Lives of Muslim terror victims matter, too

BY ABDI NOR IFTIN
THE WASHINGTON POST

ISMAIL TAXTA | REUTERS

A Somali policeman walks past the wreckage of a car destroyed in an explosion outside the headquarters of Somalia's Criminal Investigation Department in the capital Mogadishu last month.

When Islamic terrorists killed a priest last month in France, it was front-page news. Yet when terrorists in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, killed more than a dozen civilians that same day, the story received much less prominent coverage. This was despite the amazing revelation that one of the Mogadishu suicide bombers was reportedly a former member of the country's parliament — quite a news hook, as they say in journalism.

As a Somali who spent years reporting from Mogadishu and Nairobi, I understand such editorial decisions. For readers and listeners in developed countries, France is clearly a different world than Somalia. Yet I am concerned that as Republican Donald Trump's presidential campaign and far-right Europeans translate Islamic extremism into Islamophobia, the West will continue to ignore the huge numbers of terrorism victims worldwide who are Muslim.

It goes without saying that terrorism victims in the developing world are humans whose lives are as valuable as those in the West. Less appreciated is that our cultures also are as valid, and are being destroyed. As recently as the early 20th century, Mogadishu was known as the Pearl of the Indian Ocean. It was a capital of Arabic trade and learning for centuries. The historic center contains the remains of medieval sultans' palaces, ancient mosques among the largest in Africa, even a stone lighthouse built before Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas.

You would not want to go there today.

I grew up surrounded by death and destruction in Mogadishu. I have been staring into gun barrels as long as I can remember. First it was rebel militias fighting the central government; then, after there was no more government, came the Islamic terrorists. Escaping death was for the lucky. I watched fighters shoot old men for target practice. I saw wailing mothers forced to leave dead babies by the roadside, unable to bury them. I saw my own sister starve to death. One day my father kissed me goodbye; the rebels were killing all the men, so he had to leave. He returned 10 years later. Before I could tell him I thought he must have been dead, he said he was surprised I was still alive. I guess we were both just lucky.

Mogadishu's booby-trapped streets were my playground. Danger was everywhere. One day, while pointing his gun at my head, a young rebel fighter accidentally dropped a bullet. I picked it up and handed it to him, the way you would if someone dropped a glove on the bus. That might have saved me. He took it and left. A few years later, a group of armed men showed up at a family wedding, demanding money. They grabbed me and pointed guns at my head. By then I was used to guns being pointed at me, but I will never forget my mother's face at that moment. She was trembling in fear. They let me go when they realized we had no money. The eyes of the gunmen were red and spelled death.

For six years, I lived under sharia law imposed by the terrorist group al-Shabab. I was hung by my wrists for watching a World Cup match. One time the terrorists caught me walking on the beach with my girlfriend, and they whipped us. Muslim terrorists hate Muslims like me even more than they hate you, because they view me as a traitor. In Mogadishu, they called me evil because, after saying my prayers, I liked to dance, go to movies, play soccer and hold hands with my girlfriend. They wanted me to stay in the mosque and listen to their anti-Western propaganda, then join them in jihad against infidels — including moderate Muslims.

I refused. I wanted to be an American ever since I was a kid watching "Rambo" movies in a video shack in Mogadishu. I learned my first English from another American immigrant: Arnold Schwarzenegger. ("I'll be back!") Eventually I became the video shack's translator, shouting out dialogue for the audience as the movies played. I put Michael Jackson songs on my cellphone, then hid the phone's memory card in a hole under my mattress. When members of al-Shabab said they would kill me for speaking English, I knew I had to escape.

Today I live in beautiful Maine, now home to about 10,000 Somali immigrants. I am counting the days until I qualify for U.S. citizenship. I want to be an American like the ones I watched in that video shack in Mogadishu. Americans are always the good guys in the movies. But my Muslim countrymen back in Somalia, and in dangerous refugee camps in Kenya, are good guys, too. For them, terrorism is not some outlier event like a plane crash, or something more likely to happen in a Hollywood movie than in real life. It's just another day.

Abdi Nor Iftin has lived in Yarmouth since 2014.

Want to toss the floss?

Here's why you shouldn't do it

BY JON S. RYDER
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

A recent article from The Associated Press has stimulated much interest about whether flossing really works.

Can we finally stop doing what our dentists and hygienists have been nagging us about all this time?

Well, it turns out there really isn't that much scientific evidence to support flossing directly.

However, our focus should actually be on removing plaque. There is an extremely strong body of evidence that plaque contributes to both tooth decay and periodontal disease, or bone loss. When we look at the effectiveness of floss, toothbrushes, regular professional cleanings and so on, we have to think about it in the context of plaque removal and keeping teeth and other oral structures clean.

Bacteria, some of which damage teeth and the supporting structures, live in dental plaque. If we reduce the amount of plaque, we reduce the total numbers of potentially pathological bacteria. So when we keep our mouths as clean as possible, we are much less likely to suffer from oral disease.

To do this effectively, sometimes we need to use all the tools in the toolbox — including floss.

Suggesting that floss is always good for everyone, or always bad for everyone, can never be accurate. Everyone is different. Our oral health care providers should give us individualized recommendations based on our unique oral conditions.

Students and faculty at the Oral Health Center, UNE College of Dental Medicine's clinical facility, treat thousands of patients of all ages with very different needs. For example, a 3-year-old child with crowded teeth would need help from her parents to floss because teeth that are tight together trap food and plaque more easily. Another 3-year-old child who has spaces or gaps between the teeth may be able to remove most plaque with simply a toothbrush. An older or special needs patient with limited movement may struggle to use floss or a toothbrush, so occupational therapists often assist dentists to devise ways to help them clean their teeth.

We also must remember that a lack of scientific evidence does not necessarily equate to a lack of effectiveness.

The Associated Press article implies that the U.S. government no longer supports flossing and has removed flossing from the 2015 U.S. Dietary Guidelines because of a lack of evidence. The Dietary Guidelines have no bearing on the longstanding recommendations from the Surgeon General, the CDC and other health agencies to continue regularly using floss. In fact, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reaffirmed the importance of flossing in an Aug. 4 statement to the American Dental Association.

"Flossing is an important oral hygiene practice," it states. "Tooth decay and gum disease can develop when plaque is allowed to build up on teeth and along the gum line. Professional cleaning, tooth brushing and cleaning between teeth (flossing and the use of other tools such as interdental brushes) have been shown to disrupt and remove plaque."

We strongly advocate for the use of all proven and effective methods for removing disease-causing plaque. That includes the regular use of floss. Ask your oral health care provider what they recommend for you.

Jon S. Ryder is dean of the College of Dental Medicine at the University of New England.

Cianchette

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So while going back to the USSR might make it easier to refocus on what makes us American — instead of doped-up Communist supermen — it shouldn't be necessary for us to set politics aside and simply enjoy the efforts of our countrymen. The United States of America is the only nation in the world founded on an idea, rather than geographic happenstance or tribal affinity. We believe no matter your color or creed, men and women are individuals endowed with the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Besides, whether you are a Democrat or a Republican, America invented BMX. I t is about time we win our first gold medal in it. And that is a good enough reason to chant "USA!" as any.

Michael Cianchette is former chief counsel to Gov. Paul LePage, a Navy reservist who served in Afghanistan and in-house counsel to a number of businesses in southern Maine.

Steed

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of "The Apprentice" yet dropped the line, "I'm not here to make friends?"

Back in 2009, on the radio show "This American Life," writer Rich Juzwiak said of the now-classic reality TV trope: "What makes, 'I'm not here to make friends' quintessential reality TV is that it's impossible to imagine ever saying it in real life."

And so, seven years later, it would fit right in this election season, would it not?

Is this even real anymore? It's getting harder and harder to tell.

Alex Steed has written about and engaged in politics since he was a teenager. He's an owner-partner of a Portland-based content production company and lives with his family, dogs and garden in Cornish.

Scraps

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organics from the trash. This summer, the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments in Auburn awarded Agri-Cycle Energy a contract to potentially roll out organics recycling programs in several rural towns across Androscoggin, Franklin and Oxford counties.

Rumford, Mexico, Roxbury, Byron, Dixfield and Peru — which compose the Northern Oxford Regional Solid Waste Board — as well as Greenwood and Woodstock are among the towns considering a partnership with Agri-Cycle Energy, according to Rebecca Secrest, an environmental planner at the council who is leading the effort to start organics recycling.

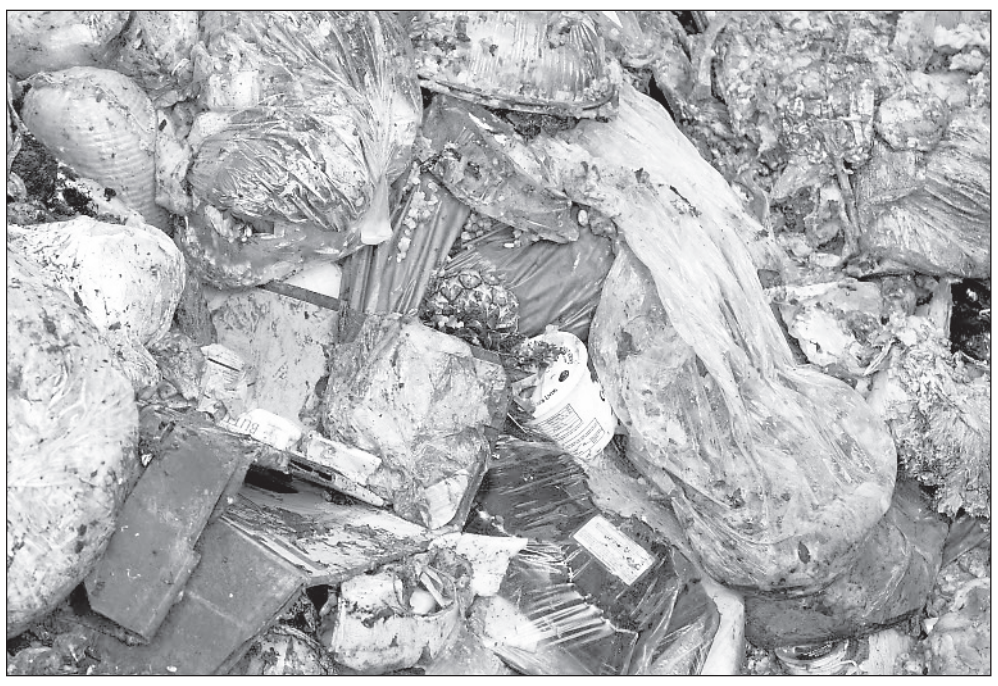
The prospect of diverting more food scraps from the trash bin is a promising development, but organics recycling can be logistically problematic unless enough residents participate, generating the tonnage needed to make it cost-effective for haulers to expand routes and for towns to see trash disposal costs drop.

"All these things take a little time to work out the kinks, build awareness and to get people on board," Williams said.

For the towns of Norway and Paris in Oxford County, it didn't take residents long to get on board with an organics recycling program.

Back in March, the Norway-Paris Solid Waste Board joined forces with We Compost It! to start an organics recycling program at the towns' shared transfer station, where two 32-gallon green containers were set up for residents to drop off their scraps. Within the first month, they found that two containers weren't enough. Now the towns fill between four and five containers a week, according to Warren Sessions, the manager of the shared transfer station.

Of course, the eventual goal of recycling organics isn't just to keep food scraps from going to the waste-to-energy plant in Auburn, where they would otherwise go or to a landfill. It's also about reducing the cost of trash disposal for the two towns.



ASHLEY L. CONTI | BDN

Food waste is delivered to Exeter Agri-Energy in March. Located on Stonyvale Farm in Exeter, Exeter Agri-Energy has transformed manure from the dairy farm's cows and organic waste into electricity, fertilizer and animal bedding since 2012 using anaerobic digestion. Exeter Agri-Energy accepts organic waste from a range of commercial clients and has started to compete for residential organic waste.

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Under the partnership, Norway and Paris pay $78 per month for We Compost It! to haul away the organics, no matter the tonnage, compared with $89 to haul and process a ton trash at Mid-Maine Waste Action Corp. in Auburn, Sessions said. Since March, the towns have diverted an average of 2 tons of organics a month, giving them a slight reduction in trash disposal costs.

"We didn't want to spend more money on composting than we spend to get rid of the trash. It only took us, I'd say, a month to get to the point where we're saving money from composting," Sessions said.

'The next tin can'

This just scratches the surface of the amount of food scraps and organics that could be recovered from the waste stream. A 2011 University of Maine School of Economics analysis found that organics — food scraps, leaves and grass and some paper products — account for 43 percent of the trash generated in the state.

Of the 1.18 million tons of trash Mainers generated in 2014, an estimated 507,000 could have been composted, according to the Department of Environmental Protection. But only 23,627 tons of organics, or about 5 percent, were composted. Nationwide, the composting rate is about 9 percent, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Given limited infrastructure, it isn't a surprise that Maine has a low recovery rate for food scraps and organics. Discussions in towns such as Greenville and those in the Androscoggin Valley are small steps that together could represent early progress toward developing the state's capacity to recycle organics.

State and federal policies could help programs to recycle organics get off the ground. Last September, the EPA and U.S. Department of Agriculture set a goal to reduce food waste in the U.S. by 50 percent by 2030 as part of the agencies' efforts to advise the private sector on strategies to reduce waste and educate consumers.

At the state level, legislators earlier this year adopted a food recovery hierarchy that has prompted the Department of Environmental Protection to put more resources into advising towns on ways to divert greater amounts of food scraps from incinerators and landfills, according to Paula Clark, director of the Division of Materials Management at the DEP.

With food scrap recovery set as a priority for the state, it has spurred interest among towns looking at whether to offer residents organics recycling programs, according to Secrest, the environmental planner at the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments.

"It's a shifting paradigm. Everyone is looking at food waste and realizing we've been disposing of a valuable resource for a long time with no real good reason," Williams said. "We'd like to see the apple core become the next tin can."