

What Terrorists and Minneapolis Street Gangs Have in Common

The 2019 movie [*Hotel Mumbai*](#) tells the gripping tale of the [*Islamic terror attacks in Mumbai*](#) during November 2008.

The ten youthful terrorists were from the Pakistani group Lashkar-e-Tayyiba. They murdered 164 people.

The alleged mastermind, Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, was never tried. In the movie, he is known as Brother Bull, a disembodied voice heard over cell phones giving instructions to the terrorists. Murdering others is not natural, so brainwashing the young Pakistanis to justify the murder of “infidels” was a crucial part of terrorist training.

Brother Bull knows he must reinforce his indoctrination. He reminds the terrorists in real-time, “these animals have no humanity.” “None of them,” he exhorts his terrorist squad, “deserve Allah’s mercy.”

Famed psychologist Roy Baumeister, in his book [*Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty*](#) writes, “Many violent people believe that their actions were justified by the offensive acts of the person who became their victim.”

The movie brilliantly illuminates the one mindset that must be embraced for humans to harm other humans: perpetrators must not see the humanity in their victims. When we truly see the common humanity in others, how can we harm them? Who can harm a part of himself?

Fast forward to October 2018, when a Saudi Arabian hit-squad killed journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Hidden microphones [*recorded the death of Khashoggi*](#).

Khashoggi, a writer for The Washington Post, and a critic of the Saudi regime, went to the consulate for a marriage license. After arriving, a 15-member hit squad dragged him to a back room, where he was referred to as “the animal to be sacrificed.”

Dr. Salah Muhammed Tubaigy, the head of Forensic Evidence at the Saudi General Security Department dismembered Khashoggi’s body. Tubaigy chillingly explains:

I’ve always worked on cadavers. I know how to cut very well.

I have never worked on a warm body though, but I’ll also manage that easily. I normally put on my earphones and listen to music when I cut cadavers. In the meantime, I sip on my coffee and smoke.

After I dismember it, you will wrap the parts into plastic bags, put them in suitcases and take them out.

Tubaigy is a doctor who justifies his murderous ways by thinking he performs his evil work on something less than a human being.

Committing unspeakable crimes because you see others as animals is not limited to attacks like these in Mumbai and Istanbul.

In downtown Minneapolis, there has been a recent spate of muggings by gangs of violent youths who steal the phones and wallets of their victims. [Video evidence of the attacks show that](#) after pummeling victims, gang members took running leaps to jump on their now prone bodies and ran over them with bicycles. These gang members, like all violent criminals, cannot see the humanity in others.

Notice your reaction to the gang violence video. Did you, for a moment, lose sight of the humanity of the gang members and think of them as animals?

Hannah Arendt, in her seminal book [*Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*](#), reports on the Adolf Eichmann trial. Arendt's idea that evil can be banal was and is still controversial.

Most people think murderous acts are perpetuated only by monstrous people. Arendt didn't deny the existence of such monsters, but she dug deeper. She wondered how ordinary people could fail to see the humanity in those they were harming and succumb to evil?

Amos Elon, in his introduction to Arendt's book, points to her conclusion that "Eichmann's inability to speak coherently in court was connected with his incapacity to think, or to think from another person's point of view." Elon continues:

[Eichmann's] shallowness was by no means identical with stupidity. He personified neither hatred or madness nor an insatiable thirst for blood, but something far worse, the faceless nature of Nazi evil itself, within a closed system run by pathological gangsters, aimed at dismantling the human personality of its victims.

The Nazis, Elon writes, "had succeeded in turning the legal order on its head, making the wrong and the malevolent the foundation of a new 'righteousness.'" With enough propaganda, "civil norms" can be redefined and "decent instincts" inherent in people are "no longer to be taken for granted."

[*Maria Popova observes*](#) that Arendt borrowed from Saint Augustine "the phrase amor mundi" which means "love of the world." Arendt was not pointing to romantic love but a love of humanity. Tyranny and evil flourish when we make "other human beings irrelevant."

It's doubtful that anyone reading this essay is a potential Muslim terrorist or a Minneapolis street gang member, yet we all have something to learn from evil acts.

"The foundational problem," the [Arbinger Institute observes](#), "In our homes, our workplaces, and our battlefields is that our hearts are too often at war—that is, we too often insist on seeing people as objects."

Do you see your fellow commuters as obstacles in your way? Do you see your colleagues as competitors instead of teammates? Do you silently swear when dealing with a customer service representative diligently working from a call center in India?

Each of us must activate goodness day by day, in our ordinary encounters. Each of us can choose to see those we meet as people with ["hopes, needs, cares, and fears as real to me as my own."](#) As we do, we bring more peace to our corner of the world.

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[Image Credit: Screen grabs via WCCO video]