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A Message to a World Rife With Terrorism

by *Emma Tobin*

The Le Petit Cambodge restaurant with a makeshift memorial of flowers, the day after the November 13 terror attacks.

Photo: Wikipedia.

I was four years old when the 9/11 terrorist attacks happened, effectively meaning that I grew up in a country full of fear, anger and resentment towards Muslim people. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars only furthered that fear and anger, as soldiers from all over the world were sent to the Middle East to fight Al Qaeda and terrorism.

I grew up listening to Islamophobic news scare people into becoming frightened of Muslims no matter what country they were

from, their age, their socioeconomic background or their religious views. I listened to people dehumanize the innocent civilians who were being killed by their own countrymen and our armies. I heard the cheers as Saddam Hussein was hung when I was the mere age of 9, celebrating the death of a man who had killed the very people he was sworn to protect.

I was 14 when Osama bin Laden was killed in Pakistan, and when I was asked by teachers to discuss whether the United States had the right to invade Pakistan's sovereignty in order to kill one of the most hated men in America. I was 16 and living in Switzerland when the Boston marathon bombings occurred. I watched on the news

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I was 18 when the Paris attacks happened, as I watched from a cafe in Siem Reap, Cambodia, and worried not only about those killed, but also about those who would be targeted and persecuted for the very fact that they shared a similar religion. Now, just turning 19, I watch as Brussels is mutilated by the effects of terrorist attacks. It feels as though my entire life has been waiting for the next terrorist attack and watching as the numbers of casualties grow everyday whether from death or fear.

It was only three months ago when I flew from California to Morocco to intern at the High Atlas Foundation (HAF) and learn Arabic; three months since I moved in with a Muslim family that have since become my home here in Morocco; three months since I realized all of the ingrained and unconscious Islamophobic beliefs and prejudices I had. I was always so worried about terrorist attacks in the US and Europe, but I never realized the pain and fear that Muslim communities go through daily as a result of the fearful media and Western countries. I have friends and coworkers who are worried about leaving Morocco because of the way that non-Muslims will treat them simply because of the fact that they share a similar faith with those extremists who commit terrible acts of violence.

All of the pleas not to fight hate with hate will be posted on social media in the coming months after a terrorist attack, but I know that those messages will be followed by people who demand war and vengeance on innocent people. Living in a Muslim country has taught me over and over again that we need to separate the religion from the people. There are amazing Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. all over the world and we can't condemn people for the actions of a few. We need to fight terrorism from the root. We need to instill values of respect and understanding instead of hate and vengeance.

There are so many ways to counteract terrorism, such as through interfaith and intercultural dialogue.

The High Atlas Foundation is attempting to create programs and opportunities for impoverished, uneducated and scorned members of the Moroccan community, so that there is less of a chance of their turning to radicalism. HAF is also doing interfaith work between Moroccan Muslims and Jews through tree-planting near ancient Jewish

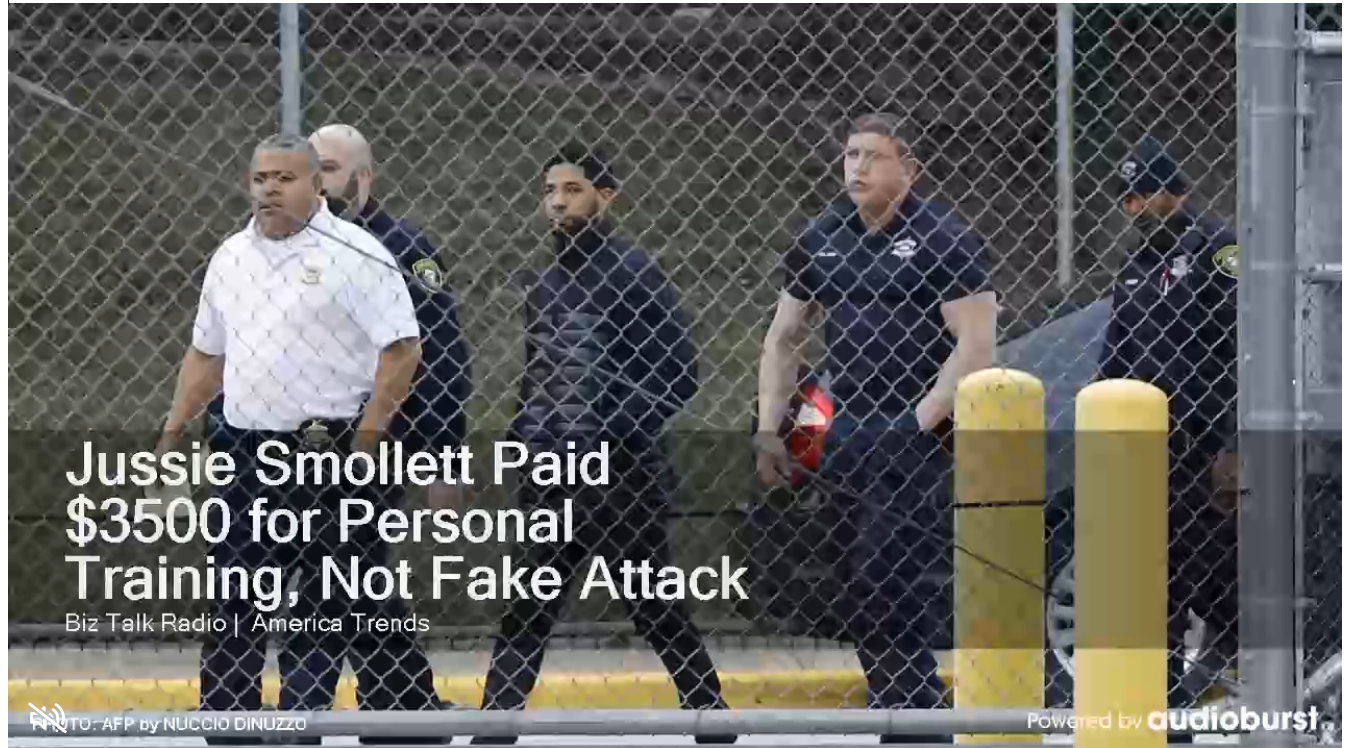
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educate yourselves and others about the root causes of terrorism before we blame those who are themselves victims.

Emma Tobin is a photojournalism and social media intern at the High Atlas Foundation. Ms. Tobin is currently on her gap year where she has been able to explore both Southeast Asia and North Africa.



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