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7/7: An academic and reflexive re-evaluation of journalistic practice.

Dr Paul Lashmar. Journalism, University of Sussex.

Abstract

The July 2005 London Bombings are the most serious terror attacks in the United Kingdom to date in the so-called 'war on terror'. Many books, papers and chapters have been published on the war on terror but few journalists have reflected on the domestic coverage of the 7/7 attacks. This paper is written by a journalist who covered both the suicide attacks of 7th July (7/7) and 21st July (21/7) for a national newspaper and more recently is a practitioner-academic. Using academic texts focussing on the reporting of the 'war on terror' as stimuli for scholarly reflection, this paper reviews the author's own coverage using reflexive practice and content analysis. Some 63 authored articles were considered from the period. The paper places 7/7 in the continuum of reporting subsequent to 11th September 2001 (9/11) and issues discussed include news values, patriotic reporting, elite sources, interacting with the security forces, agency and editorial stances. The paper argues that while many academic texts see journalism as hegemonic and monolithic, responding to events in a homogenous reactivity, that in practice news organisations can have graded responses and journalists agency.

Keywords: terrorism: 7/7, 21/7, 9/11; London bombings; national security reporting

7/7: An academic and reflexive re-evaluation of journalistic practice.

Introduction

There are numerous books, chapters and articles on the reporting of the so-called 'war on terror'. Fewer though, specifically deal with the terror attacks in London in July 2005 and ever fewer are from journalists reflecting on their reporting of the successful 7/7 and the failed 21/7 attacks and very few, if any, have done so in an academic context. The author attempts to remedy this omission. The aim of this paper is to consider the reporting of 7/7 and the aftermath from the perspective of an academic-practitioner who covered the event for a UK national newspaper. This is undertaken using reflexive practice of the author's own 7/7 journalism and then reflecting on that corpus in the light of the subsequent academic discourse on the reporting of the London attacks. Academics have used a range of concepts including political ritual, hegemony and elite discourse to consider coverage of 7/7. The author seeks to benefit from this discourse. After all, if published academic research and texts have no impact on or do not encourage reflection in the practitioner its value is much reduced. The interaction between journalists and academics over practice is not always an easy one. Morrison and Tumber, when conducting their ethnographic study of the British reporters who from the Falklands conflict observed that:

> It is strange to find journalists, whose business is to enquire into the occupations and lives of others, so frequently making the comment that it is impossible to understand their occupation unless one has oneself been a journalist.

They continued:

> Reading the academic literature one cannot help feel sympathy with the journalists' claim that the 'outside' has failed to get inside the trade: it is all too formalistic, too sterile, too serious; and it is not surprising that working journalists fail to recognise the world they are supposed to inhabit (1988 viii).

Now that practice research is more common and granular and the number of reflexive practitioners lecturing in universities has increased, there is greater understanding of working practices. There has also been greater interest in developing theories of practice and how they relate to power. As Ryfe notes this has developed a philosophical dimension: 'Among news production scholars, interest in the theory of Bourdieu, Giddens, Latour and related authors has

grown in the last 20 years' (2017). Bourdieu identifies and names the way the journalist connect in the 'field of journalism', how it interacts with the political and economic field. He identifies a 'habitus' – a structure that organises practice and the perception of practices or as some have simplified as a 'a feel for the game' that can change over time and is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time. Bourdieu's ideas around practice are helpful in reflecting how newsdesks function. Schultz picks up on Bourdieu's concept of doxa and defines it as the journalistic 'gut feeling' as the 'seemingly self-evident and self-explaining sense of newsworthiness' that all journalists share (2007 190, 191). This I recognise and like all silent assumptions embedded in practice it needs to be critically examined.

Context

Coverage of the July 2005 attacks place the attacks in the context of the 'war on terror' rather than a *sui generis* event - as significant as the attacks may have been with some 52 deaths. These acts of terror are in a continuum - the latest in a horrendous manifestation - of what has been a running story since 9/11.

The Author

In July 2005 I was a regular contributor to the *Independent on Sunday* (IoS) covering the 'war on terror'. As an investigative journalist with national security reporting experience my role was to give depth to the paper's reporting, primarily on the UK domestic front. I was well versed in the emergence of the new manifestations of terrorism that had developed from the 1970s, most spectacularly to highlight the Palestinian and Irish Republican causes. From 1998 to May 2001 I had been the *Independent's* accredited reporter with a formal links on behalf of the paper with the security services. Then I was recruited to the IoS four days after 9/11 to contribute to a rolling news agenda of related stories: the aftermath of 9/11, the invasion of Afghanistan, the US anthrax campaign, the arguments over Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), the Iraq Invasion, the BBC coverage of the 'sexed up dossier', the Hutton Inquiry.

The newspaper

The *Independent on Sunday* (IoS) was created in 1990 to complement the daily paper. By 2001 both papers were owned by Tony O'Reilly's Irish Independent group. The 'war on terror' reporting team operated on the set of news values

that O'Neill and Harcup (2009) would have recognised. As with all news, there was 'gatekeeping' by selection and inevitably some subjectivity but we strove to be topical, objective, accurate, insightful, concise and to engage the reader. We were well aware that the main objective of terrorism is publicity and reporting has to be sober and measured. After 11 September 2001 the IoS had a core team for working on the war on terror anchored by Foreign News Editor Ray Whitaker. We worked together regularly during these years often supplemented by other reporters depending on the story. From 9/11 to 7/7 I had been involved in 50 articles, some solely, most co-authored relating to the 'war on terror'. Then in the two years after 7/7 I was involved in a further 13 stories. I ceased writing for the IoS in 2007.

UK Accounts

While there are copious accounts and biographical texts of the foreign side 9/11 and the so called 'war on terror' there are very few journalists who have written about their work covering the domestic aspects of the war. Reporting through the period was often controversial. In the US and to a lesser degree in the UK we saw a resurgence in uncritical 'patriotic' reporting. In the US there was Judith Miller's now largely discredited reporting for the *New York Times* that was based on falsified information from government and other sources. In the UK, No10, MI6, MI5 and others sought to be the *primary definers of* the narrative – especially with the Iraq invasion - and too often UK journalists obliged uncritically. David Rose, then *The Observer's* home affairs correspondent, later wrote a reflective apologetic article for the *New Statesman* in 2007 admitting he had got too close to his intelligence contacts after 9/11.

> To my everlasting regret, I strongly supported the Iraq invasion, in person and in print. I had become a recipient of what we now know to have been sheer disinformation about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and his purported 'links' with al-Qaeda - claims put out by Ahmad Chalabi and his Iraqi National Congress (2007).

The London attacks occurred of an extended period of major change for journalism as a result of the internet and social media. In the vernacular, gatekeeping was making way for gatewatching where journalists were as likely to select User Generated Content (UGC) as it appeared on social media as to report. For those on the IoS, as a Sunday newspaper, the task was to provide in-depth reporting, so USG was of less significance to us than to our colleagues

with 24/7 deadlines and we retained a somewhat traditional approach to our journalism.

Literature review

This review identifies key academic texts on terrorism and in particular the London Bombings of July 2005 and the discourse those texts initiate. Having reported on terrorism since 1980 I had read the key terror texts from Wilkinson (1974), Sobel (1975) and Laqueur (1977 and 1999) onwards in a 'rolling snowball review' and was aware of the development of terrorism studies (Matusitz 2013) and intelligence studies (Bakir 2015). With 3000 people killed in one episode, 9/11 was a historical moment that brought terror to the centre of the global stage and raised major questions about journalism in modernity.

A 'war on terror'

The phrase 'war on terror' is a controversial trope. On 20 September 2001, during a televised address to a joint session of Congress, President George W Bush proclaimed that: '(o)ur 'war on terror' begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.' The term has been used since to encapsulate diverse counter-terrorist interventions and invasions by the West usually on the premise of containing Islamic fundamentalist inspired terrorist or military action including full military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Others believe it disguised the neo-con neo-empire ambitions for the US. Pilger has commented: 'It is not a war on terror but a war of terror' (de Burgh 2008, 191). The historian Andrew Bacevich observed, terror 'was not the source of opposition to the United States, but only one especially malignant expression' of it. Terror was 'a tactic, not an enemy' (Bacevich 2002: 240, 231). He further noted that declaring the war on terror, 'obscured the political root of the confrontation' and 'made it easier to deflect public attention from evidence suggesting that it was America's quasi-imperial role that was provoking resistance – and would continue to do so' (ibid: 231). It may be an inadequate or even misleading phrase but it has become common shorthand for a linked set of events that have run for sixteen years and show no sign of ending.

Reporting the war and terror

Journalists had written for many decades on their role as war correspondents (e.g. See Bell 1995; Simpson 1999, Loyd 2000). By the 1980s the tone of such

memoirs had often become more critical and less 'patriotic'. In Robert Harris's book *Gotcha!: The Media, the Government and the Falklands Crisis:* he concluded

> The episodes which caused the most disquiet, and which have been described in this book were not necessarily unique to the Falklands crisis. The instinctive secrecy of the military and Civil service; the prostitution and hysteria of sections of the press; the lies, the misinformation, the manipulation of public opinion by the authorities; the political intimidation of broadcasters; the ready connivance of the media at their own distortion…al these occurred as much in peacetime Britain as in war (1983, 151).

One of the first social science works to analyse UK war reporting in depth was Glasgow Univeristy's Media Group's *War and Peace News* (1985). Then there was Morrison and Tumber's (1986) ethnography of reporters who covered the Falklands War to establish the 'dynamic of war reporting'. Much of the 'war on terror' narrative is insurgency and terrorism and there is a literature on the way the news media report terrorism with *Televising Terror* (Schlesinger at al 1983) as an early example critiquing the TV news output. TV reporter James Rodgers' *Reporting Conflict* combined his experience, interviews and theory for a practitioner-academic text (2012). *Journalism after September 11* edited by Zelizer and Allan (2002), focussed mainly on the US news media. Following 9/11, US journalists were accused of reverting to what President Roosevelt had once called the 'patriotic press' – as epitomised by ABC TV anchor Dan Rather's famous patriotic, thoroughly unjournalistic comments (Schoenfeld 2010, 145). In their introduction Zelizer and Allan comment that in pondering journalism's imperatives following the events that shook the world, their contributors considered the emergent capacity of those invested with helping to give the events voice:

> At the heart of this discussion is a notion not previously addressed in scholarship on journalism, namely that of trauma. Frequently invoked as a label for a wide range of cognitive-emotional states caused by suffering and existential pain, it is our belief that journalists and news organisations covering the events of September 11 were wounded too. There were no detached vantage-points situated 'outside' the crisis from which they could objectively observe. And indeed, as we have seen in the months that have since passed, trauma does not disappear lightly (2002, 1).

The thrust of this argument utilised notions from sociological and psychological concepts of 'trauma'. With this analogy 9/11 was 'traumatic', and media accounts of the day were 'traumatised', by the sheer magnitude of the event and journalists exhibited subjectivity and patriotism rather than behaving as objective observers. As Holloway states; '9/11 was a cataclysm of such magnitude, it was suggested, that it abolished media industry concepts such as "critical distance" and "observer-hood", making objective reportage impossible.'

Holloway further observed that:

> The uncritical patriotism that flooded TV screens, radio airwaves, magazines and newsprint after 9/11 was partly a function or reflex of trauma, in the sense that it helped reconstruct the abstract collective entity threatened by 'terror' – 'America', and the things 'America' meant in the dominant media frame: freedom, civilisation, innocence, resolve, victimhood, unity and the pursuit of justice via legitimate war (2008 60).

Journalism after September 11 has one chapter directly relevant to the UK national press where Bromley and Cushion suggested that 9/11 showed broadsheets newspapers and tabloids were two distinct cultural expressions: 'addressing largely different social groupings rather than versions of a single artefact ranged along a continuum'. They also suggested that overall the Press adopted a much more serious approaching the tone of its reporting of 9/11 and its aftermath. Waisbord's chapter was a proposal on risk and patriotism where 'Hawkish patriotism provided the script to make September 11 and subsequent risk intelligible'. Other key texts on the 'war on terror' include Jackson (2005) who deconstructed the way that rhetoric has been used to justify the global counter-terrorism offensive and Norris, Kern and Just (2003) argued in *Framing Terrorism* that the headlines matter as much as the act, in political terms. In Allan and Zelizer's *Reporting War* Couldry and Downes (Allan and Zelizer 2004 266-282) analyse the coverage of the Iraq War build up over a six day period in January 2003 as reported in seven different UK newspapers and found them deeply divided in terms of being for or against the invasion of Iraq.

Reporting of the London Bombings
As with 9/11, a deep critical analysis of reporting followed the events of July 2005 where 52 people died and also the four suicide bombers. Hoskins and O'Loughlin have suggested that since the 7/7 London bombings a new genre of

security journalism has become established in British news. This, they said, has contributed regular representations of terrorist threats to a presumed national audience, offering coverage of the threat 'we' face in the form of Al-Qaida leaders' speeches, bomb attempts, criminal trials and 'radical' protesters in Britain. They state that national security journalism's delivery of Al-Qaida speeches is particularly significant:

> By repackaging and remediating jihadist media productions from one context and language to another, reporters offer to British audiences 'messages' presumed to be radicalizing to would-be jihadist recruits (2010, 903).

In Julian Matthews' analysis of the 7/7 coverage he postulated that genetic conventions of the news form delimit the possible range of its symbolic expression in the first instance, while its story telling function highlights instances of suffering and destruction and terrorist tactics in the aftermath of the incident:

> Decisions on the legitimacy of news voices define what is said and by who here too. Government leaders and spokespeople's primary definition of events (Entman, 2003; Montegomery, 2005) viewed as credible commentary at this time not only predominate on this basis in these event–centred and decontextualized accounts of terrorism but structure their omissions including the absence of the objectives informing terrorist actions and the wider context (and sometimes conflict) surrounding them (2016, 174)

Agendas

An important consideration is the importance of sources in setting the news agenda using a careful selection of frames. Within cultural studies there has been a source theory discourse (see Hall *et al.* 1978, Gans 1979, Schlesinger and Tumber 1994, Cottle 1998, Manning 2001, Franklin and Carlson 2011). These discussions set out a theoretical framework for how the news media find, use and publish source material. Schlesinger pointed out that the study of sources must take into account: 'relations between the media and the exercise of political and ideological power […] by central social institutions which seek to define and manage the flow of information in a contested field of discourse'

(1990, 62). During the war on terror the intelligence lobby became important agenda setters. The relationship between intelligence services and the media is a small but growing research area (Hillebrand 2013, Lashmar 2013, Bakir 2015). The war on terror was the first where there were formal regular intelligence briefings to the UK news media. These briefings were opaque to the public but drove specific narratives from 9/11 through the July 2005 bombings into the present day. The experience of working with these relationships over a long period of time is discussed in Lashmar (2013) which examines in some depth one of the most contentious points from 7/7, did MI5 mislead journalists and the public, knowing far more about the 7/7 leader Mohammed Siddique Khan than they admitted? This paper seeks to see if improvements could be made to journalistic practice with the benefit of more than a decade to reconsider what was an intense period of reporting.

Methodology

This paper's key research questions are:

RQ1 By using critical reflexive practice and other methodologies can the experience of a practitioner provide insight into the editorial processes in covering acts of terror?

RQ2 Using the same methodologies, can a practitioner place coverage of 7/7 in the discourse of editorial processes in the 'war on terror'?

RQ3 How did the primary definers help frame the 7/7 attacks?

Several methodologies are used with reflexive practice used to interrogate the data. The use of reflexive, reflective or transformative practice as a pedagogic tool has evolved since the 1970s (see: Schön 1983, Kolb, 1984, Prpic 2005, Cunliffe 2016). Reflexivity as a pedagogic tool is used across a variety of disciplines including sociology, the natural sciences, clinical practice, nursing education, osteopathy practice and psychology but rarely in journalism. Greenberg has suggested it can help bridge the practice-theory divide in journalism education (2007, 289). A handful of journalists have reflected critically on reporting of the 'war on terror' such as US journalists Dahr Jamail and Danny Schechter's chapters in Media *and Terrorism* (Freedman and Thussu 2012). This paper utilises reflexive practice and focusses on praxis which is of particular importance to journalism because by thinking more critically about our own assumptions and actions, practitioners can develop more collaborative,

responsive, and ethical ways of developing the profession and creativity within those news organisations. Part of the UK news media has a poor track record of immoral, unethical and illegal behaviour notable in recent time around the phone hacking scandal (Davies 2014). Reflexive practice is a natural development of Bourdieu's theory of practice and as he noted, journalists have a strong collective identify and self-justifying ethos through their habitus and doxa (Benson and Neveu 2005, 58). In some circumstances this cohesion sustains and amplifies inappropriate practice. the need for self-conscious and ethical action based on a critical questioning of past actions and of future possibilitiesit what is after all, a social construct.

There is a considerable literature on how news is created. Hall (1978) was a prominent early theorists who noted that 'news' is the end-product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories. The process of signification - giving social meanings to events - both assumes and helps to construct society as a consensus. The media do not themselves autonomously create news items; rather they are 'cued in' to specific news topics by regular and reliable institutional sources – 'preferred sources'. Entman, in developing framing as a useful method for identifying how agendas are set stated:

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Typically frames diagnose, evaluate and prescribe (1993, 53).

Framing entails selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution. Entman emphasized a lack of critical reflection by journalists: 'because they lack a common understanding of framing, journalists frequently allow the most skillful media manipulators to impose their dominant frames on the news' (2003, 5).

Research

This paper combines reflexive practice, content analysis and framing to analyse a corpus of 63 articles articles from the *Independent on Sunday* written between September 2001 and August 2007. A simple content analysis is undertaken to

seek general topics in these overall articles, using the headlines and content of each article were compared to assess their news angle or foci.

9/11 to 7/7

50 articles totalling nearly 50,000 words post 9/11 prior to 7/7. These were all news stories, longer form news features or analysis pieces.

The main episodes include:

Aftermath of 9/11: Initial American responses; identification of terrorists; terrorists relationship with UK; UK security forces responses to threat; European connections of 9/11 terrorists; radical preachers; al Qaida networks; further plots; lone wolf terrorists; home grown terrorists; possible targets for terror attacks; US arrests of 9/11 terrorist suspects.

The Anthrax threat in the US was also analysed: US journalists became preoccupied with this domestic story, the discovery of anthrax sent to various government buildings contaminating a number of victims. For months reports suggested a range of suspects from Iraqis to al Qaida fourteen years on we still do not who was responsible for the anthrax attacks.

There are a series of articles reporting but also attempting to test UK government claims that Saddam Hussein was evading the UN Weapons Security conditions and planned to keep developing WMD. The Iraq invasion occurs in March 2003 and we turn to the coverage of the failure to find WMD.

Sources

In the UK given that most of the coverage involved terrorism much of the security forces work was undertaken in secrecy with the few exceptions of the occasional trials which were held in public. We had to rely on public statements by politicians and the rarer public utterances of intelligence chiefs. Academics with knowledge of terrorism were also frequently used. Contacts with security services were either informal (confidential sources) or formal (unattributable). I had confidential sources in the period that provided a different picture of the politicization of intelligence. As early as Feb 2003 the IOS provided an alternative narrative:

> Britain and America's spies believe that they are being politicised: that the intelligence they provide is being selectively applied to lead to the opposite conclusion from the one they have drawn, which is that Iraq is

much less of a threat than their political masters claim. Worse, when the intelligence agencies fail to do the job, the politicians will not stop at plagiarism to make their case, even 'tweaking' the plagiarised material to ensure a better fit.

'You cannot just cherry-pick evidence that suits your case and ignore the rest. It is a cardinal rule of intelligence', said one aggrieved officer. 'Yet that is what the PM is doing', (Lashmar and Whitaker 2004).

In contrast to its most obvious rival the *Observer*, the *Independent on Sunday* was sceptical and critical of the Blair government's intent to invade Iraq. This was an organic policy process in the news team but was also ratified at senior editor level.

Blowback

By August 2003 conversations with MI5 and security officials revealed that they were stopping terror plots but were very conscious that sooner or later there would be a successful attack. Interestingly they did not choose make this a 'frame' of their narrative. Examining our reports from the post-9/11 certain domestic key frames from the political-intelligence elite emerge:

The external threat frame: Through contacts with the security services we established that by early 2002 that MI5 believed it had broken up all possible al Qaida operatives in the UK before 9/11 either by arrest or deportation.

The sympathiser threat frame: What then became the issue was who were sympathetic to al Qaida. MI5 believed these were mostly North Africans who were funding potential terrorism but a wide range of crimes including credit card fraud.

The convert or home grown threat frame: With the arrest of the 'shoe bomber' Islamic convert Richard Reid in January 2002, the issue of home grown and convert to Islam terrorists first arose. He was seen as a lone wolf, converted in prison, who had had some kind of guidance via the internet from al Qaida. We also see the discussion about radicalisation developing.

7/7 and after

On Thursday 7th July 2005 the IoS team launched into a major reporting exercise as soon it was clear it was a terror attack. In our first post 7/7 article we offered the analysis:

> If we are fighting a 'war on terror', then al-Qaida is clearly the enemy. But even before it was disrupted by the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the arrest of many members of its inner circle, it was never an organisation with a clear hierarchical structure. It has always been as much an ideology as a tangible group. 'Trying to hit al-Qaida is like trying to hit jelly,' said one intelligence source. 'One minute you think you know who is running it, and next minute you feel you have no idea,' (Whitaker and Lashmar 2005a).

Following through some two weeks later we observed:

> MI5 used to boast that it had identified and dealt with all al-Qaida operatives in Britain before the attacks of 2001, and that it knew who needed watching among the 600-800 Britons trained in camps run by al-Qaida in Afghanistan. Resources are concentrated on the 200 or so people in the UK deemed the greatest threat to national security. At any one time at least 10 round-the-clock surveillance operations are under way (Whitaker, Lashmar & Elliott 2005).

Certainly themes are picked up in the IOS coverage and repeated and amplified after the failed 21/7 bombings. These are then developed with further reporting as new developments direct the news narratives. Eight weeks after 7/7 al-Qaida released the leader of the attack, Khan's posthumous video. We commented:

> The words of the 7 July suicide bomber Mohammad Siddique Khan were chilling, all the more so for being delivered in a flat Yorkshire accent. 'Until we feel security, you'll be our target,' he said. 'Until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people, we'll not stop this fight. We are at war, and I am a soldier. Now you too will taste the reality of this situation'.

> Most al-Qa'ida tapes and videos, however threatening, are given an other-worldly quality by their misty, translated rhetoric. Khan's message, by contrast, is blunt and direct (Whitaker and Lashmar 2005bsommers).

I was to be involved with 13 articles on terror after 7/7 with the last being in August 2007 in the wake of the Glasgow Airport terror attack. The story themes post 7/7 and 21/7 were to be:

- 'Home Grown' terrorists and the alienation of second generation Muslims, often in the north of England

- How much terror plots were directed by external al Qaeda operatives.
- Radicalisation and the rising number of converts.
- Travel to Pakistan and other locations to get terror training.
- Acquisition of explosives.
- Surveillance operations
- Further plots, raid, arrests, attacks and trials.

It was the home grown problem and radicalisation that became the dominant frames of the political intelligence elites in their briefings.

In the thirteen post - 7/7 articles we directly quoted

Official security sources – 16 times

Confidential sources 10

Politicians - 6

Terror experts - 16

Bomber – 1 (from video)

Relative of bomber – 1

External jihadist - 2

Bomb disposal expert -1

Salman Rushdie - 1

Other - 2

Analysis and reflection

Zelizer and Allan's claim that the media had 'no detached vantage-points' over 9/11 but I would suggest that this was much more a US problem than a UK one and the UK reporting was less hegemonic. But that is not to say in the wider Press there was pressure to report from a 'patriotic position'. Even when it came to 7/7, some news organisations managed to maintain something of a 'detached vantage–point' for their reporting of 7/. In his 2016 paper Julian Matthews analysed the immediate coverage of 7/7 using ritual communication theory to interpret the news coverage. 'This predicts that newspapers will fuse wider concerns over the health of the social system in their retelling of the incident, producing from their unified commentary a recognisable, yet ephemeral,

reporting genre characterising the moment' (176). Matthews analysed coverage from nine UK national papers including their Sunday counterparts so over the eight days after 9/11 to a total of 216 articles. He stated that the view of terrorism that emerges from the overall coverage is of terrorism's role as the cause rather than symptom of conflict and the terrorist as operating within this situation according to their inner drives or brainwashed misconceptions as psychotic thugs or religious zealots, respectively (Chermak, 2003; Curtis, 1987; Karim in Zelizer and Allan 2002). This is a difficult proposition for a journalist working within the *Independent* newspapers at the time to accept. I understand that these conclusions are based on overall research but I would suggest it needs to be more unpacked to get a sense of the individual processes and the agency at work. It was not until later that we knew who the suicide bombers were. At the IoS we never saw terrorism as a cause but a symptom of alienation. Editorial teams and journalists do have agency within the functions of the immediacy of news production. Different news organisations respond in different ways subject to a range of criteria for reasons that include their editorial stance, experience, knowledge, media format and audience.

In the subsequent coverage of 7/7 IoS' wider editorial team sought to understand the context and sent reporters to the home towns of the suicide bombers. The IoS editor had other journalists fulfil different aspects of this coverage. For example, in a few days after 7/7 the IoS ran an analysis piece by Jonathan Raban based on research with those who knew the suicide bombers. He pointed out the Tony Blair had just made an 'admirable' statement: 'We are not going to deal with this problem, with the roots as deep as they are, until we confront these people at every single level and not just their methods but their ideas.' Raban then picked up from Blair's comment:

> It is a great step forward to acknowledge that the jihadis have ideas, an intellectual framework for their bloody missions, and are not motivated, as the Bush administration stubbornly continues to insist, by a spirit of pure evil for evil's sake. Arguing with people's supernatural delusions is a losing game. But ideas are different. Ideas are negotiable: one can expose their false premises, concede their partial truth, disentangle their conclusions, rob them of their magic by the force of sweet reason (Raban 2006).

Political elite discourse

A repeated criticism of the coverage of 7/7 and indeed the war on terror is that it gave priority to elite sources. Many of the articles took in comments by the government figures. Often it would be leading politicians, officials on the record comments by security and military officials or their press people. While Hall et al's (1978) work on *primary definers* has been the subject to later critique, their general explanation is never more apposite than with the intelligence services: 'such spokesmen are understood to have access to more accurate or specialized information on particular topics than the majority of the population.' We at the IoS were aware of the problem of anonymous official sources but took the view that we listened to what they said and subjected it to test wherever possible. At the same time I was also dealing with non-official, long-standing contacts within the intelligence agencies. Talking to unsanctioned contacts in intelligence was difficult as the journalist should protect their sources and it became very difficult around the time of the Kelly affair after the then Home Secretary John Reid castigated unofficial sources as a 'rogue element' on the BBC's *Today* programme specifically referring to my sources.

> ……I said a rogue element because I thought there was one that was briefing Andrew Gilligan or indeed I said indeed elements because there may be the same source, there may be the same person, who is briefing the *Independent on Sunday* and various others, I don't know. But they are very much in the minority (Today, 2003).

Plots?

In his 2013 paper Bournemouth academic Jamie Matthews raised the important question of how real the alleged plots were that were a constant part of the government and security narrative. This was an ongoing problem and the classic example was the 'Ricin plot' in 2002, which was highlighted as a major plot at the time of the arrests. It later emerged that no ricin had actually been found and the actual prosecution case was much reduced and resulted in only one conviction. Certainly we reported the MI5 assessment of the number of plots and I quote from a September 2004 article:

> Since 9/11, MI5 has monitored those it suspects of close links with al-Qaida, most of North African birth and believed to number around 30. In addition there is a concentric ring of between 300 and 600 supporters and active sympathisers. A worry for MI5, reflected by a spate of arrests, is a

small but growing number of British-born Muslims becoming al-Qaida supporters (Lashmar 2004).

In November 2004 in questioning whether there really had been a terror plot to attack Canary Wharf (McSmith, Lashmar and Bennetto, 2004). And again in August 2006 we referred to the notion of 'dozens of plots' and those who would carry them out:

> Many are being watched day and night amid fears that at least one, possibly two, other significant plots are well advanced, and may be brought forward in the wake of Operation Overt (Whitaker et al 2006).

It did and does remain difficult to ascertain how real these claims emanating from security sources of many and various plots were. Some ended up in court and as Jamie Matthews (2013) pointed out, the courts cases ended with mixed results. It is a difficulty the national security reporter faces. On the one hand these people are in a position to have this privileged information and there are good reasons why they cannot detail the specifics. We therefore take the information on the basis that we search for corroboration where possible and also would return to such claims in future editions. Examining the frames that emerge from the IoS' post 7/7 from a reflexive standpoint they were created mostly by actual events, but often reinforced by elite discourse. We could not have ignored them and they were interrogated in the coverage. Some academic analysis suggests that journalist downplay the importance of 'ordinary voices'. After citing the *Independent's* coverage the day after 7/7 where an article leads with first hand testimony of eyewitness and survivor of a tube blast Zeyned Basci, Matthews, picking up on Zelizer and Allan's notion of the 'wound', stated:

> Newspapers do not position ordinary voices in these prime positions in their everyday coverage. At this time, they are included in reporting as reference points for wider commentary on the social wound that follows (2016, 179).

Every story is different and while there are, as Julian Matthews says, 'templates', ordinary voices are important if they convey unique insight. I cannot recall an occasion when an eyewitness, for example, was considered of secondary importance. The problem was accessing ordinary voices that would enrich our reporting. We were also keen to reflect the views of those from the

communities where jihadists and their sympathisers had lived. We discussed the nature of radicalisation and sought to understand. When the suicide bombers' backgrounds were established we worked hard to understand their process of radicalisation. We got little insight into those communities into our stories at the time. But 7/7 showed that we needed greater diversity of backgrounds in UK journalism. As research shows, (Sutton Trust 2007) most journalists are drawn from a narrow stratum of society and journalism is poorer for it.

There were occasions when we were proved wrong. We were very sceptical about Operation Overt in 2007 with a wave of arrests in this country and Pakistan which is said to have prevented the attacks on air travel. This resulted in containers with more than 100cls of liquid being banned from aircraft because it was believed that terrorists had worked out how improvise bombs in flight. In the end the security forces did get convictions in the Operation Overt. As the BBC's Dominic Casciani reported in September 2009:

> ...it has taken two prosecutions to prove beyond reasonable doubt that a plot which changed the nature of air travel was genuine. Now, the British men behind a plan to launch suicide bomb attacks on a succession of transatlantic airliners are facing a life in jail (Casciani 2009).

There were frustrations for working with the IoS. The compiling editor was often under enormous pressure and often I did not see the final version until it was in print and occasionally I was not happy with the way material had been used. I also did not like the IOS senior editors use of the term 'An *Independent on Sunday* Investigation' flagged on stories that I had barely two/three days to work upon even if I was drawing on many years of reporting this area. It undermined the notion of well-resourced and lengthy investigations in which Sunday newspapers had once earned, as Champagne puts it, their 'legitimacy' (Benson and Neveu 2005, 58).

Political ritual

In the coverage of 7/7 Matthews' use of ritual communications theory does fit the reporting and the 'national wound' does provide a way of conceptualising what occurred. There is certainly in the times of a signal moment, in these cases, a national tragedy, an effort to capture the zeitgeist and offer the sense of a cohesive sympathetic society. I have no problem with this as a journalist but would agree that some news organisations verged on the hysterical. Matthews

described the impact of 7/7 as an 'imagined' wound. To this day it seems real to me as the Omagh bombing in 1998 which killed 29. Many years on 7/7 remains a 'priming' notion of Islamist terrorism, used to conjure a contextual mental picture of a horrific act of terrorism in the UK. If ritual communication theory does provide a concept to analyse the coverage I think that most journalists involved just saw it as reporting relying on their doxa. Schudson observes that journalists do not stand outside of their national communities when reporting such incidents (Zelizer and Allan 2002, 36-47).

Conclusions

By using critical reflexive practice and other methodologies the experience of a practitioner who covered 7/7 I would hope this provides insight into the editorial processes in the coverage in one newspaper. I would also hope that it places the coverage of 7/7 in the wider context of the so-called war on terror and in doing so the paper describes how primary definers helped frame the 7/7 attacks. Rereading the cuttings I sought to identify what we on the IoS had got wrong or how we could have better reported the war on terror. Given the resources available to us, and that was a major constraint on the unprofitable IoS, mostly it is hard to know what we would have done otherwise and that will remain for others to deconstruct, analyse and judge. There were considerable differences between UK and US coverage of the war on terror. The US had rarely experience terrorism yet the UK had had thirty years of IRA terror and it had appeared often in the news and also London had been the site of intermittent acts of terror derived from *causa belli* in the Middle East. History has confirmed the IoS' skepticism over the origin and execution of the Iraq war, though the Chilcot inquiry took many years to reach the same conclusions.

There can be little doubt that there was a great deal of poor and ill-considered reporting during the years 2001-7. Editors often referring back to some mythical national and 'better' time with validating tropes like conjuring up 'the blitz spirit' and 'they will not change our way of life'. After the Hutton Report the savaged BBC were muted in their criticism of the UK Government, limited their investigative journalism and developed a more jingoistic tone (Lashmar 2008). Parts of the UK press were already jingoistic, negative of anything perceived as 'Other' and concerned to reinforce their paying audience's prejudices. We were also concerned with by-products of counter-terrorism including the desire of politicians from both major parties to undermine the Human Rights Act and

indeed sometimes the rule of law which was often supported by elements of the Press notably the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail* (see Silverman and Thomas, 2012, 291). This reporting largely coincides with the same news organisations later shown to have been, at the same time, engaged in phone hacking, paying public officials and using private detectives to breach individual privacy on the industrial scale. This moral vacuum extended to the reporting on the war on terror. Indeed some of the Press coverage of the war on terror conformed in the worst possible way to Hermann and Chomsky's Propaganda mode (1988)l.

Over a decade on from 7/7 the news scene has changed with the rise of diverse globalised news organizations increasingly questioning the dominant perspective of any nation state. This change has been underway in 24/7 TV news for some time but some of the London based news website like the *Guardian*, the BBC and the *Mail Online* find much of their audience outside of the UK. In *Global Activism, Global Media*, De Jong, Shaw, and Stammers argue that 'Media appear to be increasingly globalised, as national television, press, etc. are subsumed in gigantic worldwide flows of information and ideas, symbolised by the internet, which offers social and political actors new opportunities for direct communication' (2005, 1). Overall many of the texts consulted see journalism as hegemonic and monolithic in responding to events in a kind of homogenous reactivity. What I argue most strongly that while some do conform to the Hermann and Chomsky's propaganda Model (1988), the national news media always includes non-conformist voices in terms of outlets, editorial teams and journalists who exercise agency. There were consistent genuine attempts by some news teams during the 2000s to deliver insightful, impartial and-in depth reporting.

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