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The tyrannical silence surrounding The Tyranny of Silence

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In last Sunday's *Toronto Sun*, columnist Alan Shanoff wrote a "J'accuse" of sorts. In a piece entitled "[The silence is deafening](#)," Shanoff accuses the Canadian media of all but ignoring *The Tyranny of Silence*, the book written by Flemming Rose, the *Jyllands-Posten* editor who commissioned those now-infamous cartoons of Islam's founder. As Shanoff points out:

“Although the book was published in November, 2014, there has been silence from most Canadian media sources on it.

“There have been no references to the book, for example, in the four Toronto daily newspapers until my column, today.”

Shanoff further observes that the cartoon have appeared in a Canadian publication exactly once - when Ezra Levant printed them in *The Western Standard*. (Shanoff doesn't mention that the 'toons appearance in the now defunct magazine led to two "human rights" complaints and Levant's two-year-long persecution/prosecution at the hands of the Alberta Human Rights Commission.)

Since the book, an account of Rose's experiences pre-and-post publication of the cartoons, "isn't anti-Muslim," Shanoff wants to know why it has been so steadfastly ignored. What's behind the apparent "self-censorship?" he asks.

Asks - and then answers:

“I suspect we are ignoring the book because we are fearful of what might happen if it receives mainstream media attention and because we don't like the author.

“We blame him for the publication of the Danish cartoons and the events that followed.”

That's absurd of course. Blaming Rose for what happened is wrong and ignoring his book encourages censorship.

Actually, I don't think "blaming Rose" has much to do with it. I think the reason the book is being ignored is because it's a hot potato - kryptonite, even - that no one in Canada wants to touch. And the reason no one wants to touch it is obvious - it's because they don't want to have to deal with the potentially volatile, not to mention deadly, consequences of acknowledging it. Which is to say that they don't want to be put in a position of perhaps "offending" the wrong sorts of people and eliciting their wrath in a *Jyllands-Posten/Charlie Hebdo* sort of way.

And lest you think Canada's media are the only cowards, think again. A scan of the Toronto Public Library site reveals that Rose's book is not in the library catalogue. (If, however, you want to read, say, Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, [there are 14 copies available](#). You may have to wait a bit, though, because, as of this writing, there are nine holds on it.)

But surely you can buy a copy at the Chapters/Indigo book chain, Canada's largest? Well, no. You won't find *The Tyranny of Silence* on any store shelves. And if you want to buy a copy of the book on the Chapters online site, there too you'd be plum out of luck; while [the website offers the e-book for download](#), no copies of the paper version are available. (You *can* pick up physical book, the kind made of paper, [on the Amazon.ca site](#) - so kudos to it.)

Aside from fear, what's behind this ongoing tyranny of silence? Appropriately enough, Rose tackles it in his book. [In conversation with Rose last fall](#), Jonathan Rauch of the Brookings Institution and himself an expert on subject of free speech (or the lack thereof) as author of *Kindly Inquisitors: The New Attacks on Free Thought*, read a quotation from Rose's book. The tyranny of silence, goes the line, occurs in...

"...a society in which grievance fundamentalism is consistently practiced; where nothing meaningful can be uttered since any speech of any sort may potentially be characterized as offensive to some person or group."

What a perfect characterization of Canada, no? Especially of a Canada post-Levant/Maclean's magazine "human rights" prosecution where, even though there's no more Section 13, the now-rescinded censorship provision of Canada's human rights legislation, but where writers and media outlets self-censor anyway. And where revered novelist Michael Ondaatje, withdraws from a PEN event honouring *Charlie Hebdo* because he, too, does not want to offend, and doesn't want to reward those who do.

Oh, and here's the kicker. Flemming Rose's account of his ordeal, brave as it is, has one glaring omission, as Alan Shannoff observes: "Ironically, it doesn't contain any cartoons or illustrations that set off the wave of protests and violence..."

Ironically, Shanoff thinks that's a good thing, because it shows that the book isn't "anti-Muslim." I however think that – ironically - it's another indication that "the tyranny of silence" is alive and well, even in places where it shouldn't - and where you'd least expect it to - be.

