

GRAYZONE PROJECT

Violences - Letter From Nice: The West Is Learning All the Wrong Lessons From the Latest Atrocity

Saturday 16 July 2016, by [KHALIDI Ismail](#) (Date first published: 15 July 2016).

What we witnessed in Nice was harrowing, and the response only adds to the tragedy.

Nice erupted into chaos Thursday evening after a lorry driven through Bastille Day crowds killed and wounded hundreds of onlookers. Visiting family and friends in Nice for the week, I had ventured out with them to see the fireworks, finding ourselves at the time of the attack about 800 meters from the scene of the carnage.

What we witnessed blocks away in the moments after the attack was harrowing, as a flood of people rushed away from the Promenade des Anglais. Police had yelled at revelers along the seafront to run, causing scenes reminiscent of a Hollywood disaster film. At one point we saw a man jettison his kids over a high fence and then follow them over the barrier in search of safety. Unfortunately this was no movie, nor was it a crowd-induced stampede as we and others thought it might be at the time. In fact, one of the defining factors of the evening for the thousands of people who ran for fear of an ongoing attack, was that no one (apart from those directly at the scene) seemed to know what was going on.

In the 30 minutes it took us to cut through the old city of Nice to get home, we crossed paths with hundreds of confused people, some terrified and others sure that the night's chaos must be the result of an on-edge citizenry misled by jittery police. Not once in our long and uncertain walk home, did we come across police or soldiers (many were posted around the city before the festivities) informing people what to do or where to go (or not go).

This fact, and the night's events as a whole, were for me another reminder that militarized police and/or a policing military are rarely the answer to our fears; and that more men with guns won't make people safer. Unfortunately the French government is likely, like its U.S. counterparts, to again take all the wrong lessons from terror, using it to justify even more draconian measures, increased military and police spending, and probably dropping more bombs abroad.

If governments in the U.S. and Europe truly want to pay tribute to the victims and prevent others from being touched by such violence in the future, they must take a hard look in the mirror. Nothing justifies such a heinous crime, but neither can we react to it in a vacuum or be blind to our own violence. The West is indeed in crisis, but not because of immigration or religion or because of a small number of social outcasts out for blood. Our real crisis is fueled by a different and entirely homegrown menace: greed and war and the systemic violence, inequality and racism that is cultivated in the boardrooms and backrooms, senate floors and newsrooms on both sides of the Atlantic.

Honest self-reflection would connect these dots and produce a deep shift in policy: Rather than manufacturing and selling arms for outrageous profit, our governments should invest in public education and healthcare at home, both of which are being constantly whittled away and privatized in much of the industrialized world. Instead of bombing endlessly in the Middle East (one report suggests between one and two million people in the Middle East have been killed during the 15 years of the so-called war on terror [1]) we should invest in our crumbling infrastructures at home, where (in the U.S.) roads, bridges, railway tracks and water pipes are decrepit and dangerous to the public.

Instead of falling further into the abyss of xenophobia, racism and Islamophobia, we should listen to and better integrate immigrant and minority communities whence the alienated young criminals who have perpetrated most of the recent atrocities in France have come. Instead of more bombing, we should reach out to the Arab and Muslim world—not to deal arms or prop up autocrats and apartheid regimes as is our habit, but to help heal the wounds that the West's policies have inflicted there with illegal, irrational and bloody wars like the one we waged against Iraq. And instead of building more prisons and further militarizing police on our own streets, we should acknowledge and confront the damage which these same police forces do to black, brown and immigrant communities on a regular basis.

And as we recoil in the coming days at the horror of Nice, we must also acknowledge the double standards around the value of human life, which our news media garishly display whenever such an attack strikes Europe or the U.S. Lives elsewhere—whether in Baghdad, Gaza, Ferguson, Beirut, Kabul, Kenya, Mexico or Syria—seem to mean very little to mainstream media and politicians when they are extinguished from above by jets or drones, executed by police or paramilitaries, or torn apart by other grisly acts of terror.

If we care about the victims of Nice and Paris, we must also care deeply about victims of both state and non-state violence everywhere. In their names we must demand not more blood, but an urgent reassessment by our governments about the priorities they have decided upon in our names (often without, or in defiance of citizens' input). Endless war and terror are unacceptable sides of the same coin, and our governments must share blame with the deranged men who carry out the kind of vicious attacks that took place Thursday night.

Ismail Khalidi

P.S.

* AlterNet July 15, 2016:

<http://www.alternet.org/grayzone-project/letter-nice-west-learning-all-wrong-lessons-latest-atrocity>

* Ismail Khalidi is a playwright and a poet. His plays include Truth Serum Blues and Tennis in Nablus. He is co-editor of Inside/Outside: Six Plays from Palestine and the Diaspora (TCG, 2015). His writing has appeared in the Nation, Mizna, Guernica, Remezcla and American Theater Magazine.

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.psr.org/resources/body-count.html>