

# The terrorist within

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A number of experts in terrorist studies have claimed that post September 11 we have witnessed a new era of security policy, legislation and practice internationally (e.g. Haymann, 2003). At least three new facts drive these policies. Terrorists are no longer seen to be acting alone. The attribution of the New York attacks to a single organization (Al Qaeda) told us that terrorist powerful networks do exist. These are not mere cells in random places, but well-funded, highly organized entities that can stand up against some of the world's most powerful nations (including the US). In fact, most of the times, these well-organized entities appear to be one step ahead of national and internationally intelligence. Second, the use of weapons of mass destruction is possible including nuclear and biological weapons. If they can be obtained, then there is no guarantee that they will not be used. Third, terrorism as an act cannot be confined by time, place or nation.

Before I advance this short paper, I must make two disclaimers. First, I have been a long standing student of restorative justice; an ethos that is founded in the belief that there is good in everyone and that in the pursuit of justice, all parties in conflict can play a role in restoring the harm that was done (Gavrielides, 2007; 2015). Prompted by 'International Restorative Justice Week', in November 2015, I wrote a blog<sup>1</sup> asking: "If restorative justice (as an ethos, a value and yes ... as an international ideology) has the potential to bring out the best of us, help us reconcile and empower the weak, then how can people like me regain their belief in it, following events such as those in Paris two days ago?" A number of fellow researchers tried to restore my lost faith only to have it questioned again on 22 March 2016 as I was watching the multiple bombings in Brussels.

The second disclaimer relates to two personal experiences. In fact, someone would call 'odd coincidences'. The first happened in 2005 when I was fortunate to have taken the train that was followed by the one that was bombed in Kings Cross. With minutes' difference from each other, I arrived at work completely oblivious of what

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theogavrielides.com/#!/Black-International-Restorative-Justice-Week-2015/c1ywn/564897180cf2708e001b9ad0> (accessed April 2016)

happened to the train before me. The second coincidence took place just a few months ago when I was due to travel to Brussels and stay at the hotel above the train station that was bombed. The travel (which in the end was cancelled the day before it was due) related to a meeting that was organized by the European Commission with the aim of informing their restorative justice policies on terrorism.

So, I do not write without passion. However, I do want to believe that I write with truthfulness and evidence. As I questioned the limits of restorative justice, I asked myself who is the real terrorist in the attacks that I so fortunately escaped. I also asked whether a restorative justice encounter can ever be possible for restoring terrorist acts. In Paris' case, the "offenders" chose death and thus their mere absence made restorative justice void. But how about their families? And what is restorative justice if not just an encounter and a diversionary method for the criminal justice system? In fact, Bueno quotes a good number of examples in Colombia, where terrorists have been able (and willing) to meet the children or family members of their victims (2013). This was also the case in the Spanish-Basque conflict (Rodriquez, 2013). Follow up research told us that the healing effect of these meetings was significant and that the affected communities were able to ask questions, understand and restore what they could.

I cannot imagine a world where our sense of justice is measured by how many offenders we incarcerate or indeed how many terrorists we punish and kill. Thinking of my own fear and two coincidences, I understand that priority for public security can overrule a restorative justice response. But the many examples whereby communities came together to heal through a restorative ethos reassured me that we are not an international society of punishment and control. In fact, it reminded me Walgrave's maximalist (and romantic) vision of restorative justice. He said: "the pursuit of restorative justice is grounded in a social-ethical vision that focuses on the quality of social life. Furthering the quality of social life is possible through three ethical guidelines (or virtues) for members of the community: respect, solidarity and active responsibility (Walgrave, 2008: 79– 99).

The truth is that our communities will apply restorative justice whether our governments chose to endorse or fund it. For example, in the case of Paris, the French government was swift by declaring a "war on terror" and by putting a ban on public gathering. And yet, what followed was unprecedented. On 11 January 2016, thousands of people from France, Europe and internationally gathered to march against what they saw as a "war on liberties". Their slogan "Je suis Charlie" showed that there is solidarity and indeed a shared feeling of community and ownership in what happened. It is true that this demonstration did not involve any encounter between victims and offenders and yet its impetus goes at the core of restorative

justice. It focused on the positive values of the affected communities and on what binds these communities together irrespective of faith, nationality and economic interests. One could even call this attempt 'a ritual'. Follow up interviews with the killers' relatives (and other members of the Muslim community) showed that they have found this ritual to be the most inclusive and constructive act that made them feel part of the solution and no longer the enemy. "The accent was on what unites and not on what divides. We now go a step further and wonder whether a policy inspired by restorative social ethics could contribute to a decrease in terrorism" (Walgrave, 2016).

The Paris demonstration reminded me that the forgotten victim in all terrorist attacks is the community and with it our humanity. But there is no effort to heal this victim who in fact get re-victimised by the follow up "get tough" policies. Every time there is a new terrorist attack, the immediate reaction of politicians, criminal justice agents and the media is to declare war against the terrorists and call for special meetings to toughen up immigration rules, security policies and protocols. Only they forget that 'war' by definition should have a time and geographical limit. Terrorism does not understand these barriers. Over the last years, new anti-terrorism legislation and executive measures have been introduced in almost all Western states in the hope of meeting enhanced security obligations. Special powers have been handed over to the executive and *ad hoc* procedures have been introduced with the belief that these will increase effectiveness and reduce the risk of terror. However, while doing so a number of human rights and civil liberties were put in danger or on hold until the 'crisis is resolved'. This crisis has been live for 15 years and following the recent terrorist attacks in Europe, it is exacerbated.

James Madison once said: "Perhaps it is a universal truth that the loss of liberty at home is to be charged to provisions against danger, real or pretended from abroad" (Letter of James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, May 13 1798). How true these words sound when considering for example the anti-terrorism legislation in the UK. The Terrorism Act 2000 and the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 have exposed the British government to a number of criticisms mainly coming from international NGOs such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other national human rights groups such as Justice and Liberty (Justice 2003; Liberty 2001; Watch 2001).

The road that we have taken is leading international society to becoming more polarised than ever, while the "them" (criminals - terrorists) and "us" (victims) rhetoric dominates political speeches and media presentations (Gavrielides, 2015b). And I have to ask: what will it take for society to finally raise the mirror of responsibility and look well into its reflection?

Every time I look into this mirror, I see nothing but myself and a thousand of other fellow citizens. We are the real architects of the social fabric that generates the extremist ideologies, which then gradually corrupt universal values such as tolerance and the respect of life, dignity and brotherhood. The extremist ideology that leads those young men, men and women to act inhumane is not an alien virus of unknown origin. It is a product of our way of living.

Sharing responsibility and the ability to look inside also made me ask whether a public debate and a restorative dialogue for responsibility-taking and reconciliation might indeed be more fruitful than yet another "war on terror" that could take more freedoms away from every-day people including those who are most vulnerable such as those in hospitals, care homes, foster care and yes ... prisons. As I try to visualize a terrorist, I see no face. If I try harder, then I see the terrorist within.

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