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EXORCISING OTHERNESS: A BAUDRILLARDIAN ANALYSIS OF NEW ZEALAND'S COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM COMMUNICATIONS

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New Zealand government communications about countering violent extremism and terrorism emphasise the values of "transparency". A small but growing literature on public intelligence analyses these types of communications. However, like the government publications it focuses on, this literature tends to treat transparency as an unqualified good. The French philosopher, Jean Baudrillard, problematises the idea of transparency. His work positions transparency as part of a process that reduces phenomena into concrete categories accessible to human reason. The world is rendered as integral reality, operationalised and objectified. Anything that does not fit, such as ambiguity and flux, is designated as an evil to be exorcised. This paper employs Baudrillard's theories on transparency to analyse government communications about countering violent extremism and terrorism. The primary empirical analysis is focused on one of these communications, the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service's *New Zealand's Security Threat Environment 2025* report. This demonstrates that a Baudrillardian analysis of these documents is viable and can lead to novel findings. The analysis is then extended more broadly to New Zealand government communications about countering violent extremism and terrorism. The paper concludes that transparency enables jurisdictional claims to circulate as objective facts. In turn, these facts reproduce the logic of transparency. This logic, which cannot admit ambiguity or the unknowable, expels otherness. In this way, transparency impedes the state's claimed goals of informing the public about violent extremism and terrorism. However, transparency aids the state in performing its role of doing security by deferring events.

New Zealand, public intelligence, Jean Baudrillard, transparency, counter terrorism, violent extremism

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Introduction

On 15 March 2019, New Zealand experienced a terrorist event that was live streamed in real time and transmitted around the world. In the wake of the unprecedented transparency of this terrorist event, the government began to incorporate transparency into its own communications about countering terrorism and violent extremism. Accordingly, previously secretive government agencies have begun producing intelligence documents for the public. In this article, I employ concepts from the work of French philosopher Jean Baudrillard to analyse some of these public intelligence communications. Baudrillard is critical of the concept of transparency which is often taken to be a self-evident good. I argue that, in the case of the documents I analyse, transparency renders government agency's claims for jurisdiction of the problem of terrorism and the government's ability to deter terrorist events as objective truths. These are effects of what Baudrillard calls simulation, a globalising process that works to dispel ambiguity and otherness from the world.

I begin this report by discussing some of the key literature about public intelligence and its lack of critical engagement with the concept of transparency. To respond to this gap in the literature, I turn to the work of Baudrillard. While he has written extensively about the intersections between transparency and terrorism, his theories do not appear to have been applied in the field of intelligence communications. I describe how he problematises the idea of transparency. This problematisation draws on and utilises concepts and terms that he developed over the course of his life. I describe these concepts and terms in this section.

In the next section I use Baudrillard's ideas to inform a qualitative analysis of an empirical case. I argue that transparency operates in this case to propagate a government agency's claims for jurisdiction over the problem of terrorism as objective truths. These objective truths leave no space for ambiguity or anything that cannot fit into their conceptual framework. The case in question is the New Zealand Security intelligence Service's (NZSIS) *New Zealand's Security Threat Environment 2025* report. This report is the most recent public intelligence document released by a New Zealand Government agency at the time of writing.[1] It is part of a series of reports that have elevated transparency to a moral imperative. This is demonstrated in the agency's announcement of the publication of the first report, which included a quote from their Director-General, Andrew Hampton. He stated, "being more open about national security means that as a country we can develop a greater understanding and be better placed to manage risks." Similarly in the foreword of that threat assessment, Hampton states that "being open and transparent with one another about the threats we face is one way we can have this important discussion". News media articles accompanying the report's release dutifully repeated Hampton's remarks about the greater openness and transparency that its publication represented.[2] Although this report includes sections on espionage and foreign

interference, I focus on the sections related to violent extremism and terrorism. This is because the strategy of transparency appears to have been most strongly influenced by the response to a terrorist event. However, this is not to claim that transparency's logic only operates in these sections, it is merely to avoid unnecessarily diluting the analysis.

After demonstrating that it is not only possible to apply these ideas to public intelligence communications but that they can lead to novel findings, I then extend this analysis. In this next section I look more broadly at New Zealand government communications about countering violent extremism and terrorism that followed the Christchurch Mosque shootings. This section demonstrates how these communications use a moralising frame to exclude dysfunction within the system from discussion. By moralising events caused by dysfunction, critical distance is lost and events become part of the information market. This allows the state to retrospectively deter terrorist events, preserving its own claim to authority. Transparency, especially in the form of community engagement, draws academics and the public into collaboration on this performance.

Problematising knowledge on public intelligence communications

There is a growing body of literature on the subject of "public intelligence". It focuses on "intelligence communications" that are created for the express purpose of public dissemination. Unlike other intelligence communications that may become publicly available, these documents are produced at an unclassified level.[3] This characteristic helps distinguish the literature on public intelligence from a more traditional body of intelligence literature that looks at historical analysis of declassified documents. There is not much academic literature treating public intelligence documents as case studies. It is more common for these documents to be treated as data, as one type of public intelligence artifact among many.[4] This could be explained by their production only recently becoming widespread. Consequently, older works on public intelligence focus almost exclusively on speech acts.[5]

Academic works on public intelligence generally touch on three interrelated themes. First, public intelligence is used for the purpose of demonstrating competency. Second, it builds trust. Third, it enables public, private partnerships. The theoretical component of these works tends to draw from the literature on secrecy. Not surprisingly, these studies nearly always acknowledge a tension between transparency and secrecy. However, there is limited engagement with transparency as a concept. All the literature discussed below treats it as an unquestioned good.

Kudirkaitė applies discourse analysis and the theory of securitisation to intelligence communications by the Lithuanian Intelligence Services. They conclude that intelligence agencies must use strategic communication if they want to be successful in the long term. These communications are seen as integral to the Service's efforts to build

their reputation and create an image of openness. Furthermore, they facilitate cooperation with the public. However, there is no description of this cooperation besides giving intelligence agencies the role of educating and informing the public.[6] In this conception of cooperation, agencies take on a paternalistic role. This role is legitimised by their access to secret information. This connects to Masco's claim that secrecy is a performance, deployed by political actors. These actors reference secret information to make their arguments persuasive.[7]

Vaage and Stenslie produced an article discussing the Norwegian Intelligence Service's annual threat assessment document. Vaage is a director of Operations in the NIS. The way the authors refer to the document as a "report" may lead the reader to assume that it would not be an academic treatment of the topic of public intelligence documents. Instead, we might assume that it would be an intelligence practitioner's assessment of the effectivity of the document to meet the agency's goals. However, this is no more the case than in the other literature discussed here. Arguably this says less about if the authors have academicised the topic and more about the common focus in the literature. Like many of the other articles discussed here, this one describes public intelligence in instrumental terms. Public intelligence is successful in so far as it "maintains trust for (our) service and as a mechanism for gaining external input". Trust is conceived here as being linked to "transparency".[8]

A study by Setianingrum, Gani and Wiweko is one of the rare ones to focus entirely on public intelligence documents.[9] They analyse 10 documents and synthesize 12 principles they claim are needed for making "high credibility products".[10] They also propose a governance structure to enable these public communications to balance "transparency, security, and accountability".[11] Transparency is described here as necessary for democracy. However, they also point to a potential danger when selective disclosure supports a political spin. Barnes, Robers, and Leivesley examine one public intelligence document produced by the New South Wales Crime Commission.[12] They also focus on the tension between transparency and secrecy. In this article, transparency is described as enabling the public to critique the report's findings while secrecy is vital to protecting its sources.

Despite the literature above generally portraying public intelligence's ability to counter misinformation as a benefit, some studies have been more sceptical towards it. Hayward makes the point that counter disinformation operations can threaten civil liberties. He states that 'dissidents who simply highlight inconveniently true information may be perceived as a threat from the security perspective".[13] When these inconvenient truths align with a state adversaries' interests, they may become a target of their home state's counter disinformation campaigns. This is because disinformation is so difficult to define clearly.[14] It is not hard to see how this same situation can apply to extremist activist movements. Ronn and Hartvigsen touch on the danger of security logics being passed on to the public. They claim that this is a danger when intelligence agencies engage the

public in the co-production of security. At worst this "increased responsibilization" can turn members of civil society into "security actors".[15] This co-option is presented in a more positive light by Huminski, who points to the Open-source Intelligence Community as an independent third party that can lend credibility to intelligence disclosures.[16] They do not question what it means for the supposed independence of this third party to be lending credibility to government communications.

Numerous works on public intelligence focus on the strategic logic of the actors making these disclosures. These works tend to approach this dynamic through a realist lens, looking at geopolitical competition. An extreme example of this is a study by Kearny and Huba that examines the use of intelligence disclosures as the result of a "disclosure calculus within a decision-theoretic framework".[17] A number of these studies look at the public disclosure of intelligence during the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.[18] This event has led to an 'evolutionary rather than revolutionary" development where intelligence is released to the public at a higher than previous rates.[19] These studies tend to evaluate these public disclosures based on their ability to control narratives about the war and gain public support.[20] Marleku employs comparative case analysis and document analysis to look at public intelligence artifacts. He concludes that "intelligence transparency" had a mixed success for influencing diplomatic relations and failed to deter Russian aggression. However it was "effective" at neutralising misinformation.[21] Buluc, Arcos and Ivan use a similar methodology to analyse how "intelligence was integrated into the strategic communications of the US, UK, NATO and the EU in the months preceding the Russian invasion in Ukraine".[22] These communications helped promote "the values and interests of democratic societies and international security alliances", restore the reputation of western intelligence services, and make the population resistant to disinformation. Furthermore, they were successful at building public support. The authors note the importance of transparency and the tension between it and secrecy.

Despite frequent references in the literature to the benefits of transparency, it is never interrogated as a concept. Instead, it is treated as a tool that can be used strategically to build public support for intelligence agencies and their work. Little consideration has been given to its suitability for enabling the partnerships between government and the public which the literature takes for granted. Generally, it has been presented as in tension with security. In these formulations, security is a desirable outcome, and transparency is also a desirable outcome. The challenge is described as finding a happy compromise between the two. It is taken for granted that transparency enables cooperation with the public and makes practices of security more democratic. However, we are never presented with any reason to believe that transparency has these positive effects. These works do limited work, if any, to indicate the public is better informed by public intelligence documents. Furthermore, they do nothing to support their claims that transparency enables democratic oversight of the state security apparatus.

The Transparency of Evil

The philosopher Jean Baudrillard engaged critically with the concept of transparency. His work directly challenges commonsensical assumptions that treat transparency as an unmitigated good. This has clear implications for any public intelligence communication strategy. In the section below I describe the concepts and terms most relevant to his work on the concept of transparency. Many of them are closely related and require knowledge of the specific way he uses certain words. First I describe his most well-known but often misunderstood idea, simulation, and the related concept of integral reality. I then describe his uses of the terms good and evil as well as the related ideas of misfortune and deterrence. Throughout this section, I link these ideas back to the concept of transparency. These descriptions are relatively short and only intended to give the reader enough knowledge to follow my analysis.

Baudrillard's work has a complicated relationship with the concept of reality. He describes how humans have increasingly come to live within a world of simulation. This became most apparent during the enlightenment with the popularisation of the idea that the world could be fully understood if only we apply reason and the scientific method.[23] As humans increasingly come to take these "objective" models for granted and develop further ways of understanding the world through relating these concepts to each other, we are increasingly removed from simulation's opposite, illusion.[24] Technology has accelerated the disappearance of illusion and enigma. What we live in now is increasingly an "integral reality", a sterile globalising simulacrum, or copy of the world that increasingly renders reality into an instrumental and objective form.

> Integral Reality is the perpetrating on the world of an unlimited operational project whereby everything becomes real, everything becomes visible and transparent, everything is 'liberated', everything comes to fruition and has a meaning (whereas it is in the nature of meaning that not everything has it). Whereby there is no longer anything on which there is nothing to say.[25]

Transparency ushers in a scientific, objective view of the world. However, this liberation of information conversely leads to a confusion of categories[26]. In a phrase which seemed to predict viral content on social media, Baudrillard claimed that instead of communication we have "contamination of a viral type; everything spreads from one person to another in immediate fashion".[27] Categories are likewise subject to contamination with aesthetics, economics, politics and sex infecting every sphere but diffracting into more trivial forms in the process.[28] As networks proliferate around the globe, allowing previously hidden information to contaminate new spaces, illusion and metaphor have less space. They are ultimately suppressed by the blinding light of transparency.

Baudrillard claims that the globalising project of a totally objective and instrumentalised world presents itself as the "good".[29] Likewise, anything that opposes or threatens to disrupt this scientific and predictable world, anything that maintains illusion, comes to be seen as "evil". Under the hegemony of the good, modern society has developed an overactive immune system. It has gone for so long without admitting evil that it can no longer tolerate the other.[30] According to Baudrillard, "our society is entirely dedicated to neutralizing otherness, to destroying the other as a natural point of reference in a vast flood of aseptic communication and interaction contact".[31] Transparency extirpates evil through "whitewashing", blinding the individual with so much sterile information that they are unable to see negativity.[32] Through this process, the other is reconfigured as merely "different" and joins the dizzying array of differences in circulation.[33] They are subject to the same market logic as anything else in a system of regulated exchange, their proliferation decreases their value and makes difference trivial. In other words, difference makes the other into a reconcilable similar. Furthermore, the objectification and instrumentalisation of the world represented in integral reality requires evil to be presented as misfortune.[34] This renders a moralistic effect to the event, impeding serious attempts at analysis and restricting engagement with it to feelings of sadness about shared victimhood. In the process, the event becomes like any accident, subject to the language of insurance and probability.

The intelligence of evil describes how for every advance of the "good", evil automatically responds in a way that reverses it.[35] According to Baudrillard, terrorism is one such response and this is what happened on 9/11.[36] Globalisation had spread the good across the planet, and America is its engine, supressed the other, incorporating it into a global capitalist system. Terrorists, otherwise impotent, used planes, part of the technology of globalisation to strike at America. In doing so, they created an event that the "good" could not deter or rationalise. While the system was seemingly impotent to conjure away 9/11, other events are deterred through the liberation of information enabled by transparency. Events are sent into circulation as information, removing their "singularity" in the process and making them substitutable for all other events "in the cultural information market".[37]

Baudrillard positions "Radical thought"[38] as another such strategy that can oppose the objectification of the world. Radical thought operates using the system's own internal logic to push an idea past the point of absurdity. In this way, it "constantly challenges the real to expose itself as illusion"[39] and so presents the threat of disruption. For this reason, it is represented by the system as evil.

New Zealand Security Intelligence Service's Threat Environment Report 2025

On the face of it, this report represents a public claim for jurisdiction, where a profession reveals "to the public some of its professional terminology and insights", attracting "public sympathy to its own definition of tasks and its own approach to solving them".[40] This is consistent with how the literature describes public intelligence documents being used to build an agency's credibility. However, even if this was the intent of the report, it is not the full story of what happens in an environment where transparency has liberated all information. These descriptions of "terminology and insights" become claims about reality, defined within the parameters of the agency's jurisdiction. These facts precede the phenomenon they describe and so the phenomenon naturally conforms to them. Furthermore, these claims reproduce the logic of transparency. This logic is unable to treat any challenge to a fully operationalised world as anything but evil. Its response is an attempted exorcism, removing any negativity. In this way it works to usher in integral reality, free from otherness.

From the beginning transparency is presented as enabling collaboration in addressing security problems. The report's introduction outlines its purpose, stating it is about "raising awareness so that government institutions, organisations and communities can have clear-eyed conversations on how to avoid or reduce harm".[41] This is reiterated with the statement that NZSIS wants to "work with organisations and communities" to share knowledge about the avoidance and management of harms.[42] The public is then called on to report any "concerning behaviour" including "activities related to violent extremism".

The introduction includes six key assessments, three of which relate to violent extremism. The next three sections describe different threat environments effecting New Zealand. First and most substantial, at least in terms of page count, is "New Zealand's violent extremism environment". Other sections describe foreign interference and espionage, which are beyond this article's scope. The final sections include a glossary of commonly used terms, before ending with another call for the public to report national security concerns.

Throughout the report, the radical is presented as a kind of evil. We first see this operation in the definition of violent extremism which focuses not on the presence of violence but on a supposed desire for "radical" change. Here, violent extremism is defined as "the use of or justification of violence to achieve radical political, social, or religious change".[43] This initially sounds reasonable due to the reference to violence. Afterall, most people would probably agree that violence is an unacceptable way to pursue political change. However, the way the definition is written, it is the presence of the radical as opposed to the presence of violence that is the problem. The use of violence to achieve non-radical "political, social, or religious change" is excluded.

The exclusion of violence used to achieve non-radical "political, social, or religious change" is a problem for a couple of reasons. It means that state sanctioned paramilitaries that might use terrorism to protect the status quo from an out group, would not qualify as violent extremists. Although it hardly seems likely that we would see these kinds of groups in New Zealand, it is not impossible that violent extremists in New Zealand could be motivated by state sanctioned violent extremists overseas. In fact, there are indications that this is already happening, according to claims about "far-right Indian Nationalist groups" operating in New Zealand.[44] It seems unnecessary to adopt a conceptual framework that excludes these violent extremists, when their inclusion would not weaken the analysis.

The exclusion of non-radical violence also precludes any accusation that state actors, including NZ state actors, could conceivably act or be motivated in a similar way to violent extremists. This serves to other violent extremists as something totally separate from the agencies that counter them, preventing any kind of self-reflection, possibility of common ground or culpability. A potentially counterproductive endeavour, if we consider claims that terrorists and counter terrorists constitute themselves relationally, and the ways their mimetic violence arises out of this relation.[45] It also precludes the possibility that counter terrorist action can create terrorists. Kilcullen's term "accidental guerrilisation", describes this situation, where individuals mobilise to violence after witnessing security forces victimising their associates. [46]

So why is it that, despite these drawbacks, the definition prioritises the presence of the "radical" instead of the presence of violence? Afterall, "radical political, social, or religious change" is not inherently a threat to life. Very few radicals are violent and not every person who carries out a terrorist attack holds radical beliefs.[47]

Radical thought and terrorism are not just related in the sense that a small number of radicals may be terrorists. They both present the system with the challenge of reversal. Radical thought in this way, operates like terrorism, it takes things that have been operationalised by the good and pushes them past their logical limit. In this way, radicals accelerate politics, religion and supposedly self-evident truths past the point of absurdity. This allows for a radical reversal that disrupts transparency and returns ambiguity and mystery to the world. It is this radical reversal that is evil, not violence on its own. In this instance transparency makes it apparent how the NZSIS's definitions merely reproduce the system's own logic.

Radicalisation is never directly defined. This stands out because there are multiple, often contradictory ways to interpret the term.[48] Instead, the lack of definition allows it to take on whatever shape the report needs it to. Even if we are to look at the concept at a high level, ignoring the specific mechanisms of how it functions, the reader is still left

wondering if the writers are talking about cognitive radicalisation, behavioural radicalisation,[49] or an indivisible blending of the two.[50] The closest we have to a description in the report is the context it is presented in, "radicalisation to violence".[51]

The way radicalisation is used in the report reduces the messy complexity of the multitude of drives affecting action into one term. It is used to meet transparency's dictate that every phenomenon is made knowable and predictable. Furthermore, it brings multiple processes within the agency's area of expertise. The only time it tries to reflect the ambiguity and flux of an individual's participation in a violent extremist movement is with the statement that "no one pathway to violence is the same".[52] However, not only does it collapse these multiple pathways into the term radicalisation, but it also presupposes that they end in violence. In this way, transparency removes the other, replacing the ambiguity and flux with fixed categories. Contrast this with Horgan's argument that the adoption of both violent extremist beliefs and action can follow a countless variety of pathways and processes.[53] His argument is that the plurality of these processes makes it impossible to generalise, but this is not an argument acceptable to the logic of transparency.

Transparency transforms tools used by analysts into objective accounts which precede the supposed reality they are supposed to explain. This can be seen in the way the term "vulnerabilities" is used in the report. An analyst may employ a list of vulnerabilities which they compare to what information is known about the person. This may highlight questions that need to be answered to better understand risks the person may present. It also helps prioritise their case versus others. However, these lists are typically treated as heuristic devices. They are not a literal description of the totality of drives that motivate a person. It is certainly not a prediction.[54] In other words, it makes sense as a tool when it is used by a security professional doing security in concert with other tools and with knowledge about their limitations. However, when this tool is liberated by transparency, it enters circulation. No longer a tool that operates in a dialogue with others, it has become an objective model of how the world operates. This is a case of the map preceding the territory.[55] The phenomenon now has no choice but to conform to the tools used to measure it.

The political nature of violent extremism presents a problem for the NZSIS's jurisdictional claim because the agency presents itself as politically neutral.[56] The report solves this by treating violent extremism as part of a general problem of criminality. It attributes this problem to youth and vulnerabilities that have reportedly been observed in New Zealand's violent extremist cohort. These vulnerabilities "increase the likelihood of an individual taking part in anti-social behaviours, such as criminal offending, drug dependence and violent extremism". There certainly are similarities between common indicators of threat attributed to mass killers and terrorists.[57] However, regardless of how the state defines terrorism as a criminal act, it does not appear to justify deemphasising the political element and attributing the problem to youth and vulnerability.

Terrorist organisations may begin life as legitimate political parties which adopt terrorism as a strategy when they are unable to achieve their political goals.[58] They may also identify themselves as activists, not criminals, regardless of the material benefit. For example, hunger strikers in Northern Ireland were so committed to being labelled as politically motivated, not criminal, that they starved themselves to death in protest.[59]

As evil always shows through transparency, the political dimension of violent extremism is visible though the mechanism of its exorcism. The report states that common vulnerabilities to radicalisation include "unstable socio-economic status, poor mental health, developmental trauma and low emotional maturity". The first of these problems is clearly political but there is no reason not to see the others as at least partially connected. Mental health issues for example seem to proliferate in the neoliberal mode of capitalist society.[60] This would indicate violent extremists have firsthand experience of political failures. In that case, the political dimension may be relevant, especially for agencies or community groups trying to disengage them from violent extremism.

New Zealand's foreign policy and its contribution to the good, the globalising force of objectification, is explicitly removed from consideration. The reader is assured that "NZSIS analysts look closely at how overseas events impact our threat environment", which gives authority to the statement "global events have less of a direct impact in New Zealand than elsewhere".[61] However, foreign policy and global events would seem to be relevant considering New Zealand's close relationship to the United States. Research has found a strong corelation between military action in a state and terrorist attacks at home from that state's affiliates.[62] Despite the United States' propensity for military adventurism, it is largely insulated from terrorist responses due to massive spending on domestic security. New Zealand is not so well insulated. The New Lynn supermarket attack by a supposed refugee and self-reported ISIS supporter would seem to be evidence that global events do have some relevance.[63]

Presenting the problem as one of criminality, not politics, is one of the many ways the report conjures away the other. This limits the report's ability to describe involvement in violent extremism. It is generally presented as either culminating in a violent act or leading nowhere in particular. The only exception to this is that "support for online extremism" in the "online environment can still be harmful if [it] involves promoting, creating, or disseminating violent extremist content".[64] This stops short of explaining that violent extremist movements include a variety of actors who take on numerous roles. For example, Dyer and Simcox divided members of terrorist groups into active participants, aspirants, facilitators, trained aspirants and ideologues.[65] Another study by Horgan, Shortland and Abbasciano divided individuals into actors, supporters and facilitators.[66] Even New Zealand law includes offences that relate to roles within a violent extremist movement besides directly carrying out a terrorist act, such as for example financing terrorism.[67]

The report attempts to divide violent extremists into four categories, an endeavour that is both in the service of transparency and made impossible by it. While the world made transparent requires the objectification of all things, the confusion of categories caused by transparency's liberation of information impedes this. This is an automatic effect of the intelligence of evil, which reverses the good. The categories used in the report are Faith motivated Violent Extremism (FMVE), Identity Motivated Violent Extremism (IMVE), Politically Motivated Violent Extremism (PMVE) and Mixed Unstable and Unclear (MUU).[68] These terms are confusing and lack explanatory power demonstrated by the fact that they can be used to potentially describe the same individual or group. Looking at Al Qaeda for example, are not their self-reported motivations stemming from their religious identity enough to qualify them as IMVE? Is not their targeting of political regimes in the Middle East and the Western nations that support them politically motivated? Does the average Al Qaeda recruit's typical lack of knowledge of religious doctrine[69] make them ambiguous enough to qualify as MUU? Clearly, these labels are not meant to aid security professionals in understanding the beliefs of violent extremists. The limits of their utility for this purpose are demonstrated by the fact that they require a category that describes this mixing and confusing of categories, MUU. The only reason they appear to explain anything at all is because they are employed from the outset when analysing a violent extremist. Once again there is no alternative but for the phenomenon to conform to the tool used to measure it.

Just what is included in MUU, demonstrates that the actual meaning of the scientific sounding language the report used is dictated by the NZSIS's jurisdictional claims. MUU presents the possibility that individuals involved in other types of mass violence are part of the violent extremist threat environment. These types of violent attackers are mostly indistinguishable from violent extremists regarding the indicators commonly used to identify them.[70] This is reflected in FBI publications emphasising behaviour, not belief. They cover school shooters, violent extremists and public mass killers.[71] However, these appear to be outside the agency's jurisdiction so despite the imprecise use of the concept making way for their inclusion, they are effectively treated as if they do not exist.

These ideological labels are constructed in such a way as to remove the other. They exist to "avoid securitisation and stigmatisation".[72] In other words, they work to protect a community that lacks the immune system to engage with otherness except in a form free from negativity. Otherness becomes reconcilable through its reduction to difference, to a state of being merely similar. One of the key assessments even assures the reader that "no one ideology currently stands out as presenting a greater threat".[73] Despite the multiple categories supposedly presenting a more particularistic way for looking at the ways violent extremism is expressed, the report is quick to assure the reader that in fact all violent extremism is created equal. There is also no acknowledgement that violent extremist ideologies contain a significant amount of material that does not

relate to violence. Therefore, individuals who find inspiration in this material may not even believe that violence is justifiable in New Zealand or that they must be the one to carry it out.[74]

The removal of the other is aided by a total avoidance of the possibility that liberal capitalist societies like New Zealand may have an ideology. In part this is achieved by never defining the term. Like radicalisation, ideology has many definitions. The term could describe a belief system based on doctrine, or on an imagined community, or as the Marxist tradition has it, "a false consciousness".[75] In this situation, ideology is something associated with a threat and everyone else is rendered identical under the banner of liberal tolerance. Facing up to one's own ideology is not an easy task. As Zizek describes it, it requires the subject to adopt a specific lens to see that they are even in ideology to begin with.[76] However, any serious engagement with the problem of ideologically motivated violence requires one to have the integrity to do so, to engage with the problem with the minimum of bias.

The report employs a distinction between the "online world" and the "real world", which accomplishes two things. First, this juxtaposition acts as a sleight of hand to make the reader think that a fully rationalised and instrumentalised world exists. Second it establishes a domain that the NZSIS has a professional claim to. We are told that in the online world isolated, vulnerable individuals encounter content that contributes to their radicalisation. In addition, we are told that users often use anonymity to "separate their online and real lives".[77] Both these statements assume a separation between real life and online which seems unconvincing in an age where the merging of the "virtual" and the "real" is commonplace.

Both the online world and the supposed real world of objective scientific reality are part of simulation. In other words, they are the same world. The online is merely another globalising technology that is collapsing distance, increasing the speed of communication and exhibiting transparency to an alarming degree. This last point is demonstrated by the report's claim that users are exposed to violence and extremist content online. This content, shared by supposedly clandestine actors is exposed by the light of transparency to "vulnerable" users. In this way it is hardly different from the so-called real world where every inch of the planet is being exposed through scientific apparatuses and subjected to valuation through the logic of the market.

The NZSIS undertakes discovery work in both spaces. However, the report describes the specific expertise their analysts have when operating in the online space. Couple this with the government's attempts to censor the internet of violent extremist material and New Zealand's laws which attempt to limit who can view it, and we can see that this is a domain the NZSIS is making a professional claim to.

New Zealand Government Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism Communications

The analysis above has demonstrated that applying Baudrillard's theories to a public intelligence document is both a viable proposition and capable of producing novel findings. In this section, I extend the analysis to the government's counter terrorism communications strategy after the Christchurch Mosque shootings. I argue that transparency rendered this event into a whitewash of information. In the process, it was reduced to an objective phenomenon that could be understood and deterred by the state's existing security apparatus. Again, we see transparency exorcising negativity in favour of an objectified, integral reality.

On March 15, 2019, an Australian national carried out a mass shooting at two mosques in Christchurch. He became the first person to be charged under New Zealand's Terrorism Suppression Act. The state was confronted with an atrocity by a clandestine actor gaining almost unprecedented visibility. This was enabled by the very technology and logic of the transparent, global society. That which was previously hidden was now streamed in real time[78] on the world's most subscribed social media platform.[79] Shortly before the attack, he had released a manifesto which, along with the live stream, was distributed around the world by internet users.

The initial response was a whitewash of information that removed the otherness of the attacker while invoking the image of the victim to reconfigure the event as shared misfortune. New Zealand media outlets alone put 749 articles focusing on the event into print in the first three months.[80] They almost uniformly followed the Prime Minister's lead in refusing to use the attacker's name and focused instead on the victims.[81] This rendered a moral dimension onto the event, removing the distance that would have been required for an analysis. In a further attempt to deter the event, which had already happened, the classifications office quickly ruled the attacker's manifesto and the livestream video as objectionable.[82] This meant that anyone in New Zealand who wanted to watch or read these publications had to pay a fee.[83] Payment was not a guarantee that access would be granted, the applicant also had to provide a reason that was acceptable to the classifications office. The alternative is a charge for possession of objectionable material, likely resulting in substantial fines or imprisonment.[84] Expert knowledge from academics, and potentially security professionals, which may have provided alternative ways of understanding the event, was impeded by these requirements.

Counterintuitively, transparency governed these moves to restrict access to the manifesto and video. Instead of expert knowledge attempting to problematise the state and the terrorist's respective framings of the event, the information market was drowned in simplistic mass media accounts. The result was a whitewash of information. Media was far less affected by the rules around classification than expert opinion was. Their role as supposed fourth estate meant they had a readymade reason for an exemption to be

granted, one that had long precedent. Furthermore, a fee is less of an issue for a media agency that is going to use the information to make money. The result is that non-experts in the form of the media, provided extensive coverage of the event including brief engagement with elements of both the live stream and the manifesto. Classification of the manifesto and video thus did not lead to their disappearing, they instead proliferated widely in fragments, a whitewash of noise regurgitated by non-experts alongside their usual coverage of sporting and celebrity news. Readers were informed of these publications existence but were also subjected to a bewildering array of sterile information about what they meant.

The "otherness" of the victims was a casualty of transparency's need to remove evil. New Zealand's liberal multicultural ideology treats "the other" as just another difference that can be subject to regulated exchange with other differences. We can see this in the way the Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's statements emphasised that the victims of the attack "are us".[85] Ardern emphasised this by wearing a headscarf in some of her public appearances. These communications had the dual effect of suppressing the irreconcilability of "the other" while allowing the state to share in their victimhood. The terrorist event was moralised as a shared misfortune for which the difference of the victims became the reference point. The good thus gained an alibi for any culpability it may have had in this event. Despite these efforts, evil still shone through. Wearing the headscarf, Ardern managed to reference both the controversy around the way Muslim women dress through choice or compulsion and the controversy among Islamic scholars about whether women can be leaders.[86] This performance appeared to deter tensions between Islamic practice and liberal democracy, and tensions within the Islamic community itself. However, this came at the expense of otherness.

In August 2020, the state released its account of the Mosque shootings which formalised how transparency would operate to deter not just future violent extremist attacks but the event that had already happened. Transparency is expressed as a moral value in the recommendations section which explains the goal is to enable "information sharing, public engagement and scrutiny" and "enhance transparency."[87] The report is hosted online, propagated by the technology of globalisation around the world to any interested party with an internet connection. At the same time, it strips the event of negativity, its ambiguity. The commission achieved this by suppressing almost all information about the event that was used in the report.[88] They justified this by claiming that they had thoroughly investigated it and everything relevant was in the RCOI. Any artifacts related to the event that threatened its objectification, that threatened attempts to make it knowable were conjured away. The reader was expected to take this on trust despite the commission's lack of credentials related to terrorism.[89] In fact their lack of knowledge about terrorism and violent extremism may have been what let them believe their own simplistic explanations. Regardless, they fulfilled transparency's moral requirements of propagating information and removing negativity.

As with Ardern's statement that "they are us" the report focuses on the victimhood of all of New Zealand society at the hands of an evil that came from outside the system. This renders the event as a moral effect for readers to share in feeling bad about, instead of an event with "antecedents and consequences" which can be subjected to analysis.[90] For this reason, although the report briefly acknowledges the limited capability and capacity of New Zealand's security state, its recommendations do not include building this capability. Instead, they focus on various ways to increase transparency, such as through "social cohesion, inclusion and diversity" which were not part of the commission's "original work plan". [91] The New Zealand government's authority in the area of counter terrorism, which stems from its ability to deter terrorist events, is not subjected to serious analysis. Instead, the Mosque attacks are retrospectively deterred by being reduced into the language of misfortune. This allows them to enter the same market of information exchange as every other deterred event. Ultimately this meant they could be exorcised with a series of cash payouts.

The culpability of the technology of transparency which enables the global society of the good was removed from consideration. The report reproduced the Mosque attackers claims that YouTube videos were his primary source of "information and inspiration" for his attack.[92] It also points to violent extremist material such as the Oslo attacker's manifesto that was found on his devices. The analysis of his social ties is limited to his violent and unstable childhood and social isolation as an adult.[93] Conveniently this puts less of an onus on social media companies. It suggests that it is merely sufficient for them to remove violent extremist material, rather than the alternative, that social networks themselves are a major part of the problem. This reasoning also supports the classifications office's censorship activities as an effective strategy of deterrence. Despite the "context" section of the report stating that "radicalisation" is generally considered to be a group activity the "assessment of the individual and the terrorist attack" section emphasises that he operated as a "lone actor". [94] Contradicting the commission's findings, although ironically consistent with its description of radicalisation, research by Wilson and Dziwulski asserts interactions between the Mosque attacker and likeminded individuals.[95]

One of the RCOI's recommendations would enlist academics in reducing terrorist events to the moral language of misfortune. This recommendation called for the creation of He Whenua Taurikura, "New Zealand's National Centre of Research Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism". Originally this was conceived as a panel where "relevant central and local government agencies, communities, civil society, the private sector and researchers create opportunities to build relationships and share understanding of countering violent extremism and terrorism".[96] Like the RCOI, the governing board of He Whenua Taurikura did not include anyone with a background in terrorism studies or violent extremism.[97] Consistent with the RCOI's treatment of terrorism as misfortune and shift from analysis to shared victimhood,

the description of the centre on DPMC's website emphasises its focus on "diversity" and "social cohesion". According to Victoria University of Wellington, which handled administration of the centre, it "amplified the voices of communities and groups that have experienced violence, bigotry and harm".[98] Researchers had been granted a bit role in deterring terrorist events by reducing them to the moral language of misfortune. However, the Christchurch Mosque shootings appeared to have been well and truly exorcised by 2024, and the centre's funding was ended.

He Whenua Taurikura held an annual Hui which was even shorter lived then the centre's research funding. From the start, these hui exposed the incompatibility between transparency and allowing "the other" to have a voice. The first hui in 2021 was marked by the walkout of members of the Muslim community led by the Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand chairperson, Abdur Razzaq. This walkout was in protest a claim by a Jewish Council representative, Juliet Moses, that leaders in New Zealand lacked consistency because they failed to condemn a supposed "Hezbollah rally" held in Auckland in 2018. Razzaq stated that Moses' claims had been to promote "securitization of Islam" and that her remarks were "divisive".[99] His remarks point to the tightrope community engagement had to balance. Different actors carried out securitising acts, designating political movements as an existential threat. Many of these actors belonged to minority communities with ties to countries suffering ethnic and political strife. These ties had a bearing on what they saw as a threat and inevitably this came to include violent extremist movements that claimed to represent a group that was also present in New Zealand. This risked forcing participants in these hui to engage with the subject of violent extremism and terrorism in a way that was outside the scope transparency sets on the discussion. Violent extremism shone through transparency as dysfunction created within the system, as contradictions inherent in liberal multiculturalism.

Transparency's inability to tolerate the other was demonstrated again with the cancellation of the final hui. The 2023 hui was initially postponed due to fears that Israel's operations in Gaza would cause conflict at the Hui. This demonstrated the security services belief that tensions overseas could translate into community tensions in New Zealand. When it became clear that the conflict in Gaza was only going to escalate, the hui was cancelled by Rebecca Kitteridge, then chief executive of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.[100] Considering the foreword she wrote for "Know the Signs" extolled the value of working together to combat violent extremist threats, it was interesting that even this cancellation was unilateral. In other words, working together only extended so far as community groups could fit within the security service's agenda. When otherness threatened to make the world more enigmatic, the state responded with deterrence.

A wider ranging attempt to co-opt the public in making the world transparent is the "Know the Signs" document published by the NZSIS in 2022. Unlike the threat environment reports, "Know the Signs" creation is not stipulated in the RCOI and was produced under a different director general. However, there are themes common to both.

Like in the RCOI, security is described as a collaborative effort involving all of society, "NZSIS cannot do this work alone. We all have a role to play in keeping each other safe".[101] The public's role is clearly outlined, "I am asking all New Zealanders to look out for concerning behaviours or activities that could be easily observed, and to report them." The public is to take on a prevention role, detecting threats before they end in violence. This requires the public to be educated on what the NZSIS sees as indicators of threats. In this manner, they are instructed to reproduce the agency's interpretation of these phenomena and regurgitate it back to the agency. They are enlisted in transparency's project to make sure everything is subjected to the light of transparency and incorporated into integral reality.

Conclusion

Since the Christchurch Mosque shootings, transparency has been elevated to a moral value and invoked in most government communications about violent extremism and terrorism. However, despite the promise that transparency would enable public engagement, it is not immediately clear where this public engagement is happening. The involvement of community and academic input in countering terrorism and violent extremism appears to have run its course. Besides the public sending the NZSIS and their partners in police information about leads there appears to be little in the way of exchange. Nor does there appear to be a greater understanding of the phenomenon of violent extremism in New Zealand. Public intelligence documents reveal an uncritical engagement with simplistic and haphazardly employed labels that describe multiple, complex phenomena.

Using Baudrillard to help analyse public intelligence documents can bring us closer to understanding why transparency has not delivered on its promises. Baudrillard presents a novel method for analysing the operation of transparency. While transparency is often taken for granted as a self-evident good by the literature on public intelligence, he problematises it as part of a process that is working towards the objectification of the world. This process destroys anything that cannot be made knowable. Applying his theories to public intelligence communications demonstrates the potential for his work to contribute to the literature. Furthermore, this application demonstrates the contribution that theory can make to New Zealand counter terrorism literature. While much of New Zealand counter terrorism literature is concerned with describing the how of the phenomenon, theory can help refocus the field on questions of why.

Transparency enables jurisdictional claims to be rendered as objective truths. However, these jurisdictional claims are made within the logic of the system that transparency is an operation of. This system is incapable of admitting negativity. Therefore, reproducing the system's logic entails exorcising otherness. Transparency is thus incompatible with the state's supposed goals of aiding the public in understanding violent extremists or enabling community engagement.

Extending this analysis to government counter terrorism and counter violent extremism communications gave further support for these claims. It also demonstrated the way the system confounds evil and misfortune. This allowed the security state to protect the legitimacy it derives from deferring terrorist events. In this way we can see that although transparency makes the government's self-reported goals impossible, there are clear reasons that it will continue with this strategy.

The analysis in this article was limited to the sections of the NZSIS threat environment report that focus on violent extremism. Substantial sections of the report focus on the NZSIS's more traditional remit, espionage and foreign interference. These sections are certainly worthy of analysis and would create a fuller picture of the operation of transparency in the report. The coverage of government public intelligence communications could also be extended to non-governmental organisations that were involved in the response to the Christchurch Mosque shootings. Furthermore, there is potential to apply it to the communications of other five eyes partners for a comparative analysis.

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