Mass-Media and Terrorism: fringe reflections for a central issue.

Review of Terrorism and the Politics of Fear. Authored by David Altheide. 2006. Altamira Press. Oxford. Pp. 247.

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In last years the terrorism posed as an issue that concern public opinion and academicians from all corners of the globe. Even if an attack against Western countries is not a new phenomenon truthfully after Sept-11 the World saw how deeper and earth-shattering can be these types of attacks. Some well-known scholars immediately launched to support the imminent responses of United States in Afghanistan and Iraq. George W. Bush referred to this event as the presumption of a new era wherein the giant should awake for a large slumber … applauded by some academicians and disavowed by others, 11/9 represented a disrupting event in the way people were accustomed to perceive risk and threats of environs. It is unfortunate that when supporter of preventive war realized about their error, it was too late due to the era of fear has inevitably begun. This seems to be the backdrop where Samuel Huntington speaks about the Clashes of Civilizations and other intellectuals refer to religious incompatibilities between Christians and Muslims.

Under such circumstances, the book of David Altheide corresponds with one of the best and critique essays relating to the manipulation of fear of US Government. In a similar line in accordance with other scholars as J. Baudrillard, S. Zizek, and C. Robin, Altheide examines to what extent the politic of fear induces voters to elect Georges Bush by second time. In addition, the mass-media play a pervasive role in disseminating news containing warning message and elaborating a discourse based on panic, risk and threat perception. Undoubtedly, there is a rise of these shocking events which often are intellectualized as the presence of evilness. Bin-Laden, Hussein and other personages are characterized not only by their rage against Western development but also for being part of the evil. In sharp contrast with Leo Strauss who encourages these types of panic flights, Altheide examines the role played by Mass-Media in the divulgation of news.

In terms of our author, "*Mass-media materials are organized through an entertainment format that promotes conflict and drama, vicarious and emotional identification, and spontaneity. The mass-media and popular culture are relevant in the production of meaning by providing significant symbolic meaning and perspectives that may be drawn on by individuals in specific social situations*" (Altheide, 2006: 61).

From this perspective, mass-media is responsible for the dissemination of fright in the core of industrialized societies. Their aims are uncertain but they ascribe to the promotion of a new style of life: the consumption of violence and fear. Anybody when have a time to relax enjoy to watch how climate disasters, uncanny illnesses or other calamities at the comfort of home. Basically, one might speculate that Altheide is not wrong when he argues that journalism should be more conscious and liable as to how they

communicate the events. Of course, this means that they magnify events of day-to-day life restructuring how operates the fear in psychological minds.

The moot point here is that Media Culture has radically changed the basis of social institutions and the response these type of organization give to citizenship's needs. We come across with a scary bunch of consumers who demand the State provide further care. The politics are being invaded by the logic of market. Emphasizing on the dangers face the children or our own off-spring Mass-media dissuade officials to impose restrictive policies. That way, politics of fear paved the pathway to the social reclusion.

Altheide goes on to say that *"media politics have entered the framework of all institutions. Several examples will be offered about domestic issues and media politics, then I´ ll turn to the international terrorism scene. Any discussion about crime and justice or war and terrorism in The United State today must begin by correcting the audience member assumptions about crime, law and order, and evil. Serious personal criminal attacks happen rarely, but they are regarded as typical and quite common by American Citizens because virtually all mass-media reports about crime focus on the most spectacular, dramatic, and violent"* (ibid, 63). It is often hypothesized on the psychological profile of offender who supposedly has some sexual pathology or is living in an Oedipus syndrome unresolved.

In the mid of this mayhem, Hollywood and film industry focused on how safe it is to live in United States. The overarching ways of control as well as all technologies advances in favor of communication play a pivotal role in creating a symbolic bubble where converges the threats of strangeness with a much broader yearning for security. Possibly, these mechanisms mediate between a real and unreal event. As Baudrillard put it, Sept-11 was not only a strong event, it became, in the end, reality. The combination of mass-techniques gives a reason and a pretext to participate morally in the chaos of tragedy. Television humanizes the hearth of viewers because put them into a dilemma of difficult solution: taking part in one or other direction for a certain issue implicitly they are embedded in the most cynic indifference. A showcased disaster functions as a form of social virtual control.   This control is more penetrative and intrusive altering the relationship between State and individuals.

Partial views of reality that mass-media drives can be comparable with the unseen War against terror costs or militia injuries people suffer in battle-field. Altheide is captivated by the fact that *"if the politics of fear lasts long enough, the lack of negative coverage about the costs of war or other military adventures will become common-place. Indeed, the news discourse*

largely constitutes the politics of fear for mass audience because this is their main source of information about the state of political world. Soon, curtailing negative reports about the government, specially foreign policy, becomes the baseline for journalists and editors and, over time, their audiences as well" (ibid: 68).

For one hand, we admit that politics of fear have changed its own format from Reagan's administration up to date, for the other, a similar underlying message still remains. In addition, journalists are not prone to criticizes to new administrations in moment of instabilities. Post disaster coverages even Sept-11 frequently are functional to existing political-powers. Throughout the book Altheide emphasizes on the performance of mass-media creating meaning to the event they cover. Politic, hegemony and fear converge in a same arena wherein consumption sublimates the logic of perversion. I must acknowledge that the enemy still is outside but I need its presence to order my own businesses.

To put this in brutally, Altheide argues that *"objective indicators of risk and dangers in America life suggest that most US citizens are healthier and safer and live more predictable lives than any time in history, yet numerous surveys indicate these same citizens perceive that their lives are very dangerous. The politics of fear requires specific topics or events to promote fear. In the United States, crime policies lead the way in promoting crime as a major public issue that citizens should fear and that authorities should control. Crime and fear dominates US newspapers and television news reports"* (ibid: 73).

Altheide recognizes how crime coverage operates with the logic of the market. Crime and assassination became in the two more popular features of entertainment television in last decades. The discourse of fear is associated to the declination of trust and disguise of public life. Sociologically speaking, mass-media analysis suggests that popular culture prefer values enrooted in the adventure for novelty and absence for ordinary breaking the routine. Ultimately, our author put emphasis on the American beliefs which assume that fear is a positive feeling that wills safe their integrity. At a first glance, contributions of narrative of fear entail that such a sentiment is intellectualized by means of much broader identity process. Besides, dominant cultures encourage identity, vision, travels and culture as a form of social distinction.

The advent of market in daily social life technically replicates previous stereotypes based on exclusion, dread and panic. Consumers who are constantly concerned about the last innovation product for their security are

less concerned than other subjects. It is a postmodern paradox that consumption and fear are inextricably intertwined. *"Fear is used to deal with social life lacks. It can be a substitute or catchall explanation for numerous troubles and disjuncture between what is and what ought to be. Fear provides a rationale for the management and control of social order. Fear provides explanations and solutions that often involve formal agents of social control, involving police, control, and surveillance"* (ibid: 94). Tourism and travel industries seemed not to be alone in the commercial apathy to terrorism. Numerous ads as well as scientific researchers priorized the inner travel within the boundaries of US as a way of patriotism whereas the rest of globe started to be perceived as dangerous and hostile. All industries and commercial activities were not immune to the fear of terrorism. Altheide does not loose the sight of how 9/11 attacks implied an increase of psychological vulnerability in America. This valuable book is fraught with striking ideas that stimulate the criticism. Of course, the future of terrorism and preventive war against terrorists is uncertainness. Following this, the present work can be catalogued as one most important and well-described narrative of effects of terrorism in United States, a book that pose a serious challenge in the American ethnocentrism, one of the best pieces I have ever read.