

Reviews

Elaine C Hagopian (ed), *Civil Rights in Peril: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims*, Haymarket and Pluto, Chicago and London. 2004, ISBN 0 7453 2264 6

Discussions of counter-terrorism law and policy routinely use the ‘balancing’ metaphor in order to describe the process legislators and policy-makers go through when enacting new laws against the threat of terrorism. According to this metaphor, civil liberties and human rights are balanced against the imperatives of national security and community safety. The balancing metaphor asks us how many civil liberties we are prepared to trade away for increased security. At first glance this appears to be a fairly utilitarian calculus, but what often gets elided in this opaque formulation of the balancing metaphor is that the ‘us’ is in fact not an ‘us’ at all. Rather, it is a ‘them’. In real political terms what the balancing metaphor asks of a democracy is how many of the other’s rights, how much of the other’s liberty, comfort, indeed security, is the majority prepared to countenance in order to safeguard its own? Of course, it is the Arab and Muslim populations which have, subsequent to the events of ‘9/11’ and in the context of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, been constructed as the other of Western democracies and whose way of life has been placed in the balance. As Elaine C Hagopian’s recent collection of essays attests, the majority (at least in America, although similar trends are indeed reflected in Australian and British experiences) has shown a disturbing tendency to condone legislative and executive behaviour of a thoroughly appalling nature towards Arab and Muslim minority populations.

Civil Rights in Peril is a disturbing and, if for that reason alone, important book in the current political climate. It is a collection of seven quite lengthy essays (and a much pithier ‘Introduction’ by M Cherif Bassiouni on pp 1–5, an opinion piece reproduced from the *Chicago Tribune*) which is organised into three separate parts. Part One is dedicated to outlining those government measures which, both before and after the events of ‘9/11’, seriously impacted on Arab and Muslim Americans’ enjoyment of their civil liberties and human rights. The opening essay by Susan M Akram and Kevin R Johnson (pp 9–25) shares in common with the work of Cole and Dempsey (2002) a concern to demonstrate that the targeting of Arab and Muslim citizens and non-citizens by American authorities is not a phenomenon peculiar to the post-‘9/11’ world. Their survey, particularly of immigration cases such as the infamous treatment of the LA Eight, is a useful one. More useful still is the second essay by Nancy Murray (pp 27–68), which outlines the litany of executive and legislative abuses of Arab and Muslim Americans post-‘9/11’, along with a discussion of some of the more supine efforts of the federal judiciary (appropriately enough for an American piece, the essay is structured around the tripartite division of executive, legislature and judiciary). What Murray’s piece lacks in depth of analysis and, in places, readability, it more than makes up for in thoroughness. Her essay is an extensive catalogue of the efforts of the current American administration and Congress to prosecute the ‘war on terror’ domestically.

Part Two of the book, which is devoted to a discussion of media (mis)representations of Arabs and Muslims, contains the most interesting and focused critical analyses of the collection. Robert Morlino’s piece (pp 71–103) is a close textual analysis of the media

reporting of a particular incident — the FBI and US Customs investigation of a Massachusetts-based software company, Ptech, in relation to alleged financial connections to al-Qaeda. Through an in-depth reading of this particular incident and the ensuing media ‘beat-up’, Morlino demonstrates how mainstream American media outlets are critical in creating negative public images of Arabs and Muslims, and how this ideological work is crucial to manufacturing public support for the domestic ‘war on terror’. Just to make his point abundantly clear, Morlino embeds his Ptech example within wider comments on the American media and some more egregious examples of American media Islamophobia. These examples include Ann Coulter’s injunction in the *National Review* to ‘invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity’ (quoted on p 71) and Fox anchor Bill O’Reilly’s comparison of an introductory freshman textbook on the Qur’an with Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* (pp 95–8). Will Youmans’s essay (pp 105–30) on the ‘academic’, media and online activities of Steve Emerson and Daniel Pipes is just as damning. The latter’s ‘Campus Watch’, a website ostensibly devoted to correcting the supposed ideological biases and academic misconduct of American academics teaching in Middle East studies courses, actually functions as a McArthy-esque censor of anti-Israel and anti-American speech. Perhaps more disturbing than the mere existence of such an organisation is the institutional legitimacy its views and methods have been granted by the present administration. In a related point in the ‘Epilogue’ to the editor’s concluding chapter (pp 193–238) it is revealed that Pipes, along with an academic from Stanford University, Stanley Kurtz, testified before the House Sub-Committee on Select Education and the Workforce in June 2003 in a bid to deny federal funding to Middle East studies courses that present a ‘one-sided analysis of American foreign policy’ (p 236). Kurtz in particular criticised the prevalence in the discipline of post-colonial theory and critical analyses influenced by Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1995). This kind of insidious anti-intellectual conservatism is one of the most dangerous dimensions of the current ‘war on terror’.

Finally, Part Three of the collection aims to illustrate how the domestic ascendancy of the neo-conservatives, the pro-Likudists in Washington and the New Christian Right has facilitated the adoption of more aggressive and unilateralist American foreign policies, especially in the Middle East in support of Israeli state interests. This linkage is indeed demonstrated by the essays, yet there is some overlap and repetition. Much of the material is interesting and probably bears repetition, yet this concluding section could perhaps have benefited from some tighter editing. On the whole, Samih Farsoun’s piece (pp 133–60) on the domestic rise of the far right in American politics is probably the most informative for Australian readers, while Naseer Aruri’s essay ‘American Global Reach and the Antiterrorist Crusade of George W Bush’ (pp 161–91) contains yet more revealing information about the current President and his neoconservative aides. Sadly, Hagopian’s essay (pp 193–238) is of less use to the general reader interested in understanding the current demonisation of Arabs and Muslims. Hagopian focuses more on questions of Middle Eastern geopolitics and international relations, giving a very detailed ‘regional analysis’ of Iraq, Lebanon, Iran, Palestine, Syria and Saudi Arabia which describes the internal and expatriate political communities in each country.

However, these concluding critical comments should not detract from the overall impression of this review, which is that *Civil Rights in Peril: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims* is an immensely valuable text which should be required reading for anyone trying to grasp the legal, political and social contours of the current ‘war on terror’.

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References

Cole, D & Dempsey, J X (2002) *Terrorism and the Constitution: Sacrificing Civil Liberties in the Name of National Security*, New Press, New York.

Said, E (1995) *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.