

IN TIMES OF TERROR

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Last year I witnessed a terrorist attack on police officers on a trip to France. With this project, I set out to deepen my relationship with this topic in a cathartic way, as I believe it is an important step in recovery. I found comfort in releasing some of my pent up angst, and was able to talk openly about my experience for the first time in over a year.

Having a base understanding of the motivations and justifications surrounding terrorism was key to getting through a traumatic experience, and I used a new form of art to push myself further. Animation allowed me to move freely between thoughts and ideas, without being restrained to any tangible size or shape. This animation is an extension of my research; it explores the dynamic between violence and peace, replacing guns with balloons and knives with flowers. I am personally intrigued by stories that embody two starkly contrasting ideas, so I brought this concept into my animation.

I wanted to feel a sense of resolution at the conclusion of my video, even though this topic isn't solved. My research was very broad, so when I was finally able to create the art, I used a more light-hearted expression as a tool for personal growth.

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What are preliminary steps that we can take to prevent terrorism? I would like to address terrorism prevention and the effect terrorism has on bystanders. I am interested in combining two starkly contrasting ideas, so I decided to use poetry as a way to represent something grim.

1. Found Poetry

*Paris Shootout Leaves Police Officer and Gunman Dead (NY TIMES)*¹

Gunman wielding assault rifle
killed a police officer
on the city's most iconic boulevard
stirring worst fears of a terrorist attack.

Gunman was shot
dead
as he tried to flee on foot,

two other police officers and a bystander were [physically] wounded.
Police quickly blocked access
as a helicopter hovered overhead.

Near midnight,
[the nation decided]
that the attack appeared to be an act of
terrorism. The Islamic State
claimed responsibility.

“My thoughts are with the family of the police who were
killed
and with those close to the
wounded.”
Denis [reported] that people had sought
refuge in his restaurant.

“They [we] were scared.
They [we] didn't know what to do,
or when it would end,
some of them [we] were in shock, others [we] were crying.”

Counterterrorism experts believed
the Islamic State's claim was credible.
The speed with which the group claimed *responsibility*
was surprising.
“It seemed prepared and coordinated,
like they knew this was going to happen.”

¹ Rubin, Alissa J., et al. “Paris Shootout Leaves Police Officer and Gunman Dead.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 20 Apr. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/04/20/world/europe/paris-champs-elysees-shooting.html.

President Trump responded,
[dismissed]
“it looks like another terrorist attack.
And what can you say?
it just never [never] ends.”

2. A Short Story

Paris, France
April 20, 2017

I sat on the cold linoleum floor of the H&M subconsciously sipping the provided water. The plastic cup tasted of disguised comfort. An employee's curls bounced playfully as she attempted to suck the anxiety out of the crowd, but her hands shook with fear. She wasn't much older than I was at the time, maybe just out of high school. She didn't have any more information than we did. No school field trip should end with gunshots.

A slender man dressed in designer denim and sparkly leather shoes carried shopping bags worth more than both of my plane tickets. He told elaborate stories of his modeling career in Italy and explained in broken French that he was only in Paris for the night. Champs-Élysées seemed like the perfect place for this man to be. A young girl sat with only cheap floral dresses and fluorescent lights to keep her company. A buff man held an upset baby to his chest, singing French lullabies in attempt to reassure himself. We all felt like the baby.

The moment the two gunshots went off, I remember my frozen body, a statue of cold, anxious, brick. I stood for a few seconds before Maddie grabbed my arm and knocked some sense into my petrified form. My body realized that we needed to get the hell out of there before my mind did. Her nails dug into my skin as our legs lured us down the stairs and into a crowd of unsatisfied hearts and lungs. I could feel my blood pulsing through my veins underneath my skin and my unappreciated muscles. My eyes, darting lasers on my face, forced me to be hyper aware of the screaming and stampeding.

We didn't know whether there were more weapons or if the shooter was dead. We didn't know who he was with and if there were more of them coming. We didn't know why he had opened fire or where he got an AK-47. We didn't know if we were safe or if we should be worried. For hours, we sat waiting for information. It was the first time that I had ever truly feared for my life.

When my parents texted me from the other side of the ocean, I felt a distant comfort. I pictured them sitting around the fireplace leaning up against Grama's antique sofa. I asked them if they knew what was going on, and I told them I loved them. They searched for recent news articles from Champs Elysees and found that the active shooter was shot down by a police officer. When they said he was dead, I was relieved. I had never wanted a person dead before. Very soon after the attack, ISIS claimed responsibility and we waited for the area to be cleared before we were let out. We were in that store for hours and hours before anyone told us what was happening.

Now, I flinch at loud noises and I'm more aware of my surroundings. Last Thanksgiving, I was sitting at the dining table, ready for my mashed potatoes when my dad

popped the cork of a champagne bottle. Anytime I am attacked with loud noises, I am brought back to the night I feared my life. I jump and I'm startled and my body freezes up. So that night, I left the room, angry that I couldn't handle a holiday, a celebration. My mom followed me out because she knew. I hard-cried into her body for a minute or two while she told me that I was safe and there was no need to be upset with myself. It had been seven months since the incident, so I believed that I should be over it.

A few weeks ago, my friends and I watched a movie with a lot of violence in it and the gunshots made me cry. I was able to tell them why, and they understood that it wasn't something I should keep inside.

Yesterday, I was sitting in the common room of our dorm when a friend dropped a hardcover book on the floor. Something as small as a book can trigger me for hours or even days at a time. On April 20, 2018 it will have been a year since the shooting. Sometimes I think that I am too sensitive and I need to get past it. Sometimes I see myself as weak. Sometimes I still trap my thoughts inside me, but I am stronger than I was a year ago. Even when something horrifying happens, there is always something good that comes out of it. For me, my connection with myself is more powerful, because it has to be. I know when I need to be alone and process a current event or why something triggered me, and I know when I need support.

3. Introduction to Research

I have a personal relationship with this topic because about a year ago I witnessed an attack on police officers on a school trip to Europe. As I embark on this journey, I would like to create a clear definition of terrorism, including what I consider it to consist of and what it means to be a terrorist. There are hundreds of different sources that vaguely define the word, but I would like to have a more specific understanding as it relates to my personal background.

The society we live in constantly faces unnecessary violence. The news is riddled with shootings and bombings and organized crime, so I decided to use my personal experience as a witness to guide my research further and greater understand the different aspects of terrorism. However, I am less interested in the actual events, as they can be triggering, and more interested in prevention and awareness.

Unfortunately, it is common for people to justify acts of terrorism because it is a way of coping with these events. In order to try to understand the problem, people often sympathize with the terrorists. Instead of sympathizing, we should try to assess the motives that they are basing their justifications on. I would like to evaluate the root causes to see if there are any significant changes we can make in preventing further attacks. In my opinion, justifying terrorism and violence can be detrimental; the act of justifying something is the opposite of what is necessary to fix the problem. In order to understand different preventative methods, the objectives of the terrorists need to be considered. Why is terrorism appealing to vulnerable individuals? Who is the target audience?

This brings up an important issue, who does terrorism affect? It affects me daily. It probably affects the girl sitting to your left and the man sitting across from you, who may have witnessed terrorism as bystanders. It also affects innocent people because they are recruited through means including social media. It is scary to think that there is a specific

target audience. How do we counter this mass recruitment of legitimate, hardworking people that just feel the need to fit in?

Awareness is key when it comes to funding terrorism. There are people making 2000% profit selling fake handbags online, which comes with very little risk and low penalty according to Alastair Gray.² Believe it or not, the fake designer purse that you see on the street might be causing an attack on your city. This is a concept that made me feel oblivious, and I think it needs to be known. What can we do as consumers?

As a young adult, I would like to be more conscious of the causes and effects of terrorism because it has affected me so severely. I think that by understanding the background, I will have a more meaningful connection to the topic that will bring me closer to comfort. One should never be comfortable with something as appalling as terrorism, but there is a satisfaction in being educated.

4. Research

It is difficult to define such a broad topic that isn't universally agreed upon, but it is necessary that there is a consensus about the definition of terrorism. According to the US Code of Federal Regulations, terrorism is, "the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives."³ What image comes to mind when you think of terrorism? I see bloody violence, oppression, and discrimination. From my perspective, terrorism is a violent means of communication that is about intimidation.

In Louise Richardson's book, *What Terrorists Want*, she highlights seven characteristics that form terrorism. She argues that terrorism has to be politically inspired, involve violence, send a message, have a symbolic significance, is not run by states, the victim and audience are different, and civilians are targeted.⁴ From Richardson's perspective, if terrorism is not politically inspired then it is just a crime. Violence is a key part of terrorism that frames the act; an act of peace is not included under this definition, even if it is politically inspired and civilians are targeted. Suicide bombers are not trying to defeat or show the enemy up; they are just trying to send a strong message that proves their point. It is easiest to send a message if the victims have symbolic significance. Richardson wrote, "Bin Laden referred to the Twin Towers as 'icons' of America's 'military and economic power.' The shock value of the act is enormously enhanced by the symbolism of the target." She goes on to say that the psychological impact is often worse than the physical act. An attack is most alarming if it is planned so that the victims have a significance beyond "innocence."

A more controversial point that Richardson makes is "terrorism is the act of substate groups, not states." This is hard to accept because there are often states that use terrorism as

² Alastair Gray is a trained counterfeit investigator. His job is to police the internet in search of counterfeits, rip-offs, and brand abuse.

³ "Terrorism 2002/2005." *FBI*, FBI, 21 May 2010, www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/terrorism-2002-2005.

⁴ Richardson, Louise. *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Terrorist Threat*. Random House, 2007.

a way to deal with other nations.⁵ The sixth characteristic that she believes is important in defining terrorism is that the audience of the act is different from the victims. This means that the victims are often chosen at random, or are already part of a selected larger group of people and individual targets are not specifically chosen. The victims are there to be used to influence others and as a fear factor. The most important characteristic that makes up terrorism is that terrorists ‘deliberately target civilians.’⁶ All seven of these concepts need to apply to an attack, so if one of the categories doesn’t apply to a crime, it is not terrorism.

I believe that terrorism can be effective in creating a terrified population, but is that really all they want? No. When a terrorist group instills fear on a group of people, their goal is to scare the government into changing a policy. In order to say that terrorism is effective, you would have to prove that the terrorist who committed the crime achieved what s/he wanted. This also infers that there was no other means of getting what they desired in the first place, which has never been proven. In most cases, it is reasonable to assume that terrorists could acquire the same effect by petitioning or executing other peaceful acts.

Millions of people around the world are directly affected by terrorism. Whether you were in the wrong place at the wrong time, or you knew someone who was recruited, it can truly change your life. I was interested in finding people who had a close relationship with terrorism and were willing to share their story when I came across Zak Ebrahim’s TED Talk. He is an author and advocate for victims of terrorism as he grew up in a family of extremists. His father was a terrorist, so he dealt with discrimination and constant judgement in his household. Instead of going to play baseball in the park, his father would take him to target practice at a shooting range. He recalls being disturbed when his father’s friends joked, “like father, like son” when Zak hit the target. He said, “They thought they saw in me the same destruction that my father was capable of.” I cannot imagine getting away from that lifestyle, but Zak did it. He broke away from his father after an unstable childhood full of bullying and moving from place to place.

How did Zak turn his life around? He was lucky. He was one of the few that was able to break out of his father’s box, and figure out his own key values. Meeting people of different cultures and faiths was fundamental to his character development, and he decided for himself that it was important to accept people for their differences. A big step for him and his mother was when she said, “I’m tired of hating people.” Zak realized how much it affected her negatively; it was not healthy for either of them to be involved in the extremist lifestyle. Now, Zak is using his experience as a child to constantly stand up for the victims of terrorism.⁷ Stories like these prove there is hope in preventing or countering terrorism.

In researching terrorism and the effects it has on different people and populations, I came across stories of recruitment. One of the most important ways to combat the abundant attacks on civilians is to figure out how to stop these organizations from growing. Honestly, it’s easy to think that all terrorists struggle with mental illnesses, but this just isn’t the case. According to different researchers, there are certain mindsets that recruiters target. There is

⁵ Richardson calls these states ‘substate actors’ for the purpose of analyzing terrorism in this text.

⁶ Richardson, Louise. *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Terrorist Threat*. Random House, 2007.

⁷ Ebrahim, Zak. “I Am the Son of a Terrorist. Here's How I Chose Peace.” *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading*, www.ted.com/talks/zak_ebrahim_i_am_the_son_of_a_terrorist_here_s_how_i_chose_peace

no specific profile, despite the stereotypes, so people from all different backgrounds join extremist groups. Erin Marie Saltman⁸ claims that people who struggle with alienation and isolation are often vulnerable or desperate enough that they don't think they have any other choice. Often, they believe that their "in-group" is under attack and larger powers aren't doing anything to stop it. Saltman explains that people often "take a complicated world and simplify it into good vs. evil." This way, it is easier to cope with difficult events that they experience.

Another aspect Saltman addresses is pull factors.⁹ She considers belonging, spiritual purpose, and empowerment to be the key factors to be aware of.¹⁰ People are drawn to these groups because they need a sense of brotherhood/sisterhood; there are a lot of cases where it is easiest and the most reliable to go along with the not-so-great beliefs in order to receive the positive parts. On the other hand, some people require something specific to rely on, most likely religious beliefs. A spiritual purpose gives them this power, but it often leads to violence that isn't necessarily brought up in the preliminary stages of recruitment. Another pull factor that Saltman mentions is empowerment and the idea that you will become a hero by joining this group. Obviously, it is important to feel a sense of power and belonging, but they don't tell you what really happens once you've joined the organization.

Terrorist groups who use these pull factors are now hitting even more audiences using social media. These online sites have created a safe place for recruiting people peacefully; it is easy to get people involved through positive posts that make terrorists look like they are normal people who lead normal lives. They aren't just in need of fighters, but now they need architects, engineers, accountants, hackers, etc. According to the *Global News*, recruitment on social media is a problem in Canada. "Using social media as a recruitment tool is not a new method for ISIS. In 2015, experts estimated more than 20,000 foreigners were fighting with or supporting ISIS in Iraq and Syria – and more than 4,000 of those had come from Europe, the U.S. and Canada."¹¹ This online propaganda is dangerous because these sites are updated so rapidly and can reach such a huge population without much work.

Who are these targeted populations? We are often tempted to dismiss these terrorists as "crazy" people or psychopaths, in fact, Louise Richardson has gathered evidence to show that this isn't the case. She wrote, "We often think of terrorists as crazies....But terrorists, by and large, are not insane at all....There are, of course, psychopaths to be found in many terrorist groups, as in many organizations in which violence is sanctioned. But there are not nearly as many psychopaths in terrorist groups as one might imagine. Most organizations

⁸ Dr. Erin Marie Saltman works to develop new innovative ways to counter terrorism. She completed her PhD in Political Science and went on to participate in a number of conferences and events around the world to continue the fight against terrorism.

⁹ Pull factors are the benefits that are presented as reasons to join an organization. These factors "pull" vulnerable individuals to join a certain extremist group because they show the positive aspects of the job. Often, terrorist propaganda is riddled with pull factors so that there are more people willing to join.

¹⁰ Saltman, Erin Marie. "How Young People Join Violent Extremist Groups -- and How to Stop Them." *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading*, www.ted.com/talks/erin_marie_saltman_how_young_people_join_violent_extremist_groups_and_how_to_stop_them.

¹¹ Bogart, Nicole. "ISIS Is Still Trying to Recruit Canadians on Social Media, CSIS Warns." *Global News*, 2 Mar. 2017, globalnews.ca/news/3280939/isis-recruiting-canadians-online-csis-warns/.

consider them a liability and quite deliberately try to select them out.”¹² This is intriguing, as we often refer to these people as crazy monsters without understanding the thought that goes into the recruitment process. After learning that these organizations have specific and rigid guidelines about a member’s mental state, I wondered about suicide bombers. Personally, I have always thought that they were desperate psychopaths, but I was struck by Richardson’s book *What Terrorists Want*. She wrote, “In killing themselves in order to kill others, suicide terrorists are behaving in a way that is entirely consistent with the behavior of soldiers throughout the ages. Military historians long ago convinced us that what drove young men over the trenches and out of the foxholes was fierce loyalty to their small band of brothers.” Richardson goes on to explain that suicide bombers are not acting as individuals, but as a loyal part of a team. A suicide bombing isn’t carried out with just one man; it takes about ten others to support one attack.¹³ Richardson also points out the similarities between any military and a terrorist group. She talks about the dedication that each individual has, and how they expect to be honored because of their achievements. “Public squares everywhere are filled with monuments to those who have been victorious in battle. Suicide terrorists seek honors like these, and their handlers make sure they get them.” Understanding that suicide bombers and terrorists are not crazy people will help us develop ways to prevent further recruitment.

Another step in preventing further recruitment is better understanding who is being targeted. In Muhammad Ali’s TED Talk, he mentions the link between unemployment and recruitment, and how much more vulnerable young urban populations can be. This is because they are often stuck with no money or means of making a living, so they are forced to do whatever they can. He refers to waitthood¹⁴ as a gateway to terrorism because it is a perfect time to seek people out. So, what are ways to prevent this from happening?

Ali believes that the first step to eradicating terrorism is to inspire young people.¹⁵ In teaching people that there is hope, there will be a bigger community of people that are immune to the pressure to fit into a certain box. He trusts that if people learn to make their own livings, they are less likely to cave into the pressure of recruitment. When he talks about entrepreneurship as one of the most powerful tools against waitthood, I believe him. By starting your own business, you are proving that there is nothing holding you back, that there is hope. If people were educated to be innovative, and bring to the table whatever their town was lacking, there would be a much smaller pool of lost young people. Seeds of Peace is an example of an organization that is developing ways to create leaders who feel like they have power. "In the face of some of the most intractable conflicts, Seeds of Peace gives rise to new generations of leaders uniquely positioned to accelerate the social, economic, and

¹² Richardson, Louise. *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Terrorist Threat*. Random House, 2007.

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ Waitthood is a term that means ‘waiting for adulthood.’ It is a way of referring to the time between school and having the ability to support yourself. For many people, it is a time of vulnerability because there is little hope of finding a decent job that they can make a living off of. Unfortunately, this is the time when young people are most likely to become extremists because they lack hope, and believe that it is the only way that they can make a life for themselves.

¹⁵ Ali, Muhammad. “The Link between Unemployment and Terrorism.” *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading*, www.ted.com/talks/mohamed_ali_the_link_between_unemployment_and_terrorism.

political changes essential for peace.”¹⁶ This organization has made an impact on thousands of young people who feel the need to initiate a new train of thought. We need to create more organizations like this that are willing to teach young people to problem solve in positive ways.

If the government isn't worried about the emotional problems that terrorism creates, another reason to fight terrorism is the economy. The economic impact of terrorism can be detrimental to society. According to economics consultant Sean Ross, the top five ways that terrorism impacts the economy are “direct economic destruction, increased uncertainty in the markets, insurance, trade, tourism, and FDI, a war in the health of the state and increased national and foreign skepticism.”¹⁷ Beyond the obvious destruction of buildings and property, terrorism creates uncertainty. The majority of the human race relies on certainty, especially in the marketing world. Sean Ross, who studies global economics contends, “Even if you do not live anywhere near terrorist attacks, you might still be negatively impacted indirectly. This is because all kinds of markets hate uncertainty, and terrorism creates a lot of it. The financial markets literally shut down after Sept. 11, and did not really recover until months after the 2003 invasion of Iraq.”¹⁸ Clearly, terrorism has more than just personal implications, it can also damage our economy.

Another way we can fight terrorism is as consumers. Terrorists rely on us for their funding. The scariest information I came across that involves consumers is something that makes me feel absolutely oblivious. I like to think that I'm pretty aware of the deep dark depths of the clothing/fashion/textile industry, but I came across something that I doubt most people know. A 2007 article in the New York Times reported that a 500 billion dollar global trade in counterfeit goods was funding terrorism. Buying fake bags like Prada or Gucci has been linked back to terrorist events like the Madrid Train Bombing of 2004.¹⁹ Alastair Gray, an Online Brand Protection Manager, also supports that fake handbags fund terrorism. He has the expertise to back this up, as he is a counterfeit investigator who has come across multiple companies selling fakes. This is disturbing because he is able to prove that buying a fake designer handbag on your street could affect you personally without you knowing it. Imagine buying something, thinking you were just saving money, only to witness an attack on your city. Basically, specific groups use the sales that they make from the fakes to buy ammunition and weapons. These are then used for attacks, so there is a direct correlation between the consumer and the attack. People often think of buying fakes as a victimless crime, but Alastair Gray exposed the truth.²⁰ As consumers we need to take charge and use our power as just one more way to fight terrorism.

¹⁶ “Seeds.” *Seeds of Peace*, www.seedsofpeace.org/seeds/.

¹⁷ Ross, Sean. “How Terrorism Damages the Global Economy.” *Investopedia*, Investopedia, 19 Aug. 2016, www.investopedia.com/articles/markets/080216/top-5-ways-terrorism-impacts-economy.asp.

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ “Counterfeit Goods Are Linked to Terror Groups - Business - International Herald Tribune.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 12 Feb. 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/02/12/business/worldbusiness/12iht-fake.4569452.html.

²⁰ Gray, Alastair. “How Fake Handbags Fund Terrorism and Organized Crime.” *TED: Ideas Worth Spreading*, www.ted.com/talks/alastair_gray_how_fake_handbags_fund_terrorism_and_organized_crime.

5. Conclusion

This research started as a way to cope with my experience in Paris. Like so many people, I believed that terrorists were just “crazy” people, but I have learned otherwise. They are just people looking for a purpose in life; they are trained as soldiers and will fight for their team. After my experience with terrorism, I also felt helpless and powerless against it. I now understand that there are simple steps that we can all take to make a difference. We can start by educating consumers against buying counterfeit goods, and we can push to support and fund more organizations that give young people a purpose and skills against vulnerability. Educational organizations can protect future people from becoming recruited. President Trump said, “And what can you say? It just never ends,” when referring to terrorism. My research has proved that we can all play a role in ending it.

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