



After September 11: TV News and Transnational Audiences

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INTRODUCTION

The events on and after September 11 have had a dramatic impact on world affairs. Our knowledge of these events has been mediated to a very large degree by television and in particular the coverage provided by terrestrial national news bulletins. However, for an increasingly large number of viewers satellite news channels have offered a broader range of views and sometimes, when originated outside the UK, a different sensibility and analysis of these events. This has provided a new dimension to the ways in which viewers, of whatever language or ethnic background, gains access to news which interests them. In the light of the events post September 11, it is also of particular interest to examine the impact of the coverage from the UK's main news programmes of Islam and the views of the British Muslim communities about the current world political situation.

In order to examine the coverage and impact of events on September 11 and after, the BFI and Open University with the support of the ESRC, ITC and BSC have carried out this initial programme of research. The first strand of research analyses the content of selected news bulletins of the UK terrestrial channels and some of the key satellite channels available to UK viewers, as well as a number of national channels across the globe. Four separate days in the period between 11 September and 13 December 2001 were analysed. The second strand of the research focuses on the responses to the TV news coverage after 11 September by audience members in a range of British families and households, including multi-lingual households and families.

The results reported here are summaries of the findings to date. A book containing the detailed analyses will be published next year.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Part 1. Comparison of TV News Bulletins

September 11

- UK evening bulletins provided measured and sober summaries of the day's events. Few images of direct distress were used. The one exception, unusually, was Channel 4 News, which was more emotional in tone and subject matter than its ITN stablemates.
- There were some striking examples of acknowledgement of the Palestinian cause on UK bulletins, as the programmes attempted to provide a frame or context for the WTC attacks. This evidence runs counter to the perceptions of audiences interviewed for this project, who felt that TV news coverage of the Middle East and Palestine was minimal and biased towards Israel.
- Possible links between the attacks and the political situation in the Middle East were made in UK bulletins but not on US newscasts.

7 October

- Al-Jazeera footage of explosions in the Kabul night sky was used by all broadcasters, although less frequently than might have been expected, considering the widespread use of similar footage from Baghdad at the start of the Gulf War, and the fact that there was little other visual material available.
- The UK's involvement in the attacks was particularly stressed on CNN in order to show that the US had the legitimacy of international support.
- There was no reporting of how the attacks were received by the British Muslim community in UK news bulletins. The only mention of the possibility of the attacks being seen as a war on Islam, and the dangers of a backlash, were embedded within reporting of foreign reaction to the news, namely from Pakistan. However, it should also be noted that there was little in the way of contextualising perspective from any UK voices apart from those of the military and the political.
- The release of the first tape of Usama Bin Laden was covered extensively on Al Jazeera and CNN but received little emphasis in UK bulletins.

13 November

- UK bulletins portrayed a good deal of uncertainty over the desirability of the Northern Alliance taking control in Kabul. However, as these concerns were interspersed around stories detailing the joy in the city, and relief at the end of Taliban rule, the overall message was confusing for viewers on most bulletins.
- This uncertainty was not present on French bulletins, who were much more positive about the Northern Alliance. The BBC presented the issue as a complex one concerning the future of Afghanistan. In the US, bulletins portrayed the Northern Alliance as irrelevant and temporary.

13 December

- The release of the second video from Usama Bin Laden was framed almost as a foreign news story for UK bulletins, as many of them placed it within a context of American reaction to the tape. In turn, the US bulletins focused on the impact of the video upon Middle East opinion.
- The attacks by Israel upon Palestinian buildings were widely reported, albeit some way down the running order. The position in the bulletin often belies the importance of the story, and the depth of the coverage.

Part 2. TV News and Multi-Ethnic Audiences

- A deep lack of trust in British and American TV news was evident in the views expressed among most British Muslim informants. The most common complaints concerned lack of challenging debate and analysis, sensationalist reporting, limited and limiting perspectives, and perceived anti-Arab and anti-Muslim bias.
- Prime time UK TV news was generally seen to follow the line of US media.
- CNN was condemned for its perceived manipulation and censorship of crucial information by most of the British Muslim viewers we interviewed. Above all they deplored the censorship of information about civilian casualties in Afghanistan.
- Al Jazeera has created a transnational Arabic-speaking public sphere and affirms a strong, positive sense of Arabic identity.
- The existence of non-western transnational satellite TV news stations, providing alternative accounts of events, directly feeds scepticism and cynicism about 'western news'.
- Multilingual audiences consuming both national and transnational news services are better served than monolingual audiences in terms of diversity of perspectives, narratives and images.
- Multilingual news viewers in multi-channel households regularly engage in flicking across channels. The most common combination of channels watched was CNN + BBC + Al Jazeera. These "sceptical zappers" display relatively high levels of cynicism towards all news media, regardless of language or source.
- Internet news has become a very significant information source for consumers who cite dissatisfaction with current news services as the primary cause of seeking alternatives.
- BBC Radio 5 Live was cited as one of the very few '*open platforms of debate*' and a good supplement to other news sources.

- BBC World Service radio – especially in Farsi and Arabic – provided a crucial conduit of information for many (including some who access it online).
- TV news is consumed ritualistically and collaboratively and tends to confirm rather than change political worldviews. However, September 11 gave audiences a lot to think about and TV news provided resources for thinking through the crisis.
- Patterns of gendered discourse were evident in responses to the September 11 news. Men tended to adopt a discourse of action and retribution, while women tended to focus on different facets of the human tragedies, and the dread of someone close to them becoming victims of terrorism or some other disaster.
- The most important factors shaping understanding and interpretation of TV news are: class and education; politico-religious orientation; and personal experiences of war and disaster.
- Even at times of crisis, viewers who live in predominantly mono-cultural and mono-lingual milieux, and who perceive diversity as a threat, tend to interpret news in ways that reinforces existing dogmatic modes of thinking. This finding relates to viewers of both dominant white English and minority ethnicities.
- In contrast, multi-lingual viewers living in multi-ethnic milieux, for whom diversity is a resource rather than a threat, experience the consumption of multiple sources of news as a stimulus to critical reflection.
- Multilingual audiences are able to exploit the diversity of news sources to engage in contrastive analysis of news images and stories. These highly critical and self-reflexive interpretative practices tend to encourage flexible, cosmopolitan forms of thinking.
- Serious erosions of free speech and civil liberties, as well as constraints on public debate, were felt to exist in the aftermath of September 11. British Muslims felt obliged to exercise self-censorship in public spaces for fear of reprisals.
- UK government spin is seen to be at odds with the military action. Despite official protestations that *'this is not a war on Islam'*, for many British Muslims *'it certainly feels like one'*.
- Major information deficits were identified among white working-class viewers in areas of low migration. Many claimed to be unable to interpret the causes and consequences of these events, and felt restricted in their capacity to participate in political debate and active citizenship.
- For all viewers with low levels of political and news literacy, TV news bulletins assume too much background knowledge, convey information in overly complex or compressed forms of language, and fragment news narratives – making for lack of continuity in how news stories are told.
- For these viewers, the preponderance of polarised news images and narratives of the West and Islam contributed both to an information deficit and also to rigid and dogmatic thinking.
- Thresholds of acceptable images of death, violence and terror are perceived as markedly different in Turkish and Arabic as against 'western' TV news. Multi-channel viewers in the UK are often highly critical of explicit imagery of violence and death and what is perceived as exploitative use of images of dead and dying children.
- Many refugee, exile and other migrant viewers invoke *'our ground zeros'*. They draw upon their memories and personal experiences of wars, disasters, or genocides, in order to compare and criticise the relative lack of significance ascribed to these traumas by 'western' media.
- British Muslims, and other minorities, felt that the severe impact of September 11 on their everyday lives and civil liberties in the UK had not been deemed newsworthy.

- Many British Muslims stressed that their 'English', 'white', and 'Christian' friends expressed their concern about the rise in racist attacks and Islamophobic climate. Many cross-ethnic friendships and dialogues were strengthened after September 11, as people thought through the crisis together.

**AFTER SEPTEMBER 11:
COMPARISON OF TV NEWS BULLETINS
INTRODUCTION**

This research provides empirical evidence of the ways news broadcasters covered the events of 11 September and the subsequent ‘War on Terror’ in Afghanistan. The main source of news in the UK and other countries remains the evening news programmes of the terrestrial broadcasters. We have therefore analysed these bulletins in a number of countries with a focus in this summary report on the US and UK. However, one of the main objectives of the overall research programme was to investigate those satellite channels which provide additional interpretations of events for multi-ethnic audiences in the UK. Audiences in the UK at the time of the study had relatively easy access via cable or satellite platforms to Al Jazeera, Star News and Zee News¹, and the analysis here also focuses on these and the reports carried on BBC World, BBC News 24, Sky News and CNN International.

Main news bulletins have been analysed on the following days:

- (i) 11 September 2001: The attacks on the WTC and Pentagon
- (ii) 7 October 2001: Launch of US-led military operations over Afghanistan, video of Usama Bin Laden (UBL)
- (iii) 13 November 2001: The fall of Kabul
- (iv) 13 December 2001: Release of UBL video discussing September attacks

This report provides empirical documentation of how the events of these days were covered. In details a series of snapshots of how news organisations covered the events on and after September 11, not a fully exhaustive analysis of all output. It is not the purpose of this report to pass judgement on how representative these days were. This research did not set out to examine *why* TV news bulletins showed what they did - there are many logistical and culturally-specific reasons behind the selection and ordering of news events within bulletins - but simply to show evidence of *what* they portrayed, to provide documentation and analysis of what ended up on screen. In other words what a viewer, switching on to watch the main bulletin of the day, would have been told of the events of these significant days of 2001.

¹ *Al Jazeera* was established in 1995 in the wake of the collapse of BBC Arabic TV following a disagreement between the BBC and its Saudi financial backers about editorial integrity. It is based in the State of Qatar under the auspices of the Emir. *Star News* is currently provided by New Delhi Television (NDTV), an organisation which symbolises the ethos of urban India today defined by English-speaking middle-class town or city-bred people educated to graduate level or upward. It is generally accepted that NDTV produces programmes that lean toward the liberal point of view. Star is a wholly owned subsidiary of News Corporation. *Zee News* is the news arm of the Zee entertainment network, whose programming is almost entirely in Hindi as is the news. Zee is generally more popular amongst the large Hindi-speaking middle and lower middle classes in the northern half of India, in preference to what is seen as the more elitist Star News. *CNN International* is a subsidiary of AOL Time Warner and offers an international service which is distinct from both CNN, the world’s first 24 hour news channel, and *Headline News* in the US. *BBC World* was set up in 1991 and is an international news and information channel received around the world in nearly 200 countries. It is not available in the UK

I: COVERAGE ON SEPTEMBER 11

Table 1: 11 September 2001 – UK-based evening news bulletins

Major subject of news item*	UK-based 24 hour						UK terrestrial					
	Sky News 9 pm		BBC World 10 pm		BBC 10 o'clock News		ITV News at 10		Channel 4 News		Channel 5 News	
<i>Planes hit WTC and Pentagon</i>	1+	2:45++	1	4:00	1	2:00	1	6:45	1	8:30	1	4:15
	2	3:00	10	2:30	2	6:00					10	3:45
	6	11:00										
<i>Eye-witness accounts from NY (as separate news item)</i>									2	4:30	2	1:45
											15	2:15
<i>UK reaction – nationals involved; travel information; evacuations</i>							6	2:00			7	2:00
											14	2:30
<i>World leaders express condemnation</i>	7	1:30	2	3:45	7	1:45	5	2:45			11	3:30
<i>Palestinians "rejoicing" **</i>			4	[0:50]	7	[0:50]	5	[0:45]	8	[0:30]	6	2:00
											13	[0:20]
<i>Impact on US economy</i>					12	2:00	4	3:30				
<i>Impact on global economy</i>					12	2:00	4	3:30				
<i>Impact on US politics and security agencies</i>	3	3:15			8	0:45	3	4:30			15	4:00
<i>Appraisal of how the event could have happened – building, airline security</i>	9	3:00	6	3:00	11	2:30	7	3:30	4	11:00	16	5:45
					12	2:00			7	4:00		
<i>Discussion of who might be responsible and why</i>	5	2:30	3	0:30	7	1:45	2	3:15	4	11:00	12	2:00
			4	2:00	9	4:00			8	3:00	13	2:30
			8	3:15					9	2:45		
			9	2:45								
<i>Current reactions/situation in NY and across USA</i>			7	3:00	4	3:45	8	1:45	3	4:15	4	4:30
									10	4:00	18	1:15
<i>Reaction in Israel</i>	7	1:30	5	4:00			9	1:30				
	10	3:00										
<i>UK political/P.M. reaction</i>	1	2:45			10	3:45	10	1:45	15	2:00	3	6:30
	6	11:00									5	3:00
	7	1:30									19	1:45
	11	2:30										
<i>US political/Presidential reaction</i>	1	2:45			3	1:45			3	4:15	3	6:30
	4	2:45			5	2:45						
	6	11:00			6	1:45						

Notes:

* *Either a news item devoted entirely to the event/issue listed, or one where a significant proportion of the news item is devoted to the event/issue. Timings in the latter case are for the entire item, not just the proportion devoted to the news event.*

** *The exception to (*) is the use of footage reportedly showing Palestinian celebrations of the attacks. This was given only a brief mention by some UK bulletins, but due to its significance in terms of how the attacks were framed, it is included in this list of events.*

+ *Position in running order of bulletin*

++ *Length of news item (rounded to each 15 seconds)*

The footage

All UK evening² news bulletins in the sample began with footage of the WTC towers – the impact of the planes, and the subsequent collapse of the buildings – but the way in which these and other images were subsequently used within the programmes varied. The ITV *News at Ten* bulletin (an integral part of its longer news special on this night) showed the most striking images during some of its studio interview segments, which distracted attention from the issues under discussion – for example, on airline security. The Channel 5 bulletin used the images only during its packaged items describing the day. Channel 4 began its bulletin with only 30 seconds of the three minute introduction comprising the footage, instead using computer graphics to illustrate the events of the day. BBC World used for its lead item amateur footage shot from the other side of the Hudson river in New Jersey, in which a voice is heard saying “there’s another one” immediately before the second plane hurtles into the tower. Sky News showed footage from Fox News, the US and US-international network owned also by Sky’s

² Analysis of the live coverage of the WTC attacks has been carried out and will be made available in the forthcoming book.

proprietor Rupert Murdoch. On this day, Fox News was extensively used by Sky, and was its primary source for material.

There were relatively few images of direct distress on these UK-based bulletins, and none of death. Channel 4 broadcast footage of people waving from the WTC for over 20 seconds in its opening report on the day's events, whereas ITV showed it for a few seconds only, and Channel 5 did not show it at all. BBC World and the *10 o'clock News* both showed the footage, and World commented on the fact that there were people leaping to "certain death" to escape the horror high up the tower. It is interesting to note that *Channel 4 News* emerged as the most overtly emotional in both tone and content on this day: for example, its second item was a round-up of many eye-witness accounts and footage of injured and distraught people.

Reference to US security

While the homogeneity of news 'agendas' on this day was inevitable, there were some points where divergence did occur. One of these was in the reference made to American politics and security agencies. The implications for the US security community were barely covered by Channel 4 or Channel 5, but ITV's anchor Trevor McDonald stated only ten minutes into the programme that the event was an "operational disaster" for the FBI and CIA, and discussed with ITN's diplomatic editor the likely political and security forces fall-out from the day's events. This was a surprising emphasis by the ITV bulletin upon the more 'distant' issues of politics and blame rather than a focus on the 'proximate' humanitarian issues (note also that ITV was the only ITN bulletin which did not run a discrete 'human suffering' story). The BBC's *10 o'clock News* also picked up on this topic, echoing McDonald's point that this represented some kind of failure for the FBI and the CIA – declaring it "remarkable" that the attacks had not been foiled by US intelligence.

Reaction in the Middle East

Considerable attention was paid by many of the bulletins to the situation in the Middle East, particularly to Palestine, and to the repercussions of the events there. BBC World had an item detailing "Arab reaction" from its correspondent in Cairo. His report made clear the degree to which the attacks had brought some satisfaction to many Arabs. His assessment was quite blunt: "It may come as shock, but on the streets, certainly in the Palestinian refugee camps all across the Middle East there has been jubilation – chanting, cheering, celebratory gunfire, people have been handing out sweets; they're ecstatically happy. They are saying, now, at last, America is having a taste of the same sort of suffering that we, the Palestinians, have had." The report moved on immediately to stress how this reaction was at odds with the official one of Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority, as well as to suggest that the jubilation was not shared by Arabs across the Middle East generally. Overall, however, his report focused on the current situation and how it was being perceived by certain Arabs in the region, and did not temper this with contextual reference to the background to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Of the terrestrial bulletins, Channel 5 was similarly robust about the likelihood that news of the WTC collapse would bring satisfaction to some in the Middle East. It inserted the images of Palestinian celebration into a studio discussion between the anchor, a staff member of *Time* magazine, and a “terrorism expert”, which occurred 20 minutes into the programme. When invited to comment, the *Time* magazine interviewee was sanguine: “Yes [these images] will raise the political temperature to some degree. However, this is not that unusual ... I think many Americans will understand the kind of desperation that leaves people to take pleasure in the deaths of others”. This articulation that there was some legitimacy in any Palestinian satisfaction over the events of the day was mirrored by the second item towards the end of the bulletin. A “Middle East expert” was asked to comment on the images and said: “America and the West have to understand what support for the Israeli government means” and noted that 750 Palestinians, “among them many children”, had been shot dead by the Israelis over the past several months. The anchor concluded: “so it’s almost inevitable?” [meaning the attacks on America] and the expert replied “yes, it’s just the scale that’s different”.

Other terrestrial UK news bulletins chose to provide strong caveats as to the veracity of the material. ITV’s *News at Ten* bulletin used the footage in its round-up of world reaction 20 minutes into the bulletin, but countered them immediately in its commentary: “In Arab East Jerusalem, some Palestinians reacted to the news with street celebrations, though Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat later ordered them to be curtailed, and expressed his shock and sorrow at the attacks.” The BBC *10 o’clock News* also reported that while there had been some celebrations (which were “horrific”) most people had stayed at home in fear and in awe watching TV, and emphasised the need to put the matter “in context”. Channel 4 downplayed the significance of the celebratory images and stated that it was “not clear that the full horror of the likely death toll was understood ...”.

Other countries, different emphases

In contrast to this approach on UK television, French bulletins gave less of a sense of justification to the causes behind such reaction, and placed far more reliance on the veracity of the actual images. For example on F2’s evening bulletin, the anchor introduced the item by saying “Let’s go now to Jerusalem to consider several leads. Everybody is thinking of bin Laden. Moreover, immediately after the attack many Palestinians greeted the news with cries of joy.” Other French channels used a similar framing.

It is also of note that Tunisian coverage on ERTT did not use such pictures at all, but rather included its own correspondent’s interviews with Palestinians who expressed their condemnation of the attack: “we don’t like terror, we are civilized people and we don’t want to hurt civilians.” Tunisian news chose to follow its initial eight minute report on the WTC attacks with a three minute item on the situation in Palestine, and its correspondent mentioned during the report that Palestinian citizens were afraid of reprisals.

The US networks and CNN had shown the images of Palestinians celebrating earlier in the day, but by the time of the evening newscasts examined had dropped the footage. There was very little coverage

examining the Israel-Palestine conflict, or assessing causal links. This set the tone for later weeks of the ‘War on Terror’, when any slightest suggestion of justifiability for the attacks was treated as reasonable by the American public.

Taking Stock – US National News

Table 2: 11 September 2001 - US national news

Major subject of news item	ABC		CBS		NBC		CNN	
	6.30pm*		6.30pm		6.30pm		6pm	
<i>Planes hit WTC and Pentagon</i>	1	3:00	1	3:15	1	1:00		
	4	3:00	2	3:00	3	5:45		
<i>Human stories from NY (as separate news item)</i>	2	4:30						
<i>Focus on the flights and the victims on the planes</i>	8	1:30						
<i>Appraisal of how the event could have happened – building, airline security</i>			10	1:15	5	5:15		
<i>Discussion of who might be responsible and why</i>			5	3:45	7	5:30	9	2:00
<i>US government officials</i>	6	10:30	4	0:15	6	1:30	10	5:00
			6	5:00				
<i>US President reaction</i>	3	0:30	3	0:15	4	3:45		
	5	2:45	7	3:30	9	5:30		
	7	1:45	9	0:45				
	9	1:30						
<i>Missile attack on Kabul (live coverage)</i>					2	0:30	1	5:15
							3	2:00
							5	1:15
							7	4:45
<i>Discussion of who might be responsible and why – Kabul</i>							6	3:00
							8	5:00
<i>Afghan/Taliban political reaction</i>							2	0:30
							4	0:15

Note: All timings are EST

It is important to highlight the fact that these US newscasts were taking place some hours after the evening news bulletins in the UK. This meant that there was additional material to include, in particular that of details of the passengers on the planes, and the collapse of buildings around the WTC. There was less attempt or need to provide viewers with a round-up of all the elements of the day’s events than was evident on the UK bulletins. While CBS and NBC provided their normal news bulletin format, CNN and ABC did not, although ABC did provide a brief round-up of the day’s events at the start of the newscast.

Overall, the US newscasts emphasised the “shock” and “anger” felt by Americans about the attacks, although at this time there was little in the way of reliable public opinion: arguably a case of the networks priming their audience what to think. The situation in New York was given more airtime than that of the Pentagon or Pennsylvania crashes – a likely result of the relative power of the New York images over those of the others. The focus of CNN’s news material for this sample (and by extension CNN International) was unique, and erroneous. Between 6 and 7 pm (EST) it broadcast a series of live links to its correspondent in Kabul. He reported hearing explosions, and footage was shown of distant flames. The correspondent repeatedly stated that this might be US cruise missiles retaliating. The US government immediately denied this, and CNN eventually started to report that the attack was likely to be a routine incursion of the Northern Alliance on a Taliban installation.

II: THE 'WAR ON TERROR'

Table 3: 7 October 2001 – US-led military operations

Major subject of news item	'non-Western'				UK terrestrial							
	Al-Jazeera		Zee News		BBC 10 o'clock News		ITV News at Ten		Channel 4 News		Channel 5 News	
<i>UBL video</i>	4	15:00 3:00			1	1:00	2	2:45	9	1:15 4:00	10	0:30
<i>US statements/speeches</i>			1	7:00	2	2:15			11	2:00		
			2	3:00	4	1:30			14	5:45		
			4	7:00								
			6	2:00								
<i>Future of Afghanistan</i>					3	3:15						
<i>UK speeches/statements</i>	1	2:00			5	2:30	7	1:30	8	1:30	5	2:45
					6	1:30			12	1:45		
									13	0:30		
<i>Analysis of US-UK attacks</i>					7	1:45	8	3:00	7	3:30		
							10	1:30	15	4:00		
<i>Impact of attacks on Taliban</i>			5	2:00	8	2:15	4	2:15	5	5:45		
<i>UK forces in Oman</i>					9	1:15						
<i>Attacks on Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan</i>	3	2:00	1	7:00	10	0:15	1	4:00	1	3:30	1	4:30
	5	6:00	2	3:00			3	2:00	2	4:45	6	2:30
									7	3:30		
									16	1:00		
<i>International responses to military operations</i>					11	3:15			5	5:45	2	2:30
									18	1:00		
<i>US official and public opinion</i>					12	1:30	5	2:00	3	4:15	3	3:00
							6	2:00	18	0:45	7	2:00
											9	1:45
<i>Northern Alliance spokesman (Abdullah Abdullah)</i>	2	7:00	3	7:00								

Note: BBC News 24 coverage is included in the discussion below, but not in the table due to the fact that the time of the bulletin received (5 pm) is not directly comparable with the other UK bulletins

7 October was a watershed in the unfolding story of September 11 and the US-led reaction to it. There were two big stories on the day – the launch of the US-led attacks in Afghanistan and the pre-recorded tape message by Usama Bin Laden. It should be noted that due to the times of the evening bulletins under discussion, some of them went on air before UBL's tape had been broadcast by Al-Jazeera, hence its occurrence low in the running order for Channel 4 and Channel 5 bulletins.

Available footage

Footage detailing the launch of US airstrikes on Afghanistan was limited. There were few reporters actually inside Afghanistan as the military operations began, so to-camera reporting came mainly from neighbouring Pakistan, where most of the journalists were based. This meant a lack of immediacy, both in terms of content and image. Package reports on the BBC bulletins and Sky News used archive film of UK cruise missiles, for example, being test fired and (BBC only) of B-2 Spirit stealth bombers, as well as studio presentations with computer graphics to explain what was known about the operations. *Channel 4 News* fared better, with a satellite phone link with its correspondent placed just outside Kabul. The bulletin crossed to him three times, as he described seeing flashes and hearing explosions.

The only source of images inside Kabul itself was Al-Jazeera. Its footage showed a night sky periodically lit up by explosions: visually reminiscent of the shots taken in Baghdad at the outset of the Gulf War. The BBC, Sky News and CNN did not use this footage as extensively as might have been expected, or as might have been the case with images from another source. This perhaps reflects a caution regarding Al-Jazeera (discussed below). ITN's Channel 5 bulletin, on the other hand, made full use of these pictures of Kabul's night sky (which at times showed an Al-Jazeera logo, at times CNN), punctuating many of its items with the footage.

CNN offered a different kind of coverage to other stations analysed for this date, in that its coverage was rolling, rather than regular programming. Headline News and International were primarily operating jointly, as they had on 11 September. Presentation relied mainly on tapes of statements from international figures, or live links with reporters at other locations, such as the White House or Islamabad. It is of note that Zee News also relied primarily on showing statements of the key protagonists rather than attempting to relay the events of the unfolding attacks. It showed Bush's statements four times within its bulletin, and also devoted seven minutes to showing the statement from Abdullah Abdullah, the Northern Alliance chief spokesman.

Framing of the attacks

The involvement of the UK in the attacks was stressed on British bulletins, and also within the CNN coverage. A UK role at this stage was important: for London to show its status and for the US Administration to show (above all to its own public) that Washington was not acting alone, but had the legitimacy of international support. CNN was clear always to describe US-UK operations, even though the British involvement at that stage was very limited (and would very soon be dormant). Both Headline News and International (where it separated) gave additional emphasis not only to UK involvement, but also to the degree of support for the action from around the world. The only contrary voice shown was that of the Taliban Ambassador to Pakistan, denouncing the attacks as "terrorism."

The humanitarian part of the military mission was also stressed by the bulletins. The BBC channels, Sky, and CNN all made reference to the 37,500 ration packs that would be dropped on the first day. They also noted that the attacks were not on cities and people, as far as possible, but on air bases and terrorist training camps outside built-up areas. Where CNN's Christiane Amanpour at one point did not express this message accurately – saying attacks on cities – Retired General Wesley Clark (described as CNN's military analyst) was quick to offer correction before getting into his own two-way with the anchor. Thereafter, all concerned – notably Amanpour in her next intervention – noted that the attacks were on specific targets outside cities.

Although President Bush and Prime Minister Blair underlined in their televised statements that the strikes were being launched against an individual and his network, and not against the people of Afghanistan or against Islam as a faith, the news bulletins under analysis did not themselves stress this issue. It is hard to escape the conclusion that TV news organisations were extremely concerned not to

fan any flames of domestic racial tension, and therefore decided not to tackle the troubled questions of the impact of such attacks upon domestic Muslim feeling. On ITN, for example, there were no British Muslim voices heard at all on this day – and indeed, on none of the days under analysis. The only mention of the possibility of the attacks being seen as a war on Islam, and the dangers of a backlash, were embedded within reporting of foreign reaction to the news, namely from Pakistan.

The use of Al-Jazeera footage and the UBL tape

The broadcast of the UBL tape by Al-Jazeera enables a comparative assessment of the use of its material by other broadcasters. As mentioned above, although all bulletins used some Al-Jazeera images of tracers and explosions from Kabul, such images were not used as frequently as they could have been – and have been in the past when coming from a different source, e.g. CNN. Only the UK's *Channel 5 News* and CNN used them extensively. There was variability in the degree to which Al-Jazeera was named outright, and indeed, how it was described. ITN's *News at Ten* noted that the pictures of the Kabul night sky were “live on Middle Eastern Television”. *Channel 4 News* made no mention of the provenance of the footage, and Channel 5, when showing pictures of Taliban troops, labelled them as coming from “Afghan (sic) television Al-Jazeera”. The BBC's bulletins, in keeping with its usual practice of not naming media organisations, mentioned Al-Jazeera by name only once, in a report by John Simpson described below. Its *10 o'clock News* carried a report from Steven Sacker in Washington that featured Al-Jazeera footage, but did not give credit in the image and was acknowledged by Sacker only as “from an Arab station.”

Turning to the tape of Usama Bin Laden, the role of Al-Jazeera was variably highlighted. On the BBC's *10 o'clock News*, footage of the tape was clearly labelled as being from ABC, but included ABC's ‘Courtesy of Al-Jazeera’ credit. At another point in the bulletin, the anchor noted the role of “an Arab TV station” in receiving – and initially broadcasting – UBL's tape in a two-way with correspondent John Simpson in Islamabad. Simpson responded that he had been “at that station – Al-Jazeera, in Kabul” only “a couple of weeks” before and pointed out that “it has very close links with Usama bin Laden and they've been careful to foster those links.” Simpson's reference was the only clear ‘name-check’ for Al-Jazeera in the BBC coverage, even though its mediation of UBL's message was considered to be an important part of the story. ITN's *News at Ten* made only brief mention of the tape's provenance, saying it was “released by an Arab satellite TV station”. *Channel 4 News*, despite having to deal with the tape's release as a breaking story, provided some context on what it called an “Arab TV station”: “[the station] has been part of the information process, trying to get pictures of Usama Bin Laden out, but of course there's been much confusion about each piece of videotape that's been released... we have no independent confirmation of when that video might have been, they are claiming it's very up to date”.

Al-Jazeera's coverage of the release of the tape was midway through its evening bulletin following coverage of a statement by Tony Blair and an interview with Abdullah Abdullah, the Northern

Alliance's spokesman. The tape was broadcast in full, without interruption, and was followed by a link up with a correspondent in Afghanistan and a studio analysis of the tape and its significance.)

III: THE FALL OF KABUL

Table 4: 13 November 2001 - the fall of Kabul

Major subject of news item *	UK-based 24-hour		UK terrestrial				'non-Western'	US newscasts				
	Sky News 10pm	BBC World 10pm	BBC 10 o'clock News	ITV News at Ten	Channel 4 News	Channel 5 News		Star News	ABC	CBS	NBC	CNN
<i>Troops enter Kabul to jubilant reception</i>	1+ ^{4:15++}		1 ^{7:15}	1 ^{4:30}	1 ^{9:00}	1 ^{3:45}	1 ^{10:00}	1 ^{2:45}	1 ^{6:00}	1 ^{4:30}	2 ^{0:45}	5 ^{5:00}
<i>Description of how the Northern Alliance entered Kabul</i>	2 ^{0:30}	1 ^{7:30}	1 ^{7:15}	1 ^{4:30}	1 ^{9:00}			1 ^{2:45}	1 ^{6:00}	1 ^{4:30}	5 ^{5:00}	5 ^{5:00}
<i>Fighting continues in other parts of Afghanistan</i>	3 ^{2:15}			5 ^{2:15}	4 ^{4:45}	3 ^{2:15}	3 ^{2:00}	2 ^{0:15}	2 ^{2:00}	2 ^{2:00}		
<i>Challenges/issues facing the Northern Alliance and Afghanistan</i>	4 ^{2:45}	3 ^{2:30}	3 ^{2:15}	5 ^{2:15}	5 ^{2:00}	3 ^{2:15}		5 ^{2:00}	9 ^{1:30}			
<i>Uncertainty and concern over the role and desirability of Northern Alliance</i>	4 ^{2:45}	3 ^{2:30}	5 ^{3:00}	4 ^{1:45}	1 ^{9:00}	3 ^{2:15}		6 ^{2:15}	2 ^{4:15}	5 ^{1:45}		
<i>US government and military view of the day's events</i>	6 ^{2:15}			3 ^{2:00}	3 ^{2:00}	4 ^{0:45}	4 ^{2:00}	5 ^{2:00}	2 ^{2:00}	2 ^{2:00}		
<i>Impact of fall of Kabul upon Taliban</i>	8 ^{2:30}	4 ^{2:00}	3 ^{2:15}	2 ^{1:15}	8 ^{3:00}			3 ^{2:00}	2 ^{2:00}	2 ^{2:00}	3 ^{0:30}	
<i>Round up of world leader opinion</i>				7 ^{2:00}		3 ^{2:15}		10 ^{1:30}			7 ^{2:45}	
<i>Reaction from Pakistan</i>		4 ^{2:00}		8 ^{3:00}								
<i>Kabul office of Al-Jazeera bombed by US/ BBC reporter's office affected**</i>		2 ^{3:00}	2 ^{3:20}		6 ^[0:15]			1 ^[0:05]	1 ^[0:05]			
<i>Aftermath of plane crash in NY</i>		7 ^{3:30}	7 ^{3:00}	10 ^{4:30}	9 ^{4:15}	9 ^{5:30}	6 ^{2:00}	11 ^{3:15}	6 ^{2:30}	4 ^{5:30}	4 ^{0:15}	
<i>UK moves to detain terrorist suspects without trial</i>					11 ^{0:30}	8 ^{0:30}			7 ^{2:30}	8 ^{3:00}	8 ^{7:00}	
<i>US preparations for a transitional government in Afghanistan</i>	4 ^{2:45}							8 ^{2:00}	2 ^{2:00}	3 ^{2:30}		
<i>Bush-Putin summit re US arms conflict offer</i>		5 ^{3:00}	7 ^{3:00}					9 ^{0:15}	4 ^{0:45}	5 ^{2:15}		

Notes:

* Either a news item devoted entirely to the event/issue listed, or one where a significant proportion of the news item is devoted to the event/issue. Timings in the latter case are for the entire item, not just the proportion devoted to the news event.

** The exception to (*) is the inclusion of the bombing of Al-Jazeera's Kabul office. This was given only a brief mention by some bulletins, but due to its significance in terms of how the event was framed, it is included in this list of events.

+ Position in running order of bulletin

++ Length of news item (rounded to each 15 seconds)

Triumph of the TV Journalists

While the BBC's John Simpson was subsequently criticised for the valedictory tone of his report on 13 November which stressed his own personal entry into Kabul ahead of the Northern Alliance (NA) forces, evidence from other UK bulletins on this day shows that the BBC was not alone in emphasising its journalists' endeavours to viewers. ITN's *News at Ten* report from Kabul stressed that "we were among the first journalists to get to the city and were greeted by delighted crowds", and Channel 4's first report noted "we were the first journalists allowed into the [Kabul] airport".

This type of acknowledgement of a journalist's visibility and presence is, in addition to underlining a journalistic 'exclusive' a valid form of 'authored journalism' – portraying a news report as overtly authored by a journalist rather than ignoring the fact that news reporting necessarily comprises mediation. However, on this particular day's news it resulted in some confusion about the real message of the day's events, as explained below.

Framing the fall of Kabul

The most striking aspect of the UK TV news coverage on this day was the uncertainty portrayed about the desirability of the Northern Alliance taking control in Kabul.

Doubts about the Northern Alliance were encapsulated by Trevor McDonald's initial adjective introducing ITV's *News at Ten*: "Rebel forces pour into Kabul as the Taliban flee". Channel 5 stressed the happiness of ordinary Afghans more than ITV did at the outset of its bulletin, but both channels moved fairly quickly to discussion of the potential dangers of the NA, once the up-beat authored reports by journalists in the field had been shown. Indeed, Channel 5's regular "Five Facts" item focused on the Northern Alliance and listed their previous "bloody rule", framed with music and text graphics. However, as these expressions of concerns were interspersed within and around stories of the joy in the capital, and the relief at the end of Taliban rule, the overall message remained confusing.

As Table **Four** indicates, Channel 4 spent much of its bulletin discussing the problems that the Northern Alliance represented. The anchor's lead-in to the programme was unequivocal: "Beatings and summary executions of Taliban fighters who didn't get away. The challenge now: for politics to catch up with what's happening on the ground". The main report ended: "Will the Northern Alliance be handling the Afghan people any better than their predecessors did when they last controlled this city?" Channel 4's coverage, then, stressed the dubious benefits of Northern Alliance control. In this, it was internally consistent, unlike its other ITN stable-mates.

On the BBC's *10 o'clock News*, its reporter pointed out that "it wasn't meant to be like this": the US and its Allies had spent weeks trying in vain to get the rival anti-Taliban factions to agree on a common future and now the Northern Alliance were already taking revenge on the Taliban. This report was shown on BBC World News too, and both also included a section with graphics entitled "Filling the Vacuum".

In contrast, French bulletins made no reference to any potential dangers of Northern Alliance power. The Northern Alliance had been very popular in France, and its leader considered a Francophile, therefore no doubts were raised about the benefits of the Alliance being in charge.

On the US bulletins, there was little concern expressed about the legitimacy of the NA. Some of the commentary referred to its poor human rights record, but this was not presented as a significant problem. Instead, the news of the fall of Kabul was framed as a temporary milestone in the eventual US reconstruction of Afghanistan. None of the reporting suggested that the NA might be the long-term government in Kabul, or the nation as a whole. Thus, all three networks underlined the role of the US in setting up a transitional government in the country, without making reference to the NA as the government now in power. It is of note that the CBS newscast referred to the NA as “US-backed united front forces”. This may have been due to the request to all news media from the old Afghan government in exile to name the ‘Northern Alliance’ in this way, although on the evidence of this day’s newscasts CBS was the only organisation which chose to honour the request.

Attack on Al-Jazeera offices

The US bombing of the Al-Jazeera offices in Kabul (close to the BBC’s office) was variably reported. ITV’s *News at Ten* and *Channel 4 News* did not mention it at all. Channel 5 made a brief reference, but did not include news of a BBC journalist who had been making a video-telephone report when the attack occurred. The BBC’s *10 o’clock News*, on the other hand, showed footage of its reporter William Reeve sitting in his office, then being knocked over, as an explosion occurs. The report stated that an American missile had completely destroyed “a building barely 50 metres” away, but did not name Al-Jazeera.

This incident underlines the reluctance of news organisations to give each other publicity when they are caught up in part of a news story. ITN was clearly unwilling to mention the fact that a BBC journalist had been as good as at the scene and visibly thrown by the blast. There was only bare acknowledgement and recognition of Al-Jazeera. On the US networks, NBC gave the attack a five second mention, while CBS’s thirty-second report of the event poked gentle fun at the BBC reporter: “the takeover happened so suddenly, as he found out, the Americans were still bombing the capital”. CBS neglected to mention that Reeve was not part of the “takeover”, but had been based in Kabul for some time. It was only CBS, of the US networks, which mentioned later in their bulletin that Al-Jazeera had been “damaged”. It did not link this news to the earlier footage of the BBC reporter, and more importantly countered Al-Jazeera’s claim that the damage was from a US bomb with a Pentagon statement that there might have been an “accidental” missile strike. It seems that although the US networks had come to depend heavily upon Al-Jazeera during the conflict, they proved unwilling to speak up when US government rhetoric against the news organisation turned to violence.

IV: UBL, ISRAEL, INDIA

Table 5: 13 December 2001 – UBL, Israel, India

Major subject of news item	UK-based 24-hour				UK terrestrial				'non-Western'			US newscasts			
	Sky News 10pm	BBC World 10pm	BBC 10 o'clock News	ITV News at Ten	Channel 4 News	Channel 5 News	Al- Jazeera 9 pm	Star News	Zee TV	Tunisia ERTT	ABC	CBS	NBC	CNN	
<i>Usama Bin Laden video celebrating success of September 11th</i>	1 3:30	1 4:45	1 6:00	3 3:45	1 4:30	1 2:45	1 13:0 5:00		6 1:00		1 5:30	1 4:00 1:15	1 4:30	1 0:30 5:15	
<i>Continuing campaign and search for UBL</i>		2 2:00		4 1:30			3 3:00				3 3:30	6 2:30	2 1:00	3 0:45 4:00	
<i>Reaction to UBL video from US</i>		1 1:15	2 2:15	3 3:45	2 3:00	1 2:45	2 5:00				7 2:30	3 0:15	5 2:00	2 0:30 4:00 3:00	
<i>Reaction to UBL video from Middle East</i>			2 2:15		3 3:30		2 5:00				2 2:15 2:15	2 0:45	4 2:00	5 4:00 3:30	
<i>Attack on Indian Parliament</i>	2 2:15	6 1:45	9 1:45	7 1:45	8 2:45 9 2:00	3 0:30	7 3:00	1- 10 12 21:00	1-5 18:0	3 3:00	5 0:30				
<i>Israel/Palestine – Israeli attacks on Gaza City, Ramallah and Jenin</i>	3 2:00	4 2:00	5 2:45	6 2:00	6 4:00	4 0:15	5 8:00			2 4:00	4 0:45	7 2:30	7 1:00		
<i>Hamid Karzai visits local Pashtun leaders in Kandahar</i>							4 3:00			5 2:00					
<i>US withdrawal from Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty</i>		7 3:00	10 1:30		12 0:45		6 5:00			6 2:00	8 0:15	8 0:15	8 2:00		
<i>Passage of UK anti-terrorism bill</i>			4 2:00	5 0:15	10 1:45										

Which stories?

13 December offered three major news stories: the videotape of UBL acknowledging his surprise at the extent of the WTC destruction; the increased tension in Israel; and the attack upon the Indian parliament. Bulletins varied considerably in their emphasis on these stories, both in terms of running order and the depth of analysis. In the UK, ITV's *News at Ten* led on a domestic story: its first seven minutes were taken up with the Selby train crash verdict. It then showed extracts from the UBL tape, then the Israeli attacks, and finally the attack on the Indian Parliament. Channel 5 led with the tape, and then made brief mention first of the Indian attack and then Israel. *Channel 4 News* devoted the first eleven minutes of its bulletin to the UBL tape and its impact upon US and Middle East opinion. The Israeli attacks were reported as item 6, lasting for four minutes, and the Indian Parliament attack as items 8 and 9, lasting for a total of nearly five minutes.

The BBC's *10 o'clock News* showed and discussed the UBL video for over eight minutes as its first two items, then devoted six minutes to the Selby rail crash verdict. The Israeli attacks were reported for under three minutes as item 5, and the attack on the Indian Parliament was covered in under two minutes as item 9. BBC World spent its opening five minutes on the UBL video, two minutes on the Israeli attacks as item 4 and one and a half minutes on the Indian Parliament in item 6. In contrast, Sky News spent under four minutes as item 1 on the UBL video, then two minutes on the Indian Parliament as item 2 and two minutes on the Israeli attacks as item 3.

In the US, the UBL tape was the lead item for all newscasts analysed, and reaction to the tape within the US and also the Middle East was a focus of subsequent items. The attacks on Palestinian targets were reported by CBS in its seventh item, lasting two and a half minutes, by NBC in one minute and by ABC in 45 seconds. CNN did not cover the news at all its newscast. The attack on the Indian parliament building was reported only on ABC, as the fifth item, for 30 seconds.

Unsurprisingly, Star News and Zee News bulletins were dominated by the attack on the Indian parliament building, and chose not to cover the situation in Israel at all. Star News' entire *News at Nine* bulletin was devoted to the events at the parliament, leading with footage of the attack itself for six minutes, followed by political reaction and investigation into how it happened. It is of note that the more 'human interest' element of the bulletin, namely the injured in hospital, was not shown until towards the end of the bulletin, with two updates sandwiched around the stock market report. Zee News' *Is Waqt* bulletin was similarly dominated by the attack, although it squeezed in a one-minute summary of the UBL video towards the end of the programme.

Tunisian ERTT news led with news of its President, as was customary, and followed this with the attacks on Palestine, including a number of eye-witness accounts from Palestinians. The attack on the Indian Parliament was the third item. The bulletin did not show or mention the UBL video. Its only

news from Afghanistan came half way through the bulletin in the form of a round-up of events there, focusing on Hamid Karzai's visit to local Pashtun leaders in Kandahar.

This can be compared with Al-Jazeera's evening news bulletin on this day, which focused primarily upon the UBL tape and the situation in Afghanistan (including a query about whether the Americans were using napalm or a similar substance given the thick plumes of smoke produced by the bombs being dropped), although the Israeli attacks and the Indian Parliament were also reported in some depth.

The UBL video

Both ITV's *News at Ten* and *Channel 4 News* framed their coverage of the video through the perspective of American reaction. *News at Ten*'s report of the video came from their correspondent in Washington, and Trevor McDonald's introduction highlighted the American response: "As our American correspondent reports, Americans have been watching the tape with shock and disgust". Channel 4's second report on the video also came from Washington, and described how the US networks showed it live. In other words, the release of the video was almost treated as a foreign news story. There was no examination of reaction in the UK, either political or otherwise, from *News at Ten* or *Channel 5 News*. *Channel 4 News* did include a 15 second comment from Jack Straw, and also had as its third news item an interview with the editor of *Al Quds*, a Palestinian newspaper, which explored the reaction to the video from the Arab world. The BBC's *10 o'clock News* also mentioned likely Arab reaction to the tape in a report from Cairo. Its correspondent stressed "don't expect a huge wave of support suddenly for America, you won't get it from the Arab world ... because of what's going on in Palestinian territories".

The UK's emphasis upon how Americans perceived the tape belies the way that American networks themselves covered the story. In the US, newscasts framed the video as simply confirming that which Americans knew all along – that UBL was culpable – and that the key question was whether public opinion in the Middle East would be convinced by the tape.

US newscasts differed in their sign-posting of the tape's provenance and authenticity. While the networks gave no verbal or visual signal that the tape was anything other than genuine, CNN used a graphic to remind viewers that they were seeing a US government translation. In the UK, reference was made by a number of bulletins to the US government provenance of the tape, although there was no suggestion that the tape was therefore suspect. Instead, there was a small degree of reticence about calling the tape absolutely genuine, encapsulated by Trevor McDonald's introduction saying that the video "appeared to prove beyond doubt" the responsibility of UBL for the September 11th attacks.

The Israeli attacks

The attack by Israel on Palestinian buildings was reported thoroughly by all the UK bulletins with the exception of *Channel 5 News* which devoted only 15 seconds to it (it should be noted, however, that the

24-hour news channels did not allocate any more time to the events than terrestrial bulletins, and indeed, less than Channel 4's four minutes). *News at Ten* stressed the significance of the attacks in its introduction to its report: "Fighting between Israel and Palestinian groups threatened to escalate into all-out war tonight. Israel has broken off all contact with Yasser Arafat's Palestinian party". The correspondent from Israel highlighted Israeli proactivity, ending his report with "Israelis, it seems, are re-drawing the map". Channel 4 followed its report of the attacks with an interview with the Israeli foreign minister. Al-Jazeera devoted 8 minutes to the news, and included civilian eye-witness accounts. The Tunisian ERTT news also included eye-witness accounts.

The Indian parliament attack

The attack upon the Indian parliament building was the news event least emphasised by the UK and US bulletins on this day. It was largely reported as a discrete event, with minimal links to any wider context, except on *Channel 4 News*. Channel 4 broadcast an interview with the Indian High Commissioner, who was careful not to blame Pakistan outright, and said that India was willing to explore all bilateral issues with Pakistan, including that of Kashmir. In contrast, Al-Jazeera reported that the Indian Prime Minister had accused Pakistan of being complicit.

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON UK COVERAGE

As past conflicts have shown, the extent of ‘distance’ and ‘proximity’ provided by a news report are significant units for comparison. How is a conflict made resonant to a domestic audience, and also kept at a safe distance so that public anxiety is assuaged? This question was particularly acute during the conflict in Afghanistan (and continues into the present) as British TV news attempted to ensure that the British Muslim community did not feel alienated through the portrayal of its religion as something ‘other’ and dangerous.

The difficulty is that such concern about alienating a community may result in appearing to ignore the community altogether. It was noticeable from the UK coverage on the days under analysis that very little if any emphasis was placed upon garnering reaction from British Muslim, Arab, or other non-white or non-‘Western’ voices. Some experts on Arab affairs and politics were included, but there was no sampling of British Muslim opinion on the events.

It should also be noted, however, that there was little in the way of contextualising perspective from *any* UK opinion base. The lack of domestic perspective was striking: the vast majority of the UK bulletins focused on the issues and events of the day without refracting them through any frame of domestic relevance. Indeed, when refraction occurred, it tended to be through the eyes of ordinary American, not British opinions. It is possible that this lack of overt domestication of the events is due to the fact that British news organisations by and large retain a commitment to journalists operating in the field, and that a visual ‘proximity’ is thereby produced which obviates the need for a more overt, narrative one.

In other words, on the evidence of these snapshots, UK television news organisations showed few tendencies to highlight the domestic at the expense of understanding the event of the day. As domestication of news events tends to veer towards the emotional, this is arguably a positive finding. It was only the *Channel 4 News* bulletin on September 11 which used to any significant degree an emotional, sensational tone, and this tone was not repeated on its other bulletins in the sample. The other ITN bulletins on this day were more measured in tone, and provided sober summaries of the events of the day. This interesting departure from Channel 4’s normal pace and tone underlines the fact that a single news organisation – i.e. ITN – can fashion a meaningful plurality of news agendas on its different news outlets.

The degree of context provided by bulletins also varied on the days in question. The bulletins of September 11 contained a number of references to links between the attacks on the WTC and the political situation in the Middle East. Indeed, as outlined in the report, there were some striking examples of acknowledgement of the Palestinian cause in the midst of discussion over UBL culpability for the WTC attacks. On other days in the sample, much less attempt was made to combine Middle

East events with those of the prosecution of the war in Afghanistan: an outcome of the dominant Western political discourse which preferred to see UBL and Al-Qaeda as maverick outsiders. The provision of contextual background is a thorny area for news broadcasters as they run the risk of being accused of partiality. But the danger of not providing it – or of providing it and then withdrawing it – is that viewers simply don't have the necessary framework with which to understand the events of the day.

Even here, however, it should be noted that certain types of information do not necessarily get noticed or 'heard'. According to the audience research component of this report (see below), interviewees felt that coverage of the Middle East and Palestine was minimal and biased towards Israel. On the evidence of the days under review, this simply was not the case on the bulletins analysed. The mismatch reveals that even if certain stories are covered in particular ways, these may not filter into the viewing public's consciousness.

METHODOLOGY AND NOTES

Material from the following countries is in the process of being collated and examined: Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Serbia, Sweden, Tunisia, UK and US.

Requests were put in to national archives and the broadcasters themselves for videotapes of the main evening bulletins for the dates in question. Some broadcasters refused to take part in the project, and others simply ignored repeated emails and phone calls. Other broadcasters and archives did not have (or did not provide) tapes of all the days requested. For these and other logistical reasons, a number of news bulletins and channels are not included in this sample, or are less well-represented than had initially been hoped.

AFTER SEPTEMBER 11: TV NEWS AND MULTI-ETHNIC AUDIENCES

Background to Research

This research explored responses to terrestrial and satellite television news coverage of September 11 and ensuing events among audiences of dominant and minority ethnicities, mostly in the UK. In-depth interviews were conducted with interviewees in a culturally diverse range of family, household and friendship groups. 85% the 320 informants lived in multi-channel households, were multilingual and spoke English in addition to one or more of the following languages: Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish, Farsi and Pashto, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Sylheti and Hindi. The majority of these multilingual interviewees had access to very diverse news sources. We aimed to explore how this diversity might shape viewing activities and audience responses (1). 15% of interviewees were monolingual English speaking of dominant white ethnicity coming from mixed class and educational backgrounds. This category was included for comparative leverage and interviewees were distinguished by their lack of access to culturally or linguistically diverse news sources.

Fear and Self-Censorship After September 11

Many informants were initially very suspicious about the research. There was concern that official agencies might be using the research as a form of 'surveillance' in the search for terrorist organisations: *'Why should we be put in the spotlight? We already feel over-exposed. We are already made to feel guilty by association.'* (2) About 25% of those approached flatly refused to participate. Many of the researchers report that they had to work hard to gain the trust and confidence of participants, even in cases of common language and ethnic background.

Many of our British Muslim informants claimed that they exercise self-censorship in public spaces, for fear of recriminations. Few believed full and frank public discussions about September 11 and after to be possible. Fear about voicing a political opinion in public and media spaces, and a perceived lack of opportunities to do so, were seen to constitute significant obstacles to the promotion of intercultural dialogue and understanding, and to reinforce a sense of marginalisation and exclusion. The researchers believe that such a clear pattern of response has implications for issues of free expression, participation in public spheres of communication, and active citizenship.

The repercussions of September 11 precipitated deep anxieties among groups racialised by skin colour or religion, who feel themselves to be categorised as *'suspect others, already accused and blameworthy'*. Issues of civil liberties came to the fore in the interviews, as did widespread discomfort at being perceived as *'dangerously different'*, especially among Muslim women wearing the *hijab*.

Recollections of September 11

News viewing increased dramatically in the two weeks following the September 11 attacks, then declined to normal levels for most of our informants. However, many British Muslims report that their levels of news consumption have remained high, and also that they now use a greater range of news sources than before. Most have a very mixed media news diet, using radio, newspapers, TV and the Internet at different times of the day and week for different purposes. News information is processed, collaboratively, in the form of retellings and discussion as everyday TV news talk among family and friends.

All recall where they were when they heard the news, and the impact of seeing the planes flying into the towers. Many were shocked by the target and scale of the attacks, as well as America's vulnerability: *'It cooled the anger inside us because of all the hardship in the Middle East and all over the world that is caused by American policies.'* Many found the images incredible or thought they were a hoax. The most common refrain was: *'it was like watching an American movie'*. The stunning visual spectacle, it was widely claimed, will never be forgotten: *'the most dramatic images seen in my lifetime, and I've lived through several wars'*. A few informants pointed out what they felt to be the irony of watching *'a true life American disaster movie. It was as if America itself had already written the script and anyone who had ever seen a Hollywood disaster movie had already had a kind of premonition. It was eerie!'*

Patterns of gendered discourse were evident in responses to the September 11 news. Men tended to adopt a discourse of action and retribution, while women tended to focus on different facets of the human tragedy, and the dread of themselves or someone close to them becoming victims of terrorism or some other disaster. This is best illustrated in recollections of early reactions to the attacks elicited during interviews. Male informants tended to concern themselves with attributing blame and guilt, solving how the attacks were carried out, and debating what should be done to avenge the deed. Women tended to discuss how families, children especially, might be affected in the short and long term. Female responses were not simply emotional. Rather, according to many of the researchers, the depth of emotional response among many women appeared to trigger philosophical reflections on the nature of risk, threat and uncertainty faced by all human beings, and ways of coping with these, regardless of ethnic or religious background. This kind of self-reflexive humanist discourse tended to catalyse flexible modes of *'thinking one's way through the crisis'*.

The most important factors identified by both informants and interviewers as shaping understanding and interpretation of TV news are: class and education; politico-religious orientation; and personal experiences of war and disaster. Migrant and multilingual viewers expressed a much greater sense of political involvement and proximity to the unfolding events than their monolingual counterparts. The data reveal that discussion of political news especially of *'back home'* is central to the everyday political culture of British Muslims, and the great diversity of news sources consumed enriches discussions.

Anti-Americanism

September 11 immediately unleashed profound anxieties about further terrorist attacks, but no less fear about what America might do to retaliate. There was intense speculation about what might happen next.

All informants sympathised with individual victims and their families, but a majority believed that *'America had it coming to them'*. Clear distinctions were drawn between the American people and the US government, foreign policy, military and media. US foreign policy is widely perceived as arrogant and indifferent to the human consequences of its actions (or inaction).

Intense anti-American sentiments were expressed by all groups with the exception of some of the monolingual white groups in areas of low migration (one woman claimed she was *'ready to go and fight to defend our American allies against lunatic, terrorist Muslims'*). According to the majority of our British Muslim informants, the UK and USA governments and their foreign policies are perceived as being broadly consistent, even if differing in the details of response or policy. The UK and USA governments are understood as forming the foundations of a 'western' response to the attacks. George W Bush is widely perceived as *'stupid but able to exploit the crisis to acquire the legitimacy that he so lacks'*. Tony Blair is seen as his *'puppet'*. The American public is seen as insular and ignorant about the wider world. The individualist, materialistic and consumerist ethos of the 'American dream' is criticised, as are the failures of the American government and news media to properly inform the American people of the consequences of its foreign policies. Many British Muslim respondents believe that the American public and audiences have long been deliberately kept ignorant by the American government, in order to better manage and control them and pursue foreign and military policies without opposition. American media are regarded as complicit in this.

Criticism of 'Western' News

A deep lack of trust in British and American TV news was evident in the views expressed among most British Muslim informants. The commonest complaints concerned lack of challenging debate, sensationalist reporting, limited and limiting frameworks and perspectives, and anti-Arab and anti-Muslim assumptions. BBC2's 'Newsnight' was widely praised for its in-depth analysis, but it was seen to lack the baleful opinion-forming power of prime-time news. The existence of 'non-western' transnational satellite TV news stations providing alternative accounts of events feeds this scepticism and cynicism about 'western news'.

'Western' satellite TV news comes under particular attack. BBC News 24 and Sky News are criticised as *'Americanised infotainment'* and as *'limited'*, *'superficial'*, *'repetitive'*, *'stilted'*, *'cheap'*. BBC News 24 was above all condemned for the lack of in-depth or detailed analysis. A common view expressed by British Muslim audiences was that rolling 24 hour news was inferior to prime time bulletins: *'There is no excuse that BBC News 24 cannot provide its viewers with better background*

information about the underlying conflicts which led to the attacks [...]. It is clear, for example, if you watch Al Jazeera, that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is absolutely pivotal but what does the average British viewer know or care about the Palestinians?’

The perceived lack of interest among the UK public about the plight of the Palestinians is often mentioned across the interviews with deep regret. Some blame is laid at the door of UK TV news in general, which is seen as failing to inform its viewers adequately. Some of our researchers suggest that such views may reflect sentiments stored up over years, an entrenched political stance, rather than a specific response to TV news coverage post September 11. The lines between dogmatic and flexible modes of ‘thinking through the crisis’ are often blurred.

Thinking Through the Crisis: TV News as Cultural Resource

Both interview transcripts and researchers' reports suggest that television news is mostly consumed ritualistically, serving to confirm an already established worldview and political viewpoint. At times of crisis, news rituals can take compulsive forms. However, the events of September 11 and after shook viewers (both white as well as minority ethnic viewers) so profoundly that many were forced to revise conventional and dogmatic modes of thinking.

Many of the testimonies elicited during the interviews reveal deep-seated ambiguities and contradictions with regards to the causes and potential consequences of the attacks and the ensuing war. The data also demonstrate that the sense of ambivalence and cognitive dissonance generated by September 11 was able to unleash highly productive tensions conducive to 'flexible thinking' and cosmopolitan modes of consciousness that eschew narrow, particularistic patterns of thought.

The capacity to engage in such flexible thinking depends in large part not only on linguistic, intellectual and cultural competences but also on the perception of cultural and ethnic diversity as an asset – typically based on personal experiences of living in multi-ethnic milieux. For viewers living in predominantly mono-cultural and mono-lingual milieux (whether British Muslims, Hindu nationalists or British whites), diversity is perceived as a threat, and news consumption and interpretation tend to reinforce dogmatic modes of thinking.

In contrast, for viewers with experience of living in multi-ethnic milieux and for whom diversity is resource rather than a threat, news consumption and interpretation tends to engender more flexible and transformative modes of 'thinking through the crisis'. September 11 gave audiences a lot to think about and TV news provided resources for thinking through the crisis. But the type of programme format also has implications for *how* viewers think through the crisis.

Important distinctions were made between news bulletins, political commentary, current affairs and political chat shows, interview programmes or phone-ins. The ‘Question Time’ programme following September 11 was applauded for the diversity of views that were presented. However, many felt that

BBC, in the interests of free speech, should not have allowed itself to be pressurized into apologising for the way that the American ambassador was treated and, by implication, for the anti-American views expressed by some participants. This was 'read' by many of our viewer-informants as *'an early warning sign of the UK's and the BBC's complicity with the American government and a true test of its impartiality'*.

UK media were generally seen to follow the line of US media. But exceptions were noted, and many felt that UK television news media were at times struggling to discard an image of slavishly following the US media. News agendas were largely seen as being shaped on a daily basis by Pentagon briefings. US-dominated news agendas were seen to *'stifle dissenting voices as irrelevant, disloyal, and terrorist supporters'*. Serious erosions of free speech and constraints in public debate were felt to exist in the aftermath of September 11.

CNN was condemned for its manipulation and censorship of crucial information by most of our British Muslim viewers. Some researchers and interviewees were in the USA on and after September 11. They noted differences between domestic CNN's intensely patriotic domestic news services (*'flags draped around the news desk and gung ho rolling slogans'*), and CNN International which *'did not want to upset overseas viewers'* or *'wanted to get the American angle and propaganda over to the Arab world'*. According to accounts of personal viewing experiences among researchers and interviewees, domestic CNN was thought to be concealing vital information from a traumatised American public and keeping them ignorant of the suffering of the Afghan people.

CNN is condemned as pro-Israeli by British Muslims. Yet British Jewish and Israeli informants believed the opposite to be the case. They also expressed deep concern about the rise of anti-Jewish sentiments and attacks around the UK.

British Muslim viewers deplore above all the censorship of information about civilian casualties in Afghanistan. The humanitarian effort on the part of the USA and UK was rarely remarked upon, but when it was, it was condemned for a series of incompetent blunders, such as sending pork or packages labelled in English. Such efforts were regarded as *'a drop in the ocean'* compared to the human fear and suffering inflicted on the Afghan people.

The perceived excessive repetition on US and UK television of images of the attacks, people jumping out of windows, people escaping from the WTC, as well as the use of mobile phone messages, though poignant, was much criticised as tabloid-style melodrama. British Muslim viewers saw this as serving to raise passions in order to justify the American military attacks on Afghanistan.

UK television news in general was criticised for supporting the war without any clear evidence or identification of the guilty party. And as an eight-year-old BBC Newsround viewer put it: *'I don't think the Americans should go attacking ordinary Afghan people when they are looking for one man in a*

cave and a few of his helpers!' Parents feared the impact of news images on their children, many of whom reported having nightmares in the weeks following September 11. For refugees and others who had experienced other disasters, September 11 and after triggered traumatic memories. It was felt that UK and USA television news showed little interest in the consequences of the American strikes for the Afghan people in the war zones. This, it was felt, is typical of 'western' disregard for the suffering of 'others'.

Anti-war demonstrations around the world were felt to be grossly under-reported, issues of human rights marginalised, and American-Israeli complicity left unquestioned. Euphemistic language masked the true numbers of people killed, especially civilian deaths in Afghanistan. UK and US media were felt to have unanimously condemned the attacks of September 11, but not the strikes on Afghanistan, and this was seen to typify the double standards of western news media as well as of western (US/UK) foreign policy. Rigid polarities in narrating the conflict were exacerbated by the adherence to the principles of 'balance' and the adversarial approach: *'Palestinian voices can never be heard without the echoes of Israeli voices'*.

Both interview transcripts and researchers' reports indicate that white viewers living in areas of low migration, for whom diversity is a threat, and whose news diet is mostly limited to tabloid newspapers and Sky TV news, display comparatively low levels of understanding of news about September 11 and its aftermath. This is coupled with high levels of political apathy, and ignorance about the causes of the conflict and about British Muslims. Part of the blame may be attached to news bulletins which, according to some interviewees and researchers, assume too much background knowledge, convey information in complex or compressed forms of language, and fragment news narratives, making for lack of continuity in how news stories are told.

Seeking Alternative News

Lack of trust in UK and US media not only tended to reinforce a sense of Muslim, Arab or Palestinian identity, but also catalysed alternative news seeking. Various rumours circulated (*'the CIA and Israel did it'*, *'there were no Jews in the WTC on 9.11 - how come?'*). One informant said: *'I don't watch TV news. I don't believe anything on the news, I believe reality. Rumour is more reliable than the media'*. Rumours, as well as alternative media sources of news offering non-western perspectives, provide competing frames through which UK and US news is analysed.

Viewers were highly critical of most 'homeland' news services (the sample included viewers of Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, Indian, Pakistani and Iranian TV). They perceived low production values, and low levels of trustworthiness. Some Arabic channels were accused of scare-mongering and circulating stories based on speculation rather than fact. Other 'homeland' channels were seen as slavishly following state-dictated 'western' lines, and as devoid of informed analysis and debate.

Thresholds of acceptable images of death, violence and terror are perceived as markedly different in Turkish and Arabic as against 'western' TV news. Exposure to such imagery, it was argued, triggers deep emotions as well as 'bad blood'. It is seen to contribute to impassioned political views. For some who have become used to 'western' TV, their 'homeland' TV news can often be visually shocking. Images of wounded or dead bodies, especially those of children, were mentioned.

Radio and TV news chat shows are seen as valuable resources for thinking through the crisis. Radio 5 Live was cited as one of the very few '*open platforms of debate*' and a good supplement to other news sources. News phone-in shows include more informal talk about political news. They are seen as less prone to political management and hence more informative than news bulletins for viewers with lower levels of news comprehension. However interviewees claim that they learn a great deal from the dialogue and interaction between speakers which is perceived as more informal and colloquial than the more formal, middle class language registers of TV news presenters which makes comprehension difficult for many without the necessary language competence. Studio debates in TV news and current affairs programmes are criticised for an adversarial approach that does little to promote intercultural dialogue and understanding. September 11, it was argued by some of our interviewees, presented a good opportunity for promoting intercultural dialogue that news and current affairs programmes could have assisted but news producers were seen as either not ready or not able to seize upon this opportunity effectively.

Despite the criticisms aimed at UK TV news media, BBC World Service radio – especially in Farsi and Arabic – provided a crucial conduit of information for many (including some who access it online). For Afghani refugees, who had no alternative homeland news source available to them, the Farsi service was their only adequate source of information about what was happening in Afghanistan during the war. Over one third of our interviewees were at one time, if not at the time of the interviews, refugees. They display high levels of education and political literacy, in contrast to our small sample of white working-class monolingual informants.

For most of our white informants, tabloid newspapers set the agendas by which they interpret television news. The links made by UK newspapers between terrorism, refugees/asylum-seekers, and Islam, are perceived as extremely worrying by our non-white and Muslim informants.

Al Jazeera

Al Jazeera is hugely popular among Arabic-speaking viewers. It is seen as offering relatively uncensored news when compared with 'western' TV news channels, and hence as an emancipatory new force in transnational Arab affairs, enabling Arabs and British Muslims more generally to participate in diaspora public and political debate more actively. Al Jazeera, it is claimed, assuages the feelings of impotence felt by many with ties to the Middle East. According to our Arabic speaking researchers and informants, Al Jazeera has created a transnational Arabic public sphere and affirmed a strong, positive sense of transnational Arabic identity. All other Arabic services come far lower in

viewers' esteem, though some favourably mention Abu Dhabi, Dubai IQRA, Middle East Broadcasting (MBC) and Arab News Network (ANN) and al Manar channels. Al Jazeera is forcing these and other Arab news services to raise their game.

Al Jazeera is seen to compensate for western TV's failure to cover the second Palestinian Intifada fairly. Its strength lies in its political debate programmes, special documentaries, and one-to-one interviews with personalities, as well as its high production values and plurality of perspectives: *'genuine coverage of current affairs related to human rights, democracy, the Palestinian struggle, free expression in the Arab world.'* *'It expresses the Islamic and Arabic way of thinking and opens the door to free expression about some of the most sensitive issues in the Arab world that have long been repressed.'*

The Arabic diaspora previously had to rely on European radio and TV stations to find out what was going on in the Arab world, due to the impoverished and state-manipulated nature of regional media. Now Al Jazeera is helping to create a *'consensus narrative of the entire Arabic world'*. But this consensus is pluralistic, stretching from the official discourse of Arab states (seen to be Americanised), and the discourse of militant groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, to the highly diverse discourses of Arabs in the Middle East or the diaspora. Unsolicited by the researchers, many called for Al Jazeera to develop services in English and other European languages.

Some informants felt that Al Jazeera became a mouthpiece for Osama Bin Laden by giving him a platform to explain his political beliefs. For most, the transmission of his tapes was an issue of freedom of speech. It enabled Arabic speaking viewers to fully comprehend, without condoning terrorism, the depth of rage that might lead to violent or terrorist acts. This contrasts with some of the white informants who expressed a complete failure to understand how such actions were motivated.

Monolingual viewers claimed that with the broadcasting of the Osama Bin Laden tapes: *'we' were watching 'their' TV'*. Concern was expressed about transnational TV news. Arabic channels like Al Jazeera were perceived as a potential threat either to the integration of immigrants or to British national security interests. It was thought that Arabic-speaking viewers might be receiving propaganda from the Arab and Muslim world, inflaming extremism and terrorism.

Representation of Muslims and Islam

September 11 provoked heightened sensitivities to 'western' media representations of Muslims and Islam. The ubiquitous phrase 'Islamic terrorists' was deeply offensive to British Muslims: Irish terrorist organisations are not referred to as 'Christian terrorists'. Insensitive use of language was seen to reveal inherent racist thinking and assumptions about Islam as violent, abusive to women, prone to terrorism, illiberal, isolationist, and anti-western. The perception or implicit assumption that Islam itself was a causal factor in the terrorist attacks was widely condemned. It was widely felt that news bulletins, sometimes intentionally, feed into Islamophobic sentiments in the UK, and indeed elsewhere (e.g.

India, Germany). Deep concern was expressed about the rise of anti-Islamic assaults in everyday life in the UK, and the erosion of civil liberties. It was striking how many Muslim women restricted their movements in public to avoid discomfiting stares, verbal and physical abuse. It was felt that the severe impact of September 11 on the everyday lives of British Muslims had not been deemed newsworthy.

UK news bulletins were seen to propagate the ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis, implying that the attacks of September 11 and the war in/on Afghanistan constitute a ‘war of religions’. Polarised thinking (Arabs and Muslims are barbaric, medieval, poor; the Christian West is civilised, democratic, affluent) was seen to pervade news media discourse. Many British Muslims felt that they were put on the defensive by the assumption voiced in much UK news that Osama Bin Laden has supporters among ‘immigrants and refugees’. UK government spin is seen to be at odds with the military action. Despite official protestations that ‘*this is not a war on Islam*’, for many British Muslims ‘*it certainly feels like one*’.

It was strongly felt that the news media failed to represent the full range and plurality of views of UK citizens – especially Muslim and Arabic speaking citizens. British terrestrial news tended to present a polarised view of Muslims either as ‘*extremists and terrorists leading parallel lives*’, ‘*the enemy within*’ or else as ‘*moderate, normal and assimilated to the west*’. The diverse spiritual, intellectual and humanistic aspects of Islamic religion were not represented.

There was a perceived tendency to focus on individuals whose views were deemed newsworthy, i.e. could be dramatised or sensationalised in some way. Making dramatic news stories was seen to override questions of fair representation. The voices of extremists and militant Islamists were ‘*given a more open platform*’ and over-represented compared with other Muslim views. British terrestrial news was also seen to play safe by ‘*wheeling out the same tired old voices of so-called community leaders, usually religious elders over the age of 75 who speak for nobody but themselves and ignore women*’. It was felt that the views of the vast majority of British Muslims with more subtle, nuanced and ambivalent perspectives were too complex for news bulletins looking for fast and easy sound bites with a clear and unambiguous message. Yet it was widely acknowledged that some current affairs programmes (notably ‘Newsnight’) had attempted to cover a more diverse range of views.

Media practices were seen to reinforce headline-oriented, sound-bite-driven public opinion, encouraging dogmatic thinking in those sections of the British public with little or no direct experience of Muslims, Arabs or Middle Easterners living in the UK.

Most non-Muslim British respondents refrained from expressing Islamophobic sentiments, but some admitted that others in their social circles had become more hostile to Muslims since September 11.

The repeated news footage, allegedly of Palestinians celebrating shortly after the attacks, was met with dismay and at times scepticism among British Muslim viewers. The repetition of these images was judged to be very counter-productive and seen to exacerbate anti-Islamic sentiments among the

dominant white ethnic population who were inclined to such views. However many British Muslims stressed that their 'English', 'white' or 'Christian' friends rang them continually to express their concern about the rise in racist attacks across the UK. One cannot ignore the data suggesting how multi-ethnic complicities and friendships were strengthened after September 11 as together some people thought through the crisis.

Transnational TV News: Flicking and Flexible Thinking

The proliferation of transnational news channels has generated a heightened awareness of the diversity of perspectives on major world events, among those able to access alternatives. According to our researchers, for some news viewers, especially multilingual, transnationally mobile migrants, as well as white, media mobile, cosmopolitans, this tends to loosen up their thinking. It relativises their political opinions and worldview, moving them to think beyond the kind of '*immortal frozen imagery*' and populist polarities that were seen to characterise news bulletins in the immediate aftermath of September 11.

Multilingual news viewers in multi-channel households regularly engage in flicking across channels. They perform comparative and contrastive analyses of TV news bulletins: in our sample, the commonest combination was CNN v BBC v Al Jazeera. At times of political crisis they do so more intensively and compulsively. These sceptical zappers display relatively high levels of cynicism towards all news media regardless of language or source. They tend to be highly skilled and competent alternative news-seeking surfers. They supplement their consumption of TV news bulletins with a highly selective but extensive use of Internet and other news and current affairs source material. They take nothing at face value, regardless of medium.

Distrust of available TV and press news sources was the single biggest reason given for the vastly increased use of Internet sources following September 11. News of the civilian casualties in Afghanistan and censorship of such news on British and American channels was one of the main reasons given for alternative news seeking.

The Discourse of Conflict Resolution

These pluralistic news-seeking practices reflect a demotic discourse of conflict resolution – a dominant everyday way of talking, especially among British Muslim and Arab males in clubs, cafes, mosques and other public meeting-places, that analyses causes and possible resolutions of conflicts. Such interpretative communities of news consumption are characterised by '*a passionate engagement with news and politics as compared with the cold detached realpolitik attitude among British people*'. Superior knowledge, experience, competence and expertise can, according to the data, confer the position of opinion leader within such interpretative communities. This emphasises the fact that news stories are read through the interpretative frames of significant others.

Translation Traffic in Transnational Networks

In multilingual households, where competence in different languages is variable, patterns of translating and interpreting news develop: fathers may interpret Arabic news to wives and children, and in many cases children interpret English news to grandparents. This may reflect the exercise of patriarchal authority or simple necessity. Competent young translators of news for elders may pass a 'rite of passage' into adult status through skilled performance. The translation traffic in various directions catalyses translation practices that extend beyond language to the interpretation and negotiation of worldviews and political perspectives.

In transnational kinship and friendship networks linked by phone and email as well as face-to-face meetings, 'translation communities' form. They become highly active in response to crises concerning people and places of interest. Responses to the September 11 news were strongly emotional but also deeply reflective. Reflection is encouraged by the diversity of transnational television news sources and by the activities of translation and comparison.

Our own Ground Zeros

Some refugees point out that '*we have a September 11 every day*'. Many viewers invoke '*our ground zeros*' in previous media and/or personal experience of wars, disasters, or genocides, in order to critically assess the relative significance ascribed by different news media to these different events. Reference points mentioned by different groups accord with their collective histories and tragedies. Their testimony is often deeply moving. For British Kurds, memories of Saddam Hussein's gassing of Kurds in Halabja and other villages in northern Iraq remain etched in their memories from accounts given by others. Yet, they argue, this atrocity barely entered 'western' consciousness partly because of the extent and nature of the coverage by British and American media and their viewers who '*suffer amnesia about tragedies in other parts of the world*'. For Turkish viewers, the recent earthquakes were pre-eminent, while for Armenian viewers the genocide of 1915 remained salient. Other viewers compared the tragedy of September 11 with Hiroshima, Vietnam, Tiananmen Square, Allende's coup in Chile, or Kosova.

All claimed that September 11 was the most covered story in TV news history, because it was an attack on America, and that American national and political interests, perspectives and views dominated UK as well as US TV news screens. American lives are seen to be more valued than the lives of others. The individual and family tragedies of Americans are shared around the world, while Palestinian or Afghani deaths are '*normalised*' and '*anonymised*'.

Censored Images

Specific images, it is claimed, were not given a high profile by BBC and CNN news bulletins but were widely seen around the Arabic-speaking and Muslim world. Such views are a product of channel switching. Images frequently mentioned include: Palestinian houses being burned down in the Gaza Strip; the killings of Palestinian boy Mohammed Al Durra beside his father, of Palestinian baby Iman

Hejjo, and of Afghan children under US bombardment; Afghan refugees flooding into Pakistan; a Red Cross supply warehouse in Kabul being bombed. Many British Muslim viewers challenged the censorship of such images and the implied assumption that American viewers, in particular, 'did not need' to see these images.

Information Deficit

Our small sample of 'white' informants were mostly working-class, displayed low levels of political literacy, and were consumers of tabloid newspapers and Sky news. They do not make for an appropriate comparison with the non-white interviewees who were mostly middle-class and highly educated. Their characteristics can certainly not be generalised. Their relative information deficit, as compared with multilingual channel-flicking viewers, is nonetheless very striking.

When asked directly about the rights and wrongs of the war in/on Afghanistan, white viewers tended to be agnostic: *'I don't know. We don't know, do we? We only know what we get told and that's what the Americans want us to hear'*. There was a strong feeling that UK news media are led by US media, in turn led by the Pentagon. These viewers were mostly at a loss to explain why someone would become a suicide bomber, only that they must be *'mad'* or *'not normal'*. A small minority of the sample, those with a higher level of intellectual and cultural competence, were able to offer thoughtful explanations based on some knowledge of international politics.

Most monolingual English-speaking viewers with low to medium level news and political literacy felt so disempowered by their own professed lack of background knowledge, that they could form no judgements as to whether the news they saw was reliable, accurate, truthful or trustworthy. Yet most assented to American policy, despite some anti-American comments. A few supported American policy unreservedly: these displayed the lowest levels of knowledge and understanding of international politics. Monolingual viewers' information deficit vis-à-vis multilingual viewers impedes the possibility of political debate, alienates viewers from the political process and undermines full and active citizenship.

NOTES

(1) This report is based on in-depth interviews (90-120 minutes) conducted in January-March 2002 with a total of 320 people, mostly UK residents. However some interviews were conducted with non UK based members of transnational families in different sites who had access to the same TV news stations as their relatives in the UK. Most of our interviewees were adult males and with high levels of news literacy and political engagement. Just under 100 were female and just over 30 were aged between 9 and 19. Most of the multi-lingual interviewees were of 'British Muslim' background although the use of this category masks huge variations in belief and practice, national origin and politico-religious viewpoints. Our interviewees ranged from devout practitioners of mainstream versions of Islam, to adherents of different sects, or to transnational or translocal varieties of Islam. We also interviewed 'cradle Muslims' of secular, atheist and agnostic persuasion. The range of national identities among our interviewees, hyphenated with British and others, includes Armenian, Afghani, Egyptian, Indian, Kurdish, Iraqi, Iranian, Pakistani, Palestinian, Saudi Arabian, Somali, Sudanese, Turkish, Tunisian and Zimbabwean. About a dozen interviewees were recent refugees to Britain. The majority were migrants of various types, including refugees and asylum seekers, or migrants' children. The sheer complexity of our interviewees linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds is difficult to exaggerate.

The interviews were carried out by 20 researchers mainly in England (London and Cambridgeshire), Wales (Cardiff and Swansea), and Germany (Cologne), but also in Turkey (Istanbul), India (Bombay), Israel (Tel Aviv), USA (Los Angeles) and Canada (Toronto). Most of the researchers are multilingual and, though resident in the UK, lead highly mobile lives. Like most of the interviewees, they commute physically, culturally and linguistically between various 'homes' on a regular basis, sustaining multiple ties and social relations across transnational spaces.

The interviews were mostly conducted in domestic settings with household, family and friendship groups. Some individual and focus group interviews were conducted in cafes, community centres, clubs, sports centres and the like. All interviewers used a common interview schedule, adapting it according to need. Interviews were conducted in various languages as appropriate, transcribed and/or written up in report form. They were analysed by the individual researchers and by the research coordinators.

This is qualitative research. The sample does not purport to be representative, nor can the results be easily generalised. However, the data gathered is rich, robust and reliable, and this approach can deliver insights that are more likely to be counter-intuitive and surprising than other research techniques. The summary distils the essential patterns and differences in audience responses, and necessarily leaves out much of the detail and richness of the researcher's individual reports. More details can be found on <http://afterseptember11.tv>

(2) We are using anonymous quotes to protect the identities of the informants.