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Fighting Evil

Terror, Community, and Networked Journalism

If “SuperMedia” is to come to the rescue, we need to make sure it has the tools for the job. New challenges require new powers. There is no greater challenge to the ability of journalism than terrorism. The incidents and issues around public security and community conflict are among the most difficult to mediate for journalists. They are complex and they are vital. The news media is very much part of these narratives. If the news media get it wrong, we will all pay the price. But there are lessons that we can learn from looking at the extreme issues that terror and community raise. Grappling with the task of getting it right is a good way to understand how Networked Journalism must be different in its composition, its practice, and its relationship with society. This chapter will look at the role of a more networked journalism in community issues in Britain and then the international context of the global debate over faith and politics.

4.1 Terror, Public Security, and Community Cohesion

I’m sure by now the media has painted a suitable picture of me, this predictable propaganda machine will naturally try to put a spin on it to suit the Government and to scare the masses into conforming to their power and wealth obsessed agendas. (Mohammad Sidiq Khan, London bomber)¹

The videotaped message by British suicide bomber Mohammad Sidiq Khan was an extraordinary example of a terrorist using the media. His actions were a challenge to the media in more ways than perhaps he realized. By “terror,”

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I mean a range of interrelated issues. To understand acts, such as the bombings of 9/11 in New York or 7/7 in London, we have to know much more than whom the perpetrators were and what motivated them. That is difficult enough. But we also need to understand a lot of other things. We need to analyze the relationship between various international conflicts in places like the Middle East and the way immigrant groups behave in host societies. We need to interpret the various political dynamics within modern Islam and their relationship to other ideologies, faiths, and to new social conditions. Journalism has to be able to investigate the power struggles within factions of Western governments, local community groups, and national or regional forces around the world. The media has to give a voice to those hurt by terror and those driven to use it. It must allow a dialogue to take place, but it must not become a propaganda tool. This is to ask a lot of conventional journalism. But some would say we should ask even more.

Journalism is no more immune to moral demands than any other section of society. Certainly, journalism should strive for objectivity, impartiality, and a rigorous professional code. Like the police, politicians, educators, or any other socially influential group, journalism should, at least, avoid harm and, ideally, act as a progressive force. In other words, journalism does bear responsibilities. However, the real question is how those are best insisted upon and exercised. In the context of reporting terror that is all the more important and difficult.

Terror is an especially mediated form of politics and violence. It is deliberately created as a spectacle, and it is most immediately understood as a compelling object for media consumption. The attack on the Twin Towers was not intended to bring the US to its knees economically or militarily. It was a gesture of power, an image of defiance and a token of threat that was intended to frighten, humiliate, and provoke. Jihadi websites are created for a reason. Their job is to communicate information for the terrorist groups and their supporters and to recruit and fund-raise for the cause. They exploit new media's global reach and unaccountability. Likewise, Al Qaeda has become adept at releasing audio and video through online and other outlets to maintain its presence. As Britain struggled to understand how home-grown terrorists could commit the atrocities perpetrated on 7/7, it was the terror group itself that supplied the answer. A long video by former teaching assistant and suicide bomber, Mohammad Sidique Kahn, explained in great detail his political and religious motivations. It was expertly choreographed with the requisite Al Qaeda combat gear. It even included some pre-rebuttal in the form of a tirade against the media, quoted at the beginning of this

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chapter. It was a morally distorted form of Networked Journalism, proof that Networked is not always noble.

The creation of this terror and any solution to it is grounded in community. One of the tragedies of the phrase “The War On Terror” is the implication that it can be defeated militarily. No significant terror group has ever been policed out of existence. All “victories” over terror have been achieved ultimately by political and social processes. That does not mean that governments should not prosecute the campaign against the terrorist, but it does mean that we should pay more attention to the conditions that sustain it. By understanding the communities that “host” terrorism, we can begin the process of eroding their support. This is true on a local and on a national scale. If communities, such as Muslims in Britain, are going to be part of the struggle against terror and not part of the problem, the media has to help convey another set of messages. It must, for example, promote the debate between Muslims themselves about how they will respond. It must also mediate a conversation between Muslims and the wider community that seeks to reduce the threat while preserving community values and identity.

This needs to happen on an international scale as well. This is a version of the rather crude “draining the swamp” metaphor. Achieving peace in Palestine and reducing poverty in Muslim countries will not be enough for Al Qaeda. They have all sorts of global and specific aims that go far beyond that. Their motivations are often psycho-political as well as materially driven. But we are not seeking to appease or satisfy the terrorists, we are seeking to dilute their support and their impact to such a degree that they become irrelevant. There needs to be much greater understanding of these issues on the part of different populations. But there also needs to be much better knowledge and more robust and open debate among Muslims in different countries about the reality of politics in places like the Middle East. Young Muslims in Britain, for example, regularly cite the treatment of Muslims in the Middle East and especially the Palestinian Territories as a cause of their anger against the British government. And yet they seem unaware of the way that Palestinians have been abandoned and mistreated by many fellow Muslim countries in the region. Their information flows are highly selective and inadequate and the wider media is not doing enough to correct that state of affairs. The news media is critical to this process, because how else can the public form their views of otherwise inaccessible people?

At present we do not get a full and rich picture of our fellow human beings through the conventional media. We need this more intelligent and more “human” understanding in order to reach beyond the stereotypes. Only

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through a more sophisticated media process can we learn how to move forward into a future in which support for terrorism is diminished because people feel a sense of justice and solidarity with one another. This is partly about maintaining a critical understanding of how Governments and other authorities mediate the fear of terrorism as a way of retaining political power and ideological control over certain debates.

There are three demands being put upon journalism under these circumstances. First, to consider carefully its role as part of the terror process, and second, to understand its role in portraying the communities involved. There is a third demand being put on journalism directly by the terror threat. Terror groups like Al Qaeda have an ideology which is antithetical to all the values of a liberal, free media. The way that this form of terrorism is constructed and expresses itself presents a specific challenge to the positive role of journalism in a multi-cultural liberal society that we enjoy in post-Enlightenment, free market societies. This is why the more extremist demonstrators against the Danish Cartoons carried banners denouncing freedom of speech. Journalism must respond to the terror threat by upholding freedom of speech in a responsible fashion that acts as a model for liberal values that others will wish to embrace.

Those are the challenges, but how much does journalism have to change to respond to these demands? I believe that the news machine is not built for this task. *The Times* newspaper Deputy Editor, Ben Preston, rightly points out that we tend to exaggerate the power of the mainstream traditional media to control agendas. He believes that the news cycle is always a crude process whereby professional journalists are always catching up with events and their implications:

In the case of the sudden media interest in Muslim culture in Britain I think it was the politicians who opened up a whole area of debate which hitherto people hadn't been that interested in going into or some people had been nervous about going into. It then became the subject of heated discussion. And I think the media will follow where people take them, to a degree. I think you can probably see more recently how some of the heat has gone out of that debate and how people have come to more settled and informed opinions. That's a positive outcome from having had a national conversation about it.
(Ben Preston, Deputy Editor, *The Times*)²

As British commentator Simon Jenkins said, "The unshackled and irresponsible press sometimes gets it wrong. But I still prefer it, warts and all, to a shackled and responsible one."³ And that is the conflict here. We want a news

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media that is independent, virile, and critical. We don't want journalists to be social workers or diplomats. Indeed, it is possible to argue that through a combination of ignorance and over-sensitivity, much of mainstream journalism failed to identify the threat of extremist Islam until it was bloodily effective and already entrenched. But we also want a media that does not leave a trail of anger and distrust in its wake. I believe that Networked Journalism offers a way through this dilemma that allows journalism to retain and enhance its core critical function while allowing a fuller and more positive engagement with its role in the problematics of terror and community.

4.1.1 Bias and ignorance

There is a problem with overtly or subconsciously racist news outlets which are too eager to pander to prejudice. They are easy to identify but harder to deal with. There is nothing unique or unprecedented about Islamophobic journalists. The media has always shared society's bigotries. The history of the past century is manifest evidence of the appalling results when those attitudes are allowed to develop unchecked. But the evidence is also that those prejudices are often left behind on a rising tide of integration and understanding. The racism routinely displayed in British or US popular culture during the 1960s simply would not be tolerated today. We should not assume that will always be the case. But we should not simply concentrate on the worst cases. So, I want to focus not on the proudly racist but on the blithely ignorant. An example of this was the case of Molly Campbell, or Misbah Rana, in the British media in 2006.

Misbah Rana was the 12 year-old daughter of the marriage of Pakistani Sajad Ahmed Rana and Scot Louise Campbell. On August 25, 2006, she got on a plane with her sister Tahmina and went from their home in Stornaway – the main town of Lewis in the Western Isles of Scotland – to Glasgow and then met up with their father to travel on to Lahore in Pakistan. This was one year after the London bombings. Initially after the bombings, the UK media had focused in on the actual bombers and their background. Even the popular press was highly conscious of its responsibilities and made overt calls for tolerance and understanding. This restraint loosened as the attention subsequently shifted to a much broader examination of the wider culture and ideology of British Islam. So the Misbah Rana story broke at the height of this media fascination with all things Muslim. It was also during the traditional summer "silly" season for the UK media when Parliament doesn't sit and when generally the news flow is pretty slow.

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The immediate reaction by *all* the media was to label this a child-abduction case. She was described as Scottish girl Molly Campbell. The police held a press conference where they did not use the word “abduction,” but a grandmother of the child implied that she had been taken against her will. The UK media accepted this cue with little pause for thought. The BBC and all other broadcasters led their bulletins with lengthy features explaining the problem of “child abduction” and “arranged marriages” in South Asia. *The Times* went further and linked it to a campaign they were running on international abductions and arranged marriages of children. They were all spectacularly wrong. It was, in truth, a good old-fashioned custody battle. The girl had gone voluntarily with her father, who had split from the mother. But using its instinctive news judgments, the British media could not conceive how anyone could possibly prefer a Pakistani father in Lahore to the delights of Stornaway.⁴

Now was this Islamophobia on the part of the press? Well, underlying it, yes. But it was also incompetence and bad journalism. They didn’t check their story properly, they didn’t question the background of the relationship of the child with her mother, and they didn’t try to get a quote from Pakistan. Within 24 hours the real story was emerging and both *The Times* and the BBC went into reverse gear. They started calling Molly by her chosen name, Misbah, corrected their reporting and apologized for their mistake. But by then the damage had been done, and another negative assumption about Muslims had been deepened. It was by no means the most wicked thing said about Muslims, nor the most ignorant, but because of that I think it does show how the news media is not self-aware and self-critical enough about these issues. This is not about political correctness, or treating Muslims with special reverence, it is simply about getting the story right. It is about having enough people with knowledge of these issues – in this case, Muslim communities, to help stop the herd from stampeding off in the wrong direction.

Samira Ahmed is a presenter/reporter for *Channel 4 News*, a program with a reputation for a liberal approach to stories with an ethnic element. And yet she found they too were in danger of going down the same unquestioning path on the Misbah Rana story.

I remember just turning across news bulletins that day and they all had a top package with the facts about the story and then they had a second package about the evils of forced marriage. And I just remember bursting out laughing because I thought this probably isn’t about forced marriage. For me it reminded me just how deep the ignorance goes and this rather shocking assumption that

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why would any girl possibly choose to live in Pakistan over Stornaway and that's when you realise what kind of people actually make editorial decisions in most newsrooms. (Samira Ahmed, reporter/presenter, *Channel 4 News*)⁵

Samira Ahmed believes that better informed journalism is a prerequisite for tougher, more responsible journalism. She warns that journalists may lack the tools and confidence to investigate stories properly:

I'm concerned that there's still so much ignorance about the basics of Islam – not because one should be understanding for the sake of it, but just as a journalist you want to know these things so you know what you're covering. I sometimes find there's this real fear among journalists of tackling sensitive topics in a robust way because they're a bit ignorant. (Samira Ahmed)⁶

Networked Journalists are not frightened of opening their minds *before* they start writing the story. They have permanent networks that allow a great diversity of influences upon their work. This need not compromise their journalistic independence. An example is Nick Carter, editor of *The Leicester Mercury*, a daily evening newspaper in a British midlands city with a majority of its population now from immigrant backgrounds. A few years ago Carter realized that his paper was out of touch with its readership. It was missing stories, losing readers and failing to attract the advertising it could from Leicester's ethnic communities. It was also reinforcing a lot of negative feelings about issues that touched on ethnicity by treating them in the same formulaic manner. Over the past few years, Carter has done two things that have made the *Mercury* more networked. He is now on the city's Community Liaison committee, which means that the newspaper is at the heart of the multi-cultural communication process. He hears direct the concerns and aspirations of the many different people in Leicester. He also hears how the various authorities are trying to deal with the issues. This allows him to put the individual news stories in to a strategic perspective.

This leads to the second difference. He has encouraged an editorial policy which he described as looking to start stories about ethnic "problems" on what he calls the "second paragraph." Take a story about a primary school which suddenly finds itself swamped by a sudden influx of Somali families and which can't cope with the drastic increase in the demands on its resources. Traditionally, the article would start on the frightening top line of pupils suffering because immigrants are making excessive demands upon a school. Carter wants the newspaper to reflect its wider understanding of the

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issues. He wants his reporter to start the story on the second paragraph, which is about how the council and the school and local communities are mobilizing resources to cope with the emergency. All the same facts are in the story and the problem is recognized as serious. But the Networked Journalism solution is to accept a wider input from the public in to the editorial framework of the way the problem is mediated. Carter believes this is all part of a recognition that journalism is part of a connected community:

The responsibilities the *Leicester Mercury* now accepts as a consequence of sitting round the [Community Liaison Committee] table mean we work harder to look for the positives in our communities particularly where they demonstrate that people from different cultures are living and working together. We are more aware of those small groups of extremists who want to divide our communities and spread fear and suspicion. And we are better able to provide a platform for all the communities in which we seek to sell. Inevitably this puts more pressure on us to make those right decisions and it does mean we have to spend more time thinking about the consequences of everything we do. (Nick Carter, Editor, *Leicester Mercury*)⁷

I would argue that, far from surrendering editorial authority, the *Mercury* now speaks with more integrity and additional kudos. It will probably sell more copies and advertising as well. Indeed, some would say that the *Mercury* is only changing tack for business reasons. I am not sure that matters too much. But what has that school story got to do with terror? I would argue that a media that can represent people fairly as well as thoroughly, and that takes its social responsibilities seriously, is more likely to mediate other divisive issues in a way that opens up possibilities of reconciliation or at least of understanding. I do not think that people become bombers because of simple social or economic factors. But they are surely far less likely to do so in a society that acknowledges the significance of the background context for conflict. There is a continuum between the global clashes and local disaffections. The media must mediate both. When it is networked it does so better.

4.1.2 Diversity and fragmentation

We have already pointed out how there is more fragmentation in the new media landscape. [Chapter 1, 4.3 and 4.4]. While there is a threat to the diversity of the mainstream media, there has been an explosion of choice for ethnic audiences, especially diaspora populations. The fear is that people will not share their news consumption, and that we will exist in journalistic

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bubbles of specialist media. The implication is that this will reinforce differences and even prejudices. This is partly about the ease with which more marginal or extreme voices access global audiences. Conspiracy websites such as *9/11 Truth*⁸ or Jihadist websites, such as the now defunct *Global Islamic Media* website⁹ are only the click of the mouse away. But it is also about perfectly respectable ethnic media. It's not just what people are consuming; it is the separateness of the act itself.

The fragmentation of the media is taking place within the context of a public that is becoming more diverse itself. But, as personal choice and control increases we should be concerned if communities of interest replace responsibility, that the ego drives out the egalitarian and the Daily We becomes the Daily Me. An increasingly competitive marketplace could see comment and opinion replace fact and argument as people seek out information that stokes the harsh fires of prejudice. So the need for the news media to act as a civic forum, a channel of communication and public debate has never been more pressing. (David Lammy MP, British Minister for Culture)¹⁰

Muslims in places like Paris, Chicago, or in Britain's larger cities use new media, digital broadcasting and other methods, such as the distribution of cassettes by imams and mosques, to create a rich and complex media. This reflects the diversity of their own backgrounds. Muslims still consume mainstream media in great numbers. They do not want to abandon it – but they feel that it does not do enough to speak for them or speak fairly about them.¹¹

Media organizations have made efforts on both fronts. They have put in place policies which seek to increase ethnic representation within their ranks. This kind of technique can produce superficial results, but what has tended to happen is that well-educated middle-class Asians take the best jobs, leaving the more disaffected groups, such as working class urban Muslim males, untouched. In Britain the BBC has also created the Asian Network and other ethnic digital stations which provide a more tailored service that is still recognizably part of the BBC. But the challenge is how those services provide integration, rather than fragmentation, and how much they inform the wider media coverage. There needs to be more networking between the journalism in the specialist and mainstream newsrooms. An interesting attempt to do just this has been started at the British commercial TV news service ITV. ITV News (made by ITN) has launched a partnership with a regional Asian newspaper, *Awaaz*, that covers the north of England. ITV will consult *Awaaz* on stories relating to Asian communities and will also draw

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upon the newspapers' specialist editorial resources. ITV News' Deputy Editor, Jonathan Munro, believes that it is more than just a newsgathering exercise:

We approached *Awaaz* in the run-up to the 7/7 anniversary to help us establish a better understanding of the Muslim community and enable us to cover certain stories more comprehensively. Coverage of the Misbah Ranah story has shown that news organizations don't always get it right and we need a better grasp of the issues affecting our Muslim and Asian viewers. (Jonathan Munro, ITV News)¹²

In the context of terror, journalism must be considered as a network of consumption and of production. If communities consume in a diverse way then that is a positive enrichment provided by the new media landscape. In the modern world we increasingly have multiple identities and it is surely a good thing if journalism reflects that state of affairs. But how much better if the journalism itself is more networked and can make the links of common interest or dialogue? This is of paramount importance in the global context.

4.1.3 Networked Journalism and global politics

One of the most bizarre stories I have seen recently was a *Fox News* item on the Palestinian children's TV show *Tomorrow's Pioneers* on *Al-Aqsa TV*. In this episode of the weekly series, a child presenter is being incited by a man dressed up in a Mickey Mouse suit to wage ideological and real war against the Jews (see Figure 4.1). The presenter of the show, 11-year-old Saraa Barhoun, is quoted in the *London Observer* as saying, "We love life, but we are happy to be martyrs."¹³ For once, one could share fully in *Fox News*' sense of outrage.¹⁴ Although I was bemused to see they were as angry about the implied copyright violation for *Disney* as they were about the rampant anti-Semitic sentiments being expressed on the publicly funded Palestinian equivalent of *Sesame Street*. Sadly, *Fox News* chose not to bring together Palestinians with others to discuss how a society can be so dysfunctional that it creates this kind of media culture. No-one appeared to explain or justify. Prejudices were left unchallenged on both sides. Much of the mainstream media completely ignored the story. Partly, I suspect they did so because the more liberal media were nervous of suggesting that the program symbolized something more widespread in Palestinian culture, rather than just being an extreme example of Hamas propaganda. We need more broadcasters who, like *Fox* in this case, take an interest in international affairs and the ideological differences that

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exist. But we also need a more Networked Journalism that tries to open up debate between the world's publics. This is partly about better journalism that puts difficult issues like the *Al-Aqsa TV* program up for debate. Even considered, thorough, and balanced treatment is not enough. The global networked media needs to open up the channels to the people.

One example of this is the effect of Aljazeera upon both the Middle Eastern and wider Muslim publics and on other news organizations. The Doha-based network has been a catalyst for media reform over the past decade. Its very existence has had a Networked Journalism effect upon the global media. It is watched in every international news organization, as it gives the "non-Western" view on world affairs. It also produces any number of scoops because of its access to Arab and Muslim organizations or contacts. It is now generally admired by journalists around the world. It clearly does have an institutional bias that reflects its roots in the Middle East, but this is not significantly different to the way that CNN or the BBC is conditioned by its origins, paymasters, and cultural make-up. Aljazeera has also proved that there is a market for relatively independent and trustworthy journalism in the Middle East and

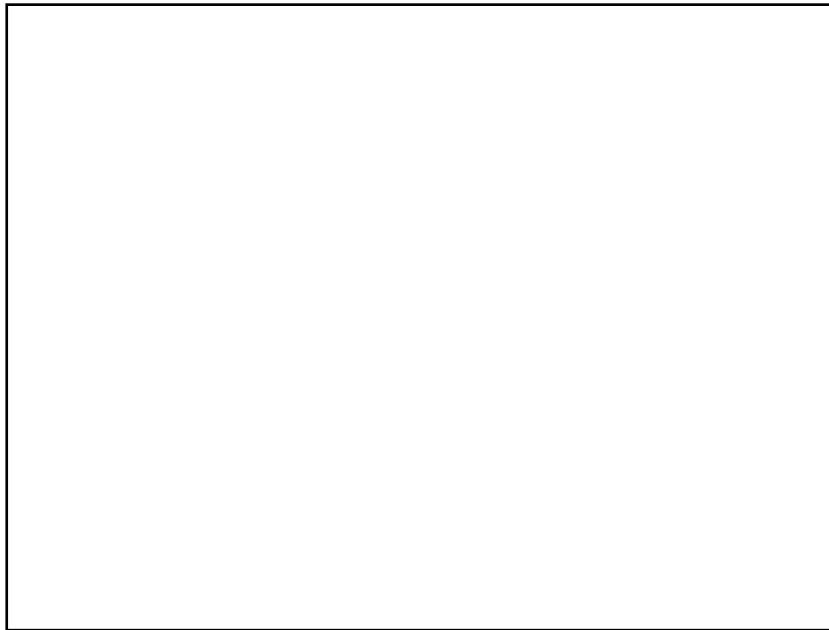


Figure 4.1 Palestinian children's TV gets political: tomorrow's pioneers on Al-Aqsa TV

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beyond that is not commanded from London, Atlanta, or New York. As well as Aljazeera English we now have a variety of 24 hour news channels throughout the Middle East. Aljazeera has also created a different audience with new expectations. As their former Chief Correspondent, Yosri Fouda, explained in a speech to POLIS, the simple act of a phone-in changes cultures:

We would get a couple of guests in a studio and chat together with open tele-phones live. It was historical. When the public rang up they couldn't believe it was really live, they kept asking who would monitor the calls – they couldn't believe they were able to talk direct on air. It's empowering people because information and facts and that sort of journalism can only empower people. And when you empower people who are not meant to be empowered, that's what really pisses [off] the government. And if a government feels that it is pissed off, then there must be something wrong with it. (Yosri Fouda, *Aljazeera* correspondent)¹⁵

So, on the one hand, *Aljazeera* was a way of giving voice to people, and on the other, Yosri Fouda was also a conduit for Osama Bin Laden. He was "Osama's Postman," as George Bush's White House saw it. Fouda insists that any journalist would have wanted to broadcast that material:

Every single source would like to use you, and the mechanism works exactly the same whether it's a head of state or a terrorist organization for this matter. It's down to you, as a journalist, your judgments on a certain situation. And I was lucky, Al Qaeda invited me for some kind of exclusive and I ended up interviewing the two main 9/11 masterminds. But, I was not there to argue with them, to debate certain things. I came back with information, with facts, that even the CIA did not have. (Yosri Fouda)¹⁶

In a bizarre way, *Aljazeera* was bringing together Osama Bin Laden, the US administration, and the Arab public (see Figure 4.2). It was one of the first Middle-Eastern broadcasters to allow Israelis regular airtime. *Aljazeera* has a bias; it is not sympathetic to US or Israeli foreign policy, but then neither is the BBC either. But it is a major step forward for a more networked global journalism. By its very existence, *Aljazeera* has added to the diversity of world journalism. The fact that it is comprised of many former BBC and other Western journalists emphasizes how linked it is to the rest of the global journalism culture. With the addition of other channels, such as *France 24*, and African versions, we are seeing the creation of a diverse and interconnected broadcast news world. If that system can begin to exploit the potential of its

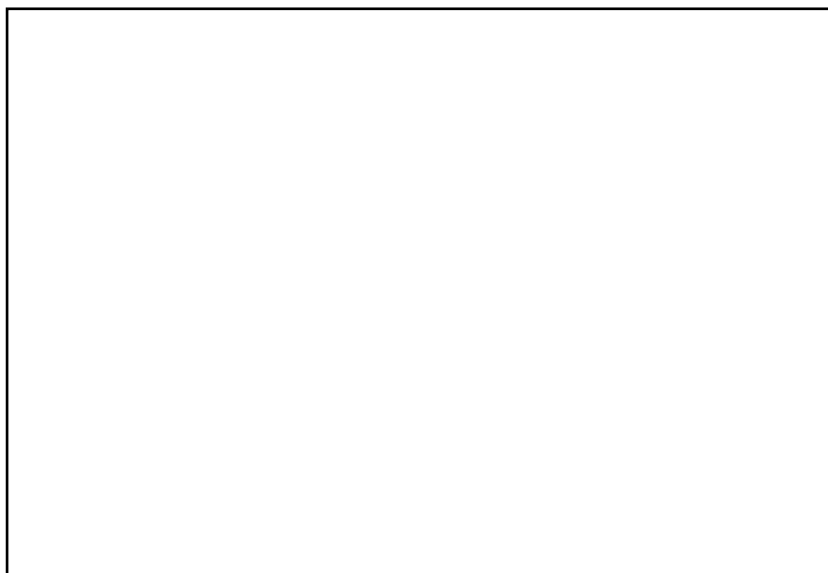


Figure 4.2 The Aljazeera: the typical newsroom design of modern global broadcaster but with its own editorial take on the news agenda

online operations in the way that Reuters has done, then there is a vast potential for interaction between the blogosphere, citizen journalism, and these vast global platforms. Setting up a 24-hour news channel that pumps out the same agency footage and has beautifully coiffeured presenters reading out the same headlines is relatively easy. The trick will be for those channels to draw upon their core audience communities and the wider public to create a genuine communications network.

4.1.4 The Cartoon challenge to Networked Journalism

Networked Journalism has to deal with novel cultural issues that raise whole new ethical dilemmas. The Danish Cartoon saga of 2005/2006 was a manufactured controversy from start to finish. But while it is exceptional as a media event, it represents many of the challenges of a diverse but un-networked media world. On September 17, 2005, the Danish newspaper *Politiken* ran an article under the headline "Profound fear of criticism of Islam." The article discussed the difficulty encountered by the writer Kare Bluitgen, who was

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initially unable to find an illustrator prepared to work with him on a children's book about *The Quran and the Life of the Prophet Muhammad*. Three artists declined Bluitgen's proposal before one agreed to assist anonymously. (According to Bluitgen, one artist declined because of the murder of the film director Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam.) Then followed a series of deliberately provocative actions, all of which were stage-managed to provoke a reaction, which in turn became the story.

As a gesture in support of freedom of expression, a Danish newspaper ran a competition to publish satirical cartoons of the Prophet. Danish imams took offence and began legal proceedings. They toured the Middle East showing the cartoons to religious and political leaders, whipping up offence and calling for boycotts. Six months later they started to get some results. A series of incidents occurred, many stage-managed by groups with local axes to grind across the Middle East. Islamic radicals seized the chance to parade their outrage – often directing it against local authorities as much as the Danes.

At this point it became worldwide news and the debate about whether to republish the cartoons became as important as whether they should have been published in the first place.

At the time this was happening, I was the program editor at *Channel 4 News* – a serious one hour live nightly news and analysis program made by ITN for Channel 4 in the UK. On the previous day's planning shift, I had noticed on a Reuters agency picture feed a small item about protests in Syria against the Danish cartoons. The story had barely figured in UK newspapers but I thought that it might make an interesting down-bulletin feature which raised a classic "free speech versus minority sensibility" debate. My assumption had been that we would show the cartoons in full in some way. However, on the morning of the day we transmitted the story the issue had taken off and was hitting the headlines for the first time in the UK. The editorial management team realized that we were in a far more problematical place.

With an hour to go before we went on air, my editor and presenter and I had an interesting ethical debate. I wanted to show them clearly because I felt that it would be bizarre not to broadcast images of something at the heart of the story. But we decided not to. Partly because there was a sense that this was getting out of hand and violence might be provoked in the UK by their transmission – did we really think that was worth it? It was partly because other broadcast outlets were not showing the cartoons – and no newspapers ever printed them in full in the UK either. Finally the calculation was made (and this is much easier for a one-off program) that the onscreen value of showing the cartoons was not worth the obvious offence that would be caused.

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By a slim margin I think that we made a sensible but weak decision. We ended up broadcasting 13 seconds of the cartoons filmed by a news agency being held by a Muslim who was campaigning for a boycott in the Middle East. You could see the cartoons and you could hear the man describing why he found them offensive. It was part of an explanatory three minute film that was followed by a discussion between a Muslim organization representative and a former British newspaper editor. Not showing them did not really deprive anyone of vital life-saving information and the cartoons were easily available on the web. In this case the cartoons were made to provoke; the offence was not incidental. By publishing them we would have been repeating the provocative gesture in itself. So with hindsight I think that it was a very close call and an understandable decision. But my instinct is that we could have made a riskier decision that found a way to show the cartoons in greater detail, perhaps with health warnings. The BBC decided to show a similar version to *Channel 4 News*, but much shorter in duration – just three seconds. It really wasn't enough to give any idea as to how offensive the images were in themselves. The great dividing line for the BBC was that it did not wish to be seen to be "publishing" the cartoons. A rumor that the BBC program *Newsnight* was going to do just that was enough to provoke demonstrations outside the Corporation's main news studios in West London. It was those demonstrations and similar ones outside the Danish embassy in London that made me wonder if the British mainstream news media had been editorially weak. The protestors were denouncing the very idea of freedom of speech. Of course, they were utterly unrepresentative of Muslims as a whole. But it did feel that we had made a compromise to a group who had raised a particular cultural objection to *anyone* seeing these cartoons – not just a measured request for restraint. This is the deeper challenge the cartoon controversy represents.

The cartoon debate is representative of a global argument among Muslims about how they send messages to the world via the media. There are the 'extremists' who welcome difference and conflict and reject liberal ideas of the media as a conduit for cohesion. They are happy to use the mainstream media and to create their own highly networked communications. But they see that as serving their political goals which preach purity and separation. Then there are the 'moderates' who are also divided among themselves as to how they want the media to treat these issues. In the case of the Cartoons, the moderates could claim victory in the light of the high degree of restraint on the part of the British media. However, the extremists could also claim to have got what they wanted because the cartoons were not fully published

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in the UK mainstream media. The extreme Muslims succeeded in defining the story as one of Muslims versus Free Speech. By not showing the cartoons the mainstream media acceded in practice to their demand that offence came before free speech.

In fact, the Cartoons saga may have preserved rather than damaged the media's right to give offence – even to a vulnerable minority. By acting responsibly in this case, I hope that it will allow the news media to defend better examples of where artistic or political freedom demands that people say or show things that a minority find offensive. The issue was, in a sense, repeated, when various Muslim groups issued *fatwahs* when the British government gave a knighthood to Salman Rushdie, author of *The Satanic Verses*, in 2007. This time the media and the government stood firm in what was clearly a case of defending legitimate artistic expression.

Networked Journalism could have done much more to mediate the Cartoon Controversy. There was an explosion of comment in the blogosphere around these issues. This occasionally surfaced in the online mainstream media in the form of angry disputes in forum posts and comments. It revealed a deep and widespread level of confusion and fear about the cultural issues it raised. It showed that there was a desperate public desire to communicate and debate and a general lack of places to have that conversation. Mainstream media failed to connect with that public discourse. It was limited in a sense by its own difficulties in covering the story. While I was pondering in effect how not to show the cartoons, my audience had already seen them and moved on to the consequences. Networked Journalism could have made that debate a reality by connecting the different levels of discourse. It could have linked the different groups and involved them in a more interrelated debate about both the issues and the media treatment of them.

The lesson of the Cartoons and the other issues I have raised in this chapter is that journalism can not pretend to operate in a vacuum. If news journalists are not conscious of their audiences then other people will be. If we do not find a way of connecting people then other people will. As we have seen, the extremists are expert in exploiting new communications technologies. It is not the job of journalists to counter this or to seek to mobilize political sentiment. But it would be bad journalism and a market failure if journalism did not seek better connectivity with the various publics. In the context of community and terror, I believe there is a moral imperative as well.

4.1.5 Misunderstanding Muslims

If the media are at times failing to understand and communicate Muslim community and terrorist issues, at the root of this, some argue, is the “failure” of Muslims to explain and express themselves. This is not the same as “blaming the victim.” There needs to be a more concerted effort on the part of society and Muslim communities themselves to communicate to the wider public the kind of debates – about growing up, being British, doing well at school – that Muslims have every day. This is important because, when terror incidents happen, it is the normalcy of most Muslim lives that should be in the back of people’s minds.

But is it the fault of the media that all Muslims get tarred with the same brush, that the anti-terrorist Muslims don’t get a voice? Muslims don’t organized themselves along the same clear hierarchical lines as Christians or other social groups might do. Often the media is looking for representatives or typical examples where they don’t exist and so they end up asking the wrong people the wrong questions. There are vast differences within “the Muslim community,” with more than 60 different national and linguistic backgrounds, even among London’s Muslims. According to the highly respected British Muslim thinker, Yahyah Birt, it is “the ethical responsibility of journalists” not to look for a single representative Muslim voice, but instead to convey a “constellation of voices.”¹⁷ I would suggest that, putting ethics aside, it is certainly good journalism (and probably Networked Journalism) to do so.

Despite the high levels of media interest in creating stories about “normal” Muslims, there has been a lack of response from Muslims themselves. There has been defensive defensiveness and a deliberate withdrawal from debate. This may be down to fear within the Muslim community, and particularly the cautious culture among imams, who have been less willing to speak out against jihadist interpretations of the Qu’ran. And should the media include radicals in the debate? How useful is the recent trend of giving a platform to former extremists such as Ed Husain, author of *The Islamist*?¹⁸ Some Muslims describe them as “charlatans,” and say that their exposure promotes dangerous ideas, giving the impression that all political Muslims are on this conveyer belt towards extremism. But it is important to bring the information they bring into the open about the motives and organization of radical Muslim groupings. It is only when that has happened that we can move the debate on. Muslims need to be more connected to the potential for communication that the news media offers. This is partly about initiatives,

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such as media training for imams. But it is also about the evolution of a more Networked Journalism that engages the public in the process of reporting their communities and that allows people to access different viewpoints.

4.1.6 Networked Journalism: Global is local

Globally the media has to come to terms with the issues around terror and community. It has to be better informed about the technical detail and the complexities of the arguments. This requires a greater sophistication in the treatment of Muslims as a community and as a factor in international affairs. It is a sophistication that will also allow a greater skepticism about claims made on their behalf. We are now in a new phase of Muslim–Media relations. Increasingly, journalists are finding ways of asking the right questions, but the relationship is still characterized by mutual hostility and a lack of capacity for understanding on both sides. Only through Networked Journalism and a greater degree of editorial diversity and media literacy can the relationship and the outcomes be improved.

There is already evidence that this is happening. The recent growth of a multiplicity of international rolling news channels, for example, allows competing perspectives of global affairs. *France 24*, *Aljazeera English*, *Al-Arabiya*, and *Russia Today* have all launched in the past few years. We are promised a pan-African news channel, *A24*. As with any journalistic market that competition can produce difference and diversity. It can also inform the different news products with a more complex view of stories. Simply having *Aljazeera* turned on in a Western newsroom means it has a cross-fertilizing influence. That is a form of connectivity. But with their restricted budgets and limited formats there is a question mark over how effective these channels are at truly connecting with their audiences. When they deal with the big issues of terror and community that we have raised in this chapter, there is every chance that they will deal with them in the same way that the media always has. That is, as a top-down reflection of the agenda of those in power, both the authorities and the terrorists.

Only when journalists share the responsibility of reporting on community and politics will we get journalism that avoids amplifying the act and its effects through the actual coverage. In the wake of terrorist acts the journalist owes allegiance to no-one but the public. Networked Journalism makes that manifest. By connecting with the citizen the Networked Journalist facilitates a debate that can be some sort of beginning for civic engagement even when that social cohesion is under the most strain.

Chapter Summary

- Terror is a highly mediated form of extremist politics and violence.
 - Terror is grounded in local and global communities.
 - Networked Journalism tries to understand and connect the issues of terror and community.
 - Networked Journalism uses networks to make itself better informed.
 - Networked Journalism can counter the shift from the diversification of media toward the fragmentation of society by connecting different media and public groups.
 - Networked Journalism can make connections on a global scale.
 - Networked Journalism must retain its core journalistic principles, such as the primacy of freedom of expression.
 - Networked Journalism is more reflective about the process of mediating terror and community.
 - Networked Journalism works to bring separate communities into the discourse about terror and security.
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