

Commentary Review

A Difficult World: Examining the Roots of Capitalism

Authors: Maximiliano Korstanje (University of Palermo, Argentina, and others)

Professor Maximiliano Korstanje's intellectual tour of the modern world leaps time and space only to connect them in terrorism's shroud of tourism. Ten chapters dedicated to expunging the fallacy of American Exceptionalism move from a critique of capitalism's origin to the intricate connection between hegemony, power, consumption, tourism and terrorism. His project aspires to a paradigmatic shift in understanding the nature of capitalism. Arguing that Weber's classic portrayal of capitalism's origin in Calvinism was incomplete, Korstanje offers Norse mythology about predestination as a better metaphor for the post-industrial order in general, and the ubiquitous culture of fear that has been justified by incomplete ideological appraisals of terrorism and risk in our time. As Korstanje states, "We live in a difficult world because it embraces complexity as a primary value." Drawing on ideological illuminations by Skoll and others, the reader is directed to consider viewing terrorism as the "commoditization of fear," and that the exhaustion of resources by capitalism creates the current crisis.

Historical and comparative materials (especially Argentina) support arguments that the risk and fear associated with this capitalistic ethos are the foundation for the national security state that problematizes and frames challenges as illegitimate and threatening, whether from unionization efforts or domestic and international terrorism. Professor Korstanje's project traces the development of rationality induced risk and control, ultimately arguing that the cultural values of terrorism are part of a capitalist system, and paradoxically, that terrorism directs the Western produced technology against the West. Scholars working with intriguing concepts like "constrained democracy," "collective memory," and "dark terrorism" or "terrorism tourism"—where people travel to sites memorialized with misery and death-- will appreciate how mythic origins inspired cosmologies emphasizing comfort, security, resistance, death, and entertainment. This comprehensive narrative remains open-ended and compelling.

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