perfect killer. In this direction, Desai & Amarasingam use the term Corojihadism to explain how radicalized groups are catalogued as a potential virus by local authorities. There is a biological metaphor of terrorism widely employed to discipline the “Other”. Authors eloquently note that terrorism, like COVID19, emulates the logic of living with the enemy inside. Our current manuscript focuses on the interconnection between terrorism and COVID19 but not for their similarities but rather by the long-lasting effects of terrorism in the Western social imaginary and the ways of perceiving the “Other”. What is original in our thesis is that it goes on the fact that 9/11 and the War on Terror mined the cultural matrix of West affecting not only how the “Non-Western Other” is seen and ultimately treated but also the “law of hospitality” which is the ideological core of Western democracies. Far from being a foundational event or an opportunity towards a more sustainable society, the COVID19 pandemic affirms a tendency that originated in 2001 which leads Occident to close its borders to the “Other”. The so-called War on Terror sets the pace for a new War against a virus.

The first section is a clear introduction on how the culture of Fear earlier formed in the US from its inception, is operating today to model the consumerist society. The culture of fear is based on precautionary logic which emphasizes the need of using a rational instrument to eradicate endogenous risks. The precautionary doctrine aligns directly with the thesis that holds we live with the enemy inside, and also the nation-state should deploy all available mechanisms to detect and destroy these internal potential enemies. Terrorism activated the precautionary logic affecting some of the check and balance institutions of western democracies (Altheide, 2017; Sunstein, 2005; Skoll 2020). Complementarily, the second section is oriented to discuss to what extent terrorist groups have mutated towards new form just after 2001. While classic terrorist tactics targeted important personalities such as Police Chief Officers or politicians, the new terrorism attacks leisure spots and tourist destinations. What is equally true, terrorism has changed to adopt more radical forms of violence originally directed against innocent tourists. The mass media covers the events in minutes making a global expansion of fear worldwide. The problem of terrorism is lived 24/7 through the media creating a difficult bridge between terrorists and fame. Having said this, terrorism is packaged as an ideological spectacle for some policies to be passively accepted by the citizenry. The third section centers efforts in unraveling the intrinsic connection between terror and hospitality, a point, less developed by our colleagues and the point where this conceptual research contributes directly. Citing Derrida, we overtly acknowledge that international terrorism just after 9/11 created a climate of fear where “the Other” is neglected. This seems to be a clear sign of the decline of hospitality. The COVID19 says nothing new speaking of a landscape that originated in 2001. However, Derrida does not explain how hospitality is affected by terrorism. In the last section, we offer a model that helps readers understanding the pathways the Spectacle of Terrorism and COVID are structured. These pathways include the axiom of living with enemies who look like us, the urgency for detecting and locking infected citizens, the randomness and

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