

<http://observatorioterrorismo.com/comunicacion-publica/el-testimonio-de-las-victimas-del-terrorismo-como-estrategia-de-contranarrativa-el-caso-de-espana/>

The role of victims of terrorism

At a conference hosted by the United Nations Counter Terrorism Center in February, Humera Khan, head of the Muflehun think-tank [3], specializing in the prevention of violent radicalization, pointed out that one of the most outstanding qualities in the use of victims As strategy to construct a narrative is its credibility:

- provide information on the ground.
- defence assumptions and utopias assumed by the violent.
- the contradictions between the values defended by extremist groups and reality stand out.
- raise doubts about the use of violence as a justified alternative.

The victims of terrorism act as the conscience of society, they are the living memory of what happened.

In many academic fields, it is stated that victims' testimonies are a valuable tool to convey what has happened and to build an effective counter-narrative. But there are still doubts as to how they should be collected, what testimonies are most effective, what is the most effective way to use them and how to adapt them to the channels of diffusion. In other words, there is no discussion about the "who", but about the "how".

Here the logic of public communication comes into play from a perspective that breaks with traditional standards: formerly only terrorists used the media to broadcast their propaganda. Now those who oppose terrorism can use those same means in two ways, as described by Rachel Brigs and Sebastien Feve in a report by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue [4]:

- to create a counter-narrative that discredits, destroys, and demystifies the message of violent extremism.
- to create an alternative narrative that weakens the extremist narrative by focusing on the "para" rather than the "against".

Why do it with testimony from the victims? Why are they valid tools? The experience of public communication shows us that stories with protagonists work.

The media in Europe have spent months talking about the refugee crisis. The figures are overwhelming: there are 4.5 million Syrian refugees, according to Amnesty International; There are 10,000 refugee children lost in Europe, according to Europol. However, to a large extent European society did not react visibly to the refugee crisis until the photo of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old boy drowned on a beach in Turkey, was published.

With the victims of terrorism, the same thing happens. We can say that in Spain there are more than 800 victims of ETA terrorism; Or that the Paris bombings caused nearly 200 victims. But until we tell their stories with names and surnames we are not able to take charge of what terrorism means. In Paris we saw an example shortly after the attacks in the Bataclan room: Mashable professionals, specialists in storytelling and new formats, created a Twitter account called @parisvictims, which uploaded images of the victims of the attacks, their data Personal and a phrase that describes them. That Twitter profile has more than 50,000 followers.

Two initiatives around the victims' testimonies: Lead stories and The terror map

In 2012, **the Lead Stories project** began. History of terrorism in Navarre. A group of journalists, including myself, received the commission from the Government of Navarra to investigate and write a book to exhaustively tell the story of ETA terrorism in this region neighboring the Basque Country and also claimed as own by the band terrorist. We decided that we would tell everything: we would chronicle each of the terrorist attacks and try to locate the relatives of the 42 people killed by ETA in Navarre, as well as the wounded and kidnapped. We were clear that the victims had to be the protagonists of the book and that the story, the narrative of terrorism, had to be built from their testimonies.

The Collective of Victims of Terrorism (COVITE) already had by then a tool called **The Map of Terror**. It is a pioneering application in Europe that geolocalizes the terrorist murders that occurred in Spain. The Map includes documentation of more than a thousand victims of terrorism murdered in Spain by various groups, including Islamic terrorism. It allows the victims to be searched by name, to enter a personal file of each one of them and to "travel", thanks to the satellite technology of Google, to the exact place where they were assassinated.

To this tool, some of the interviews with relatives of the victims made for the book have been incorporated. They bring a communicative plus: the relatives of the victims, alive, create more empathy with the public than someone who has died.

The tool allows to share the content through social networks and pretends to use the language of the new generations, who use the Internet to inform themselves and who have not lived most of the history of terrorism in Spain.

Both projects, Lead Stories and The Terror Map, have been set as an example in Spain and abroad on how to build the memory of terrorism and how stories of victims can be used to prevent violent radicalization.

Lessons learned and applicable to other contexts

To conclude, I will go on to state some lessons learned from these experiences that could be applicable to other contexts:

-Contranarrative as strategy; Alternative narrative as necessity.

Faced with the current threat of violent radicalization, victims' testimonies are an effective tool to demystify the narrative strategies of extremist groups, which we might call the terror narrative. At the same time, it is necessary to construct an alternative narrative or a narrative

of the pain that transmits what is and what are the consequences of the terrorism to the new generations, guaranteeing the prevention of the radicalization.

-The value of testimonies: personal stories work.

Journalism and public communication demonstrate that putting names and surnames to the protagonists of the stories is essential so that they have consequences on the audience. In stories related to terrorism, the protagonists must be the victims, because they represent values of peace and democracy in the face of violence. The fact of having lived the terrorism in first person guarantees the credibility of its testimonies.

-The experience of Spain in the identification of society with the victims.

The experience of terrorism in Spain has allowed initiatives to arise in connection with the collection of victims' testimonies, their dissemination in different formats and their adaptation to new media, especially social networks. These experiences are valuable to other countries facing a worrying threat around violent radicalization.

<http://mapadelterror.com/en/#>