

Mediatished Terrorism: East-West Narratives of Risk

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There is a growing body of literature in the social sciences that suggests that we live in a world surrounded by narratives that construct and interpret particular understandings of reality, that serve to make sense of the world. Following the understanding that everyone and everything has a narrative in the world we live in; it would not be wrong to say that these narratives appear in every shape and dimension. For instance, since the media also has a story to tell, we hear, watch, see and witness a wide variety of stories from the media. The media is therefore the producer and distributor of narratives. However, this emphasis has a deeper implication, namely that news stories are not simply a spiral of words describing events. This is because the media convey news to the receiving public by representing, constructing, and reconstructing it (through narratives).

We frequently witness about various terrorist acts across the world via media. Saira Ali accurately examines this particular topic. Her book is for those who are concerned about how terrorism news is presented to audiences through the media and how it is made sense of in a country-specific and context-specific way. This approach also allows for a contextualisation of the construction of terrorism news narratives, within different cultural, social, and political contexts (p.5,10). The author embarks on an intellectual journey of curiosity regarding the mediatization of terrorism in two distinct worlds. These worlds are Australia, where the risk of terrorism is quite low but it has taken drastic legal measures out of fear of global terrorism after 9/11, and Pakistan, with a more grey policy although caught in the spiral of a complex terrorist atmosphere. In this way, Ali's intellectual effort is to interrogate the narrative that global terrorism is mostly damaging to Western civilisation by including the East in her analysis. Ali's analysis is basically founded on an argument that "the reality of terrorism is constructed through discourse" (p. 6).

Her fundamental goal is to find answers to the question: How is the risk of terrorism represented within media narratives?. Regarding this, Ali aims to examine the social construction of terrorism and how the reality of terrorism is perceived in both Australia and

Pakistan through media narratives by employing a critical constructivist viewpoint. She also seeks answers to the following questions: Which factors impact the construction of terrorism news, and what are the implications for risk societies?, How does the media influence a risk society's perceptions of terrorism and security forces' responses to terrorism risk?. These interconnected questions are answered within sociologist Ulrich Beck's World Risk Society theory. According to this theoretical framework, the risk is a threat to the security of modern risk societies: it is without borders, global, uncontrollable, real in terms of the physical harm it is, but produced, constructed, in terms of its changeability within the scope of knowledge and has a boomerang effect. (p.16, 17, 18). The theory essentially implies a securitized society in the post-industrial period that exhibits an excessive preoccupation with protecting itself against risks in the face of uncertainty and fear. Therefore, there are no logical discussions regarding security in an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear.

For the express purpose of this study, the author has chosen two separate incidents that occurred in Australia (representing a Muslim minority country) and Pakistan (representing a Muslim majority country) as cases. The hostage crisis that occurred on 15 December 2014 at the Lindt Chocolate Café in Sydney, Australia and lasted 16 hours, during which Man Haron Monis, an Australian citizen of Iranian origin with a long criminal history, acting alone, took customers and employees hostage at gunpoint and was eventually killed by Australian security forces (p. 118, 119). On 16 December 2014, nine armed members of the terrorist organization Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) assaulted Army Public School in Peshawar, Pakistan, brutally murdering children and teachers (p. 168). As an integral component of this framework, Ali conducted an examination of the social construction of terrorism by means of textual scrutiny, encompassing both content and critical discourse analysis, of indigenous newspapers germane to the two designated instances. The author also conducted in-depth interviews with journalists from both countries.

This book which consists of eight chapters of a comparative evaluation of the Western and Eastern spheres, is extremely significant in terms of revealing the critical importance of the contextualization of terrorism. This work serves as a poignant reminder with a strong tone that the media, is a critical element in power dynamics that necessitates a critical examination of its impact on the construction of social realities, its adherence to the interests of the dominant power, its role in perpetuating exclusionary politics, and its capacity to shape the attitudes of the masses in a desirable manner. Ali explicitly emphasizes that the media is not merely an avenue through which events have simply been watched, seen, and heard; rather, the media is a crucial component of the power relations involved in knowledge creation, and therefore the media cannot operate independently of politics. With this insightful analysis, Ali contends that the politicization of the media has rendered it an essential component of security systems (p. 10). This book also demonstrates the function of the media in the construction of terrorism risk, which is integrated into the system, based on norms, and is one of the key players not deviating from the direction of the ruling mass, as well as the role it plays in hiding the primary factors that lead to terrorism.

In addition, the reader will notice a considerable emphasis in this book on the use of the phenomenon of terrorism as a political instrument for both governments' political purposes.

In this respect, with a critical perspective, Ali asks the question of whether it is possible to distinguish between terrorists who are considered good or bad when it comes to terrorism. Considerations such as the following illustrate the rationale for these inquiries: Pakistan while labelling and combating certain groups as terrorists, such as the TTP, is also cooperating with others, such as the Kashmiri insurgents Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) or the sectarian separatist Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) (p. 221). In Australia, although Monis, the hostage perpetrator, lacked political motivation and was not affiliated with any terrorist organization, the fact that he was a Muslim of Iranian origin was enough for the Australian government to conclude that he was an ISIS-motivated terrorist and that the incident itself was terrorism (p. 220). In light of Ali's observations, this circumstance reminds the reader, through its subtle vision, once again of the need to critically question the relationship between terrorism and sovereign authority. Considering this spectrum, these points demonstrate the vital value of critical terrorism studies once again.

One of Ali's most noteworthy contributions to academic writing is definitely her critical examination of the concept of martyrdom. In Western-based terrorism studies, martyrdom is usually associated with terrorist groups, mostly those who claim to act in the name of Islam, notably suicide attacks. These studies, in particular, frequently neglect the media's promotion of martyrdom as a politically driven discourse of the governing class and its consequences. However, as Ali's study demonstrates, in a country where both the dying and the killing are Muslims, martyrdom is not limited to terrorist groups. Although martyrdom is the ultimate honor in Islamic doctrine, when it becomes politicized, it serves as a sort of coping mechanism for deaths in Muslim countries. As the author emphasizes, when martyrdom is politicized, it covers up the faults of state officials and prevents the deaths from being called into question (p. 225, 226). In this respect, Ali's work provides an intellectual examination of Muslim societies, taking into consideration the governing class that determines who is a martyr. In this way, Ali breaks the silence of the dominant Western-centered viewpoint by producing an alternative reading. Consequently, Ali's analysis might serve as a model for future critical research on the governing class's discourse of martyrdom and its distribution via the media in Muslim communities, as well as its possible implications for counter-terrorism.

Another point that makes the study striking is that rather than the moral panic created by the media's climate of extreme fear in the case of terrorism working in favour of the terrorists, this situation leads to association with any community and draws attention to the politics of othering that comes into play. The reader will acquire a comprehensive understanding of the ramifications of the culturalisation of terrorism and its consequent impacts that lead to the construction of othering, in the book's most, undoubtedly, seminal chapter five, titled "The Culturalisation of Terror." With the assertion that the media plays an important role in the cultural production of knowledge, Ali discloses the overrepresentation of terrorism in both countries through the media and how this creates "moral panics" locked in fear of (in the author's emphasis) "folks devils" and the ways in which marginalised minorities are represented through stereotypical narratives (p. 100). The author's analysis posits that Muslims (as a cliché) are perceived as public demons in the Australian sphere, whilst Afghan refugees and Pashtuns are similarly regarded in the Pakistani domain. Without a doubt, Ali

fills a big vacuum in the literature by uncovering the constructed otherness in the East's media narratives, which are generally neglected by the dominant Western-centered academia with this analysis.

Consequently, book's pioneering contribution to the discipline as the first publication that conducts country-specific research on mediatised terrorism cannot be overlooked. This work, written using an interdisciplinary approach, certainly deserves the attention since it will sheds light on media and security studies scholars in addition to critical terrorism studies scholars.