

The Orlando Shootings: Talk, Reality,
and The New York Times

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To put this writing in its context, it needs to be kept in mind that a thing is whatever it is, and it's not any other thing. In Orlando, Florida in the early morning hours of June 12th, 2016, 49 people were killed and 53 injured in Pulse, a gay nightclub, by, it appears at this writing, a lone gunman of Afghan ancestry by the name of Omar Mateen, who, three hours after the onset of his mass killing spree, was shot dead by police as he exited Pulse, bringing the death total to 50. That event, that reality, is one thing. What people say about that thing, that concrete reality, is another thing. Reality and the words that depict it and give it meaning are two different things.

This distinction sounds obvious, but we sometimes lose sight of it, and sometimes we are encouraged to lose sight of it. We come to believe that the words we use to make sense of, in this case, Orlando, are the reality, when in fact they never can be that. We can try to get the words to align well with the reality, that would be good, but still, they aren't the reality.

This is important to underscore because now, after the event, essentially, and most importantly, Orlando is what people say about it in the public realm. Other than to the people immediately affected by this tragedy, Orlando is now about language, words, and verbal exchange. To make sense of what happened in Orlando, it is important to look at it from a linguistic angle, and that's what I'm doing here. This writing is about language and its implications.

Two things to keep in mind in this regard: Language can shape how people view reality and what they do about it, to the extent that for all practical purposes language replaces the reality and has a far greater social/cultural impact than the reality that is purported to be its referent. And second, language can distract people from looking at reality from other, potentially useful, perspectives.

When something like Orlando happens, mediators of reality get between us and the event. They use words, language, talk, writing—as well as photos and videos—to tell us what went on and what it means and, directly or indirectly, what we ought to do about it. By mediators of reality, I'm referring to anybody who goes public with what they have to say: journalists, television and radio commentators, politicians, interest group representatives, academics, and, to a lesser extent, people who express themselves on a website or a Facebook page or use a Twitter account. And of course that list includes me right now; I'm doing more here than texting a friend.

Keeping in mind that the words (and pictures, images) people interject into the flow of information and ideas are not the thing itself, we should answer four questions when considering what they have to say:

1. Who are these mediators and what are they selling, even if they don't realize it? (Humans tend to think the other guy is hawking snake oil, but not them; they are laying out the gospel truth.)
2. What alternative language—descriptions, explanations, assertions about significance or implication—could arguably, legitimately, be attached to this reality?
3. If we look at it in the way being pitched to us, what *aren't* we looking at?
4. Since this writing appears in a white interests publication [it appeared in the webzine, *The Occidental Observer*], I assume its readers care about the wellbeing of white people. Thus a fourth question: what does any, all, of this have to do with the fate of whites?

With that introduction as a frame of reference — particularly the four questions just listed — I'll use the way a prime mediator of reality in America, *The New York Times*, still considered by many to be this country's newspaper of record, communicated about the reality of Orlando, which, again, is what it is and not what people, including *The New York Times*, tell us it is.

Let's say we are reading *The New York Times'* articles and opinion pieces on the Orlando shooting. Along with taking in what they express — those words, those sentences and paragraphs, those analyses, those arguments, those pictures — and understanding that these are perceptions and not necessarily reality, what could, should, go along with that?

- We should ask and answer that first, and crucial, question: who is this mediator of reality, *The New York Times*, and what is it trying to sell via the words and pictures it interjects into the public discourse? If we don't know the *Times'* ideology and what it promotes — its politics, the causes it favors, the groups it backs (hint: it isn't big on white concerns), we need to find that out and use it to make sense of its contributions to dialogue and debate. No entities talking and showing anything about anything, including *The New York Times* (and me), are completely objective even if they are attempting to be, and for certain, the *Times* is not attempting to be even halfway objective. The *Times* is fundamentally an advocacy vehicle (with white advocacy definitely not on its agenda),

- The *Times* says Orlando is about hate, and particularly, homophobia. That claim, those words, that language, that mediation of reality, should prompt a consideration in *Times* readers of the difference between intent and motive.

Intent is clear in Orlando: Omar Mateen was indeed trying to kill a whole lot of people. But was he in fact motivated

by hate/homophobia? (The Times tends to conflate, equate, hate and homophobia—it's kind of a “you get the idea” shorthand, no need for fine distinctions here.)

In contrast, motive — why somebody does something — always involves speculation, and that's the case even if the perpetrator tells us what his motive was, because he may not know why he did what he did. And because there is a single act, it does not necessarily follow that there is a single motive; multiple motives, conscious and pre-conscious, each affected and being affected by the others, some more powerful than others, may have been involved. Invariably, reality is more complex than the language we use to depict it.

As for hate(r), nothing is more casual and distant from reality than to tack those words onto events and people; that is, if truly you are trying to come to grips with existence, substance, which ostensibly the *Times* is doing. If, on the other hand, you are trying to set up someone or some group up to be silenced and destroyed, the hate(r) smear is a shorthand winner — one pejorative does the trick very nicely, and, at the same time, shuts down examination of what is really going on.

The *Times*, any media(ator) outlet that doesn't bill itself an organ of opinion, should be better than that. I assumed the *Times* — *The New York Times!*—was better than that until I became a subscriber and regular reader five or so years ago. I still read the *Times* every morning during

breakfast, but I'm coming to have less and less respect for it as a journalistic entity. And that goes beyond the front-page coverage; the sports and arts sections and the rest aren't any better--shallow, predictably slanted, biased.

So why am I still a faithful reader of the *Times*, every morning, first thing? The power of ingrained habits will have to be the topic of a later writing.

That the killings occurred in Pulse does not establish that homophobia was the motive in this incident. We need to be careful about jumping to this inference, and the *Times* hasn't been careful about it. The *Times* acknowledges that Mateen's Facebook posts and 911 call and call to a television station while he was in the act of killing all those people do not reflect antagonism or hatred toward gays. However, that didn't give pause to the *Times* basic assumption and assertion that if it happened in a gay setting, it must be about homophobia.

That there is a good bit of testimony that Mateen himself was gay and had frequented Pulse in the past, as well as cruised gay link-up web sites, didn't give the *Times* pause either — in fact, as far as I can tell, the *Times* hasn't as much as mentioned Mateen's apparent homosexual, or bisexual, predilections, which I find journalistically questionable if not unconscionable. At the very least, Mateen's homosexuality would compound a simple hate crime explanation—which perhaps is why

the *Times* censored it; it would complicate and muddy their message.

While the *Times* — predictably, if you know about the *Times*' political and social agenda — plugs Orlando neatly into a gay rights narrative, all we can say with any certainty is that Pulse was a place where a large number of people was very tightly compacted — which, if you think about it, is an excellent context if one, homophobic or not, is bent on mass killing.

The *Times* attributes Mateen's assumed homophobia to the Muslim religion. It's possible, however, that these shootings in Pulse to some extent, perhaps to a large extent, even totally, took place for personal, private, not religious or political, reasons: say, payback for being rebuffed or misused by social contacts or sex partners, or getting ejected for drunkenness, which, according to other mediators than the *Times*, had happened to Mateen at Pulse on earlier occasions.

Was mental illness a precipitating factor? Mateen's former wife gives credence to the possibility that Mateen had mental health issues. Mental illness could have prompted a murderous act against anybody and it just happened to be against gays in a setting that was familiar to Mateen. I've read that killers of strangers tend to do it in locations familiar to them.

Hate and homophobia, those words, and where they take things rhetorically, keep matters at a high level of abstraction and generalization. And very often, that isn't happenstance. Name-calling and speechifying and moralizing substitute for reality and serve the political, ideological, or social agenda of a mediator, in this case the owners and editors of *The New York Times*.

While it may be in the interest of a mediator to touch down very lightly, if at all, on reality, it is in the interests of those on the receiving end of that mediation to press through to the specifics of the reality under consideration. The challenge is not to be satisfied with easy and familiar takes on a phenomenon.

Essentially, the *Times* preaches to a congregation of believers (with my outlook, I'm not your typical *Times* reader). What the congregation already holds to be true and right — which resulted, in good part, from prior mediations the *Times* poured down their throats — gets confirmed, and that feels good to them, especially coming from the *Times* because it is the ultimate in prestige journalism.

But however cozy and assuring it might feel, the congregation pays a price for it: the price that comes from being a flock of sheep being herded around. To stay with the flock metaphor, they could end up sheared, eaten by wolves, or hanging upside down from hooks in a slaughterhouse. We all need to think about what's going

on with the “sermons” coming at us and where they get us and where they don’t get us.

With question four in mind, what are the ramifications of all this for white people? Besides Muslims, who are the big villains in the hater/homophobia narrative? Whites. It isn’t good for whites to have that accusation, that condemnation, repeated ad infinitum— by the *Times* and a multitude of other mediators. Muslims and whites, particularly white men: the two bad guys in the hater/homophobia melodrama. Who comes out ahead if that tale is front and center in the public dialogue and debate?

- Orlando is about terrorism, announces the *Times*. The terrorism/terrorists moniker taps all the conditioned associations: zealots, nutcases, demons, senseless, no rhyme or reason to their behavior, we’re good and they’re bad, no shades of gray, case closed. My conclusion is that, bottom line, the *Times* coverage in Orlando was not about Mateen; rather, it was about demonizing and objectivizing people *like* Mateen, with his mindset, and justifying doing whatever it takes to rid the world of them.

We do well by ourselves if we stay aware that the way we are articulately and persuasively encouraged to define or categorize someone (articulateness and persuasiveness are tools of the trade for mediators of reality) is not the only way to define or categorize that person. I recently read a book about Albert Camus in France during World War II

(*Brave Genius*), which included descriptions of Camus' underground activities against the Occupation and a lot of French people sabotaging railroad lines, assassinating Germans, and such. The author of the book I read didn't describe Camus and the others as haters and terrorists. No, they were brave resistance fighters — different language, different meaning. Your spy is my intelligence agent. Your traitor is my loyalist.

If indeed, as the *Times* asserts, Orlando is about terrorism, no need to go any further: stamp out foreign and domestic terrorism. That's the ticket. We've already been conditioned to respond to the word terrorist — kill! We got bin Laden; we'll get them all, here in America, over there in the Middle East, everywhere. Again, case closed.

The argument here, don't let the sophists close the case for you. Be vigilant to mediators' disposition to distance language from reality, oversimplify it, and discourage independent investigation and critical thought, including about your welfare and that of your people.

Orlando is easy to comprehend, the talkers like *The New York Times* tell us — uncomplicated, heroes and villains, yet another instance of wacko terrorism. (Have you noticed that our enemies are depicted as not just completely off-base and evil, no shades of grey, they're nuts?) We don't have to spend time and energy muddling around in search of reality for ourselves. Look at it the way they tell us and we're on the inside rather than outside. We don't want to

be on the outside, right? It can get uncomfortable out there — in fact, *The New York Times* for one will do its best to make it very uncomfortable for anybody who gets out there. But that is exactly what we should be doing: getting out there, risking to do that, and seeing what the world looks like from that vantage point.

What did Mateen himself say he was about? He said, including, incredibly, during the killings, that he was responding to America's bombing and killing in Syria and Iraq. We can ignore him if we choose, but what he said is a reality that should be taken into account. Are we bombing and killing in Syria and Iraq? And if so, why? In his statements during the killings, Mateen pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and its leader. From the perspective of this self-description, rather than the generic term "terrorist," other words, other meanings, come into possible play, among them that he was engaging in retribution, or a counterattack, or taking revenge, or soldiering (Mateen referred to himself as a soldier).

Using more precise language than generic terrorism to define Mateen might prompt us turn over the coin and hypothesize: if a Middle Eastern army was in Missouri and using drones to attack and kill Americans, might an American born in Missouri and now living in the Middle East have the impulse to shoot somebody or blow something up around where he now is? And let's say he did that. How would we feel about him and what he did? Is he a hater? Is that how we'd see him? A terrorist,

a wild-eyed zealot, a bad guy, irrational? How would we view him?

Alternative language might encourage us to quit killing people in the Middle East and see if that helps things. Switzerland doesn't have the problem we're having; could that have something to do with the fact that they've refrained from spending trillions on military interventions in the Middle East, including Afghanistan, Mateen's ancestral homeland? If it's terrorism, if that's the language we employ, the problem, by definition, is with the deluded, malevolent terrorists. If, however, some other language is attached to what is going on, the problem might be revealed to reside, at least in part, in ourselves and our misguided policies in that part of the world.

If we get beyond the simplistic rhetoric, a question quickly becomes apparent: will a stamp-out-terrorism approach work? What stands out if we get past the talk to reality is how easy it is for a few individuals, no big army, no uniforms, to bring a country, even the world, to its knees if they are willing to forfeit their lives, which a lot of young Muslims are willing to do. The Paris attack took very little training and preparation. And virtually no money — I understand an AK-47 can be purchased for as little as seven American dollars. The San Bernardino husband and wife team needed to know nothing other than how to point a gun at a human being and pull the trigger; no rifle-range expertise necessary. In Orlando, one person made headlines like it was D-Day.

If we are going to do anything about terrorism, to go with that label, besides revile it and throw money and legislation at it to little or no effect, we are going to have to look carefully at the grievances that give rise to it and weigh the possibility of accommodating those grievances as a way to deal with the problem -- even if the grievances aren't justified, it might be a practical move (plus, in truth, sometimes if you look at them closely, adversaries' grievances have some merit). Anyway, one way to keep people from hitting and perhaps killing you is to acknowledge that, yes, they are capable of doing it, and to do what it takes to make them less predisposed to want to take after you. Certainly, if you hit them in the nose or try to get them to leave you alone, you should keep in mind the possible reality that instead of then leaving you alone they will hit you in the nose, plus bop you on the head.

But to get into any of those kinds of considerations we'll have get beyond the conditioning we've undergone—in school, through the media, and from politicians and interest groups—to attend to what they say and swallow it whole and march to their drumbeat. We need to get to the reality that is distorted and masked by, in this instance, the clever and, yes, compelling, “war on terrorism” table thumping coming at us from the people doing the vast majority of the talking in the public square, including *The New York Times*.

Back to question four, who especially likes the idea of Muslims being our enemy? Where does it get white

people to be spending trillions of dollars killing Arabs in the Middle East?

- Orlando is about guns, declares the *Times*. Mateen used a gun; ergo, tighter gun control will solve the problem. Again, simple, and you don't need to think any further about it, just get on board with the program. But seeing it in those terms obscures other considerations that need our attention.

A big one is to get beyond figuring out Mateen to figuring out the people in Pulse that early morning. Mateen, one person, three hours, he must have taken time to re-load, it was dark in there, people could jump out at you and you'd have trouble seeing them, three hundred people in that nightclub, three hundred to one, Mateen kills 49 of them and injures over 50 others, he's texting his wife; and nobody could bring themselves to try to do anything about it? Nobody would risk jumping this guy while he was reloading or tapping keys on his smartphone? Or, sorry, going to the bathroom, which, three hours, I bet he did? No way, zero, to defend themselves? Helpless creatures, like rabbits in a pen? Really?

Seriously, in 1910 or 1937, anywhere in America, any group you name, would three hundred people—again, three hundred to one, pretty good odds—go to their deaths without putting up any struggle at all, nothing, as these people in Pulse did? The way *The New York Times* sold it, the conduct of the three hundred people in Pulse gets a

pass. My take on it is, yes, let's look at Mateen hard and see if we can understand him; but not at the expense of also looking hard at what seems on the face of it to be truly remarkable docility and, I'll say it, a lack of courage in the three hundred other people in that situation.

The reality is that there is a downside to everything. It comes off laudable to be nice and gentle and correct in every thought and deed, maybe in a lot of ways it is, but the cost might be somebody seeing you as an easy and safe target. Could it be that on practical grounds, not homophobia, Pulse seemed to Mateen a better place for the undertaking he had in mind than, say, three hundred attendees at a biker gathering? Could it be that people being visibly capable and disposed toward ferociousness when they are provoked actually is a preventative to violence?

Another consideration that surfaces if we get past the gun control rhetoric is the reality that intentions do not always match up with results. At one time, America had no less than a constitutional amendment prohibiting alcohol production and consumption; prohibition, it was called. Yet people still were able to get alcohol and drink it. There are laws now against drugs. People still obtain and take drugs. In the same way, people, and just maybe the wrong people, will find guns regardless of the laws banning them.

Moreover, there is the reality of the unintended negative consequence. I grew up in a tough neighborhood. One of my buddies from time to time committed house burglaries. He shared with me that his biggest fear when he was in a house looking for pricey items he could fence is that somebody would come around a corner and shoot him. In fact, this prospect kind of took the edge off the activity for him. I'll guarantee, this friend of mine would have wholeheartedly supported any argument or any law that would have lowered the odds of him getting shot. Of course, no matter what, he would have had a gun during his crime escapades, and he'd have used it if the occasion warranted it. But anything that would have diminished his trepidation around having someone dispatch him to eternity would have been most welcome. Whether they realized it or not, the people in those houses were safer to the extent that my friend thought they were armed, whether they actually were or not. If he thought that a high number of them had guns, he would have been disposed to take up shoplifting or three-card monte. But if he thought there was airtight gun control, he'd have gotten busy casing out prospects for upcoming jobs, no hesitation. He may have been a criminal, but he wasn't dumb. Do we give enough attention to the number of lives *saved* by guns along with the number of lives *lost* when guns are present? We need to stop the evangelizing and look at the reality about this.

Back to the Swiss, why does virtually every adult male in Switzerland have an automatic weapon until deep into mid-

life—it's part of his military commitment (at least it was when I worked in Switzerland fifteen years ago)—and, as far as I know, there wasn't and isn't an epidemic of the Swiss shooting each other. So not only, as pointed out before, aren't other people shooting the Swiss, they aren't shooting each other either, at least that's what I think is the case. Would it make sense to study what the Swiss are doing, that reality, and see what we might learn from it?

Press to reality and the question arises: in a nation of hundreds of millions of people, isn't it inevitable that no matter how pacified the culture is generally, and no matter how tight the laws are against gun ownership, that there are going to still be significant numbers of politically motivated and vengeful and evil and mentally ill people with murderous intent who will manage to get weapons and break heads, rape, and blow people away, and that it is unrealistic to expect the police to protect us from them (in Orlando, by the time the police got in the nightclub, the people were dead), and that we had best be armed and protect ourselves against these individuals? Is there room in the dialogue and debate to investigate the possibility that a realistic way to protect ourselves as a country (besides stop killing people in other countries) is if individuals--not the government, individuals, each and every one of us — assume responsibility, if the occasion arises, to, as it were, go down swinging? Might this be the subject of a story in *The New York Times* sometime?

Question four: Does pushing people to be unarmed and benignly nice and rigidly correct in their attitudes and lose their historic “badass-ness” as The New York Times is doing along with a host of others, make whites stronger or weaker? My answer to that question: it weakens them, emasculates them, rounds off their edges, detracts from their honor and fierceness; it domesticates us, and even sets them up for the kill. And who might want that to happen?

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While we are occupied with talking about Orlando and Charlie Hebdo and San Bernardino and Paris, let’s keep in mind that there are other possible realities. I’ve been told by a colleague with science knowledge that it would be easy for someone to poison a city’s water supply. And there is biological warfare, fostering a catastrophic epidemic. And there’s knocking out electrical grids. And sophisticated cyber warfare. And all kinds of things I’m sure I’m not thinking of.

Back to *The New York Times*—and I wish I could shake this habit--not a morning goes by just before I read the *Times* when the thought doesn’t flicker through my mind that its front page might be a monstrous headline and the picture of a gigantic explosion, a nuclear device, in downtown Chicago, some big city, mushroom cloud and all, Hiroshima revisited.

We're playing with fire. In this day and age, people who are really, really incensed about something, whether we like their reasoning or not, could at some point be dissatisfied with just shooting up a night club or a social event, or blowing themselves and a few other people up, or even knocking down a building or two. If you hit somebody and he hits you back and you think the way to deal with that is to hit him back even harder than you've been already doing, he might figure out a way to blow your ass, as well as the asses of thousands if not millions like you, to kingdom come. Those are the stakes we are playing with in all of this, and don't let any words take the place of that reality. And to end with a question for concern: whites need to be very careful that they don't become collateral damage in a fight that's not their fight