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REVIEW ESSAY

Just war, psychology and terrorism

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Just war, psychology and terrorism, edited by R. Roberts, Ross-on-Wye, UK, PCCS Books, 2007, 272 pp., £18.00 (paperback), ISBN 9781898059929

*Our enemies make nerve gas. So will we. They squander their wealth on armaments. So will we. They spy on their own citizens. So will we. They prevent their people from knowing what they do. So will we. We will not let our enemies impose their evil ways on us. We'll do it for them*¹.

Just war, Psychology and Terrorism provides an interesting view of the 'War on Terror'. The book declares its biases right from the beginning with 'unacknowledgments' to George Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Tony Blair 'who have, in their own ways, done so much to make this book possible'.

Just war, Psychology and Terrorism (for the purposes of this essay *JWP&T*) examines effects of the War on Terror in such countries as Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon, where already hundreds of thousands have been killed and millions displaced. It looks at the direct victims of this US-led war in Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and Bagram, but also beyond, to the 60 countries which Amnesty International has identified as changing laws to increase tolerance of torture post-11 September 2001, and to a global climate where anything is permissible in defence of 'freedom'. This includes shootings of an agitated bipolar patient who was feeling claustrophobic in an airplane, a Brazilian chased in the London Underground, and Sikh gas station attendants targeted in the United States for wearing turbans – all collateral damage in the state of heightened anxiety due to the War on Terror.

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45 The chapters are a collection of essays, by primarily British academic
 psychologists, but also clinicians and international relations specialists, on
 topics that progress from organizational psychology's complicity in torture,
 to human rights frameworks addressing the War, to analysing Bush and
 Blair's language, to the history of antiwar activism and lessons for the
 50 future.

Psychology and torture

55 The story begins in the Cold War era with the 'de-patterning' treatments of
 Dr Ewen Cameron, a member of the Nuremberg Tribunal, President of the
 US and Canadian Psychiatric Associations and first Chair of the World
 Psychiatric Association. With funding from the Central Intelligence
 Agency's front group, the Society for Investigative Human Ecology, using
 methods which can only be described as torture, such as soundproofing,
 60 isolation, low constant noise, recordings of 'My mother hates me', drug-
 induced coma and electro-convulsive-therapy (ECT), these experimental
 treatments were performed on people with relatively minor mental illnesses
 with no informed consent. Though these activities took place at the Allan
 Memorial part of McGill University, where I did my Family Medicine
 65 residency, the University archives contain no mention of this part of
 Dr Cameron's professional life.

The CIA took Cameron's 'de-patterning' work to the field with a
 California doctor, Lloyd Cotter, at Bien Hoa mental hospital north of
 Saigon. Cotter coerced patients to volunteer to work in the fields in Viet
 70 Cong territory, threatening food withdrawal or ECT for lack of cooper-
 ation, publishing his findings in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*². As
 Stanley Milgram found in 1974 in an attempt to understand Nazi behaviour,
 there is no shortage of people willing to be complicit in torture, with
 responsibility removed when they are just 'following orders'³.

75 The book then moves on to Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib (Saddam's
 crimes are also not neglected). The chief psychologist, Col. Morgan Banks,
 of the US military's Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE)
 programme which trained military personnel in the art of surviving
 captivity, became a leader of the Behavioral Science Consultation Teams
 80 (1) (BSCTs or 'Biscuit') at Guantanamo and Bagram and later on, of the
 American Psychological Association's Task Force on Psychological Ethics
 and National Security (PENS). The Task Force report concluded that 'it is
 consistent with the APA Ethics Code for psychologists to serve in
 consultative roles to interrogation and information-gathering processes for
 national security-related purposes.' Its leader, Gerald Koocher, asserted that
 85 'psychologists are in a unique position to assist in ensuring that these
 processes are safe and ethical for all participants'. But this claim that the

presence of psychologists mitigates torture is highly questionable and one that the APA and the American Medical Association do not share, both concluding that it is unethical to participate in such interrogations. Human Rights First claimed that the SERE training interrogation led to the death of Iraqi Major General Abed Hamed Mowhoush. 90

The direct participation of mental health services in the War on Terror has included the abrogation of confidentiality, client therapist records being used to assist in interrogation, and coaching in torture techniques. Historically it appears that the complicity of the psychological profession is much more than of the psychiatric. The authors speculate that psychologists hide behind a myth of scientific neutrality and have no equivalent to the Hippocratic Oath. Both the British Psychological Society and the APA appear to have reacted late to allegations of complicity in abuse, advising members to use their own judgment, rather than strictly prohibiting elements of torture (p. 213). The APA also does not ask its members to adhere to international law and only briefly touches on the issue of dual loyalty of members of the military. 95 100 105

Ian Robbins, head of the Traumatic Stress Service at St. George's Hospital, London, who met United Kingdom citizens detained at Guantanamo, provides a clinician's perspective of the health consequences of detention for both prisoners and families, who displayed symptoms of depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and even psychosis. Authorities at Guantanamo demonstrated a grotesquely distorted perception of mental health, viewing attempted suicides merely as 'manipulative self injurious behaviour'. The patients are seen as 'mad' so their complaints can therefore be systematically ignored, but instead they are forced to take antidepressant medication. Michel Foucault predicted such abuses by the state, and the Soviet gulags practised this with abandon⁴. 110 115

The Ticking Time Bomb

But are such methods necessary or even helpful, in the age of terror after 9/11? Brutal methods are justified by the 'ticking time bomb scenario', often romanticized in film. For this to be helpful is premised on several rarely present criteria (p. 30) including: 120

that the person captured has key information, that those arresting know when the bomb is going to go off, that the person is captured just before, that the interrogators know a lot about the plot but are missing a few crucial details, that the interrogators know this person has the information, that the interrogators will be able to verify the information. 125

Whether prisoners will possess such high-level information years after being caught seems highly doubtful, and no evidence pointing to this has 130

been released. Other utilitarian problems are raised (p. 30); a utilitarian argument for torture is premised on several psychological assumptions that:

- the *animal instinct* for self preservation will encourage people to tell the truth to stop the pain;
- there is *cognitive failure*, and the stress of torture interferes with the ability to lie or deceive;
- *data processing* allows loads of information to be gathered from lots of prisoners and is usefully filtered;
- *rogue interrogation*, that brutal interrogation services such as those of the French in Algeria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq leads to more security through fear.

In a review of intelligence information (p. 32), while the CIA claimed to have gained good information through torture, the Federal Bureau of Investigation questioned the validity of this assertion, finding only one possible instance where this might be true; for the information found was either not useful or had been previously obtained, without torture. *JWP&T* suggests that torture decreases the legitimacy of the torturer in the eyes of those tortured, leading to an increased will to resist, and in the friends, colleagues, relatives and compatriots of those tortured, who may then be driven to oppose the torturer; and it even undermines the spirit of the torturer's society, with many perceiving their own system as being less just and legitimate for the use of torture.

Governments and reality, truth and consequences

There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know⁵.

The US Administration, full of people who avoided fighting in Vietnam, suddenly transformed into 'deciders' after 11 September 2001. Though policies and explicit instructions emanating from the White House created a climate of impunity for torture, once evidence of abuse was revealed, members of the Administration hid behind a diffusion of responsibility, attributing blame to a few lower level bad apples, and no resignations ensued. As with the famous New York City case of Kitty Genovese⁶, where dozens of witnesses to a brutal murder failed to call the police, a culture emerged in the US Administration that allowed a lack of individual accountability.

Psychology has been used not just to facilitate torture but to sell a war. Hill and Knowlton, the public relations firm, whose propaganda for Big

Tobacco might have been responsible for addicting and killing thousands, also coached the 15-year-old daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to lie before Congress about seeing Iraqi troops throwing babies out of incubators⁷, in order to sell the first Gulf War. Rather than being prosecuted for abetting such falsehoods the firm only saw business value increase. 180

But governments have since learned to do their own PR work or contract it out. The Rendon Group, a public relations firm that had previously contracted with the Department of Defence and the CIA in overseas propaganda efforts, manufactured war heroes: Jessica Lynch in 'Saving Private Lynch' and 'Pat Tillman: Football star turned war hero'. Contrary to accepting such accolades, and thereby burying the crimes of others, Private Lynch and the Tillman family became real heroes, showing honour in helping to set the record straight⁸. 185 190

In December 2001 five per cent of Americans held Saddam responsible for 9/11 but a year later in December 2002, over half felt he must be responsible. In Britain 'dodgy dossiers' about Iraqi possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) appear to have precipitated the suicide of one honest scientist, David Kelly, uncomfortable with official spin. Selective evidence, lies and half truths from Cueball, Chalabi and the Iraqi National Council (INC) were used to foster an impression of WMDs, which, in September 2006, the US Senate declared was patently untrue. Not only did no-one accept personal responsibility nor was anyone held accountable, in fact the Administration chose to pursue those who told the truth to the extent of directly compromising national security by 'outing' the CIA spouse of one whistleblower. Such lies challenge the legitimacy in government risking a backlash that may threaten democracy. Conspiracy theories abound, so that 36 per cent of Americans believe that it was very likely or somewhat likely that there was inside government complicity allowing the 9/11 attacks to take place. 195 200 205

Sleepwalking to totalitarianism

They hate our freedoms, our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other⁹. 210

Fear is what allows governments to exert control. 'Instead of delivering dreams, politicians now promise to protect us from nightmares' (p. 196). The war speeches of Tony Blair and George Bush are examined using 'relational psychology', concepts that may only be accessible to the specialist. The simple messages in the speeches for lay people are the 'us vs them', 'good vs evil', 'win or lose', 'only one option', 'the last resort, as our enemy has exhausted our infinite patience'. 215

Sometimes, as in pre World War II Italy, Spain and Germany, the march into totalitarianism may be in wilful ignorance, an intentional desire not to 220

know. The Patriot Act has widened the use of wire-tapping on phone calls and emails, allowed the FBI to pull records from libraries and bookstores and defined terrorism to include direct non-violent action by protesters. In Britain surveillance has skyrocketed, with ubiquitous CCTV collecting massive amounts of video data to be mined, filtered and acted upon.

The media does not need to be gagged or embedded; it remains compliant. It is now concentrated in the hands of six big media companies in the US (AOL Time Warner, the Walt Disney Company, Bertelsmann AG, Viacom, News Corporation and Vivendi Universal), who control 75 to 80 per cent of the media Americans are exposed to.

Meanwhile in an effort to lower political costs, the US government externalized services, outsourcing to private contractors for security and building infrastructure. Blackwater USA, Kellogg Brown Root, Halliburton, DynCorps, Bechtel, Triple Canopy, Erinsy and ArmorGroup, form a shadow army in Iraq of 200,000, larger than the militaries of most nations, costing billions and without accountability to legislative control. These companies can sign up bargain basement mercenaries from other countries. Chile, which opposed the invasion and refuses to participate in present efforts, discovers more of its citizens as private contractors in Iraq than the number of soldiers provided by almost all countries sent with the Coalition of the Willing.

Xenophobia is on the rise, with suspicion of all foreigners paving the way for the mass internment without charge of several thousand foreign nationals. *The Observer* estimated in 2004 that 3,000 people may have been held in secret CIA and allied torture chambers in the Middle East (p. 26). Through the witness of the German Khaled al-Masri, the Canadian Maher Arar, the British Tipton three – all incidentally released without charge after months or years of imprisonment and torture – we can see the Kafkaesque scenario with no charges, no court, no voice, no existence; most detainees appear to have little information and may have been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The Geneva Conventions and the Convention on the Rights of the Child mean nothing to those removing legal protections such as the accused rights to *habeus corpus* – to know charges and evidence, to be allowed visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross, to have lawyers, to have lawyer-client privilege protected, and open trials without secret or hearsay evidence – are all considered quaint antiquated notions.

It is only through the acquiescence and complicity of scholars, professors, universities and legislators that such abuses can take place. In this undeclared war with no goal posts or finishing line, universities consider

③ free speech of little value. Whether some people merely support detention without trial or the use of material obtained under torture, extraordinary rendition of citizens of US allies to secret camps or the use of private contractors to evade Geneva Conventions, we all lessen ourselves in this

battle. Eventually as with Winston Smith in Orwell's *1984*, we will be cowed into 'learned helplessness', and finally will learn to love Big Brother.

Self-deception

We in the West have a basic belief in our goodness. Many in the UK and US seem blissfully unaware of the impact of their foreign policy decisions in the recent past: the nurturing of extremist movements such as the Mujahadin in Afghanistan, the friendship of the Bush family with the Saudi leadership including the Bin Ladens, the support for Saddam while he was gassing Kurds, or current unquestioning support of Israel and dictatorships from Pakistan and Uzbekistan to Jordan and Egypt. The large blind spot extends to overlooking, explaining, excusing and justifying the attempted overthrowing of democratically elected leadership in many countries, most recently in Venezuela, Haiti and Palestine. The US is the only country to have been convicted by the World Court of state terrorism, for the mining of Nicaragua's harbours. September 11th for Chileans represents the US-assisted coup in 1973 that ultimately killed ten times those killed in 9/11. Invasions become pre-emptive defensive manoeuvres. The US, with no recent history of war on its soil, sanctimoniously tells the French and those who failed to participate in the Coalition that they are 'cheese-eating surrender monkeys.' The term, originally from *The Simpsons* TV cartoon, was popularized by National Review columnist Jonah Goldberg and then widely cited by the Freedom Fries consuming the US right wing¹⁰.

Implications for the peace movement

The nuclear protests of the 1980s saw a cultural cohesion of membership organizations, with personal connections, sense of common purpose or threat, and geographic symbols; however new challenges exist today. New Labour marginalized many of those who were opposed to wars and nuclear weapons and who supported human rights; they co-opted or silenced others, continuing many Conservative policies with a facial makeover.

The peace movement has had difficulty making its messages simple and clear. Serbians who were part of the anti-Kosovo war coalition have often sat out current protests against wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. John Sloboda and Brian Doherty in *JWP&T* speculate that Muslim opponents of current wars may similarly not see common purpose with future anti-war efforts. They also warn of problems with moral equivalency, which may deny a reality that sometimes, as in Bosnia, there is a primary victim and an aggressor whose tactics and goals are illegitimate. Approaching the Warsaw ghetto uprising as a clash between two ethnic groups fighting each other, and encouraging peace-building measures to reduce mutual prejudice

between ethnic Germans and Jews, would have been highly inappropriate to say the least.

We in the peace movement must propose realistic alternative approaches to the war on terror. Whether academics believe that aggression may have been an adaptive part of natural selection in the past, in the era of weapons of mass destruction, it is certainly maladaptive. We should not accept a different playing field where perfection is expected only from us, where we are blamed for each terrorist death. Soft, peaceful, law-based, international collaborative approaches must be measured against the hundreds of thousands of innocents who are dying in the War on Terror, the billions of dollars wasted and the loss of individual liberty and physical security, and the increase in terror. One study suggests that the Iraq war has generated a global seven-fold increase in the yearly rate of fatal jihadist attacks, comparing the period 9/11 up to the invasion with three years after the invasion and excluding the Arab-Israel conflict¹¹.

Terror

Which brings us back to how we define terrorism. We can:

- take a legal approach such as ‘non-state actor employing violence for political ends’;
- look at what terror seeks to instil in a population (the original definition as in the Jacobin Reign of Terror): the atomic bomb on Hiroshima similarly had less a military goal than one meant to convince the Japanese to give up;
- or examine tactics, whoever the actor, but these often gain acceptance over time if successful: Henry V’s use of the longbow at Agincourt, gunpowder, and Germany’s V-1 and V-2 missiles, were all initially regarded as ‘terror weapons’. The Oxford English Dictionary says that a terrorist is someone who ‘attempts to further his views by a system of coercive intimidation’. Roberts et al. feel that the term ‘terrorism’ has a political rhetorical effect but might best be replaced by ‘politically motivated violence’ (p. 205), state or non-state. This would force us to confront legitimacy of political objectives along with tactics such as the use of napalm in Vietnam or white phosphorus in Iraq, the mining of Nicaraguan harbours, or threatening the use of nuclear weapons.

We should not allow ourselves to be silenced by US right-wing commentators who appropriate the memory of 9/11. Searching for roots of terrorism or suicide bombing in language or culture is not, in itself, racist. For jihadists, 80 years of humiliation on the occupation of the land of Islam, Kashmir, Chechnya, Iraq, Palestine is part of the same attack on the

ummah. But as the 9/11 victims' families of Peaceful Tomorrows insisted, considering our own role in changing the risk of events is also not illegitimate, and does not play into the hands of terrorists. Historical experience of violation, deficits in education or in meeting basic needs, and loss of hope for the future all play a role in increasing the risk of terrorism. Understanding that suicide bombing became a social phenomenon only in the last decade and that Islam during the period of the Crusades and for many years after was a much more peaceful and tolerant religion than Christianity leads us to move beyond facile explanations of religion or cultural clash as the reason for terrorism. 355 360

The book may be criticized for a British orientation, being somewhat dogmatic with occasional over-the-top rhetoric. A better understanding of Peace Studies definitions could have enhanced the volume. Overall, though, I found *JWP&T* an interesting collection, coherent, well organized, with redundancy kept to a minimum. 365

Notes on contributor

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