

3-18-2019

New Terrorism in New Zealand? The Psychology of Censorship

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Recommended Citation

Editor (2019) "New Terrorism in New Zealand? The Psychology of Censorship," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 3 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol19/iss3/3>

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First, some observations on terrorism even older than the formal discipline of terrorism studies. Terrorism is ideologically motivated violence—most often religiously and/or politically. (Here *ideology* means some system of ideals and ideas varying in coherence and logic, not necessarily how *ideology* was coined—limiting ideals and ideas to the rational as opposed to the irrational—by Antoine Destutt de Tracy during the French Revolution. And *violence* means death, injury, destruction, damage or their threat).

Terrorism's purpose is to change the world, thus its targets—people who (1) become aware of and survive ideologically motivated violence, (2) change their perceptions and behaviors consonant with the perpetrator's ideology, and (3) have the capability and will to change the world consonant with this ideology. The dead are at most mediating targets—collateral if essential, necessary but not sufficient on the way to violence perpetrated victory. But the dead are more similar than one might think in affecting the living as James Joyce's "The Dead" in *Dubliners*.

And terrorism's fatal weakness—what aviation safety experts might term a single, psychological point of failure with three sub-points. If human targets with the capability and will to change the world consonant with the perpetrator's ideology *don't* learn of the violence or enough of it to be moved or have capability and will to change the world but *still* won't act on it—viz., are subject to some sort of psychological censorship—then terrorism fails. Preventing the terrorist point of failure are political values such as 'right to know,' logistical challenges such as drawing an iron (informational) curtain over dissemination of the terrorist act, and psychological challenges of human nature—reactance, curiosity, sensation-seeking, and the dark personality tetrad of narcissism, machiavellianism, psychopathy, and sadism. (These same psychological challenges can also motivate the terrorist along with or instead of ideology).

There is psychological research touching on the possibilities of censorship in related matters. Shahrar et al. (2018) studied what they call the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict and found relationships between self-censorship and information that may contradict dominant conflict-supporting narratives, psychological distance between sources and recipients of information recipients, disseminating capabilities, social roles of sources and recipients, and types of information. Leone et al. (2018) studied Italian Army colonial crimes (1935-1936) perpetrated by the Italian Army and found that university students were more likely to self-censor, when information was presented evasively than straightforwardly. As well, students in the latter condition were more likely to experience anger than outrage, shame rather than guilt, and support for reparations. Niccolini (2018) documented very strong resistances to censorship among a community of staff and students within a United States high school magazine concerning an article on rape culture. Yet other studies are cited in the **References** below, and over 200 are cited within the American Psychological Association's PsycNET data base. (Although

many studies are about self-censorship, the self is but the other of itself during censorship.)

The fact remains, however, that with all the public discourse on the newness of the murder and wounding of worshippers in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand—the perpetrator’s camera-mounted camera for real-time transmission of mayhem, online posting of a manifesto, lightening speed of social media transmission throughout the world, online ‘in jokes’ and elements of meme culture, digital trails and name-checking, much remains old. Hopefully, this won’t be censored away.

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Keywords: Censorship. Information. New Zealand. Self. Terrorism.

Abstract/Description: This article describes the essentialness of information transmission for terrorism and some psychological findings on related censorship.

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Philosophy, Philosophy of Science. Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

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