

Digesting Terror: Media Consumption in Boston and  
Toulouse

by

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*Note: For copyright reasons, this podcast cannot be made available to the general public. Anyone wishing to listen to it should contact the author.*

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## Preface

### *The Project*

In April of 2013, I was on a stationary bike in the school's fitness center shortly after photos were released of Dzhokhar (pronounced Johar; he goes by Jahar) and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, suspects in the Boston Marathon bombing. Who exactly the perpetrators of the attacks were had been a mystery for a couple of days, so anticipation was high once their names were revealed, especially in the Boston area, where I'm from and where my family lives.

As I read the captions for the next forty minutes, reporters on CNN spoke of nothing else. They told and retold everything they knew about the brothers, which was relatively little. They spoke with people who had known Jahar, all of them shocked that the nineteen year-old could have committed such an act. They said that Jahar was a wrestler, that Tamerlan was a boxer. They showed the same pictures of the pair: Tamerlan wearing a red sweatshirt and sporting a few bruises on his cheeks and a huge smile; Jahar with shaggy hair and a slight grin. Neither one looked remarkable.

After the first ten minutes staring at the television, I realized that I had heard pretty much everything CNN had to tell. I easily could have stopped watching. I could have turned my attention to one of the other ten televisions that were hanging from the ceiling in front of me. But I didn't. I was so surprised to learn that someone even younger than me, someone who looked like boys from my high school, could have done such a thing. Besides the four people who

were killed in the bombing and its aftermath, hundreds were treated for injuries. I wanted to know about the perpetrators, even if that meant watching Anderson Cooper and co. repeat the same few things for forty minutes.

The weekend after the marathon bombing, I received a message from a close friend, Elodie, who lives in Albertville, France. I knew what the message was about before I even opened it. After the Boston bombing, I had received a flurry of Facebook messages from friends abroad asking if my family and I were safe. I thanked Elodie for her kind message and assured her that we were all safe. I also asked what the French media was saying about the incident.

Elodie told me that the news in France reported that the perpetrators were two radical Islamists, just like the man who killed people in Toulouse, France a year earlier. I remembered the incident she was referring to. I was studying in Paris when Mohammed Merah went on a killing spree. For a time, it seemed to be all anyone was talking about. I remember first hearing that someone was killing French soldiers in that area, and then, that there was an attack at a Jewish school, and that a rabbi and some students were shot. People discussed it in hushed tones. I remember standing outside a café, watching the televisions inside, all tuned in to coverage on the shootings, for several minutes. It was the first attack of that scale inside a school in French history.

I didn't follow the Boston bombings or their aftermath very closely, but I found that many people in the Boston area, including my parents, became obsessed with news on the attacks, compulsively watching the television waiting for updates in the days following crisis. After my limited exposure to coverage of

the event, I didn't feel that I had taken much away; I had a shallow understanding of what had occurred. I wondered how my interactions with media in Connecticut compared with those of people in the Boston area. How did they experience media coverage, and how did they understand the event afterwards?

The task of answering these questions alone could have easily occupied me for a year. However, I decided I wouldn't stop after investigating media consumption<sup>1</sup> in Boston. Knowing that the marathon bombings had been compared with the Toulouse shootings, I wondered how media consumption compared in Boston and in Toulouse. I knew that the Merah attacks were widely discussed directly after they occurred, but was that reflective of the same sort of media consumption that I witnessed in the U.S.? And how had discourse on the event changed since the attacks stopped?

Investigating the media consumption in these two cities around two terrorist attacks allowed me to analyze responses in ways that would not have been possible otherwise. For instance, it offered the opportunity to note differences in media reception between cultures, some of which were stark and fascinating. Beyond that, it allowed me to trace memories of media coverage over time. I spoke with Bostonians roughly two months after the marathon bombings, whereas I spoke with Toulousains nineteen months after they saw

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<sup>1</sup> I give preference throughout my preface and podcast to terms like "media consumption" and "media consumers" over terms like "media reception" and "audience." This is because I interpret the idea of media consumption as a

terrorism. I wondered how answers would be different when wounds were still fresh versus when the event was more distant.

Although these two crises were not identical, I found that they had many characteristics in common, which made them both comparable and worthy of investigation. These attacks were the first of a large scale in the United States and in France carried out in the name of Islam by homegrown terrorists. Although attacks like these bear echoes of 9/11, they were domestic events, a feature that, I intuited, would result in different media coverage than an international incident.

Furthermore, both the Tsarnaevs and Merah were around the same age; they all became increasingly radicalized, likely at least partially in response to their positions within their environments. These were also the first cases of political terrorism in the U.S. and in France since the rise in popularity of social media, which raises the question, What role did social media play in the consumption of media coverage of these attacks?

Of course, it's also no coincidence that I chose to investigate events in the U.S. and in France. I'm very familiar with these countries. I have many contacts in both of these countries. I also speak English and French, which greatly facilitated the interview process.

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process that does not end as soon as reception has ended. Instead, it occurs gradually.

### *The Format*

The journalistic approach I decided upon for my interviews is a skill I have practiced extensively at Wesleyan and one in which I am particularly interested. I began writing news articles for *The Argus* three years ago, and during the first semester of my senior year, I worked as editor-in-chief for the paper. I enjoy doing interviews because I find that oftentimes I learn more about my world after asking strangers questions for twenty minutes than I do reading a text for double that length of time. Especially when researching reactions to terrorism, I have found academic books that analyze the history and philosophy of terrorism to be distant from the lived realities following crisis.<sup>2</sup>

The particular format of the podcast that I chose allowed me to preserve, as much as possible, a glimpse of that lived reality captured through interviews. A podcast allows a journalist to intersperse her thoughts and quotations of those interviewed with music and quiet pauses, which I believe makes for a product that is not just more interesting to consume but also one that directs the listener through the experience of listening more so than an article could.

Furthermore, despite my loyalties to printed press, I actually consume audio news much more than I consume visual news, and I hope to one day produce it professionally. I decided that creating an entire hour-plus-long show from the interview stage through the editing stage would give me a taste of what a job in radio journalism would entail.

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<sup>2</sup> For more on these, see Albert Camus, Jean Baudrillard, and Matthew Carr



## *The Style*

On March 22, 2013, *This American Life* released its 490<sup>th</sup> episode, called “Trends with Benefits.” I happened to be in the car driving back to school after spring break when it aired, so I was glad for the distraction. This wasn’t the show’s most typical episode. Generally, the show looks at three stories based around one theme, but this time, during the entire hour, reporter Chana Joffe-Walt explored different aspects of one problem plaguing America: over-reliance on federal disability payments. The first half of the episode dealt with getting to the bottom of why so many Americans collect disability; the second half looked at what the impact of that is in the private and public sectors.

I found that Joffe-Walt did an outstanding job of conveying the problem, one that most Americans are probably unaware of, but one that has a major impact on everyone who pays taxes in the U.S. She achieved this by interspersing personal accounts of those she interviewed with suggestive statements and questions. If she had a solution to the problem, she didn’t state it. Instead, she simply revealed the problem’s scope, leaving the listener thinking.

This journalistic style was the one I chose to replicate in my own project. I wanted to use the *This American Life* approach in order to slow the pace of exploration to look more deeply at individual stories. Unlike many other news radio shows, *This American Life* investigates a single topic for an extended period of time (Joffe-Walt investigated the federal disability program for six months) and produces segments on it that are between ten minutes and an hour in length, as opposed to between thirty seconds and three minutes. And unlike a more

comparable program, like *Frontline*, *This American Life* tends to move along at a slower pace, and uses a narrative style as opposed to a more assertive one.

In Joffe-Walt's story, it wasn't just "relevant" parties that were interviewed. Instead, the reporter spoke with a wide range of people, as she recognized that everyone, whether or not s/he was well informed, represented a particular viewpoint that should not be left out of the conversation but should, at the very least, be acknowledged. I tried to emulate this philosophy by not limiting the people I chose to interview, for instance, to only reporters or only people who witnessed the event of terrorism.

Like Joffe-Walt, I use the introduction as a space to establish the problem and provide some factual background. I then dedicate Part I to a close exploration of people's interactions with the media. In Part II, I show the results of this mediation. My goal, like Joffe-Walt's toward her own topic, is not to propose a solution to the current condition of media consumption; it is to reveal that the current state of consumption may not be exactly what it appears. I hope to help listeners think critically about media consumption in general, and their own consumption more specifically.

### *Methodology*

#### Interviews in Boston

I began to search for people to interview in and around Boston at the beginning of June, 2013. Although I'm from outside of Boston, I didn't want to

rely exclusively on word of mouth to find interviewees. I wanted a more heterogeneous sampling: people of different ages, genders, and from different towns. (I didn't make any effort to control for things like race or socioeconomic status—although it's possible that would have influenced responses I received—because I didn't feel comfortable asking interviewees about those things.)

I decided, despite some reservations, to reach out to the Wesleyan network in order to find people to interview. I realized that there is no lack of Wesleyan alumni of different ages and genders all around the greater Boston area, and that strangers were more likely to respond to my request if we shared a connection like attending the same school. It also helped me avoid interviewing only people I already knew and who came from my town, so in that sense, I think it diversified the sample population. However, I recognize that it's dishonest to call a group of Wesleyan alumni entirely heterogeneous.

I used Wesconnect to find alumni in and around Boston. I searched for alumni of all graduation years in Boston (where the bombing occurred), Cambridge (where the Tsarnaev brothers lived), and Watertown (where the manhunt for the brothers occurred). I also connected with people in my own town by asking friends and family to send out word that I was looking for people to interview. I refrained from interviewing family members, and almost all of the people I interviewed were strangers.

I found the people I interviewed in the Boston area, who ranged in age from twenty to about sixty, to comprise a relatively diverse group in ways that

were relevant for my investigation: their sources of media, their memories of media, and their reflections on coverage.

Once I found people to interview in the Boston area, I then decided on what questions I would ask. At such an early stage in the process, my project was still finding its shape. Therefore, I asked a wide range of questions, hoping that some of the answers would surprise me and that revelations would arise naturally. I didn't want the questions I asked to limit the material I then had to work with. For the list of questions I asked in Boston-area interviews, see Appendix 1.

The length of interviews varied greatly, mostly based on how talkative the interviewee was and on how closely s/he followed the events. Some lasted fifteen minutes; others went on for an hour or more. Most interviews in Boston were around forty minutes. I met people wherever they chose: in cafés, outside of office buildings, or at their homes. My first interview was on June 9, my last on June 25.

### Toulouse Interviews

Thanks to a grant from the College of Letters department, I was able to fly to Toulouse, France in October of 2013. Before arriving in Toulouse, I knew no one there. Finding people to interview was a challenge. I began by sending out a Facebook message to most of my French friends asking if anyone knew anyone who knew anyone who lives in Toulouse. I did get a few interviews this way.

However, to find the majority of people I interviewed in Toulouse, I went to Couchsurfing.org. Couchsurfing is a social network that helps travelers establish connections with residents of the place they're visiting in the hopes of finding hosts who are willing to open their homes to strangers. On this site, I found enough people willing to host me that I could stay with someone new each night without having to pay for accommodations. Most of these people also sat down for interviews with me, and many helped me establish connections with their friends. Some couchsurfers who were unable to host me were still able to meet for an interview. I found it to be an excellent way to meet people in a city I had never visited, and I had very positive experiences with all of my hosts.

Although I had a high response rate, just as with Wesconnect, Couchsurfing provided me with a less-than-heterogeneous group of people. I found it particularly difficult to connect with people who were much older than I am. In order to find older people to interview, I approached strangers. For instance, I went to the Musée du Vieux Toulouse, where the manager agreed to sit down for an interview. This gave me a much better-rounded sampling of Toulousains.

I tried my best to translate my questions as similarly as possible from English into French. For the complete list of questions I asked in Toulouse, see Appendix 2. I arrived in Toulouse on October 18, 2013, and left in the wee hours of October 24. My interviews all took place over the course of five days.

With a few exceptions, I found interviews in Toulouse to be much more brief than those in Boston. The majority lasted between five and twenty minutes.

Although no one I directly asked for an interview declined, people in Toulouse were, in general, much more hesitant to be interviewed, and during interviews, they were more guarded and didn't seem to want to chat much before or after. I only used about sixty percent of these interviews in my podcast, because many were not fruitful. Again, there were exceptions to this. My interviews with Basile, Sylvie, and Eric, for instance, all lasted for nearly an hour. One interview in Toulouse lasted almost two hours.

Although I can't say for sure why interviews in Toulouse were noticeably shorter than those in Boston, I do have guesses. One is the language barrier. It was much easier for me to converse with Bostonians, and maybe that made them feel more at ease. Another is a cultural barrier. It seems to be less typical in France for strangers to interact. It may have been uncomfortable for some people.

### Production

It wasn't until I had collected all of my responses and could re-listen to interviews that I was able to see trends. With over sixteen hours of interviews, I cut down most interviews by two-thirds or more and left only the most useful portions. I tended to retain quotations that were either novel and thought provoking or concise and representative of what many people responded. On the other hand, I discarded responses that were very similar to what other people had said in fewer words. I also discarded long responses that could be easily summarized. This process took several weeks, but once it was completed, I was

left with approximately five and a half hours of material, and a much better sense of what it revealed about media consumption.

I then drafted an outline for the podcast and sorted sound bites into audio files topically. This process took many days. Finally, I was able to write a script (provided following the preface), order sound bites, and record. The podcast went through four major drafts before taking its current incarnation.

### *Placing this work in academia*

This work is not intended as a work of theory. However, as it is being viewed in an academic context, it is important to see how it fits among established fields of academic research. In order to find this out, I researched media reception theory, specifically theory that deals with news, especially news of terrorism.<sup>3</sup>

Media reception theory was first developed in the 1960s as a version of literary theory that focused on readers' receptions to texts. Importantly, early reception studies showed that readers do not always interpret a text exactly as it was intended.<sup>4</sup> Instead, their backgrounds and contexts influence their interpretations. When applied to televised news, for instance, this means that when two people watch the same segment about a fire that destroyed a house, a

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, see J. Curran and T. Liebbes; Mary Gregerson; Michelle Slone.

<sup>4</sup> Catriona Miller; David Philips.

firefighter may interpret it differently than a layman because of his or her experiences and knowledge.

Despite advances in the field, one important contextual element has been generally ignored: time and its effects on one's reinterpretation of a text.

Typically, media reception studies look at responses to texts at the time they are viewed or very shortly after. When a reader responds to literature, for instance, s/he typically has the novel in hand or has just read it. However, most studies don't address what happens when the reader is responding to a text s/he no longer has access to or one that s/he hasn't viewed in months. I found that my project, looking at the remnants in people's minds of media months after coverage has mainly diminished, is outside of the realm of reception theory as it is currently studied.

In brief, media reception theory, perhaps because of its literary roots, takes for granted the fact that the medium in question remains present or reappears. However, with news, that's generally not the case. After a crisis, media on the event appears and then disappears. Unless the viewer has a reason to review the media, s/he will not, and slowly details will fade from his/her memory. This makes it very unlike other types of media such as films or television shows that are often re-watched. As I saw when I compared answers in Boston and in Toulouse, the responses we have to news media are not the same immediately after consumption as they are two months after consumption, and those ones are not the same as the ones we have a year and a half after



consumption. After swallowing coverage, we have a long, dynamic process of digestion, which appears to be an under-studied phenomenon.

Despite the tendency of reception theorists to shy away from studying consumers long after separating from a text, I would argue that the effect of time is an important component in understanding media reception. Experts in advertising seem to have figured this out long ago; a consumer's memories of an ad on Tuesday inform reception of an ad on Friday. Perhaps more on point, many of the people I spoke with recalled feeling haunted in 2013 by images they had seen in the media in 2001 after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and indeed, it is not unheard of for media consumers to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after seeing particularly graphic coverage of a traumatic event, such as 9/11.<sup>5</sup> Of course, a person is not typically free of PTSD one minute and suddenly struck by it the next. Instead, it often develops over time as a result of harmful memories. Better understanding how our relation to media coverage changes over time will help us better understand phenomena like this one.

In fact, in my research on media reception, I found theory on news to be seriously lacking. In the archives of one journal, *Participations, Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, only one article produced since 2003 specifically addressed the news, and it spoke only of news texts and the ways readers interpreted them directly after having read them.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Gregerson.

<sup>6</sup> See David Mathieu.

I find it to be very surprising that despite most people's regular contact with news media, it is not widely studied in media reception. However, if researchers were to simply study reception of news in the moments after consumption, this, too, would be an incomplete picture. I believe my project, because it does not fit neatly into the schemas developed by reception theory, reveals important gaps in the field.

Still, my purpose in completing this project was not to theorize. I'm not trying to do the work of a reception theorist, but instead that of a journalist.

### *Limitations*

The podcast I produced is a work of journalism. I interviewed forty people. Although I believe, and suggest, that their responses seem to reveal certain trends in local media consumption following these two events, they comprise a statistically insignificant group. My research is not intended to provide quantitative data in order to definitely answer questions like, "What was the most popular source of news for Toulousains of ages thirty to forty?" I leave that work to statisticians. Instead, my research looks at broader trends and speaks to questions like, "In general, how was media consumed during and after these two events?"

My interviews were purely journalistic; they were not scientific. I made no effort to control variables such as the environment; interviews occurred in a wide variety of locations (noisy cafés, quiet art galleries, student dormitories,

suburban homes). I prepared the same fifteen questions to ask in Boston and in Toulouse so that answers could be directly compared, but based on the flow of the conversation at a given interview, I sometimes skipped questions, added questions, and asked for clarifications. Some interviews were preceded by chitchat; others were not. In brief, I made no attempt to reproduce the same conditions in every interview.

My work does not focus on the media that was produced in the aftermath of these two incidents of terrorism. Although, while researching, I consumed a large amount of the media that I asked about, I recognize that there was simply too much of it for me to create anything useful out of the small percentage that I might be able to read, hear, or watch. Instead, my podcast focuses almost exclusively on observations about consumption, which limits conclusions I can draw. For instance, I can't conclude that most news coverage was inaccurate, because I didn't see most news coverage; I can, on the other hand, say definitively that most of the people I interviewed found it to be inaccurate. The one exception I made was in interviewing two journalists, one in Toulouse and one in Boston. Both report for a major local paper. I can't defend this exception other than to say that when the opportunity presented itself to interview people whose work is so closely related to what I was studying, I couldn't say no. (Incidentally, I found their perspectives to be very helpful in understanding responses of consumers.)

While listening to my interviews, I resisted categorizing responses into academic pools of thought. I tried my best to simply report what I found without

exaggerating scale or over-extending ideas. My goal is to stimulate thought and to raise questions. I don't claim to have the answers.

Considering the overwhelming amount of material I had after completing interviews, deciding what to include was very difficult. Many questions are not touched upon in the podcast; however, what I consider to be the most important ones are included.

### *Structure*

The podcast begins with two questions, "What exactly are we looking for in the media in the days following a crisis? And what are we getting out?" The podcast attempts to investigate what's at the heart of media consumption by breaking these questions down into smaller ones.

The first half of my podcast is structured around the question, "How did Bostonians and Toulousains interact with the media during and directly after terrorism?" I look at whether it seems to be possible to escape mediation after terrorism. I ask about how much news people learned from looking at media. I show how satisfied or dissatisfied people reported feeling with each of several media (television, radio, print/online news, social media). And finally, I reveal the sense of community some consumers found in media.

The second half of my podcast speaks to the question, "What was created in media's wake?" I reveal what viewers remembered and what they forgot shortly and long after the event of terrorism (two months later in Boston;

nineteen months later in Toulouse). I look at people's perceptions of the terrorists, showing how memories became tangled up with opinions. I draw attention to noteworthy differences between American and French recollections of events. I ask Bostonians and Toulousains whether their respective cities changed after the attacks, and whether they took action as a result of media coverage. Finally, I speak to the question, "Why are we hooked on media?"

Following this preface is the podcast (a CD), accompanied by the script. Questions used for the interviews in Boston and in Toulouse can be found in Appendixes 1 and 2, respectively.

## Script

### *Introduction*

#### Music

When I Google “Boston bombing media,” the first result is a USA Today article with the headline, “On Boston bombing, media are wrong again.” The second, an article in Quartz called “Four ways the media failed in covering the Boston bombings.” The third, an article on an NPR blog titled, “Social Media’s Rush to Judgment In The Boston Bombings.” You get the point. The first page of search results goes on more or less in that vein.

And yet, during the week following the bombings at the Boston Marathon, media consumption soared. One study showed that of the nation’s six most-watched news networks, CNN was considered the least believable in the week following the bombing, but on CNN, total day viewership rose 194 percent that week.

In March of 2012, an incident of terrorism in Toulouse, France, called l’affaire Merah, sparked a similar media frenzy. Viewership of media greatly increased there as well. And yet, on one poll that asked readers the question, “Are media making too much of Merah?” 87% said yes.

When I heard numbers like these, I wanted to know what was going on, not with the media, but with the consumers. What exactly are we looking for in the media in the days following a crisis? And what are we getting out?

#### Music

To start, let’s look at what happened in each of these cities.

Intro: sounds of Boston bombing

On Monday, April 15, 2013, Tamerlan and Jahar Tsarnaev planted two bombs fashioned from pressure cookers in trash barrels at the finish line of the Boston Marathon.

The result was reminiscent of a modern-day battle scene. Boylston Street was stained with the blood of hundreds of spectators. Two hundred eighty-two people were treated for injuries at local hospitals. Many lost limbs. Three died at the marathon, two young women and an eight-year-old boy. For five days, the terrorists were at large. Many in the Boston area were uneasy as reports came out that the brothers were in Cambridge, then in Watertown. That week, media spoke of little else.

It wasn't until Friday night that police located the Tsarnaevs. Tamerlan was killed in a struggle with police, and Jahar was found hours later, hiding inside a boat in a residential backyard.

## Music

After a series of shootings in Toulouse, France, the media coverage there was just as saturated.

It all started on Sunday, March 11, 2012. A Muslim French soldier was shot dead in Toulouse. Then on Thursday, two more Muslim French soldiers were killed, this time in the nearby town of Montauban. The next Monday, the shooter visited a Jewish day school and shot dead three students and one rabbi who taught at the school, gravely injuring one other student. It was the worst school-related attack in French history.

Like the Tsarnaev brothers, Mohammed Merah, the Toulousain killer, was at large for several days, and during that time, all eyes were on the media. It wasn't until March 22, one and a half weeks after his first victim fell, that Merah's apartment was surrounded by law enforcement.

Over the next 32-hours, police fired loud weapons around the apartment in attempts to wear him down.

Clip: weapons being fired

*Eric: Less than 1 km from my house, there was a Mohammed Merah shooting. We even heard, we felt the detonations at Merah's house throughout the day.*

Merah finally began shooting at police out of a window. They shot back, he jumped out, and police fired at his head, ending his life.

A lot has been published about the Tsarnaevs since they attacked Boston. Tamerlan was twenty-six and Jahar nineteen when the pair terrorized the marathon. Although they were both born in Chechnya, they immigrated to the U.S. more than ten years before attacking their community.

When the Tsarnaevs arrived in Cambridge, neither held very strong religious beliefs. However, their family in Chechnya was Muslim, and as the stress of life in the United States began to wear them down, the brothers turned to religion with growing zeal.

What struck me as I learned about these brothers were the resemblances they shared with Mohammed Merah.

Clip: Who is Mohammed Merah?

That was a clip produced by CNN while Merah was still at large.

Merah and the Tsarnaev brothers have a lot in common. All three young men were quickly referred to by the media as terrorists, a term that many Americans associate with foreigners. Yet, they all grew up in the area that they attacked. They all killed in the name of Islam with the goal of punishing their home countries.

These terrorists attacks both generated an overwhelming amount of attention from the media. To find out how it was consumed, I interviewed about forty people in the Boston area and in Toulouse, and asked them all about their experiences with the media flurry following a terrorist attack.

I interviewed those in Boston in June of 2013, two months after the Boston bombings. I travelled to Toulouse in October of that year, 19 months after the Toulouse shootings.

Music

My goal was not to critique the media coverage after these two events, but instead to look at what was created in its wake.

Music

### *Part I: Media Glut*

That brings me to the first part of my investigation: media glut.

We're at a point in history distant from the days when each member of a community read the same local paper and could chat about that day's news with her next door neighbor. Nowadays, everyone gets news from a patchwork of different sources, so you never know if your neighbor is hearing about the same events as you.

There seem to be a few exceptions to that rule. Everyone in Boston will hear if the Sox win the World Series. Everyone in Boston will also hear if an act of terrorism occurs on local soil. The same is true in Toulouse. These are small cities that don't normally see terrorism.

Every person I spoke with, both in Boston and in Toulouse, had seen or heard news on the local terrorism that I was investigating, even the people who generally avoid the media altogether.



I spoke with Bruno in Toulouse, a student who says he never looks at the media because he doesn't trust it.

*Bruno: And after that moment, people talked about nothing else—on every television. When I went to take a driving class at driving school, on the television, “oh, there’s Mohammed Merah,” etcera. Everyone talked about it.*

He couldn't help but see news about the Merah affair even though he didn't seek it out. Many people I spoke with described having an experience like his. Everywhere they turned, at the hairdresser, at the office, they were inundated with news about the event, like it or not.

Some embraced it. Here's Blanka.

*Blanka: What did you see on TV in the days and weeks following the incident? What I saw? Yes. Well, the news talked all about it. And then, the day where he was found in his apartment, it was on TV all day. So, when I could, I watched it, and when I couldn't, we talked about it at work with colleagues.*

Lots of people found themselves in cases like Blanka's, compulsively checking the news for updates. I spoke with Laura, another Toulousaine who couldn't help but follow coverage of the shootings minute by minute.

*Laura: In the news they were monitoring what was happening. I believe it was in Le Monde that there was a minute-by-minute update of what was happening, and I really followed that in a way so I knew exactly what was happening, so...which isn't at all typical for me. I don't usually follow news like that, but after that incident, yes, I followed it. And same for Boston.*

It makes sense that people like Blanka and Laura would turn to the media to try to find out about nearby terrorism. After all, they had no first-hand knowledge of the event. If they're going to learn about it, what they hear is going to be mediated. So what about someone who witnessed the terrorism? Would that person be able to bypass media coverage? I didn't speak with anyone who witnessed events in Toulouse. Those shootings were seen by few. In Boston, on the other hand, thousands of people witnessed the bombings at the marathon, and I spoke to five of them. Here's one.

Joanne: witness looks at media

Joanne was seated on the bleachers right across the street from where the second bomb went off. But she only saw a piece of the event, and she needed information to understand its impact more globally.

I spoke with someone who, tragically, had a different perspective on the event. His name is Greg. Greg lives in Somerville, but his father lives in one of the

residential towers next to the Prudential building, directly behind Boylston Street, where the bombings occurred. Greg and his brother were in their father's apartment, on the twenty-third floor of a skyscraper overlooking the marathon finish line, when the bombs went off.

Greg: From Prudential tower.7

Greg said that at first, he thought the sound might have been something celebratory, maybe like a firework. Then the second bomb went off.

Greg: From Prudential tower merged.ai

Unlike Joanne and the other spectators on the ground, Greg could see everything. What did he do? Turn on the news.

Greg: "Not real until it's news".5

So what did Greg learn from watching the news? As it turns out, nothing.

Greg: Witness watching news merged.ai

Greg didn't find out anything from the news in the minutes following the bombing that he didn't already know. In fact, reporters knew less than Greg. But what he did find out was what the rest of the world was seeing. Like he said, these days, it's not real until it's on the media.

Music

Although Greg's vantage point was pretty unique, his experience with the media wasn't. This is Andrew.

Andrew: Interview with An7dcd5f73.5

Like Greg, Andrew couldn't help but witness the unfolding of the Boston bombing, but Andrew wasn't even at the marathon. He lives in Watertown, just a few blocks away from where Jahar Tsarnaev was found the Friday after Marathon Monday. The night of the manhunt, Andrew's street was packed with every kind of law enforcement.

Andrew: Interview with An7dcd5f73#2.5

He showed me pictures after our interview. As it turns out, Jahar drove right down his street. There were military tanks swarming the area. Neighbors' houses still have bullet holes in them from shots fired by and at the brothers. Andrew listened to the police scanner and the news to piece together what was going on outside his door. And like Greg, he didn't find out much.

Andrew: Lack of information.2

That was a message I heard from tons of respondents. The minutes, hours, in some cases days they spent watching the news on TV or refreshing their Twitter feeds was largely in vain. The constant coverage continued even when there was nothing new to report.

Here's Sylvie. Sylvie works in an art gallery, where we met, and although she lives in Toulouse, she was in Paris with her husband when the shootings occurred, so she tried to stay informed by watching the news in her hotel room.

Sylvie: What did you see on television in the days and weeks following the incident? *Nothing...There were no images. There was the school, the street in front of the school, the street where Merah lived, his apartment, the police there...cornered in the street by the apartment. But they were empty streets, empty apartments. There were a few interviews of neighbors. I said "nothing," but I was exaggerating. What was moving were interviews of other children, or teachers, or parents of the school. But it was still relatively few things for such long media reels. But there you go.*

She went on to explain that sure, there *were* stories in the news, but that there wasn't much to show or to say, and yet, newscasters spoke of nothing else for hours upon hours, days upon days. Reports like this made me wonder: Why do so many of us cling to the media after a tragic event if it's not supplying us with what we're after: news?

Music

After looking at people's interactions with the media, I wondered what they thought about the quality of what they were consuming. If many people watched the media for hours on end, were they satisfied with the media that was produced? Keep in mind that with the exception of speaking with a couple of reporters, I wasn't investigating the media itself, but instead what consumers thought of it.

I asked the people I interviewed which types of media they looked at after the local incident of terrorism. I found that people looked at a wide range of sources, but that in terms of amount of time spent consuming the medium, television was the most popular.

When people in Boston talked about their experiences with televised news, one word came up a lot: speculation. Andrew did a great job of summing up what many people viewed as a problem.

Andrew: Problem with 24 hour news.5

Many people in the Boston area who noted this tendency to speculate saw it as problematic. Here's Ash.

Ash: Better journalism.8

Ash acknowledged that during crisis, viewers are looking for any information, even if it is speculation, and I found that to be the case. A few people I spoke with prioritized up-to-the-second updates over totally accurate news.

Laura: Inaccuracies, concerns.5

That was Laura. She went on to explain that as long as news sources were clear that facts were fuzzy, she was glad to know exactly what they knew.

Laura: Inaccuracies, concer merged.ai

Although most people said they were frustrated with the ever-changing story they were hearing on television, very few people seemed to turn off the coverage. Like Laura said, people wanted resolution, especially while the terrorists were at large. But a few people did say they turned off their televisions in response to the coverage. Here's Arion, who was working on Boylston during the bombing.

Arion: Self-censoring.4

Arion was one of just a small handful of people in Boston and in Toulouse who responded to televised media coverage by self-censoring. Arion mentioned that he saw the same few images over and over on the news. Many people I spoke with, both in Toulouse and in Boston, mentioned that same thing.

*Basile: You can't say it's not detailed. On BFM TV or on French television stations, every fifteen minutes, there were the same images that are looped, looped, looped, looped, looped, looped. If it were me and I was 70 and I felt pretty secure in my life and I saw that, I would immediately vote conservative. Yeah, that's for sure, it's detailed. You can't get more detailed than that.*

According to Basile and a lot of other people I talked to, televised news exaggerates the scale of an event and needlessly creates panic in consumers. Sylvie, who explained that she experienced life before and after the advent of 24-hour news networks, said that they brought with them unease.

Music

Sylvie illustrated her point with an anecdote.

## Music

Sylvie's mother, who's over 80, lives in the center of a small, safe village where the average age is about 70. One day, Sylvie's mother explained that she wanted to set up an alarm at her home.

*Sylvie: And I said, "Mom, why do you want to put an alarm in the house? Where did this idea come from?" And she told me, "Well, you know, my friends are older women as well, and...then there's everything you see on TV. Do you realize now they attack old women in their homes in the country?"*

Sylvie thought the idea was silly. She asked her mom when someone in the village was last robbed or assaulted.

*Sylvie: With those words, she stopped, and she told me, well, I don't know. And even I don't know. And then, she understood, and she said, "Yes, it's true. It's ridiculous." But there's a real bombardment of...bad news, of situations like this, because we live in an immediate world, and that creates...for me that creates a real panic, a fear of the Other, which really shouldn't be.*

This is the kind of view that a lot of people seem to have about televised news. And most people continued to watch it even though they thought news stations sensationalized the event, and even though they didn't get everything right the first time. Many people commented that it's the immediacy of televised news that makes it both attractive and problematic. So did people find coverage from less immediate sources to be more satisfactory?

Arion: Newspapers better.<sup>3</sup>

Not everyone was totally satisfied with newspaper coverage of the events, but most people who read them agreed with Arion that coverage felt more digested, more thoughtful. It became clear to me from comments like this that viewers perceive media as existing in a sort of hierarchy of quality, and televised coverage was at the bottom for many people I spoke with. Oddly enough, that didn't seem to stop most of them from watching it.

I found that many more people I interviewed looked at online journals than at print newspapers. Feedback about those was more mixed. A few people praised Boston.com's coverage of the marathon bombing and its aftermath. Greg was one of them.

Greg: Boston.com rocks!.<sup>1</sup>

Ash said he has a policy that in the one to two days following a crisis, he doesn't look at the media, because he expects to find false information. After the marathon bombing, he made an exception by looking at Boston.com, but he

waited to look at other news sources. I asked how he found the online coverage once he started looking at it.

Ash: Disappointment onlin merged.ai

So for Ash, immediacy hurt coverage more than it helped. He told me he found coverage directly after the events to be inaccurate. When I spoke with reporters from La Dépêche and The Boston Globe, they seemed to have experienced that as well. Jean-Luc of La Dépêche commented that even journalists writing for print journals are under pressure nowadays to produce up-to-the-minute news.

Jean-Luc: Did you watch the news that was on TV? *Yes. Today, we have the same immediacy in the written press that they do, actually. So, you could believe that we have plenty of time to reflect while writing an article that will be published the next day, but that's no longer the whole picture, because now we also have the website, which diffuses information in real time. So we have all those networks that develop, and social networks put out news. And the effect is that we can no longer just say, "This thing happened. We have until midnight to get information, broaden our knowledge." Now we also have to put out news before.*

And he explained that this leads to mistakes.

Jean-Luc: *There was a journalist on site to know what was happening. And we also had a colleague upstairs in the office who watched the TV, the continuous TV channels that came to Toulouse, and who, according to what they were saying, published updates on the site. The effect of that, for instance, was that we announced the death of Merah three-quarters of an hour before he was really killed because there was a TV channel that announced it, so we reproduced the news that Mohammed Merah had been killed. There you go. Rapidity. We want to go fast, but we don't double-check, and we say anything. It's dangerous.*

Jean-Luc told me that this mistake was corrected before it could be printed in the paper.

Jean-Luc: *We figured out what happened, that we announced it too early, and that we didn't check, but after, the next day in the paper, once we really did the job of written press, we gave the news that we could verify with the police service. So, the newspaper wasn't really denigrated because for that, we took the time to verify facts. Where we didn't take the time was with the website.*

Reporter Brian MacQuarrie talked about something similar that happened at the Boston Globe. Immediately after the bombings, the Globe released a story online that a fire at the JFK library was caused by a third bomb. They also published a story online stating that Jahar Tsarnaev had been captured well before he actually was. But those stories never made it to print. The newspapers were unsullied, largely thanks to their lack of immediacy.

## Music

So some media consumers, and even some media producers, told me that instant coverage of events causes problems. Then, how do they view a medium like radio, which is potentially as immediate as something like televised news or online journalism?

Despite his allegiance to print journalism, Jean-Luc said that he also thinks highly of radio journalism. He appreciated radio coverage of the Merah shooting.

*Jean-Luc: Let's say that the radio often makes more sense. It's where the people are given a voice. There are no distractions...When you listen to the radio, you don't see anything. On the radio, it has to be the person who speaks that gives the news, or he can let people speak. So, often there are more eyewitness accounts. There are no pointless images that just serve to occupy space. So, the radio can be a bit more correct and at least...have things to say.*

Many people agreed with that idea. It was interesting to me that people seemed to remember images of the events better than other details, but many people still said that over-reliance on images leads to poor coverage. Here's Charline.

*Charline: The radio is often less dramatic because there are no images with it. Other media play on images. They show us the images that they want. Listening to the radio seems more objective sometimes because some images can be a bit violent, or a bit concealed, which play on motives.*

People in Boston complimented radio coverage, too. Many of them said stories on the radio after the bombing were more reflective, thorough, and factual than coverage elsewhere. In fact, none of the people I talked to who use the radio as a source of news had anything negative to say about it, which complicates the picture of what makes people perceive media as well done. Radio has the potential to be just as immediate as televised news or online coverage, and yet everyone I spoke with found it to be better. Could it be the lack of images, as Jean-Luc, Charline, and others suggested, that improves the way it's perceived by many consumers?

## Music

I couldn't possibly explore consumption of media in 2013 without also looking at social media. Both the bombing in Boston and the shooting in Toulouse were the first major events of terrorism in the U.S. and in France since social media became popular. In Boston, most of the people I talked to, regardless of age, use social media and saw posts and links related to the bombing in the days and weeks following the marathon. Lots of people got most of their news through Twitter posts by news organizations.

I asked Joanne what she saw on Facebook after the attacks. She said that after they heard about the bombings, family members from Ireland contacted her using social media to check in. She also said that she posted something on Facebook.

Joanne: Social media.9 merge merged.4

Joanne was definitely not the only one who found a sense of community on social media. Many people talked about seeing or sharing Boston Strong messages on Facebook. But Facebook was also a source of news for many people. Here's Laura.

Laura: Social Media.29 merg merged.1

Leslie noted that in most media, more ink was used to describe the Tsarnaev brothers than to talk about their victims. But that wasn't the case on social media.

Leslie: Facebook made up for imbala.5

Which raises a good point. On social media, the public has every say in what's highlighted and what isn't. Anyone can post a link or a comment. At least for some people, this changed what messages they were seeing.

In France, the social media scene was very different. Although Facebook is widely used in France, Twitter has yet to gain as much popularity as it sees in the States. No one I talked to really used Twitter, although a couple of people had accounts. As for Facebook, almost everyone I talked to uses it regularly. I asked Bruno what he saw on Facebook in the days and weeks following the shootings.

Bruno: *I don't believe I saw anything about it...It didn't seem to change the lives of people on Facebook.*

This is the answer I got from almost everyone in Toulouse. Despite their popularity, social media don't seem to have played an important role in the 2012 shootings.

Social media bring to light what I found was a very important dimension to media consumption in Boston, and that's the idea of sharing. After a hellish week essentially trapped in a skyscraper overlooking the marathon finish line, Greg finally left Boston the night that Jahar Tsarnaev was found. Here's what he had to say about that night.

Greg: Interview with Gr617 merged.ai



And it wasn't just social media that brought Greg closer to others. He watched the final moments of the hunt for Jahar on a big screen television in a sports bar surrounded by Bostonians. Greg said that everyone in the bar cheered when he was finally caught. They all shared this moment, together, just as they had shared the entire week, apart: through media.

Joanne also talked about sharing experiences through media.

Joanne: Support through media.2

Music

## *Part II: Media Waves*

Music

That brings me to the second part of my investigation: Media waves

People were consumed by media in the days and weeks following crisis. Even witnesses had mediated experiences. In this section, I look at the result of that mediation. What was created after mediated consumption of terrorism in terms of people's memories, reactions, and reflections?

After watching an enormous amount of coverage in the days following the incident, people's memories on the events varied greatly. I asked the people I interviewed what they remembered about the victims. Here's Arion, whose response was pretty representative of the amount of detail a lot of people remembered. Arion was on Boylston street at work the day of the bombing, and he heard the blasts outside.

Arion: Memories of victims.1

Many people in Boston noted that they remembered hearing and seeing images of gruesome injuries and dismembered limbs, and almost everyone remembered that an eight-year-old boy had been killed by a bomb. Here's Shannon, who was running the marathon with her dad when she heard the bombs ahead.

Shannon: Victims.5

Most were able to recall that there were three spectators killed at the marathon. A couple people remembered the name of the eight-year-old. Beyond that, other details about the victims were mostly forgotten.

Remember, those interviews were conducted about two months after the bombings. The situation in France, 19 months after the Toulouse shootings, was

even worse. In Toulouse, three soldiers, two children, and one rabbi were killed. Here's one response, from Simon.

Simon: And what do you know about the victims? *Well, I know that there was....one soldier, three soldiers? And some children. One...One or two. One child, two children? I don't know anymore.*

A couple of people I spoke with remembered details about the victims, like the name of the Jewish day school or the location of the murders outside of Toulouse, but some remembered almost nothing. This is Delphine.

Delphine: What do you know about the victims? *Nothing at all. That there were some children, I think? But I'm not sure. I don't have a great memory.*

Those who remembered a bit more about the victims noted that unlike those in Boston, they seem to have been chosen purposefully. Here's Eric.

Eric: *I got the information on the young man of North African origin who is of French nationality, but who had North African origins. And I think that the motive of Merah's action against this man is that he said it was a person who betrayed the Muslim Arab cause—maybe I'm making a confusion there—because of his engagement with the French army. And the Jewish people, because they're Jewish, knowing that it's in the context of the crisis between the Arab countries and Israel. I think that it was for those reasons. That wasn't really the question, but there you go.*

Eric was one of the only people to say more than a few words on the victims, but in fact, he was turning the conversation to the terrorist.

Music

Back in Boston, very few mentioned Sean Collier, the MIT police officer who was shot and killed by the Tsarnaev brothers three days after the bombings. One exception to that was Charlene.

Charlene: Interview with Ch6f3d53b8.9

Charlene, like many people I spoke with, seemed to retain more information on people she had something in common with. Besides sharing age in common with Collier, Charlene also works at MIT.

Andrew, the one whose street was barricaded during the manhunt, also remembered more about victims that he had connections with.

Andrew: connections with victims.1

This pattern held up when many people were speaking about the brothers, as well. The people who remembered the most details about the terrorists tended to be the people who had the most in common with them. Here's Andrew again.

Andrew: What has in common w brothe.3

Andrew was troubled by the connections he had with Jahar, the younger brother.

Andrew: What has in common w brothe.6

A lot of people echoed that idea. What was most disturbing to many people about Jahar Tsnarnaev was that he could have been anyone you saw walking down the hall in high school. There was nothing about him that seemed to suggest to outsiders that he was a terrorist. This is Danny, who was at the marathon finish line with his son when the bombs went off.

Danny: Jahar could have bee merg.2.ai

Music

That's what seemed to worry people about Jahar. After consuming large amounts of coverage about him, people understood him to be a fairly typical guy. If this teenager, who looks like anyone and grew up where I grew up, can be a terrorist, how do we know there aren't other terrorists out there on sports teams, attending college, socializing just like everyone else? Is there any way to spot a terrorist living next door? This fear held true in France as well. Here's Laura.

*Laura: Certainly in terms of physical appearance, he seemed to be just anyone, like you and me, a totally normal person. There was nothing alarming in his physical appearance.*

Other people had similar things to say on Merah. Coverage appears to have left those I spoke to with an image of someone who didn't really stand out. Jean-Luc explained that this was because Merah was a good actor.

*Jean-Luc: He was a relatively discreet person who hid his game well. There you go. He didn't show his true nature and his interest in the bloody acts he committed.*

Music

Compared to what most people could recount on the victims, memories of the terrorists were much clearer, both in Boston and in Toulouse. Here's what Andy told me when I asked what he remembered about the Tsarnaev brothers.

Andy: LOTS of memories of merg.3.1

This amount of specific detail wasn't uncommon when people answered this question. Others added that Tamerlan, the older brother, had taken trips abroad and was then flagged by the Russian government as a possible threat to U.S. security, and that the brothers' uncle publicly disowned them. Many people said that they believed Jahar was convinced by his older brother to help with the bombings, and that he was eventually found inside a boat in Watertown.

And in Toulouse, a year and a half after Merah's death, locals still remembered a relatively large amount of detail about his life. After gorging on media, consumers in both cities were left with much more thorough images of the terrorists than of the victims. This is Delphine, the same Delphine who said she remembered nothing about the victims.

*Delphine: I know he's North African. That he lived in this neighborhood, but that he grew up, I think, in Bagatelle, or the Rennerie, or the Merai, in that area. That he was very young. That he had a scooter? And that apparently, he was very interested in an Islamic movement, I don't know in what country. That's what I believe to know about him.*

Many people remembered a similar amount of detail, including the fact that Merah owned a scooter. Some remembered even more specific info., like the name of the neighborhood where Merah grew up. Here's Basile.

*Basile: That he grew up in the cité la cizar, which is one of the poorest cités and one of the most sensitive neighborhoods of Toulouse.*

And Basile wasn't the only one who could rattle off the name of Merah's neighborhood, a detail many people considered important when they tried to explain his radical actions. As some of the people I spoke with in France reasoned, Merah, the child of immigrants, was underprivileged, or, in French, *défavorisé*, literally unfavored. He may have never have felt accepted in his hometown that he attacked.

*Eric: Me, my personal interpretation considering the news I received, is that this is a person who needed more recognition, affection, and to have more balanced surroundings than he had. But as far as I'm concerned, I believe that the source is...his environment.*

I didn't ask Eric, or anyone for that matter, why Merah did what he did, but a few people in France offered their ideas. Eric, and several other people I spoke with in Toulouse, explained that Merah was a product of his society. Like many young people in France of North African descent, he felt unwelcomed by those around him, and so he allied himself with the Muslim community abroad, punishing

those who he saw as embodying oppression of Muslims. For Eric and others, this narrative seems to have become part of their memory of the event.

Sylvie saw Merah through a similar lens. She stated her disappointment that predictions that the Toulousain killer would be anti-Israelite were true.

*Sylvie: People said "you'll see, it's going to be an Arab who's committing terrorism against Israelites for his religion"...And we didn't want to have that. We didn't want it to be true...But it was.*

This brings up a couple of striking contrasts I noticed between people I spoke to in France and those I spoke to in the U.S. First of all, after viewing coverage of the attacks, no one in Boston blamed their society for the Tsarnaev brothers' decision to terrorize the city. In fact, just the opposite. People in Boston seemed stupefied that anyone could grow up in the area and have a desire to attack locals. Joanne, who's lived in the Greater Boston Area her whole life, explained that anyone can find a place in Boston.

Joanne: NOT blaming society-Anti Fr.3

And so the environment in Boston really isn't to blame for what the Tsarnaev brothers did.

Joanne: NOT blaming society-Anti Fr.18

Others in Boston talked about the fact that the Tsarnaevs attended good schools and had good support networks, so it was confusing that they would decide to attack Boston.

Which brings me to the second major difference I noticed. Unlike in Toulouse, not a single person I spoke with in the Boston area mentioned the global context of the bombing. They never spoke about the massacre as an attack on the US. Instead, after watching the media, they saw it as an attack on Boston.

Greg attended a Red Sox game the day after Jahar was taken into custody. He told me that at the game, they showed a 25-minute retrospective on the preceding week.

Greg: You can't fuck with merg.2.ai

Most everyone I talked to felt that that's what the Tsarnaev brothers were doing; they were messing with Boston, so Bostonians reacted with defiance.

But striking at Boston alone doesn't seem to have been a major factor in their motivations. Before Jahar was taken from the boat where he was found, he scribbled a message on the inside. It said, "The U.S. Government is killing our

innocent civilians.... I can't stand to see such evil go unpunished.... We Muslims are one body you hurt one you hurt us all.... Stop killing our innocent people and we will stop."

The message was released by police about a month before I began my interviews. I don't remember anyone I spoke with in Boston mentioning it.

Music

David Ortiz's quote was representative of a spirit that most people felt in Boston following the attacks. I asked the people I interviewed whether they thought Boston was a changed city after the bombing. Some people said no, that Boston hadn't changed. A few people said yes, that Boston had changed for the worse. Bostonians were injured, not just physically but also emotionally. But in spite of looking at a large amount of graphic media coverage, most people had a more optimistic idea of the outlook for Boston.

Andrew: Boston changed for the better.1

I was surprised by how many people compared the aftermath of the attack to the aftermath of a major sports victory. But when I thought about it, it kind of made sense. When the Red Sox make it to the World Series, everyone comes together over a common enemy to support Boston. It was kind of the same in that way when the city was attacked. Like a big game, this was something that everyone heard about, and most people rallied around their community afterward.

Reporter Brian MacQuarrie covered the marathon bombing for the Globe. I spoke with him six months after he first reported on it. Between his childhood and his adult years, Brian has lived in the Boston area for 36 years.

Brian: Sense of community.4

Brian has covered crisis events for the Globe including 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the Iraqi invasion.

Brian: Hits close to home.3

Music

A year and a half after the Toulouse shootings, attitudes there were very different from what I encountered in Boston. I asked Toulousains whether they thought Toulouse had changed as a result of the terrorism. Here's the response I got from Jean.

Jean: Did you find that the incident changed the city? *No. Not at all? No, I don't see how it could have changed. For a time there were people who were fearful, but after, the people are going to go back to their normal lives.*

This response is a perfect summary of the vast majority of responses I got to this question. Sure, some people were afraid during the shootings, but once that fear went away, no noticeable change was left behind in the city. Only a couple of people didn't immediately answer "no." Here's Laura.

Laura: *I felt in the city of Toulouse a kind of solidarity mixed with fear. The whole city was in the process of experiencing something very powerful, and so, we were all Toulousain—whether black, white, young, old—everyone lived this. Despite the horrible things that occurred, I believe it was pretty beautiful, this phenomenon when we all experienced the same thing.*

This response reminded me a lot of the sense of community that many people reported feeling in Boston just after the bombings, which is interesting because of the 25 people in Toulouse that I spoke with, Laura was the only one who reported feeling that way. She also happens to be an American, originally from Pittsburgh.

## Music

One of the questions I asked those I interviewed was whether the media inspired them to take any sort of action. A bit fewer than half of the people I spoke with in Boston said that they didn't really do anything in response to the media coverage. Many people said they donated money to the One Fund, in support of the victims. One person said she donated blood. Here's what Joanne, who witnessed the bombing, said.

Joanne: Joanne prays.<sup>5</sup>

When I asked the question in Toulouse, I got a lot of confused looks. Here's one response, by Bastien.

Bastien: Did the media coverage inspire you to take action? *No, because in fact I don't even know...I don't see what special thing I could have done.*

Most people had a response like his. Take action? What could I have done? Several people reasoned that this sort of thing never happens in Toulouse, and it probably won't happen again, so what's the use of reacting? Here's another category of response I got, this one from Sylvie.

Sylvie: *No. I'm not for protests or for taking to the streets if that's reacting.*

There was no talk of giving to charity or praying for victims in Toulouse. However, a couple of people did say they acted as a result of coverage.

*Eric: It depends what you call "taking action." Because I think that reflection is an action. It's not a visible action, but I think it's an action also. So if you suppose, and if you accept that reflecting is acting, yes, it pushed me to act. Because it pushed me to really reflect and to try to see the reactions of people and to understand how people would react.*

You can debate whether or not reflection is an action, but Eric's answer does show us that Toulousains didn't all respond to the event with the indifference that many of them seemed to express a year and a half later, once coverage of the attacks had mostly disappeared. I spoke to Jean-Luc, a reporter with La Dépêche, a major newspaper in Toulouse, and as he recalled, people were impacted at the time of the shootings.

*Jean-Luc: The real scale of it was born with the shooting at the Jewish school...There, people realized it was a terrorist act...People were disturbed by what was happening. People were afraid of being shot in the street...That took the attention of every discussion. That's to say that everyone spoke only of that - the day of the shooting in the Jewish school.*

Music

Eric mentioned that coverage of the events inspired him to reflect, and he wasn't the only one who said this. I wanted to observe what kind of reflections about the terrorists came out of coverage in Boston and Toulouse, and to do so, I focused on ideas of locality.

As I listened to people from the Boston area talk about feeling a heightened sense of community, it struck me as ironic that the people who attacked the city weren't foreigners; they were locals. It was the first time most people in the U.S. saw that terrorism in the name of Islam could be carried out by a local. In response, the community came together against other members of the community. Then again, maybe locals didn't see it that way.

After viewing media coverage on the terrorists, would people in the Boston area see the Tsarnaevs as Bostonians, or would they reject the brothers because they attacked the city? Keep in mind that Jahar was eight and Tamerlan in his mid teens when the family moved from Chechnya to Cambridge.

When I asked whether the brothers were Bostonians, I saw that everyone had a very different idea of what it meant to be a Bostonian.

I asked everyone, firstly, whether they considered themselves to be Bostonians, and the answers were surprising. Leslie, who's lived in the Boston area for



twenty years, hesitated to call herself a Bostonian because she's originally from New York. Andrew, who grew up in Cambridge and now lives in Watertown, says he considers himself a Bostonian, but that maybe he's wrong to since he's not from Boston proper. Charlene, who's lived in Cambridge for about five years, says she is a Bostonian because she's grown a lot during those five years, and she feels at home in Boston. I could go on and on, but the point is, there doesn't seem to be much agreement about who's in the club to begin with.

Here's Andy's take on whether or not the brothers are Bostonians. Andy has lived here for 12 years and says he's kind of a partial Bostonian, more of one than, say, a student who comes and goes.

Andy: Bostonians like a fa merg.7

Andy went on to explain that sure, the Tsarnaev brothers might be Bostonians, technically speaking, but the door of welcoming has closed.

Arion, who works in Boston and lives in Cambridge, has lived in the area for two years, and he says that although he isn't native to Boston, he's a Bostonian.

Arion: Brothers were Bostonians.1

After consuming large amounts of media, most people I spoke had come to the opinion that the Tsarnaev brothers were not true Bostonians. Wayne and his daughter Shannon have lived in the Boston suburbs their whole lives, and they both identify as Bostonians.

Wayne: Brothers make-believe Bosto.5

Like Wayne, Danny has lived in the suburbs of Boston his whole life; he calls himself a Bostonian, and he agrees that the Tsarnaev brothers shouldn't be given the label.

Danny: Terrorists not even America.5

Music

Just like in Boston, in Toulouse I found that no one could agree on what it meant to be a Toulousain. I spoke with students who had been there for just one or two years and called themselves Toulousains, and with immigrants from Czechoslovakia and the Cote D'Ivoire who called themselves Toulousains, but I also spoke with people from Normandy and Brittany who had lived in Toulouse for decades but insisted that they weren't true Toulousains.

Here's how Delphine described a Toulousain.

Delphine: In your opinion, what makes someone a Toulousain? *A Toulousain? Yes. It's the heart that makes a Toulousain. You adopt this city. You arrive. You stay, sometimes. It's in the heart. Because there are no real Toulousains. It's very very rare. The only Toulousaine born in Toulouse that I know, and I know a lot of people, is a young woman of Algerian origin. So real Toulousains, from many generations, this doesn't really exist much. So why is she a real Toulousaine ? Because she's born in Toulouse.*

Delphine went on to say that Merah couldn't be called a Toulousain since he's no longer alive, but that otherwise he would be a Toulousain. Three people answered that way.

Here's how Eric answered.

Eric: Do you consider Mohammed Merah to be a Toulousain? *Yes, because he grew up here. I don't know him personally, but when I look at the elements of his profile, elements that I know—so where he lived, his ethnic origin, his nationality, even the problem, in quotation marks, he had with terrorism—I know people who share several of those characteristics, but who are perfectly Toulousain.*

Many people had an easier time calling Merah a member of their community because, as they explained, he lived in Toulouse, so of course he's Toulousain.

Music

So what exactly was formed after consumption of media? Two months after Boston was bombarded with media coverage, wounds were still pretty fresh. After gorging themselves on media, people tended to remember little about the event, especially about the victims. In fact, they seemed to remember more details about their own consumption—what stations they watched, which sites were better than others—than about what they actually consumed. But what they did remember was feeling proud to be a part of Boston. They reacted to the terror with defiance. They insisted, "You can't fuck with our city," and in the process, many rejected the terrorists as non-Bostonians.

In Toulouse, too, many people gorged themselves on media. And just like in Boston, most people forgot details about the event and its victims. They didn't seem to feel the same sense of community that Bostonians talked about, but some reflections came out of media consumption in Toulouse that never did in Boston: an explanation of why the terrorist acted the way he did, and of where local terrorism fits in a global context.

After interviewing fifteen people in the greater Boston area about their interactions with all types of media following the bombing, I feel like I can at least begin to answer the question of what it is about media that keeps people hooked. Despite the fact that most people tended to remember few details about

the events, and despite their disappointment in much of the coverage, they were happy that the media connected them to their neighbors. People drew strength and community pride from the media.

#### Music

Why were people in Toulouse also absorbed in media coverage? This one's more of a puzzle to me. If anything, the people I interviewed in Toulouse seemed even less pleased with media coverage of the events than people in Boston. And they didn't seem to find the same kind of community from the media that Bostonians talked about. It's possible that they're really only looking at media coverage after terrorism to find out the facts, even if only to forget them ultimately. It's also possible that they actually did find strength and community in the coverage, but that after a year and a half, it was mostly forgotten. I can only guess.

#### Music

Even in Boston, this sense of community is probably only a piece of the puzzle. It seems like most of us are addicted to media, at least after a crisis, even though we don't always get the information that we claim to be after. So what is it we're actually after?

## Appendix 1

Before we begin the interview, I have a few preliminary questions. Can you please say your name as you'd like to be identified in the podcast?

Where are you from originally?

How long have you been in the Boston area? Where specifically do you live?

Why do you currently live in the Boston area?

Do you consider yourself a Bostonian?

Now, let's begin the interview. I have a list of 15 questions to ask, some of which have more than one part, and most of which relate to your experiences with the media response to bombings that occurred at the Boston Marathon on April 15. If there are any questions or parts of questions that you don't want to answer for any reason, you can just say, "skip." If at any point, you want to stop or take a break from the interview, we can do that. If you would like anything to be off the record, that's fine; just be sure to specify before you say it, and let me know when we're back on the record.

1. Where do you typically get your news?
2. Do you remember where you were when you initially heard about the bombing at the Boston Marathon? How did you hear about it? What were your initial reactions?
3. Throughout the day it occurred, how did your picture of the event change?
4. What do you remember hearing in the media the day the bombing occurred?
5. What do you know about the brothers who are believed to have committed the crime? (physical appearance, age, ethnicity, citizenship, upbringing, religion, etc.)

6. What do you know about the victims of the bombing?
7. What, if anything, did you see on social media in the days and weeks following the incident? How did you feel about it?
8. What, if anything, did you see on television in the days and weeks following the incident? How did you feel about this coverage? (Was it thorough? Was it accurate? Was it appropriate?)
9. What, if anything, did you read in newspapers or in online journals in the days and weeks following the incident? How did you feel about this coverage?
10. What, if anything, did you hear on the radio in the days and weeks following the incident? How did you feel about this coverage?
11. Before today, approximately when is the last time you heard someone talk about the incident?
12. Did media coverage of the events inspire you to take any sort of action? If so, what action did you take and why?
13. What makes someone a Bostonian? Do you consider the two brothers implicated in this crime to be Bostonians?
14. Do you think that Boston is a changed city after the bombing?
15. In March of 2012, seven Frenchmen in Toulouse were killed by a terrorist in an incident that some French media sources have compared to the Boston Marathon incident. Do you remember hearing about this incident? If so, what do you remember hearing?

**If the person was at the marathon:**

1. Where do you typically get your news?
2. Can you describe the scene at the marathon before the bombs went off?

3. When the bombs went off, what were the first thoughts that went through your mind? What was the first thing you did?

4. What do you remember hearing in the media the day the bombing occurred? How did it compare to your experience?

Then, proceed to question #5.

**If the person lives in the area of the manhunt:**

1. Where do you typically get your news?

2. Do you remember where you were when you initially heard about the bombing at the Boston Marathon? How did you hear about it? What were your initial reactions?

3. Throughout the day it occurred, how did your picture of the event change?

4. What was it like for you to be in Watertown during the manhunt?

Then, proceed to question #5.

## Appendix 2

Avant de commencer, j'ai quelques questions préliminaires. Dans le podcast, vous pouvez vous identifier comme vous le voulez. Pourriez-vous dire le nom par lequel vous voudriez être identifié dans le podcast ?

Vous venez d'où à l'origine ?

Cela fait combien de temps que vous habitez Toulouse ? Dans quel quartier habitez-vous ?

Vous vous considérez Toulousain(e) ?

Maintenant, on va commencer l'interview. J'ai 15 questions à vous poser, quelques unes sont en plusieurs parties, et la plupart est à propos de vos expériences avec la réaction des média face à l'incident terroriste qui est arrivé ici-même à Toulouse en mai 2012. S'il y a une question ou la partie d'une question à laquelle vous préférez ne pas répondre, dites-moi simplement, « sautez la question ». Si à n'importe quel moment vous voulez arrêter l'interview ou faire une pause, dites-le moi et on peut le faire sans problème. Si vous préférez que certains propos soient hors micro, c'est OK aussi, mais dites-le moi avant, et n'oubliez pas de me dire quand nous pouvons retourner au micro.

1. D'habitude où est-ce que vous obtenez vos nouvelles ?

2. Est-ce que vous vous souvenez où vous étiez quand vous avez entendu parler des fusillades de Mohammed Merah? Comment et où en avez-vous entendu parler? Quelles étaient vos réactions initiales ?

3. Pendant les attentats, comment votre impression de la situation a-t-elle évolué?

4. Qu'est que vous vous souvenez avoir entendu dans les média le premier jour ?

5. Que savez-vous sur l'homme qui a commis les crimes ? (apparence physique, âge, ethnicité, citoyenneté, éducation, religion, etc.)

6. Que savez-vous sur les victimes ?
7. Qu'est-ce que vous avez vu sur Facebook ou Twitter pendant les jours et les semaines après l'incident ? Qu'en pensiez-vous alors?
8. Qu'est-ce que vous avez vu à la télévision pendant les jours et les semaines après l'incident ? Comment avez vous trouvé cette couverture médiatique? (Était-elle détaillée ? Exacte ? Appropriée à l'événement?)
9. Qu'est-ce que vous avez lu dans les journaux (sur papier ou dans leur version électronique) pendant les jours et les semaines après l'incident ? Comment avez vous trouvé cette couverture ?
10. Qu'est-ce que vous avez entendu à la radio pendant les jours et les semaines après l'incident ? Comment avez vous trouvé cette couverture ?
11. Avant aujourd'hui, quand était la dernière fois que vous avez entendu parler de l'incident ?
12. Est-ce que la couverture des évènements vous a inspiré à agir ? Si oui, pourquoi et de quelle façon ?
13. D'après vous, qu'est-ce qui fait un Toulousain ? Considérez-vous Mohammed Merah comme un Toulousain ?
14. Trouvez-vous que Toulouse est une ville changée depuis l'incident ? Si oui, comment ? Pensez-vous que ce changement durera ou pas ?
15. En avril 2013, 3 américains ont été tués au marathon de Boston. Avez vous déjà entendu parler de cet incident ? Si oui, qu'est-ce que vous avez entendu ?



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