This brings us back to core issues that deserve even greater discussion than they get in this book. What drives NGO behavior? Even more important, are NGOs really able to be substitutes for government and business, to actually play the role many of them claim as the monitors and supervisors of the issue space in which they operate? A famous example has to do with labor in the clothing supply chain: workers confront crowded, unhealthy, underpaid, dangerous conditions, facing even death from fire or building collapse or chemical spills. Because controversy over these conditions caused big problems for manufacturers, they came to support mechanisms for monitoring the system that would be credible to the consumers of their products. This led to the creation of the Fair Labor Association, which sent out inspectors to factories. Its board was made up of representatives of the companies, labor, and university bookstores, because students were major protestors. But then the Worker Rights Consortium complained that the presence of the manufacturers undermined the credibility of the investigations; yet, lacking representation, the manufacturers were less likely to cooperate. This expresses well the dilemma: necessary buy-in at the cost of lower credibility. Full disclosure to the readers of this review—these credibility problems were the major focus of the 2012 book I coedited on this topic with David Lake and Janice Stein (The Credibility of Transnational NGOs). We share with the authors of this volume the worry that NGOs get too much of a free pass by assuming that the virtue of their goals gives them the cover of good performance. We agree they should be pushed like everyone else to see what actually happens.

NGOs cannot replace both government and the private sector. They are not able to solve the problems of monitoring worldwide for the vast production of clothing or foodstuffs. Nor can they solve the immense problems of coordinating standards in the high-tech sector, though sometimes the market compels coordination for safety or uniformity. Health care, climate, and safety initiatives all need governments to establish and enforce standards, and they need markets and capital to coordinate production and distribution. The UN Global Compact makes an important contribution to this end. But transnational NGOs can play a huge role that otherwise goes unfilled: as societal monitors. They can be vital watchdogs for the vast production of clothing or foodstuffs. Terrorists are portrayed as monsters; in turn, they demonize and dehumanize their targets. And terrorists sometimes intentionally show their most monstrous side in order to terrorize society. This leads Pinfari, a scholar of international relations (IR) and security studies, to rightfully conclude, “The nature of terrorism as a phenomenon based on the projection (or internalization) of fear also contributes to making monster metaphors not just an incidental part of the political discourse but rather one of the fundamental, constitutive components of the way in which terrorism is presented and understood” (p. 177).

In his monograph, Pinfari weaves together historical accounts on the Italian Red Brigades (where he showcases his detailed knowledge), as well as anarchist plots and the musings of jihadists who threaten to kill their targets “in their dreams.” Rather than organizing his book effective. Interest groups have played this role. As this book makes clear, transnational NGOs are vital components of this process as well.


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A short while ago, I interviewed some convicted jihadist detainees in prison for an ongoing research project. One detainee complained quite emotionally that he had just watched a regional television broadcast on how the entire firefight brigade of a city was dispatched to save one single kitten. “They value the lives of that kitten more than they care for us,” he said. “To them we are nonhuman, just monsters.” Although there is no doubt that this particular detainee had joined the warrior ranks of the ISIS caliphate, bringing death and destruction to Syria, he was right about Dutch popular perceptions. Society does indeed see and treat him as subhuman—although penitarian conditions in the Netherlands are obviously well above the prison standards in Raqqa. Indeed, to many newspaper readers terrorists are nothing more than monsters, who should not be able to lay claim to citizenship or any other human rights.

It is therefore timely and topical that Marcus Pinfari gets to the bottom of the monster metaphor, which is slavishly omnipresent in dealings with terrorism. As Pinfari rightly states, terrorism is always a “logomachy,” a war of words. Terrorists are portrayed as monsters; in turn, they demonize and dehumanize their targets. And terrorists sometimes intentionally show their most monstrous side in order to terrorize society. This leads Pinfari, a scholar of international relations (IR) and security studies, to rightfully conclude, “The nature of terrorism as a phenomenon based on the projection (or internalization) of fear also contributes to making monster metaphors not just an incidental part of the political discourse but rather one of the fundamental, constitutive components of the way in which terrorism is presented and understood” (p. 177). As any historian or scholar in the field of security and IR knows, demonizing your enemy is as old as military strategy itself, or even older. Yet, given the performative phenomenon of terrorism, this very “monstrosity” is crucial to its theatrical, dramatic effect, in which impact and moral panic play an even larger role than in (limited) warfare itself.

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in a chronological way, Pinfari builds his chapters on the functionalities of the monster metaphor: monsters are creatures that are considered “inhuman, unthinkable, and unmanageable” (p. 14). In part I, he describes how terrorists are seen as monsters in the societies that they target. Part II then explains how terrorists themselves intentionally act as monsters. In part III, Pinfari subsequently analyzes how terrorists themselves also dehumanize their opponents as monsters to justify their attacks.

In structuring his narrative in this fashion, Pinfari presents us with a creative, original, and well-told account of the manifold variations in which atavistic, mythical images, and ideas about monsters confront us today in the twenty-first-century world of cyber and remote warfare. In chapter 6, he analyzes how the Western media and coalition troops produce this dichotomy (between the bloodthirsty monsters of ISIS, on the one hand, and the allegedly civilized West with its remote warfare, on the other) to legitimize warfare in the Middle East. Western wars, Pinfari argues, are framed as surgical affairs, with only a limited amount of collateral damage, whereas the terrorists are the real head-chopping monsters. In this chapter, Pinfari makes his most robust political statements: “this chapter explores the extent to which … counterterrorist practices mirror the demonology that they are designed to resist” (p. 154).

Indeed, it is clear that presenting someone as an inhuman monster, as an unmanageable “hydra,” tends to encourage reactions in kind.

Throughout the book, Pinfari illustrates the ramifications of his argument about the framing of terrorism. The introduction of the metaphorical imagery of monsters invokes real-world attempts to annihilate those monsters by all means possible. Such imagery thus leads societies to “renegotiate the borders between what is ‘reasonable or unreasonable, appropriate or inappropriate’ in countering it [terrorism]” (p. 157).

Here, the book takes on a rather political stance in describing the Israeli operation Cast Lead in Gaza of 2008–9, when then-foreign minister Tzipi Livni presented the operation as a reenactment of fighting the specter of evil, Amalek, in targeting Hamas. Pinfari devotes many pages to a very fascinating study of the appropriation of the allegorical and mythical archetype of the Jewish people, Amalek, by Israeli counterterrorist policy makers. Thus, it is a bit surprising that the even more widespread abhorrent and phantasmagorical abuse of the imagery of the “eternal Jew” does not figure at all in the book. For example, the fabricated Protocols of the Elders of Zion that were disseminated by the tsarist secret police to frame anarchists and socialists as Jewish conspirators and blood-drinking child slayers do not play a role in the book’s argument. This demonizing, antisemitic imaginary flared up in all kinds of national socialist, right-wing extremist, and terrorist organizations, up until the present day.

This raises the methodological question of how Pinfari selected his varied examples of monster imagery. What were his geographical, temporal, and political criteria for introducing them, and are there specific images, geographical distinctions, and grades of lethality that stand out? This does not become clear in the introduction, which hence leaves the reader a bit at a loss. When compared with two very convincing and systematic studies on the “genealogy of terrorism” that came out in recent years (by Ronald Schechter in 2018 and by Joseph McQuade in 2020), Pinfari’s book is far less historically situated and chronologically ordered. It remains somewhat impressionistic and anecdotal in the end. Moreover, Pinfari’s discussion of the jihadist use of monsters as performative and instrumental rather than metaphysical is not that convincing. The same goes for his claims that jihadists’ monster discourse can be compared to that of revolutionary terrorists. In the end, for Al Qaeda and ISIS warriors, demons are no allegorical creatures. Monsters are as real as the angels that they believe descended from heaven to support their fight. This transcendental dimension of their “monstrous operations,” which they consider acts of radical redemption, cannot simply be equated with a secularized framing of the sublime.

That said, the field of terrorism studies today is far too dominated by “instrumentalist” studies, intended for direct translation into counterterrorism policies or deradicalization programs. Apart from the niche of critical terrorism studies, there is a dearth of culturally and literary-informed studies on terrorism. Pinfari’s impressive and evocative work paints a landscape of monsters, beasts, and demons, alerting us to the fact that many of these behemoths are not at all inhuman but are products of our own making and imagination.


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The use of autonomous weapons (AWS) has been hotly debated since their creation around 1900. Although research has been published on the principles of using AWS, little has been published on the relationship between AWS and just war theory (JWT). Moral Responsibility in Twenty-First-Century Warfare is a prophetic edited volume that explores the ethical dimensions of AWS and JWT. Published at the perfect time, the authors provide answers to questions that are just starting to appear in public policy and academia. Editors Steven Roach and

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