

## Should journalists publish terrorists ' photographs ?

Media's power on public opinion is immense. The choices of writing policies from each publisher regarding social issues thus have a direct impact on public audience, which gives journalists ethics values to respect. However, these rules are not universal and evolve with time, history, context, and new technologies. Journalists therefore sometimes fail to agree on them, as it is the case on the recurrent issue of how to represent criminals, and more specifically terrorists. If this type of criminality is not recent, the emergence of social networks raises new questions on the treatment of such content. In a world where information goes by at an unprecedented speed, terrorists' organizations henceforth have their own virtual networks and anyone is present on a crime scene can set himself up as reporter. National media are no more the only one to decide of what content will be published or not, but still have to find the balanced between the duty to inform and avoiding to publish a triggering content. Since Terror french attack in Nice on 14th July 2016 national day, the debate on whether to publish photographs of terrorists or not is on in France. Europe 1, BFM TV, RFI and La Croix decided to censor it to avoid posthumous glorification, while these decisions have been contested by other media in the name of duty of information. The purpose of this essay is to ask ourselves if journalists should or should not publish photographs of terrorists in the news. In order to answer that question, we will start by studying the reasons why journalists are right to reconsider their publishing policies and censor the perpetrators' photographs. We will then focus on the arguments in favour of the interdiction of publication of such pictures. We will then see how to treat the information in order to minimize the posthumous glorification effect, before wondering if media could be accused to be the « oxygen of terrorism ».

One of the main concerns and reasons why several french newspapers decided to stop publishing terrorists' photographs was to avoid posthumous glorification, that is, avoiding representing criminals as we would portray heroes. After Liberation published a flattering picture of Abdelhamid abaaoud -the responsible for Paris terror attacks of the 13th november 2015- smiling, french public was outraged and asked for a censure. This photograph has been justified by the action of showing « the banality of evil » which can incarnated itself in ordinary people, but one can legitimately wonder if portraying terrorists with such perspective is ethic or not. Indeed, posting humanizing photographs of culprits affects the message of the article. Hervé Bérout, director of BFMTV, explains that his channel did not want to convey « an image of a beautiful guy smiling while he just strangled someone (...) The picture has a symbolic effect, especially when it will be reposted several times. » (translated from Le Point, 2017). It is with this in mind that Jérôme Fénoglio, director for Le Monde, decided to forbid any picture that has been taken by terrorits themselves or before the dramatic event. However, Fenoglio does allow informative pictures, such as identity cards. This is where lies the biggest issue of the debate : is showing these photographs serving the purpose of Isis ? Yann Moix, french writer, declares : « Terrorists do not only choose death over life, but glory over life. Coulibay, Abballa, ahouaiej Bouhlel, Salhi, Kouachis, Merah, Abaaoud, Abdeslam, Kermiche, Petitjean do not only want to live in paradise, relieved by virgins [...] They want to live in our collective memory. » (Yann moix, 2017. *Terreur*, ch.6)

It would thus be a form of victory for these criminals to talk about them, as it looks like they are ready to do anything for a few minutes of glory. Fethi Benslama adds that « They leave their identity cards – they want to be identified very quickly. » (Borger J., 2016) Indeed, being in the front pages of all newspapers for a week is part of the idea of psychologically seizing the power over population and might fill the lack of recognition these criminals seem to feel, as it has often been explained that young individuals engaging in terrorist movements had not found their place in the society they were raised in. Another reason in favour of not publishing these photographs is the lack of their informative value comparing to the words that go along with it. Are pictures of faces necessary to understand the process of radicalization that individuals followed ? Some newspapers even go further : Europe 1 decided not to publish the name of terrorists anymore, to make anonymous the ones who glorify themselves in terror. If the idea of avoiding posthumous glorification is well-respected in this case, Yann Moix precises real or fake names would be then reported in social media anyway (2017). Most of the newspapers thus made the choice of publishing names but prohibit pictures, supported by Fethi Benslama, who assumes that showing their faces « is a really big boost to their efforts to make themselves world famous, even while their victims are anonymous and will remain anonymous ». (Borger J., 2016). Indeed, the fact of putting murderers and victims at the same level constitutes another issue of publishing terrorists' photographs.

If a few names and photographs of victims are usually published after terror attacks, their number remain low, due to the significant amount of individuals killed. By disclosing the identity of criminals, the public's attention moves towards it rather than on the victims. In this lies an ethical issue, murderers are enshrined as victims. In some special cases, media choose to focus only on victims to avoid this effect. This is for instance what Anderson Cooper, American journalist for CNN, did when he refused to pronounce the name of the killer of the Orlando's nightclub. Instead of that, the journalist said the names and ages of the 49 victims. This initiative echoes with the « Memorial du Monde » for 13th November 2015 victims of Paris. (Demuyter W., 2013) These journalists' choices reveal a clear intention of singling victims out, but is not common practice yet. It is also important to add that not every family of victims are willing to publish the photography of their deceased relative. The Unesco Guide for Journalists in time of Terrorists' Attacks tries to prevent unethical behavior towards victims and relatives, by relaying the *Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma* guidelines, which precises for example : « Ask for the authorization of victims [...] Take into account the state of shock of interviewed individuals. » In the research « Victims of terror attacks and the media » ( translated from french : Les victimes d'attentats et les médias) of Patrick Lagadec, research director in Ecole Polytechnique, families of terror attacks' victims denounce the disclosure of information about their loved deceased, without their authorization. They for example tell that they learned on television that their grand-child was killed, before a member of their family had time to inform them. They also report that media shared pictures of the victim without asking their agreement first. The respect of the victim is primordial, and it is consequently hard for journalists to publish more about the victims than about the killer, which brings us back to the idea of showing the fewer as we can regarding the criminals.

Finally, the copycat effect is being called into question. To shortly describe this phenomenon, « the copycat effect is the tendency of sensational publicity about violent murders or suicides to result in more of the same through imitation (Loren Coleman, 2004. The copycat effect : How the media and popular culture trigger the mayhem in tomorrow's headlines, Simon & Schuster, NY). Therefore, precisely describing the way terrorists have operated, while giving information on their identity, would incite individuals who relate on them to want to act the same way and reproduce the crime. Indeed, the success of the terror attacks could influence disturbed people with the same intention. The P.H.D. student

Alex Mesoudi explains in his article *Mass shooting and mass media : Does coverage of mass shootings inspire copycat crimes ?* written for International Human Press, that « recent research in the evolutionary behavioral sciences suggests that media-driven copycat effects might be an unfortunate but predictable side-effect of our evolved, adaptive psychology. Humans, compared to other species, are far more likely to rely on other individuals' expertise and knowledge when learning how to solve problems or acquire new skills. » In this sense, showing photographs of criminals could make individuals relate to them somehow. Mesoudi continues : « In simply devoting so much time and attention to mass killers, the mass media may be - unintentionally - conferring prestige and success onto them. For certain individuals, this may trigger a copycat effect and result in another mass shooting. » Thus, publishing photography, which implies giving attention to the killer, might trigger people who are looking for a role model in their crime.

Nevertheless, french media which decided to keep on publishing these images remain significant. This decision, far from representing a lack of interest for the ethical question, has been justified by several statements. Michel Field, director of France Televisions, suggests that hiding the truth would turn on the surrounding conspiracies about media and encourages social anxiety. In fact, if it is known that national media have lost their credibility among french citizens these last 15 years (La Croix, 2017), hiding terrorists' photographs would feed this suspicion's climate. To go further, when people fear and speculate rumors about media, it divides the population, from which terrorists groups benefit, as Brian M. Jenkins wrote in 1974 : «[...] The strategy of terrorism is aimed at achieving broader goals, which may range from attracting worldwide attention to the terrorists' cause to the dissolution of society or of international order. Terrorism aims at creating an atmosphere of fear and alarm – of terror. » One could link this operating mode to another related issue : After the terror attacks, french government established the Emergency State. The repeated identity checks, which have been accused of racial profiling, divided the country and ended up turning on racist violence. All of this manifestations of violence between citizens make the terrorists win, as the country must be united to be able to fight it. In this sense, preventing people from knowing what terrorists look like could appear as a secret kept by media, and enforce divisions within the population.

In addition to that, the Unesco Guide for Journalists recalls « the essential function of informing without allowing itself to be intimidated by the moods of the opinion or authoritarian injunctions. » Deciding to not publish faces of the criminals would be contrary to the aim of the journalist to inform as well as the citizen right to know. This would thus be qualified as excessive censor. As factual reporting is essential in every democracy, Patrick Eveno, french specialist of media' history, tells : « I am scared that one tries to impose official ethical guidelines or at least supposed ones to media, and that journalists lose their editorial freedom. It is not to the State or politics to take this decision. The freedom of informing and the right of the public to be informed is too valuable in time of democracy to legislate about it. » (translated from Demuyter W., 2013) This latest argument underlies that the photography of a criminal actually has an informative value, and that it is necessary to understand the reported event. With this in mind, the journalist Roy Greenslade published a whole article for the Guardian, named *Why we should publish the photographs of Isis terrorists*. Greenslade assumes that photographs are factual information that should be given : « At time of crisis, people need facts and the identification of terrorists, whether dead or alive, in an indispensable part of the required information.[...] Pictures of the perpetrators of unspeakable crimes do not, of themselves, glorify the criminals. They are a significant component of the necessary factual data. » According to the author, the more we know about the issue, the easier it will be to solve it.

Regarding the potential copycat effect which could result from the matter in question, Greenslade argues that press' policy can not be made in function of what could a potential mentally-ill individual make with it : « We cannot make decisions publishing decisions based on the possibility of some disturbed, alienated person with an impressionable mind following suit. » The journalist precises that he agrees with Laurent Joffrin, director of Liberation, who said that publishing a photography will change nothing of the terrorists' strategy : « Does anyone seriously believe that depriving terrorists of images will slow them down, make them more moderate or dissuade them ? [...] It is not glorifying to show the face of a murderer. The reader is not that silly.» (translated from Libération, 2016) For sure, choosing not to publish such pictures will not prevent the country from another attack. However, I do think the idea that lies behind the choice of not showing these images is not to « reduce » terrorism but rather to behave according to an ethic and moral values, in this, not to give these glorifying minutes to the people who expected it while preparing their attack, even if it unfortunately will probably not dissuade them. Although, I do believe that, if such a significant amount of young persons, mentally not deficient, have been able to believe leaving for the djihad was the best choice to make, it might be dangerous to consider the reader as « not so silly » and take for granted the fact that all published information will be well-understood by all audience. Moreover, these same readers do not always want this information. If the photographs are published for the citizens' right to know, why do we not take into account civil' petition to prohibit it ? Edwyn Lettelier, 18, created an online petition to ask for not publishing names and photographs of these criminals, after the Nice attack. The initiative got more than 70.000 supports in one week, but did not effect the newspapers' policies.

Finally, it is essential to keep in mind that Isis has got its own network, and uses it as a powerful tool for recruiting terrorists. The reporter David Thompson, specialized in jihadist groups, considers these networks as the real danger, more than any national media representation of terrorists : « The process of making them heroes takes place in the « jihadosphere ». It already has several heroes that public ignores. Of course, mass media amplify this phenomenon, but the essential is not there. They are first heroes -positive- for their community. Outside it, making them heroes is made on a negative way. » (translated from Piquard A., 2016) National media would thus play a secondary role in reporting Isis actions, as Islamist groups now use their own to find new individuals.

The limit between the need to inform and the danger of giving too much information is thus vague and depends on each newspapers' perspective on the issue. There is no way to know exactly what kind of content will influence one reader, and the better seems to stay careful while not giving in on freedom of speech. Some journalists from the US magazine Motherjones elaborated a guideline to help media treatment on that particular question. Here are some rules that define it : « Report on the perpetrator forensically and with dispassionate language. Minimize use of the perpetrator's name. Keep the perpetrator's name out of headlines. Minimize use of images of the perpetrator.[...] » The established rules by Motherjones employ journalists' consciousness of this issue and clearly reflect the need to rethink the way terrorists are portrayed in the media, as it is an ethical issue one can not ignore. To take the analysis one step further, one can ask if media could even involuntary be « the oxygen of terrorism », as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, or more recently David Benichou, anti terrorist judge, declared. By the word oxygen, we mean that terrorism would benefit from the media, as these would contribute in making them famous and spread the fear created by their terror. This opinion goes along the thought of Brian Jenkins, who wrote in 1974 : « The willingness and capability of the news media to report and broadcast dramatic incidents of violence throughout the world enhances and even lay encourage terrorism as an effective means of propaganda. Terrorists may now be assured

that their actions will receive immediate worldwide coverage on radio, on television, in the press. » The writer also argues that terror attacks are often staged to draw attention to electronic media and international press, and that the target are not its real victims but rather the ones watching.

To this statement, one can answer that, France, such as the rest of the world, did not forget Charlie Hebdo massacre, which took place the 7th January of 2015. This attack has been directly made on journalists, in the office of Charlie Hebdo in Paris. If journalism was oxygen of terrorism, their target would have been different. However, even though it would appear that media actually were the oxygen of terrorism, what should journalists do ?

Trivializing these acts is impossible and would threat the whole society. Not covering terror attacks and remain silent would means accepting. Moreover, if media stopped covering these attacks, who knows perpetrators would not outbid by gratuitous provocation ?

« Terrorism is unpredictable », Yann Moix wrote in his book *Terreur*, but, to quote Katharine Graham, publisher at the Washington Post : « Publicity may be the oxygen of terrorists. But I say this: News is the lifeblood of liberty. If the terrorists succeed in depriving us of freedom, their victory will be far greater than they ever hoped and far worse than we ever feared. Let it never come to pass. »

Indeed, the media treatment of how to cover terrorism is a delicate and controversial question that raises fundamental ethical issues. After having weigh the pros and cons, it appears that both positions have strong arguments. Indeed, forbidding terrorists' photographs in the media does not aim to erase terrorism, but rather to avoid any kind of posthumous glorification effect that seems to serve Isis' purpose. This initiative would also prevent from putting victims and terrorists at the same level when portrayed in newspapers, which is an ethical issue one should consider. In addition to that, avoiding publishing these pictures could prevent the so called copycat effect which has been the cause of several mass shootings projects in the past. Nevertheless, media defending the liberty of keeping on posting these images make an important point : Hiding actual information would probably create new conspiracy theories against media, from which society would be affected. In a time where french people have lost trust in their media, the essential function of journalism, as well as the right of citizens to know the truth, must be respected. The risk of an excessive censor is also to take into account, as we know the dramatic consequences that losing such freedom could have on democracy. Regarding the potential copycat effect that french media would create by disclosing the matter in question, it is legitimate to wonder if media can actually construct their publishing policies taking this kind of risk into consideration. However, one should not forget that although media do play a role in the representation of criminals, they are not the only one to influence the people on that issue, as Isis now owns its own media, and uses as the most powerful weapon. Therefore, nobody knows where the limit exactly lies between an informative content and a dangerous incentive. Each media is thus free to make its own publishing choice, while keeping in mind the aim to minimize the potential danger. Finally, this debate on what behavior is ethical or not finally brought us to a more fundamental question : Do media somehow fuel the terrorists' purpose ? If it might be true that these organizations could benefit from the attention that media devote them, I do believe it would be such a terrible mistake to pass it over silent. If terrorists perpetrate the unspeakable, it is our duty to put words on it, as these latter are our strongest weapon.

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