

A photograph of a person sitting on a sidewalk covered in trash. The person is wearing a dark jacket, a patterned scarf, a white headband, and glasses. They have white headphones in their ears and are holding a small object in their hands. A brown bag is on the ground next to them. In the background, the legs and feet of other people are visible. The ground is covered with various pieces of trash, including plastic cups and paper.

SHELL SHOCKED

THE SOCIAL RESPONSE TO TERRORIST ATTACKS

GÉRÔME TRUC

'Truc's hermeneutic powers are extraordinary. He reveals the post-hoc framing process that transformed 9/11 from an event into a structure in the American and European collective consciousness. For example, he relates the immediate attribution of the "war" frame to deep collective memories in the US about Pearl Harbor, and he relativizes European understandings of subsequent terrorist events in the same way, demonstrating that they are interpretations based on analogical reasoning rather than explanations based on real experience. This book deserves to be read and discussed widely.'

Jeffrey C. Alexander, Yale University

What is it that leaves us shell shocked in the face of the massacres carried out in New York on 9/11 or in Paris on 13 November 2015? How are we to explain the intensity of the reaction to the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo*? Answering these questions involves trying to understand what a society goes through when it is subjected to the ordeal of terrorist attacks. And it impels us to try to explain why millions of people feel so concerned and shaken by them, even when they do not have a direct connection with any of the victims.

In *Shell Shocked*, sociologist G r me Truc sheds new light on these events, returning to the ways in which ordinary individuals lived through and responded to the attacks of 9/11, of 11 March 2004 in Madrid and 7 July 2005 in London. Analysing political language and media images, demonstrations of solidarity and minutes of silence, as well as the tens of thousands of messages addressed to the victims, his investigation brings out the complexity of our feelings about the Islamists' attacks. It also uncovers the sources of the solidarity that, in our individualistic societies, ultimately finds expression in the first person singular rather than the first person plural: 'I am Charlie', 'I am Paris.'

This timely and path-breaking book will appeal to students and scholars in sociology and politics and to anyone interested in understanding the impact of terrorism in contemporary societies.

G r me Truc is a sociologist, tenured research fellow at the CNRS and member of the Institut des Sciences sociales du Politique. He teaches at the  cole normale sup rieure Paris-Saclay.

Cover illustration: Christopher Furlong/Getty

Cover design: Lyn Davies Design

Printed in Great Britain

polity

politybooks.com



TRUCK S H E L S H O G K E D

polity

Shell Shocked

The Social Response to Terrorist Attacks

Gérôme Truc

Translated by Andrew Brown

polity

First published in French as *Sidéations. Une sociologie des attentats* © Presses Universitaires de France, 2016

This English edition © Polity Press, 2018

The translation of this work was supported by funding from the REAT Research Project, granted by the 'Attentats-Recherche' committee of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS).

Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press
101 Station Landing
Suite 300,
Medford, MA 02155, USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-2033-6

ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-2034-3 (pb)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Truc, G  r  me, author.

Title: Shell shocked : the social response to terrorist attacks / G  r  me Truc.

Other titles: Sid  rations. English

Description: Malden, MA : Polity Press, [2017] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017019475 (print) | LCCN 2017025984 (ebook) | ISBN 9781509520367 (Mobi)

| ISBN 9781509520374 (Epub) | ISBN 9781509520336 (hardback) | ISBN 9781509520343 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Terrorism--Psychological aspects. | Terrorism--Social aspects. | Toleration. | Cultural pluralism.

Classification: LCC HV6431 (ebook) | LCC HV6431 .T78513 2017 (print) | DDC 363.32501/9--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017019475>

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 10 on 11.5pt Sabon
by Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited
Printed and bound in the UK by Clays Ltd, St Ives PLC

The publisher has used its best endeavours to ensure that the URLs for external websites referred to in this book are correct and active at the time of going to press. However, the publisher has no responsibility for the websites and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live or that the content is or will remain appropriate.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publisher will be pleased to include any necessary credits in any subsequent reprint or edition.

For further information on Polity, visit our website: politybooks.com

Shell Shocked

*For Adélaïde
and Louis*

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

Perhaps, following a recent terrorist attack, you have taken to Facebook or Twitter to express your feelings and your support for the victims; perhaps you have even gone to the places where the terrorists struck in order to reflect, because you lived next door or were passing through the city, and then perhaps you left a short message, a candle or a bouquet of flowers; perhaps you also went out onto the streets to take part in a demonstration in homage to the victims, or to observe a minute's silence. Or perhaps you behaved in quite the opposite way: perhaps you felt that everyone was overdoing it; perhaps you waxed indignant at what you thought were inappropriate reactions; perhaps you found the litany of 'I am ...' statements on social networks ('I am Charlie' and so on) depressingly conformist, and remarked that we do not do as much for those who die every day in Syria or trying to reach Europe via the Mediterranean. It is probable, moreover, that you have successively adopted *both* of these positions in reaction to two different attacks; and that the people around you – friends, relatives, colleagues – reacted differently. Perhaps you tried to argue with some of them; you may perhaps have discovered that you did not share the same view of things, that the very definitions of these attacks and their causes were not as obvious to others as to you; and, as a result, perhaps you discovered how difficult it was to talk about it.

The reason is that terrorist attacks are not conducive to balanced discussions or to a sense of perspective. They are moments of social effervescence, of surging emotions, in which people get worked up and their positions harden. Each of us reacts to them immediately and viscerally, and we often cannot admit – let alone understand – that others, even more in our own circles, do not share our feelings. We lack the tools to grasp fully what is at stake, to understand what happens to us

PREFACE

collectively and individually at such moments. The social sciences are generally dismissed as useless in such circumstances, since this is no longer a time for scholarly quibbles but one for taking moral and political positions. With or against terrorists: you just have to choose your side, and that's that. Comments are then reduced to generalities, in which we mix reflections on what we are and what we should be, about the 'trauma' suffered by the social body as a whole and the 'resilience' it is supposed to show; meanwhile, 'cultural conversations'¹ about the causes of terrorism replace empirically based explanations. The risk is therefore that we will be sucked into the maelstrom – to use the metaphor that the sociologist Norbert Elias took from Edgar Allan Poe² – created in the wake of terrorist attacks and that, for lack of perspective, we will gradually be drowned in it.

This risk is especially great since such attacks happen again and again. I am writing these lines a few hours after the Manchester Arena bombing, just over a month and a half after the attacks in Stockholm and two months after the attack in Westminster, while the Berlin attack is barely six months old and the first anniversaries of the attacks in Nice and Orlando have not yet arrived. More than ever, therefore, we need a 'sociology of terrorist attacks' to understand the effects of this type of attack on our societies better, and to help us to face them: this is what this book proposes.

At its heart is an inquiry conducted over several years into the reactions to the 9/11 attacks and those on Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005, from which I review a whole series of questions that arose in France following the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and the Hypercacher in January 2015. The manuscript was completed one month to the day before the attacks of 13 November 2015. Despite the scale of that later attack – which meant that some French journalists regretted having hastily described the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* as a 'French 9/11' – I did not consider it advisable to postpone the publication of this book. This was because, irrespective of the train of events, the sociological mechanisms that my investigation have laid bare remain fundamentally the same. It is precisely in this respect that sociological analysis offers a valuable perspective which makes it possible to look at the news differently – just as the news sometimes makes it possible to perceive the usefulness of this analysis better.

It will undoubtedly be better understood today, at a time when European societies are being subjected to an unprecedented series of suicide bombings, why it was necessary to begin this work with two chapters which scrutinize how the attacks of 9/11 were experienced on either side of the Atlantic and the role played by the analogy with this event in the perception of subsequent attacks in Europe, as elsewhere

PREFACE

across the world. Although 9/11 took place over fifteen years ago, it marked a fundamental shift not only in the modalities of terrorism but also in the relationship of Western societies to terrorist acts, so that we cannot understand the way those societies now react to these acts without taking that initial event into account.

And if the reference to 9/11 seems to be less ubiquitous than it once was in commentaries on the attacks now facing Western societies, analogical thinking is still clearly in evidence. When Andy Burnham, mayor of Manchester, reacts to the bombing which has just plunged his city into mourning by recalling the precedent of the London bombings in 2005, he prescribes at the same time a particular form of behaviour to his fellow citizens: 'I was in the Home Office as a minister on that day and I remember how London felt on that day. I remember it very vividly. What I would say to people is, London pulled together. And in exactly the same way Manchester, in its own unique way, will pull together and we'll stand strong and stand together.'³ Warding off any risk of division where it might arise, calling for unity: that is the function of political speech. But the fact remains that, behind such language, each citizen harbours his or her own feelings, opinions and reactions. Such is the role of sociological analysis, then: to see what is going on beyond political discourse, and to embrace the reactions of ordinary citizens in their plurality in order to shed light on what produces those reactions.

So I went again to the scene of the attacks of 13 November 2015 in Paris as well as those of 14 July 2016 in Nice to observe in situ the expressions of people's feelings. I found the same words as those left in New York, Madrid and London, words which constitute the raw material of this book. Short, impersonal messages, in the form of exhortations or incantations: 'Never again', 'No to terrorism', 'Peace for all', etc. Long letters in the first person, in dense handwriting. Invocations of the values of freedom, equality and fraternity, but also, and perhaps even more, calls for love, life and peace. Quotations from the Qur'an or the Bible, the Dalai Lama or John Lennon. 'We will not forget you', 'We are united' and 'We are not afraid.' Messages from foreigners who, in the name of their country or city, stand in solidarity with the victims and the city that has been struck. But also a solidarity that is expressed in the singular – 'I am Paris', 'I am Nice' – and on other scales: 'I am French' or 'I am human.' As I write these lines, I know that similar messages are now accumulating in Manchester. Assembled together, these utterances of 'we' and 'I' form the response of a society to the test, the ordeal, of terrorism. This book suggests an approach to understanding this response and a method for analysing it. In its own way, it is also a part of it.

Paris, 23 May 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the result of a doctoral thesis in sociology at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, supervised jointly by Daniel Cefai and Louis Quéré. I would like to thank both of them for the intellectual generosity and attentiveness with which they followed my work. I have learned a huge amount from them. My thanks also go to my viva examiners: Yves Déloye, Jean-Louis Fabiani, Marie-Claire Lavabre and Étienne Tassin, whose remarks were invaluable when it came to producing this book.

My research would not have been possible without the support of a number of people and institutions. I am thinking first of the Casa de Velázquez, and I would like to thank its former director, Jean-Pierre Étienne, as well as Xavier Huetz de Lemps and Stéphane Michonneau. I am immensely grateful to Cristina Sánchez-Carretero, who gave me access to the Archivo del Duelo, and Randall Collins, who invited me to come and work with him at the University of Pennsylvania. Thanks also to Stéphane Grimaldi and Marie-Claude Berthelot, of the Mémorial de Caen; to Meriam Lobel, of the 9/11 Tribute Center; and to my friend Guillaume Fournié, who greatly facilitated my periods of research in the London Metropolitan Archives.

This work benefited from exchanges of ideas with many researchers, and the help that some of them gave me. In this respect, thanks to Alexandra Bidet, Luc Boltanski, Mathieu Brugidou, Bruno Cautrès, Clément Chéroux, Vincenzo Cicchelli, Alain Cottureau, Béatrice Fraenkel, Sarah Gensburger, Liora Israël, Sandrine Lefranc, Denis Peschanski and Max Reinert. I was also lucky enough to have attentive and reliable reviewers, starting with my two intellectual travelling companions, Pierre-Marie Chauvin and Fabien Truong, to whom this book owes a great deal. Thanks also, for their observations and advice, to Sabine

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chalvon-Demersay, Arnaud Esquerre, Christine de Gemeaux, Claire Lemerrier, Étienne Nouguez, Paul Pasquali and Thibaut de Saint Pol.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who made it possible for this book to see the light of day: Jean-Luc Fidel, for having helped me turn thesis into book; Serge Paugam, for having so kindly and enthusiastically agreed to publish it; Monique Labrune, for her confidence in me; Julie Gazier, for her patience and her meticulous revision of the manuscript; and my relatives, finally, for their support – especially to the grandparents of Louis, thanks to whom he will not have suffered too much from the final touches to the manuscript that took up so much of his father's attention, and to Adélaïde, whom I can never thank enough.

CONTENTS

<i>Preface to the English edition</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
Introduction: Terrorist attacks as a test	1
Part I What is happening to us	9
1 Under attack	13
9/11 live: Accident, terrorist attack, or act of war?	14
The view from Europe: From Western solidarity to a cosmopolitan perspective	22
2 Experiencing your 'own' 9/11	38
11 March attacks like a 'new 9/11'	38
7 July 2005, a 'British 9/11'?	48
3 To show, or not to show, violence	57
The place of the dead	58
The ethics of iconographic decisions	70
4 Demonstrating solidarity	82
The attacks as a 'time to demonstrate'	82
Why demonstrate after an attack?	90
5 Observing silence	99
A ritual of collective mourning	100
A problem of moral equivalence	108

CONTENTS

Part II	What touches us	117
6	Terrorist attacks and their publics	121
	From written reactions to the concerned publics	122
	In what capacity an attack concerns us	133
7	The meanings of 'we'	142
	Above and below the level of the nation	143
	World cities and the test of terrorism	151
8	The values at stake	159
	Reactions to terrorist attacks as value judgements	160
	The banal pacifism of the Europeans	166
9	The attacks in persons	178
	The singularization of the victims	179
	Reacting as a singular person	188
10	Solidarity in the singular	201
	The attachment to place	202
	The coincidence of dates	210
	The homology of experiences	217
	Conclusion: 'There's something of Charlie in all of us'	224
	<i>Afterword to the English edition</i>	229
	<i>Selective bibliography</i>	231
	<i>Notes</i>	244
	<i>Index</i>	299

INTRODUCTION

TERRORIST ATTACKS AS A TEST

The silence was heavy, that night, contrasting with the never-ending bustle that is usually to be found in this area of Paris, both by day and by night. In the glow from candles and street lights, they had gathered there in the cold of January, brandishing pens and pencils, the front pages of newspapers and placards with 'I am Charlie' written on them. First there were just a few hundred of them, gathered in the late afternoon around the statue in the centre of the square, some looking meditative and all of them serious; eventually, by nightfall, there were tens of thousands filling the whole of the Place de la République and its adjacent streets. And thousands of others just like them, across France's major cities. All aghast and outraged. Shocked. Terror-stricken. Never before had a reaction of such magnitude been observed in France following a terrorist act. Soon, therefore, questions came tumbling out: how was it that the French had taken to the streets so rapidly and in such large numbers? What about the fact that the slogan immediately repeated by all of them, 'I am Charlie', was formulated in the first person singular, and not plural, as had happened after 9/11 with 'We are all Americans'? And was there even any sense in comparing this with the 9/11 attacks?

So the journalists turned to the sociologists, but they struggled to get any in-depth answers from them. In the fifteen years since 9/11, the sociologists, ultimately, had found very little to say – either in France or indeed in the US. Of course, in the US you find shelves full of works in bookshops and libraries devoted to the events of 9/11. But they are mainly journalistic narratives, collections of photos, the testimonies of survivors, discussions of the official report on the attacks, and technical arguments claiming to find support for the idea that it was all a conspiracy, together with investigations into Al-Qaeda and its networks. One searches in vain for a book that would study how American society and the rest of the world responded to the attacks, exploring the causes

behind the solidarity shown towards the victims and analysing its intensity and scope. In short, a properly sociological book. Admittedly, studies do exist on specific aspects of 9/11 – the way it was treated in a certain newspaper or on a certain television channel, its impact on defence and security policies, on the aeronautics industry, etc. – but these studies were published in academic journals, meant for specialist audiences. The situation is the same when it comes to the two major attacks that have since been carried out on Western countries, preceding those that shook France in January 2015, namely the attacks of 11 March 2004 in Madrid and 7 July 2005 in London: there are as many books by experts on terrorist networks, essays by journalists, and narrative accounts as one could wish for; but when it comes to sociological analyses, there are virtually none. Indeed, the mother of a victim of the London attacks, in her preface to one of the very few academic books published to date on this event, laments this silence on the part of social scientists.¹

Though I do not claim that it will fill this gap all by itself, my book looks back at the European reactions to the 9/11 attacks, and those in Madrid and London, so as to provide a certain perspective for what the French experienced in January 2015 and to come up with answers to the questions that arose then. Each of its chapters begins with a salient feature of the events of January 2015 and then sheds light on this by drawing on the results of an investigation into those three previous Islamist attacks in Western territory – an investigation that lasted several years. This book therefore proposes a *sociology of terrorist attacks*, rather than a sociology of terrorism as such.² It focuses on the attacks as events, on the way that ordinary individuals experience them and how they react to them, rather than on terrorism as a sociopolitical phenomenon, which is already the subject of many studies. The approach taken here is a quiet, ‘cool’³ appraisal of the effect an attack has on society: it aims to understand, compare and explain, but in no way to judge or deplore, as people are frequently all too quick to do, ‘in the heat of the moment’. For the attacks are not very propitious moments for reflection, for a distanced view: people feel they are being called on to take a stand and choose sides. And as Emmanuel Todd’s detailed analysis of the demonstrations that followed the attacks of 2 January 2015 will have demonstrated,⁴ it is sometimes very difficult for a sociologist to remain objective in this area.

Testing social bonds

My book begins with a naive question, one which may seem morally aberrant: why is it that an attack does not leave us indifferent? Why do