

Book Review

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Gareth Peirce 2012 *Dispatches from the Dark Side: On Torture and the Death of Justice*. Brooklyn, NY. Verso Publishing. ISBN 9781844677597. (XII, 160 pages). \$14.95 (paperback).

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Gareth Peirce is one of Britain's foremost Human Rights lawyers specialising in miscarriages of justice. Her clients have included the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four, Judith Ward and the family of Jean Charles de Menezes. In *Dispatches from the Dark Side: On Torture and the Death of Justice*, she exposes the intricate and disturbing details of the decline in civilized justice that has characterized the War on Terror. In general, the text explores:

- political and government-based abuse of citizens in the War on Terror.
- the use, omission, and manipulation of evidence in Miscarriages of Justice.
- the ideological manipulations associated with the mistreatment of individuals.

In chapter 1, entitled *Make sure you say that you were treated properly*, the author discusses the extent to which the US and UK have been complicit in torture. When instances of abuse were investigated, government entities in the UK often placed emphasis on what was deemed as individual errors of judgment as opposed to a systemic cultural manifestation of apathy and exploitation. An examination is presented of how secrecy has been misused, in relation to government-based objectives, such as national security. This leads into a discussion of how public disclosure of abuse is thwarted. The chapter concludes with a challenge to our complacency over the dark forces that flourish under cover of secrecy. After reading this chapter, the allegations made towards the UK have clearly altered my preconceived notions regarding the integrity of government.

In *The framing of al-Megrahi* (chapter 2), the account of a passenger aircraft explosion is described which led to an internationally famous conviction that has now arguably constituted a major miscarriage of justice. This involved the compromise of key evidence within the crime scene as well as political motivation and manipulation of information by government and intelligence officials. The use of testimony of scientists with questionable reputations and methods, evidence tampering, and propaganda is covered in detail. The chapter concludes by pointing out *the death of justice* that results from corrupt political objectives.

In *Was It Like This for the Irish* (chapter 3), an analogy is drawn regarding the extent of injustice experienced by the Muslim community and the Irish. This involves details regarding contrived allegations against foreign nationals and the consequential wrongful detention. The ostensible,

expedient national security-based motives involving a mistaken faith in the efficacy of gaining information through torture is illustrated through various accounts of kidnapping, deception, and interrogation. Additional accounts of mistreatment, deception, and negligence are revealed in relation to the intricate attempts- some of which were successful- to deport detainees to countries in which torture is practiced. In this chapter, Peirce also outlines her own intimately detailed knowledge of the impact on families, of Control Orders. The chapter concludes by describing how the cultural beliefs of the Muslim community are perceived and treated as threats, involving the violation of human and religious rights.

In *Are We Our Brothers' Keepers* (chapter 4), the politically based interactions between the US and the UK in relation to the treatment of those deemed as terrorists are discussed. This includes accounts of biased political objectives, and the coercive methods used by national governments. A series of legal atrocities and due process violations are presented along with various accounts of the effects of isolation. The chapter concludes with an assessment of how the UK, along with the US, has taken part in the demise of human and legal rights. This chapter along with several of the others demonstrates in detail, the vital importance of the European Convention on Human Rights in restraining the oppressive tendencies of government.

Chapter 5, *A Decade of False Narratives* is a new chapter, appearing in the 2012 edition. Here Peirce takes a global view, interrogating the misguided motives, unchallenged rationalisations, and the undermining of the rights of those suspected of terrorism, that have comprised the War on Terror. By way of example, the war in Afghanistan was based upon an uncertain and ambitious ideology that fostered the decline in legal and moral protection of citizens' welfare. The impact of this zeal is defined by ambiguity and, at times, both support and condemnation by the intelligence community. The recurring and yet unfortunate history of conflict can only be ultimately prevented, she suggests, through the prosecution of officials who engage in criminal action against citizens.

Dispatches from the Dark Side: On Torture and the Death of Justice is a punchy, well written text that encompasses a detailed analysis of how the basic principles of freedom are too- easily compromised by political ideologies and legal irregularities. The strength of the text is revealed through descriptive personal accounts, and its capacity to address the motives and implications of questionable government decisions. An index would have been useful, nevertheless, the text makes a vital contribution to literature on international government affairs, political science and the social conflict perspective on the War on Terrorism. *Dispatches from the Dark Side: On Torture and the Death of Justice* details the intricacies of the legal maneuvers both by the state and by citizens who seek to protect themselves and to protect the thin line of Human Rights that stands between civility and abuse.