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**THE DEATH OF OSAMA BIN LADEN:
Global TV News and Journalistic Detachment**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. AN ETHIC OF DETACHMENT	11
3. CONTEXT.....	17
I) TRENDS IN GLOBAL TV NEWS	17
II) FUNDING	19
III) AUDIENCES	23
IV) ORGANISATION	25
V) CULTURE	28
VI) SUMMARY.....	31
4. CONTENT ANALYSIS	32
A) THE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF COVERAGE.....	32
B) FRAMING DEVICES	46
5. CONCLUSION	53
6. NOTE ON METHODOLOGY	57
7. SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	60
8. NOTES.....	61

1. Introduction

Journalists like to think the decisions they make about stories are pretty obvious, self-evident, commonsensical ones,¹ and the death of Osama bin Laden in May 2011 was ‘obviously’ a big story, even in a year unusually full of ‘obviously’ big stories. Any journalist, anywhere in the world, would instantly agree that it was a fascinating ‘on the day’ event, with certain elements that simply *had* to be covered: from the initial US raid, and the downed helicopter; to the walled compound that no-one in Abbottabad apparently knew about; to the pictures from the White House ‘situation room’; the implications for the American military presence in Afghanistan; the ensuing diplomatic spat between the US and Pakistan; and so on.²

I worked as a producer on an extended two-hour BBC World Service radio news special on the morning the news of Osama bin Laden’s death broke, an experience that became the starting point for this paper. I was intrigued by how naturally and ‘obviously’ key editorial decisions were made by myself and a fairly small group of colleagues in London and around the world. I wondered what economic, audience-related, organisational and cultural factors lay behind that sense of what was natural and obvious. My initial suspicion was that a breaking news story like bin Laden’s death would be an excellent test case for examining how broadcast news is produced in practice, given how little time such a story allows for thought and reflection.

Above all else, I had lots of questions about how impartiality was successfully secured in the midst of such a rapidly-moving news story. How does this core BBC value interact with other factors, such as newsgathering resources, target audiences, budgets, and the heavily-sedimented layers of a given news organisation’s corporate culture? And while Bin Laden’s death was a compelling story in any medium, I wondered how TV news, in particular, dealt with it. After all, television had been integral to the intended and real impact of the 11 September attacks,³ and many journalists came to feel, during the ensuing ‘war on terror’, that the British broadcast tradition of impartiality and the American one of objectivity were more problematic than

ever before, in a climate where, as President George W. Bush put it, you were ‘either with us or against us’.⁴

My aim here, then, is to step away from day-to-day journalism, using the format of an academic paper to explore the following question: what does the coverage of bin Laden’s death tell us about how impartiality and objectivity relate to the economic, audience-centred, organisational and cultural factors driving television news output? I will also attempt to draw out the implications of my findings for both professional journalism and the field of journalism studies.

My research centres on the three global news channels that Leon Barkho claims are ‘largely ... responsible for refining and shaping the world’s view of major events’⁵ – BBC World News, Al Jazeera English, and CNN International. Their success and agenda-setting role for many other media outlets is one reason I’ve opted to study their coverage of bin Laden’s death. I hope that this will mean my findings have some relevance for broadcast news more generally, even if, as we shall see, their sheer size makes them atypical in some respects. Like the BBC World Service, moreover, where I have spent most of my working life, each of them has a genuinely global audience and news agenda.⁶ I hope that my own professional experience will add some useful, if by no means privileged, insight to my research into their coverage of this particular event. This paper is a journalist’s perspective, above all.

Crucially, all three channels are committed to what I shall define as an ‘ethic of detachment’. This coinage of mine encompasses both impartiality and objectivity. It describes a problematic but invaluable attempt to detach ourselves from our own narrow, limited, subjective perspective, so we can occupy a standpoint from which we see the wider, more impartial, more objective truth of what is happening in the world. I discuss this ethic at greater length in my second chapter, but what matters here is that impartiality and/or objectivity are a fundamental part of each news organisation’s self-definition.

For instance, the agreement accompanying the BBC Charter places the BBC under the legal obligation ‘to produce comprehensive, authoritative and impartial coverage of news and current affairs in the UK and throughout the world’.⁷ The

corporation's editorial guidelines state that '[i]mpartiality lies at the heart of public service'.⁸ In principle, if not (as with the BBC) in law, Al Jazeera English is bound by Al Jazeera's Code of Ethics, which requires it to present 'diverse points of view and opinions without bias and partiality', to 'distinguish between news material, opinion and analysis', and to 'adhere to the journalistic values of honesty, courage, fairness, balance, independence, credibility and diversity'.⁹ CNN's internal guidelines, meanwhile, stress the importance of objectivity, stipulating that the channel's correspondents should not express their own opinions on air, or say what is 'right' or 'wrong'. They call for 'balanced coverage' and 'differing points of view'.¹⁰ In 2010 CNN's Worldwide president, Jim Walton, spoke of the American version of CNN being 'the only credible non-partisan voice left' in the United States,¹¹ and the same belief in non-partisanship is evident in the channel's international iteration. There are differences of emphasis, but the three channels all share an explicit commitment to an ethic of detachment.

I will try to hold open the questions over impartiality and objectivity's possibility or desirability. To my mind, at least, these are often erased from academic debate about journalism from the very beginning, possibly because that debate leans so heavily on the overwhelmingly critical perspectives of sociology, political economy, and cultural studies.¹² Doubtless I have my own conscious or unconscious investment in this particular argument, as a white, male, British journalist in his early 30s, working at the BBC. If ever anyone was, as Barkho, leaning on Foucault and Gramsci, puts it, implicated in the 'hegemonic practices' of a large media organisation's 'overarching editorial values',¹³ by dint of his own economic and professional interests, I suppose that person would be somebody like me. Except that I don't think that the debate should, or can, end there. Journalists around the world do tend to believe in some version of impartiality and objectivity;¹⁴ and if Bourdieu is right to acknowledge journalism's semi-autonomy from other social fields, however weak and endangered,¹⁵ I'd contend that journalistic detachment helps in practice to secure and defend that semi-autonomy. My reading of the intellectual debate around impartiality and objectivity, and my own experience of working as a journalist, mean that my starting point here is a suspicion that detachment can and does exist – and not only as an intellectual possibility, but also as a discourse and a set of practices in real-life news organisations like BBC World News, Al

Jazeera English and CNN International.

In my third chapter, I move on to outline the economic, audience-driven, organisational and cultural dynamics at work in each channel. Then, in my fourth chapter, I use a mixture of content analysis, close reading of the channels' output, and interviews with journalists to explore how these dynamics interact with journalistic detachment on a complicated news story like bin Laden's death. I discuss my content analysis methodology in detail in chapter six, but it will help clarify my approach if I flag up several points here. For the content analysis of each channel, I coded output from the following times:

- 3 to 4am, 10 to 10.30am, 2 to 2.30pm, 5 to 5.30pm (2 May 2011);
- 10 to 10.30am, 2 to 2.30pm, 5 to 5.30pm (3 May 2011); and
- 10 to 10.30am, 2 to 2.30pm, 5 to 5.30pm (4 May 2011; all of these times are in Greenwich Mean Time).

I chose to look at 3 to 4am on 2 May 2011, because this was the first full hour of output when news of bin Laden's death was breaking. I opted to examine 10 to 10.30am, 2 to 2.30pm, and 5 to 5.30pm on 2, 3, and 4 May 2011, as these were times when all three news channels were doing news programmes (rather than documentaries, sport or business) and these slots worked well for those time zones that seemed most pertinent to the story (the afternoon or evening in South Asia, and early morning or lunchtime in the United States).

My aim was to examine:

- a) the geographical distribution of each channel's coverage – the countries and regions it was produced from; and
- b) some of the subtler 'framing' at work in the coverage.

Looking at a), the geographical distribution, I wanted to establish the proportion

of coverage devoted to different parts of the world. This was because Osama bin Laden's death was a truly global story, directly affecting Pakistan and the United States, and with resonance in many other parts of the world, given the wide-reaching nature of Islamic militancy and what the US and its allies used to refer to as 'the war on terror'. Would certain countries and regions be covered much more than others? How broad or narrow a range of places would feature in each channel's output? My working hypothesis was that whilst there would naturally be different emphases in the geographical distribution of the coverage at certain points, a genuinely detached approach to this decidedly global story would be one that told the story from a *plurality* of datelines, without being strongly marked by a channel's country of origin; and sharp differences in geographical distribution would point to where a channel was being less impartial and objective than it might be. Obviously it would be reductive to assume an exact correlation between geographical spread and the level of journalistic detachment; but I do think it is fair to assume that a strong focus on some countries, and the exclusion of others, would indicate an attachment to certain aspects of the story, at the expense of the wider, fuller truth.

This approach, of course, would not make sense at smaller channels operating essentially at a national level. However, at genuinely global organisations – as I know from my own experience of producing and editing programmes at the BBC World Service – small groups of editors *do* have considerable agency when it comes to choosing *where* a programme comes from, and there is an obsession with place and 'being where the story is'. In other words, there are strong *prima facie* grounds for seeing where a programme tells a story from as being, to a significant extent, a reflection of the editorial choices of a small group of journalists, rather than as an intrinsically structural phenomenon. And in keeping with this stress on the choices of these three organisations and their journalists, I chose to focus my content analysis on where the channels channelled their own resources – the material they produced themselves – rather than getting caught up in where they used the sort of generic agency material that is available to any passably well-financed news organisation, and which plays a very large role in international news coverage in general.

As for b), my examination of 'framing' devices, I measured here the incidence of

key themes that are likely to guide the viewer's understanding of the story in a certain direction. I took my cue from Stephen Reese's analysis of the pervasiveness of the 'war on terror' news frame in the immediate aftermath of 11 September attacks.¹⁶ How many visual references to 9/11 were made on each channel? Were these made through backward-looking archive, or through more present-/future-orientated footage of Ground Zero, or – more complicatedly – through interviews with New York firefighters or the relatives of 9/11 victims? How often was the 'Arab spring' (often employed as a rival frame to the Islamic militancy bound up in the 9/11¹⁷) mentioned? How much attention was given to whether or not bin Laden's burial at sea was in keeping with Islamic custom, and to what might this mean more broadly? My hypothesis was that marked divergences would highlight which of the more covert, 'framing' elements of the story the channels were particularly partial to and subjective about.

In short, my content analysis is designed to give a concrete account of some of the subtle and not-so-subtle similarities and differences between the on-air output of BBC World News, CNN International, and Al Jazeera English – a precise description that, I hope, provides a solid base for weighing up how impartial and objective these channels are. Ultimately, I aim to test three overarching hypotheses:

1. Internal and external factors lead to a marked *lack* of journalistic detachment in the coverage of bin Laden's death, and an outright bias towards certain parts of the world and particular framing devices.
2. We see *contextual* detachment – a substantial but palpably incomplete attempt at detachment, with the channels limited by economic, audience-related, organisational and cultural factors. Their output is characterised by 'contextual objectivity' – a phrase used by el-Nawawy and Iskander in their early study of Al Jazeera Arabic. It describes what they say is 'the necessity of television ... to present stories in a fashion that is both somewhat impartial yet sensitive to local sensibilities' and expressing 'the inherent contradiction between attaining objectivity and appealing to a specific audience'.¹⁸

3. There is *global* detachment – a detached editorial approach that goes beyond the contextual detachment of my second overarching hypothesis, with a plurality of geographical locations covered, and no particularly prominent framing devices at work. The channels are not notably marked by their national cultures of origin.

El-Nawaway and Iskander think that journalists' assumptions about what the audience wants are decisive in determining how much journalistic detachment is on offer in broadcast news. I will try to establish whether they are right about that, or whether other factors are of equal or greater importance. My hope is that this paper will contribute to long-running professional and academic debates around impartiality and objectivity, the production of television news, and the globalisation (or otherwise) of television news.¹⁹

2. An ethic of detachment

What do I mean by an ‘ethic of detachment’? As I define it, this ethic encompasses both impartiality (to which BBC World News is bound by the corporation’s Royal Charter, and Al Jazeera English by Al Jazeera’s Code of Ethics) *and* objectivity (which is central to CNN International’s internal guidelines and to the broader normative framework of American journalism in general, ever since the 1920s²⁰). Admittedly there are important differences between these two terms.²¹ As defined by the BBC editorial guidelines, *impartiality* is about opinion. Arguably a more amorphous term than objectivity, with roots in moral philosophy,²² it means not being biased – or partial – towards your own opinion, or somebody else’s, and it involves representing instead all the relevant strands of opinion on a given story.²³ *Objectivity*, on the other hand, may be the more fundamental term, and it means two things: first, an outlook that attempts to get at the actual truth of the wider world through an attempt to ‘occupy a standpoint detached from that of our purely personal desires and interests’;²⁴ and second, that actual truth itself.

Yet if these are the differences between impartiality and objectivity, I think the similarities and connections between them are of equal, if not sometimes greater, importance. In practice, the lines between the two are frequently and understandably blurred. The BBC’s last major attempt to think about impartiality, the Bridcut report, defines impartiality in terms of a long list of other things, one of which – unsurprisingly, in my view – is ‘objectivity’.²⁵ Michael Schudson’s influential account of the emergence of ‘the objectivity norm’ in American journalism suggests this norm arose in large part as a reaction to a once-highly ‘partisan’ press.²⁶ In other words, objectivity defined itself in opposition to opinionated, *non-impartial* forms of journalism. Objectivity helps to define impartiality, and *vice versa*.

This makes sense on a more abstract level too. A person who goes around impartially assessing the world is likely to achieve objectivity (defined either as an outlook that attempts to get at the actual truth of the wider world, or as that truth itself).

That is, the practice of impartiality facilitates objectivity. In a similar vein, as a journalist I will struggle to stand outside my own opinion, or someone else's, and to provide coverage of the significant strands of opinion on a given story – and thereby achieve impartiality – unless I first endeavour to move outside my own subjective position into an objective, 'centreless' vantage-point, from which I can see and judge the full range of opinions. Objectivity may well be the *sine qua non* of impartiality: it tells us what we're being impartial about in the first place.

What I would argue, moreover, is that both impartiality and objectivity fundamentally involve the same *movement*: a movement whereby we detach ourselves from a narrow, limited, partial, subjective perspective, so we can grasp more fully the actual, broader truth about the world. I think, therefore, that we can justifiably speak of an 'ethic of detachment' that straddles the two terms 'impartiality' and 'objectivity', when we come to look at the output of BBC World News, Al Jazeera English, and CNN International. Usefully, too, 'ethic' points up the normative impact that impartiality and objectivity both have inside each organisation's editorial culture.

The real-world impact and desirability of any such ethic have long been questioned. For a start, journalism in general, and TV news in particular, is hardly a philosophical exercise. 'To broadcast news,' as James Painter says, 'is to choose, and to choose severely, among a host of possible events, ways of framing them, and duration of time spent revealing and explaining them'.²⁷ There will probably always be some collateral damage where impartiality and objectivity are concerned, particularly given the stylistic conventions of television,²⁸ and what some see as its inherent limitations as a medium.²⁹ And although BBC World News and CNN International have endeavoured, as a matter of policy and branding, to 'go beyond borders', by striving for a detached, universal, globalised identity that is not markedly bound by their various countries of origin,³⁰ there has recently been a very strong push back in the opposite direction. Fox News is no doubt the most famous example of a deliberately and proudly *parti pris* news channel, and its stridently right-wing programming, strongly attached to a certain view of the United States, has made substantial inroads into CNN's domestic American audience.

MSNBC presents a similar challenge from the American left, and outside the United States, there is Venezuela's Telesur (which essentially promotes Chavez's brand of leftist politics), Russia Today (entirely undetached from the Kremlin), Iran's Press TV (the view from Tehran), and in a more muted, but nonetheless explicitly nationalistic vein, France 24 (designed 'to cover worldwide news with French eyes').³¹ As Painter writes, for several of these relatively new channels, 'the assumption is that the "BBC/CNN model", and its attachment to neutrality, balance and impartiality, is to a greater or lesser extent a sham'. Their stated aim is to counter the perceived informational hegemony of British and American news organisations.³²

The sort of detachment I have defined has often raised moral concerns.³³ Additionally, in a converged media landscape, there is a noisy public debate over whether objectivity and impartiality are now quite simply anachronistic. In 2007, the British media regulator Ofcom warned that audiences in general, and young and ethnic minority audiences in particular, were disengaging from the news. It raised the question of whether the UK's tradition of impartiality was partly to blame, and asked whether 'a relaxation of impartiality rules for channels other than the main PSBs [public sector broadcasters] might encourage the emergence of new and alternative voices'.³⁴ Another popular argument is that transparency – about who you are as a journalist, what you believe in, where your income comes from, and where you work – is a better journalistic ethic than impartiality or objectivity. Its proponents argue that the 'view from nowhere' – a phrase borrowed from the title of a book by the philosopher Thomas Nagel, to whom I shall return shortly – no longer makes any sense, in an interconnected world where it's easier than ever, with a few mouse clicks, to find out who the journalists working at big news organisations actually are, and what opinions they have as real, non-corporate human beings.³⁵ Others, including the BBC's director-general Mark Thompson, argue that an ethic of detachment will actually help organisations like the BBC to thrive in a more crowded and partisan news landscape.³⁶ However, viewed from a sceptical perspective, the cultural consensus that has sustained journalistic detachment is visibly fraying around the edges.

The 11 September attacks are relevant here, insofar as many have argued that they, and the immediate US response to them (the 'Global War on Terror'), rapidly

became the predominant Western ‘news frame’, in a way that tended to undermine impartial/objective coverage of international news.³⁷ Speaking in 2002, the veteran broadcaster Dan Rather warned that a crude form of patriotism was leading the US media to censor itself;³⁸ the academic Piers Robinson has claimed that media coverage became ‘far more deferential’ towards the US government following 9/11;³⁹ and the journalist Jason Burke suggests that the 9/11 news frame, which he calls the ‘idea of a single, unitary conflict pitting good against evil’ and ‘the West against Islam’, has been a ‘mistake [that] proved tragically expensive in lives and resources’.⁴⁰ Unlike CNN and the BBC, Al Jazeera’s original Arabic network initially appeared to be operating entirely outside this frame, providing extensive coverage of both sides of the post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and receiving and airing ‘exclusive’ tapes from bin Laden and al-Qaeda.⁴¹ As a result, the former US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld dismissed it as “vicious, inaccurate and inexcusable”, and a “mouthpiece of al-Qaeda”.⁴² No doubt this is the main reason Al Jazeera English has struggled to gain any significant cable carriage at all in the United States.⁴³

Then, of course, there is the academic criticism of the sort of notion of journalistic detachment I have defined here. Nearly 40 years ago, in a much-cited article, the sociologist Gaye Tuchman concluded that American journalists’ ‘objectivity’ was, in practice, less a sincere attempt at getting at the real truth of the wider world, and more a defensive ‘strategic ritual protecting newspapermen from the risks of their trade’ (she meant things like time pressures and libel suits).⁴⁴ Others contend that ‘objectivity’ is valued, not for its own sake, but more as an alibi supporting journalism’s always rather awkward claims to be a proper profession.⁴⁵ From a more openly political perspective, Gitlin, Chomsky, Hall, Hallin, Philo and many others claim that, far from being objective or impartial, large media organisations are in fact deeply imbricated in wider hegemonic forces;⁴⁶ Barkho makes the same point in relation to the BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera’s coverage of the Middle East.⁴⁷ More generally, there is growing cultural scepticism, at least in the West, about the idea that an ‘ethic of detachment’ might yield anything valuable at all, in a postmodern cultural context where Nietzsche’s maxim about there being no facts, only interpretations, is widely disseminated in universities, and considerable suspicion clings to any claim to be able to get beyond our own partial,

subjective attachments. We would be better off – according to the postmodern catechism – if we all just accepted the ‘linguistic turn’, and understood that all we can ever know of the world is our own, partial, subjective interpretations of it.

None of this is surprising, in a way. Thomas Nagel himself points out that the tensions between subjectivity and objectivity constitute one of the oldest philosophical problems. In particular, he stresses the paradox of the ‘objective self’. This self is the identity that I assume when I try to take an objective view of the world. The inescapable problem is that if I am truly being objective, I must admit that this objectivity comes from an irreducibly subjective base (myself). As Nagel writes,

[t]he idea of objectivity [...] seems to undermine itself. The aim [of objectivity] is to form a conception of reality which includes ourselves and our view of things among its objects, but it seems whatever forms the conception [‘the objective self’] will not be included by it. It seems to follow that the most objective view we can achieve will have to rest on an unexamined subjective base, and that since we can never abandon our own point of view, but can only alter it, the idea that we are coming closer to the reality outside it with each successive step has no foundation.⁴⁸

He vividly describes the problems of the ‘centreless’ objective perspective, coining the ‘view from nowhere’ phrase that has proved so popular with critics of objectivity and impartiality. But crucially, Nagel argues that although scepticism is ‘revealing and not refutable’, it ‘does not vitiate the pursuit of objectivity’.⁴⁹

He can sustain this position, first, because he argues convincingly that it is difficult to escape from objectivity, even when attacking it.⁵⁰ If objectivity cannot escape from subjectivity, nor can objectivity’s critics escape from objectivity. The work of the critics of journalistic objectivity I have mentioned make this very clear. As Judith Lichtenberg notes, very few of them rely on openly subjective arguments.⁵¹ Secondly, objectivity, for Nagel, is a work in progress, with fragmentary results at all times. He

doesn't make grandiose claims for it. Rather than an epistemological state of grace, magically realised by some but not by others, objectivity, in his view, is a *process* whereby one level of objectivity gives way, through scrutiny and refutation, to another level, and then to another one, and so on.

So as we return, via Nagel, to a sense of the philosophical roots of the problem, we see that we might be able to recover a modest, pragmatic understanding of the real-world possibilities of an ethic of journalistic attachment. This is an understanding that cannot be readily dismissed as ridiculous by the enemies of objectivity and impartiality, because it sensibly avoids maximalist claims. It suggests, moreover, that detachment may be a more powerful and compelling idea than its critics allow; and this, in turn, raises the possibility that detachment may have some practical impact on broadcast output – and so, I would argue, the shared commitment to impartiality and/or objectivity of all three channels should be taken seriously and studied. In my next chapter, I explore the other factors interacting with the ethic of detachment during the day-to-day operations of BBC World, CNN International, and Al Jazeera English.

3. Context

Recent theories of news production stress a ‘hierarchy of influences’ approach, where journalistic output arises from the interaction between various causal layers.⁵² In this chapter, I take a similar tack, exploring macro (economic, audience-related) and meso (organisational, cultural) influences at BBC World News, Al Jazeera English, and CNN International. I also briefly discuss the micro level (the role of individual journalists).

i) trends in global TV news

All three channels face the same set of potentially serious challenges. Just 15 years ago, the global TV news market was dominated by CNN and, to a lesser extent, by the BBC, and there was even talk of a ‘CNN effect’, compelling Western governments to intervene militarily in distant humanitarian crises, as a reaction to 24-hour pictures of suffering around the world.⁵³ Since then, however, there has been a proliferation of 24-hour news channels across the world. In 2007, Rai and Cottle identified over 100 satellite news regional and international channels, and while only a handful of these have a genuinely global reach,⁵⁴ clearly there has been a dramatic boom in 24-hour news channels since the 1990s, especially in South and East Asia.⁵⁵ All three channels are operating in an increasingly competitive and fragmented global marketplace, and although they appear to be in a strong position for now, they do face a fair amount of direct, English-speaking competition, in the shape of Deutsche Welle TV, France 24, Iran’s Press TV, Russia Today and China’s CCTV (the last two of which have ambitious plans to expand further).

Digital media is a fundamental challenge. The Internet’s explosive growth is one thing, and it has been challenging the cultural centrality of television in the West for more than a decade.⁵⁶ But even more disruptive, in its implications for ‘one-to-many’ communicators like BBC World News, Al Jazeera English, and CNN International, is the dizzying rise of ‘many-to-many’ social media. To take just two of the best-known Western examples, some 700 million people are now on Facebook worldwide,⁵⁷ and it is

thought that around 200 million are on Twitter.⁵⁸ Television is no longer the one place where viewers of these channels will first hear about a story like bin Laden's death, even though links from mainstream media outlets – often filtered by friends and colleagues, rather than curated by traditional editors – still form the majority of news links shared on-line.⁵⁹ With their near-monopoly on breaking news gone, many journalists and academics are asking how the likes of BBC World News, Al Jazeera English, and CNN can redefine their role in a media landscape world where social media are set to play an ever-larger role.⁶⁰ (For this reason, although it is not central to my research, in the next chapter I look briefly at the use of social media during the coverage of bin Laden's death.)

All three channels maintain extensive global newsgathering operations. BBC World News is able to call on the BBC's 41 foreign news bureaux, and some 200 foreign correspondents, plus an extensive network of freelance 'stringers'.⁶¹ Al Jazeera English has 65 bureaux, and employs more than 400 journalists around the world,⁶² and while it is not clear how many overseas journalists CNN International employs, it is indicative that CNN as a whole maintains 26 bureaux outside the US.⁶³ Exactly what constitutes a bureau is a matter of some dispute,⁶⁴ and these figures mainly come from the broadcasters themselves. Nonetheless, their underlying financial muscle and editorial ambition undoubtedly give them a global reach. From a Western perspective, this makes them extremely distinctive. Almost all news organisations in the 'global north' have been rapidly shedding their foreign bureaux, and none of the other Western 24/7s (France 24, Deutsche Welle, or Russia Today) can match their resources. From a non-Western perspective, too, they remain highly unusual. Al Jazeera English remains the only genuinely global broadcaster from the 'global South'. This may not always be the case, however, given the boom in news channels in Latin America and Asia. In the next ten or twenty years, it is quite possible that India, with its burgeoning middle class and business elite, could produce an international news channel. CCTV could also develop into a much more sophisticated and global product. Al Jazeera English may be the first of several non-Western global channels, in a rapidly changing global media landscape.

All these trends have injected greater urgency into the debate over what 'foreign news' should mean in the 21st century. Part of this is about cost-cutting: there is a desire

to reduce the high fixed costs associated with traditional bureaux on long leases, located in expensive parts of national capitals, with edit suites, a receptionist, and so on. There is also a belief in the ability of mobile digital technology to deliver more responsive and effective ways to cover international news.⁶⁵ Others suggest that in an increasingly globalised world, with a growing minority of people developing ‘diasporic’ or ‘bicultural’ identities, the divide between ‘foreign’ and ‘domestic’ news no longer makes as much sense as it once did,⁶⁶ so it makes much more sense to use local reporters instead of expensive Westerners. For now, this last argument probably makes more sense to the global viewers of CNN International and BBC World News than it does to the domestic viewers of their related US- and UK-based channels. But we will hear more of it if these two leading Western channels find that they are facing credible competition from Al Jazeera English and other channels from the south. Optimists in the world of journalism hope that extremely different audiences in both the global South and North are ready to watch locally-hired reporters.⁶⁷

ii) funding

In one sense, of course, money’s no object, when you’re in the thick of it, working at one of these global networks, and a story like bin Laden’s death suddenly breaks. Teams and resources are deployed as quickly as possible, and managers work out how to clean up the financial mess afterwards. Yet in the long term, financial considerations obviously influence how newsgathering works. They affect how many bureaux and journalists an organisation can afford, the sort of technical equipment it has, and (at least to some degree) how it chooses to deploy its resources.

BBC World News, Al Jazeera English, and CNN International are funded in very different ways. BBC World News leans to a significant degree on the wider BBC news operation, which has an estimated budget of £350m for both domestic and foreign news.⁶⁸ This money comes from the licence fee, currently guaranteed until 2016/7, and in 2011, the budget specifically derived from the licence fee for ‘World Newsgathering’ – i.e., for reporters, producers, cameramen and other staff outside the UK – was around £35m.⁶⁹ So in one sense, the newsgathering structures surrounding

World News are built on a particularly stable financial foundation. In addition, the channel has always operated as a commercial entity since its launch in 1991, drawing funding from a mixture of advertising and subscriptions, and its current costs for 2011/11 (excluding interest) were £62.8m. BBC World News generated a small pre-tax operating profit of £8.3 million for 2010/11, with sales up 16% on 2009/10,⁷⁰ so in many ways the channel does seem to be a successful and clearly-focused blend of traditional BBC public service values and a more commercial mind-set. For instance, the BBC's global strategy review in February 2011 stated plainly that 'although commercial funding remains critical to them, the BBC's international news services exist not to make money, but to deliver public service objectives'. These include 'bringing the world to the UK' and projecting British influence by 'bringing the UK to the world'.⁷¹ This avowedly non-commercial reflex is borne out in practice by the fact that BBC World News ran no advertising at all for the first few hours after the news of bin Laden's death broke.⁷²

However, the channel's limited commercial success is not enough to offset the wider challenges facing BBC foreign newsgathering, following the 2010 freeze in the licence fee, the depreciation in the value of sterling since 2008, the dramatic overspends incurred through covering events such as the 'Arab spring' in a peculiarly busy news year, and internal restructuring initiatives like 'Delivering Quality First'.⁷³ There are currently plans to save £7m (or 20%) from the £35m World Newsgathering budget mentioned above by 2013, although, as I shall discuss later, £3.5m will be invested elsewhere.⁷⁴ In many ways, BBC World News' funding may be relatively generous and secure; but in others it is subject to a host of internal and external pressures.

With Al Jazeera English, the picture is more opaque, but what is clear is that the channel has an enormous pot of money, almost all of which comes from the Qatari government. In principle, the only link between the Al Jazeera network (English and Arabic) and the ruling al-Thani monarchy is a financial one, in the form of an interest-free loan and government subsidies. The network insists that this makes it editorially independent.⁷⁵ It has been estimated the set-up cost of the English network alone was around £670m between 2006 and 2009,⁷⁶ and in late 2004, two years before Al Jazeera English was set up, the network's former director-general Wadah Khanfar hinted at the costs that might be involved, casually mentioning that the annual budget for any

news channel was US\$30-35m.⁷⁷ Rather like the BBC, Al Jazeera English has a non-commercial revenue stream that is generous and probably (future events in the Gulf notwithstanding) fairly stable. Indeed, as I will explore later, the channel is apparently so insulated from commercial pressures that until very recently it had not commissioned any audience research.⁷⁸ This financial heft – and the fact that, unlike the BBC, it is expanding, with plans for Balkan, Turkish and Swahili services⁷⁹ – may risk creating an organisational inefficiency that does not necessarily make for focused programme-making, but it also gives the network a definite confidence I have noticed in my interactions with current and former Al Jazeera English employees.

Nevertheless, given how little advertising it attracts,⁸⁰ and the more or less complete dependence on the Qatari royal family that results from that, there must be real questions over Al Jazeera English's continuing editorial independence. Many have seen the departure in 2011 of Wadah Khanfar, the much-admired director-general of the Arabic and English networks, and his replacement by an al-Thani prince with a background in gas, rather than broadcasting, as a sign that the Emir of Qatar now intends to exert more control over the network he has been financing for so long. For one thing, his country is now playing a much more prominent foreign policy role (backing anti-Gaddafi forces in Libya, for example, and taking a particularly hard line against Assad in Syria) in a region that is liable to remain turbulent for years to come.⁸¹ Al Jazeera English's Executive Producer for News in Europe, Ben Rayner, insists that 'the guy who's come along has said he won't get involved in the editorial side of things. I don't think we'll become Qatar state broadcasting. People won't watch'.⁸² There is also the argument that Al Jazeera helps Qatar's image abroad, just as the BBC is thought to improve perceptions of the United Kingdom,⁸³ and so the al-Thani dynasty would be foolish to interfere with it editorially. It is too early to tell what will happen – but whereas at the BBC there have been no credible claims of direct editorial interference for many decades, the fact remains that Al Jazeera is currently run by a relative of the country's absolute monarch. Al Jazeera English is far less hemmed in by financial or commercial considerations than BBC World News or CNN International by dint of its funding mode. But a large question mark hangs over about the political constraints it will face in future.

CNN International's funding is purely commercial, which sets it apart from the other two channels. The total budget for the CNN family of channels has been estimated at £1bn,⁸⁴ with US\$687m to spend on newsgathering,⁸⁵ and the results for the third quarter of 2011 for CNN's parent company, Time Warner, suggest a positive overall financial picture there, with revenue up 11% for the group as a whole, and CNN viewing figures in the United States rising almost 50% in 2010-2011 'among its key audience in prime time'.⁸⁶ The international channel belongs to an organisation that self-evidently is in a muscular financial position, despite an advertising market that has been very challenging since the start of the global economic crisis in 2008. The official line from CNN International staff is that viewership rises and falls in direct correlation with how much big news – say, the 'Arab spring', the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, and so on – is around at any given moment. 2011 was 'a very good year,' says international correspondent Nima Elbagir. 'There seems to finally be an acceptance of the fact that people watch CNN when there's news breaking, and when there's news, we'll be number one, and when there isn't, we won't be.'⁸⁷

All the same, CNN's US network has faced a powerful challenge from MSNBC and Fox News in recent years,⁸⁸ with worrying implications for CNN International, which leans on its resources. The domestic US network is still the 'lead brand' within the organisation, because it brings in much more advertising revenue than the international channel; and this internal dominance is borne out in the higher salaries paid to US presenters and reporters.⁸⁹ Arguably, there is a fundamental structural tension here: between a desire – on the one hand – to strengthen CNN International, and thereby lessen CNN's dependence on the US market, and – on the other hand – the very real fact that CNN US remains the strongest and most lucrative part of the wider news operation. And if this potentially has implications for how CNN International's newsgathering works on the ground, so too may the need to make programmes that attract advertising targeted at a globalised business elite.⁹⁰ This is likely to be a subtle influence when it comes to a dramatic hard news story like bin Laden's death, and it is certainly something the channel resists entirely in some important aspects (for example, it removed all advertising linked to certain Arab regimes after the start of the popular protests in that region). Nonetheless, there are some grounds for thinking it is present.⁹¹ CNN International, in short, is a

successful part of a large, profitable business, and free of any obvious political pressures or mandate to project US influence. Yet it is worth bearing in mind that it naturally aims to make a profit every year for its parent company, and this has the potential, in theory at least, to skew some of its output toward American or elite business audiences.

iii) audiences

El-Nawawy and Iskander's definition of 'contextual objectivity' suggests that the editorial detachment of journalists working in television news is calibrated by their perceptions of what their audiences do and don't want. The three channels apparently have overlapping but different audiences, which each of them approaches in its own way. BBC World News says it is broadcast in 'more than 200 countries and territories' and 'available in more than 295 million homes', with 69 million weekly viewers.⁹² As already mentioned, a limited commercial element is at work; but those in charge of World News insist that the channel isn't crudely audience-driven, despite the BBC mantra that 'audiences are at the heart of everything we do'.⁹³ '[I]t might not be very desirable to give the audience always just what they want,' argues Richard Porter, Controller of English at BBC Global News.⁹⁴ The channel does have some 'geo-targeted' programming, yet equally it only broadcasts one, undifferentiated stream across the world, and so, as Jamie Angus, the acting head of BBC World News during the bin Laden story, puts it, 'it has to operate equally credibly for an audience ... of super-influencers on the East Coast of the US as it does for its important audiences in south and east Asia'.⁹⁵ Some energy is expended on tailoring the output to certain audiences (in South Asia, for example) but in the final analysis BBC World News believes that its global output is story-driven. It is still following in Lord Reith's footsteps, insofar as it sees itself as giving international audiences what they *need*, rather than what they think they want. For one thing, this is an eminently sensible response to its lack of a tidy, coherent audience, which makes it different from the flagship Six or Ten O'Clock News on the domestic BBC One channel, where there are regular overnight viewing figures and a clear national audience. These different perceived audiences, however, may have implications for the broadcast output whenever World News broadcasts as one stream with its domestic counterparts.

Partly because of its generous funding, Al Jazeera English has little sense of its actual audience, although it did plan to have some detailed statistics available for the first time by the end of 2011.⁹⁶ According to its website, the channel broadcasts to ‘more than 220 million households in more than 100 countries’. It says nothing about the number of people in those households who are actually watching. As mentioned, it has a very limited viewership in the United States,⁹⁷ so it is understandably keen to stress that more and more Americans are watching the channel on-line.⁹⁸ There is, at best, an impressionistic awareness of who is watching. ‘We’re big right across Africa, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Malaysia, and also in countries where domestic news channels aren’t as strong, places like France and Germany,’ says Ben Rayner, Al Jazeera English’s Executive Producer for News in Europe. He also suggests that the channel is popular among young English-speaking Arabs in the Middle East.⁹⁹

But why, funding aside, is the channel so vague about its audiences, when it is so clear and open about, say, its guidelines for reporting the Middle East and so much else?¹⁰⁰ The channel’s former head of output, John Pullman, provides one answer. ‘It’s about influence, rather than eyeballs,’ he says, with great store set on ‘coups’ like the Danish foreign minister apparently saying he watches the channel every day.¹⁰¹ In addition, there is a desire for a mass audience, particularly in the global South. ‘We want to appeal to a wide audience – to the powerful and to the people as well,’ says managing director, Al Anstey. ‘There is a massive audience of people in the developing world who speak English [...] and who are not necessarily the focus of the other networks’.¹⁰² Yet at least according to CNN International’s director of productions, Jamie Donald, while elite awareness of Al Jazeera English (and this includes journalists) may be high, surveys of general audience awareness in Europe, the Middle East and Africa suggest that whereas as around 60% of those interviewed are aware of CNN and the BBC, only 10% have heard about Al Jazeera English.¹⁰³ Like BBC World News, Al Jazeera English views itself as story-driven,¹⁰⁴ but there is possibly a greater element of projecting and gaining influence, whether for the network itself, or for the state of Qatar, which pays for it. For the time being, the perceived target audience is probably more important than the real one.

Viewing figures for CNN International are not easy to come by, but it claims to be

available in more than 275 million households and hotel rooms in over 200 countries and territories worldwide, and it clearly believes it is the market leader worldwide.¹⁰⁵ Like BBC World News and Al Jazeera English, it seems to target both an elite and a mass audience, but the elite element may be rather more important for CNN than for the other two. It was the market leader in a poll of European business leaders carried out in 2011, ahead of dedicated business channels and BBC World News.¹⁰⁶ Its staff say it has significant ratings in Africa,¹⁰⁷ and another recent survey suggests it is the most successful international news channel in the Asia-Pacific region, with 74% more daily viewers than BBC World News, its nearest rival.¹⁰⁸ A commercially-focused emphasis on the audience suffuses the way the network thinks about itself. ‘We live and thrive by being relevant to the audience and our business partners,’ says CNN International’s managing director, Tony Maddox. ‘If we fail to deliver the audience, we can’t deliver to advertisers and distributors.’¹⁰⁹ This money-making imperative lies behind the channel’s prominent business programming, and is also used to explain many other aspects of what the station does. Whereas the BBC explains its push for greater on-air ethnic diversity in the language of public service broadcasting, and looking and sounding more like the audiences it serves, and Al Jazeera English talks about representing the global South and being ‘the voice of the voiceless’, CNN International says it does the same thing because it makes ‘business sense’ to do so, because ‘you want someone the audience can identify with, and when we’re pitching for advertising, it’s great to be able to say [...] we know we reach that demographic’.¹¹⁰ There can be no doubting the strong emphasis placed inside the organisation on story-led editorial values and being ‘the most trusted name in news’. But CNN certainly does have an immediate, explicitly-stated, and profit-driven awareness of who its audiences are, and who might want to advertise to those audiences. There is no equivalent this at the other two stations, and it is likely to affect elements of CNN’s output.

iv) organisation

Journalists mythologise themselves as fiercely individual, competitive, and impossible to manage. But since Breed and Epstein, academic research has suggested that in reality they are tightly organised, with direct implications for the output they produce.¹¹¹ All

three channels under scrutiny here try to organise their staff in different ways, but a common thread is that each a close, but not always straightforward, working relationship with other elements inside its organisations, which may be older and better-established.

In BBC World News' case, these elements include historic brands such as the BBC World Service radio station, flagship domestic television news programmes like the Six and Ten O'Clock News, and BBC domestic radio stations. BBC World News also works alongside newer arrivals like BBC News Online and the BBC News Channel. At times, the channel competes with these departments for finite resources. At others, as we shall see with the first day of the coverage of bin Laden's death, broadcast output and newsgathering resources are pooled in a way that undoubtedly strengthens the depth and quality of coverage, but may also give World News a decidedly more British flavour. 'If resources were infinite,' says Jamie Angus, the former head of World News, 'we would probably not come together with the domestic output as much as we do'.¹¹² World News' position within the wider BBC organisation can be a strength or a weakness.

CNN International frequently pools resources with its older American counterpart, and there are apparently plans to bring the two channels' resources even closer together as part of the 'CNN One' project, continuing an existing trend towards more and more simulcasting, though the channels will retain separate identities.¹¹³ One key difference, though, is that CNN is simply far less structurally complicated than the BBC, something that might in theory lead to more focused and coherent editorial decision-making. CNN's US network is also arguably less internationally-minded than the BBC's domestic news services, with obvious implications for what happens when the two CNN networks come together as one.

For its part, Al Jazeera English appears in some ways to have more autonomy from the rest of its organisation than BBC World News or CNN International. As Barkho notes, Al Jazeera's Arabic and English channels are in separate buildings, have 'different budgets', and 'different editorial policies and internal guidelines', and as a result the English channel has carved out an 'autonomous turf', with an identity that is 'distinct' from the older and more established Arabic channel. But, as he also says, it is 'not difficult to detect the high level of tension' created by Al Jazeera English's arrival.¹¹⁴ One former Al Jazeera English employee told me the two channels 'definitely *have* hated

each other'. Originally, he says, 'many Arabic journalists felt Al Jazeera English wasn't Al Jazeera. It was elder child jealousy. It really was'.¹¹⁵ The English channel, for its part, believed it 'had a higher level of TV skills than the Arabic channel', and significantly, it chose to use a different computer system, which made sharing broadcast content more difficult.¹¹⁶ There has been a strong drive in recent years to encourage the two sides to collaborate more, but this probably remains 'a marriage of convenience, not love'.¹¹⁷ Whereas CNN International and BBC World News operate smoothly, if not always entirely independently, within the broader structures of their organisations, Al Jazeera English occupies a position that is more internally autonomous, yet also potentially more contested, with unpredictable repercussions for broadcast output.

So far as bureaux are concerned, the BBC is currently planning to part-offset a series of wider cuts by investing £3.5m in a restructuring of its world newsgathering operation, with a new focus on using bilingual reporters in places like Baghdad, Islamabad and Lagos, and leaning on locally recruited reporters (rather than staff reporters) in several European capitals and elsewhere in the world. This builds on earlier experiments, though I know from my own experience at the BBC that these have often been highly controversial, with not all editors satisfied with the on-air results.

Al Jazeera English, conversely, is expanding its international newsgathering. And although its bureaux are fairly traditional (in the sense of being well-resourced) they are different from their Western equivalents in that they are staffed, to a significant extent, by 'bicultural', 'diasporic' and 'local' reporters – and this as a matter of policy, rather than cost.¹¹⁸ More than the BBC or CNN, Al Jazeera English has experimented with a devolved approach to its output, with shows coming from Doha, London, Washington, and Kuala Lumpur. It also claims many of its bureaux are in the global South. This more localised, and less Western-focused, approach to newsgathering could place Al Jazeera English in pole position to cover the stories of a century during which geopolitical power will almost certainly drain away from the West. However, its management is also keen to break into Western markets, particularly the United States.¹¹⁹ This may pull against the rest of its newsgathering strategy.

In addition, some argue that Al Jazeera English's wealth and relatively short history make it far more eccentrically and chaotically-run than the other two channels I

am looking at. ‘It’s ‘like the BBC circa 1982,’ one source told me jokingly.¹²⁰ Zayani and Sahraoui argue that while at its best the wider Al Jazeera culture encourages ‘flexibility’ and ‘improvisation’, in general its ‘control system is loose’, with elements of a ‘family business’ and ‘many of the symptoms that plague Arab organisations’.¹²¹ Unlike the other two channels, Al Jazeera English does not innovate because it needs to be efficient.

CNN International, meanwhile, says it is planning to increase the number of bureaux it has abroad.¹²² It has fewer bureaux than the other two, but my own impression is that the ones it does have are all well-resourced, at least compared to the BBC (each CNN bureau apparently has a bureau manager, a correspondent, a producer, and a cameraman¹²³). It promoted on-air diversity long before the BBC did, and this is still one of its strong suits. Yet unlike their equivalents on Al Jazeera English, and to a lesser extent, BBC World News, CNN International’s non-Western reporters and presenters tend to have Western accents. That is, the channel seems to have experimented much less with smaller bureaux and locally-hired on-air talent than the other two, quite possibly because it needs everything that it does put on air to look and sound slick in a conventional way that appeals (or is thought to appeal) to the widest possible range of viewers and advertisers. It can’t try out new approaches for ostensibly high-minded public service reasons. Instead, it chooses to focus on what it sees as its tradition of excellent communication and storytelling.¹²⁵

v) culture

More than a decade ago, Kueng-Shankleman demonstrated the importance of cultural factors at news organisations.¹²⁶ There is a strongly-embedded editorial culture at BBC World News, and this core strength has enabled it to continue making high-quality programmes despite the stresses and strains of two decades of rapid organisational change.¹²⁷ The commitment to impartiality, which I have already touched upon, is enshrined in law, and my own experience of working across different parts of the BBC is that it is discussed almost every day in editorial meetings, constantly reiterated in the corporation’s internal communications, and reinforced by the BBC College of Journalism

and the training that it provides to staff. There is without question a strong belief in public service broadcasting, and a pride in the corporation's Reithian heritage.¹²⁸ More negatively, there are questions, from a management perspective, about whether these positive factors bring with them 'a culture where management skills are disdained', as well as 'insularity, resistance to change and an anti-commercialism'.¹²⁹ A rather different view is that the BBC as a whole is 'an institution with a thick layer of egregiously poor management'.¹³⁰ Furthermore, BBC World News does have a distinctly British edge to it. 'If you look at the BBC brand, and [...] what we sell the channel as [...] we don't pretend that it's coming from a bubble somewhere other than London,' says Jamie Angus, former head of the channel. 'It carries the imprimatur of the BBC's international journalism, which is based in London, and I think audiences understand that.'

At Al Jazeera English, the editorial culture appears vibrant and confident, perhaps reflecting the fact it is the newest of the three channels I am looking at, and a feeling that it has done particularly well with its coverage of the 'Arab spring'. Its Arabic counterpart was genuinely groundbreaking inside the Middle East, with its slogan of 'the opinion, and the other opinion' (essentially a version of impartiality). Despite the tensions discussed above, there does seem to be a shared 'Al Jazeera spirit' across the English and Arabic stations. The former director-general of Al Jazeera as a whole, Wadah Khanfar, says this spirit is defined by 'holding the centres of power accountable and giving voice to the voiceless in society'.¹³¹ In the case of the English network, this in essence means giving greater prominence to the global South.¹³² Under Khanfar's leadership, Al Jazeera Arabic and English both were encouraged to pursue a 'journalism of explanation',¹³³ abjuring lighter stories (particularly celebrity-based ones) and 'quick hits' in favour of in-depth explanation (Al Jazeera English has a markedly lower story count than BBC World News or CNN International¹³⁴). More controversially, the English channel has followed its Arabic sibling in two other aspects. First, it often broadcasts images of graphic violence (Gaddafi's dying moments, for example). Secondly, it has given airtime to what Khanfar calls 'the so-called terrorist groups', because, in his words, 'we felt that a tape from Osama bin Laden or an al-Qaeda figure from Iraq or whoever [was] news'.¹³⁵ This last point has led some to argue that Al Jazeera English's 'editorial slant' is 'essentially anti-Western lite'.¹³⁶

Conceivably, too, there are questions around whether – by trying to give prominence to the global South, as a way of correcting a perceived imbalance on the part of the likes of the BBC and CNN – Al Jazeera English itself provides imbalanced, disproportionately ‘Southern’, coverage of the world. Another debate pivots around whether the channel has a strong Arab identity (it does cover the Israeli-Palestinian conflict differently from CNN and the BBC,¹³⁷ and typically has superb coverage from the Middle East region¹³⁸) or whether in actual fact it distances itself from its Arab origins (by employing a sizeable number of Western journalists, working out of a different building, and/or as a matter of deliberate editorial policy¹³⁹). If, moreover, Al Jazeera English avoids a Western, ‘BBC/CNN’ news frame, and if it doesn’t have a straightforwardly Arab frame either, is something of an *Islamic* frame at work in its coverage? Might that explain, for instance, the relative absence of any stories about homosexuality?¹⁴⁰

Finally, my own personal impression of CNN International’s culture is that it is generally assertive and positive.¹⁴¹ The channel no longer dominates academic and newspaper debates about the influence of the media in the modern world in the way it did, say, twenty years ago, during the first Gulf War. Indeed, some argue that the ‘CNN effect’ has become the ‘Al Jazeera effect’,¹⁴² and more broadly, commentators’ attention has shifted away from television to the role of social media in the various protest movements of 2011 and 2012. But CNN continues to think of itself as the world leader in news,¹⁴³ drawing on three decades of often-innovative history. It has a rigorous editorial process,¹⁴⁴ and exacting, fully-developed editorial guidelines.¹⁴⁵ Part of its self-perception is the idea that CNN reinvented the news, shaking up a complacent industry with a pioneering, underdog spirit, and a globalist mindset.¹⁴⁶ Once more, too, it sets itself apart from the other two in its profit-driven focus. ‘It’s probably [...] similar to being somewhere like Goldman Sachs,’ says Nima Elbagir. ‘You have to re-earn [your reputation] every day.’¹⁴⁷ And for all its globalised identity, this is very much an American company. CNN International is ultimately run out of Atlanta,¹⁴⁸ with potential ramifications for its broadcast output on a global story like bin Laden’s death.

vi) summary

BBC World News, Al Jazeera English, and CNN International all face increased competition from other 24/7s and digital media. Despite being the most recent arrival, Al Jazeera English seems especially self-confident, and arguably it marks the very start of a wider trend towards more and more non-Western television channels with high production standards and a global reach. On a macro and meso level, all are well-funded, with extensive newsgathering operations, and confident, open cultures, and on a micro level this suggests that journalists at these channels have considerable scope to make editorial choices about the broadcast output, although further ethnographic and sociological research would be needed to establish this fully. There may, however, be underlying tensions between the national and international wings of the BBC and CNN, and whilst Al Jazeera English essentially operates independently of Al Jazeera Arabic, it faces even more complex and unpredictable questions about its overall governance structure.

A key factor is the channels' understanding of their audiences. BBC World News has a fairly detailed sense of its diffuse audiences, but ultimately sees its approach as story-driven; the core of CNN's brand is its journalistic reputation, yet it has a fundamentally profit-driven understanding of its audiences and its advertisers; and Al Jazeera English has a mission to represent the global South for both Western and non-Western viewers – but very little sense of its real audience. Of all the factors interacting with the ethic of detachment in the broadcast output that I examine in my next chapter, the channels' different approaches to their audiences seem likely, on the face of it, to be the most important.

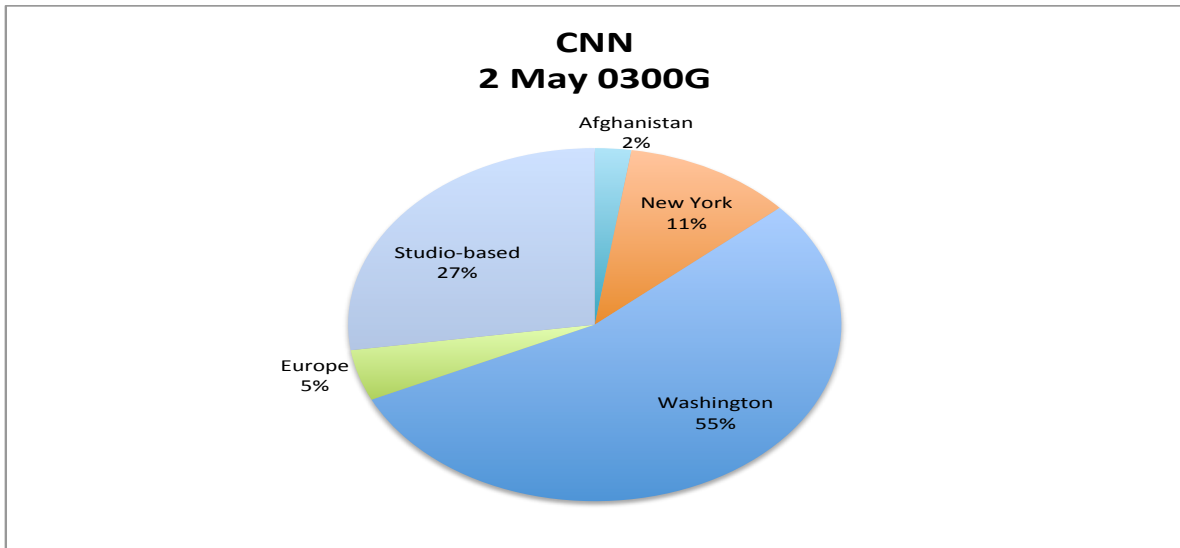
4. Content analysis

I will now discuss the results of my content analysis of the coverage of bin Laden's death on BBC World News, Al Jazeera English, and CNN International over a three-day period (2 May to 4 May 2011). I discuss my methodology in a separate note at the end of this paper. However, I should mention at this stage that television news is an extremely complex form of communication, and my sample size was limited by considerations of time and access to the material. Any conclusions I reach can only be impressionistic, at best. My content analysis in this chapter focuses exclusively on the bin Laden story, and it only involves material each channel produced entirely or mainly on its own (such as two-ways¹⁴⁹ or reporter packages¹⁵⁰). It does not include any unmediated agency material (live press conferences, for instance).

a) the geographical distribution of coverage

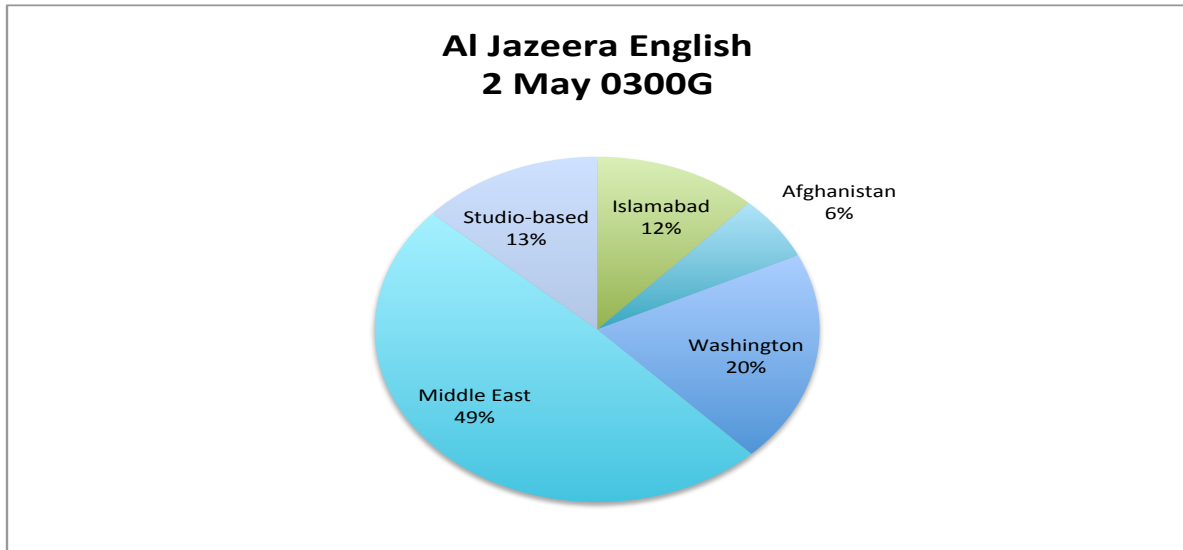
My working hypothesis is that a truly detached approach to this international story – corresponding to my third overarching hypothesis (global detachment) – will involve a *plurality* of datelines; and pronounced differences in geographical distribution will draw our attention to where a channel is being less impartial and objective than it might be.

The following pie chart represents the content analysis for CNN International’s coverage in the first full hour after the story broke:



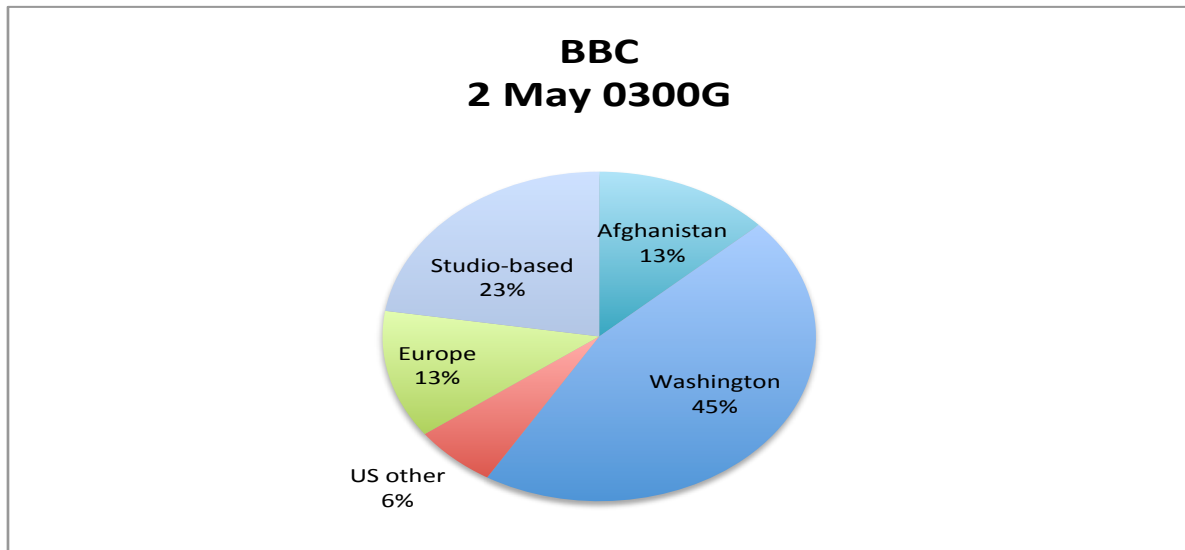
The channel was simulcast with CNN’s US network at this point, which makes for overwhelmingly US-focused coverage. 66% of the output is produced from the US (almost all of it is live reporter two-ways from Washington) and this figure is even higher (93%) when the studio-based material is included in this figure. The only elements not produced from the US are relatively brief two-ways with senior international correspondent Nick Robertson (who is in London) and Nick Paton-Walsh (who is in Kabul).

Al Jazeera English, by contrast, produces the vast majority of its coverage from the Middle East:



This includes a two-way from bin Laden’s country of birth, Saudi Arabia, with Al Jazeera English’s ‘roving Middle East correspondent’ Hashem Ahelbarra, who is in Mecca. There is also an extremely long interview (lasting 16 minutes, 31 seconds) with the British journalist Robert Fisk, who is on the telephone from Beirut. The channel is the only one of the three to have any direct coverage at all from Pakistan, which is, after all, where the US raid has taken place, with two excellent two-ways with its reporter in Islamabad. But it only goes to its correspondent in the United States *after* President Obama has spoken.

The geography of BBC World News' coverage is centred on the US, though less so than with CNN International:



BBC World News has significantly more coverage from South Asia than CNN International, though less than Al Jazeera English, and this reporting comes from Afghanistan (as a Paul Wood two-way) rather than from Pakistan, which is, of course, where the story has actually taken place.

These are sharp differences. On the face of it, they suggest strong geographical and editorial biases, especially in the case of CNN International and Al Jazeera English. But if we bracket the question of detachment for the moment, and focus on the detail of the programmes themselves, we can see that in each case there are significant strengths and weaknesses. CNN International, with its superb US sources, gets more breaking news lines from inside the American government than anyone else. Similarly, the BBC's State Department correspondent Kim Ghattas is supplying BBC World News with information on the raid from the US government. Both Western news channels manage to be more nimble and comprehensive on the US side of the story than Al Jazeera English, which undoubtedly does too little (20% of its overall coverage) from the United States, on a story where so many of the most important details are American. However, CNN International and BBC World News are themselves very weak on the Pakistan angle, whereas Al Jazeera English has its Islamabad reporter, Kamal Hyder, on air near the start of the hour, and from 0311 GMT he is reporting that the operation took place in

Abbottabad (CNN only starts to report this two minutes before the end of the this hour, and the BBC, despite its significant newsgathering presence in Pakistan, doesn't mention Abbottabad anywhere at all in this hour).

What explains these differences? The people I spoke to at each channel generally struggled to remember the details of what happened during the programme, which is hardly surprising with such a high-octane story. But one important factor, I think, is that all of the channels instinctively opt to play to their strengths. Much of this, I would suggest, springs from a desire to make the best possible programme at that particular moment, and to show what they, and they alone, can do, and their rivals can't. Al Jazeera English's breaking news strap lines up until Obama's speech repeatedly source the news of bin Laden's death to the US TV networks: one way of reading this is that Al Jazeera English is acknowledging to its viewers that a key strand of this story is coming out of the United States, but it is telling them that Al Jazeera English will take a *different* approach, and focus on the regional picture in the Middle East and in South Asia. CNN is exploiting its American expertise, and the BBC does the same, to a lesser extent, though the BBC also tries to make the most of its presence in South Asia.

More importantly, the three channels think they are giving their audiences what they want: CNN International is happy to pair up with its US sibling at times like these, because as a matter of long-term strategy it believes that its business-minded, aspirational viewers¹⁵¹ are interested in the US and its view of world events; Al Jazeera English's target audience, both elite and mass, is thought to be interested in what's happening away from the Washington and the 'centres of power' in the 'global North'; and BBC World News, without as strong a regional connection to the story as the other two channels, thinks that its viewers will want a broader global balance from its own coverage.

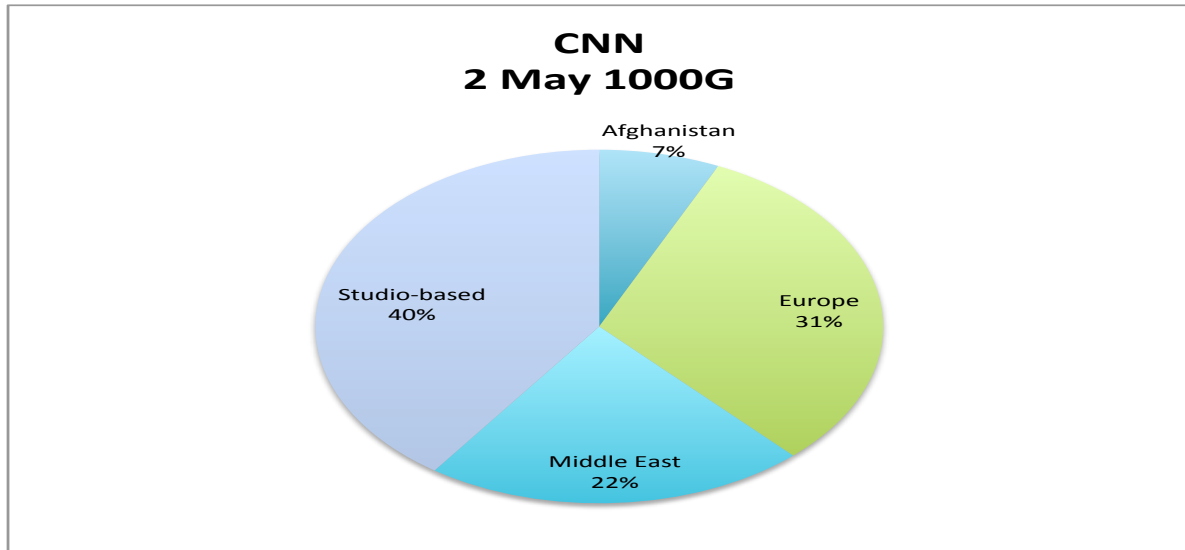
At this early stage of the story, logistics are another consideration, despite the three channels' impressive global resources. CNN's Islamabad bureau was 'dark' at this point, with only minimal staff, although the channel would not have struggled to find a reporter or analyst on a phone line in the country, had it wanted to, and other news outlets would probably have done this;¹⁵² Al Jazeera English does try to go to Washington earlier on in its coverage, but is not able to, seemingly for technical reasons; and the BBC's Jamie Angus was surprised that there was no Pakistan coverage in this hour on BBC

World News, so it is possible that there was a logistical or technical issue here as well (though it is intriguing – given the BBC’s on-going plans to use more and more local staff – that BBC World News does not put staff from its Urdu service on air here, or at any other point in the coverage I looked at).

There are cultural assumptions, moreover, about where the locus of the story is. Speaking months after the event, CNN’s Nima Elbagir and Jamie Donald were adamant that this was a purely US story, which I think is an argument that goes a long way, but in the end cannot adequately justify the complete absence of coverage from Pakistan in this hour, considering that the raid itself happened inside Pakistan.¹⁵³ Al Jazeera English staff, for their part, were very proud of their Pakistan coverage. They were unaware of how little they’d done from the United States in the early stages of the story.¹⁵⁴ This is just as serious an omission as CNN’s.

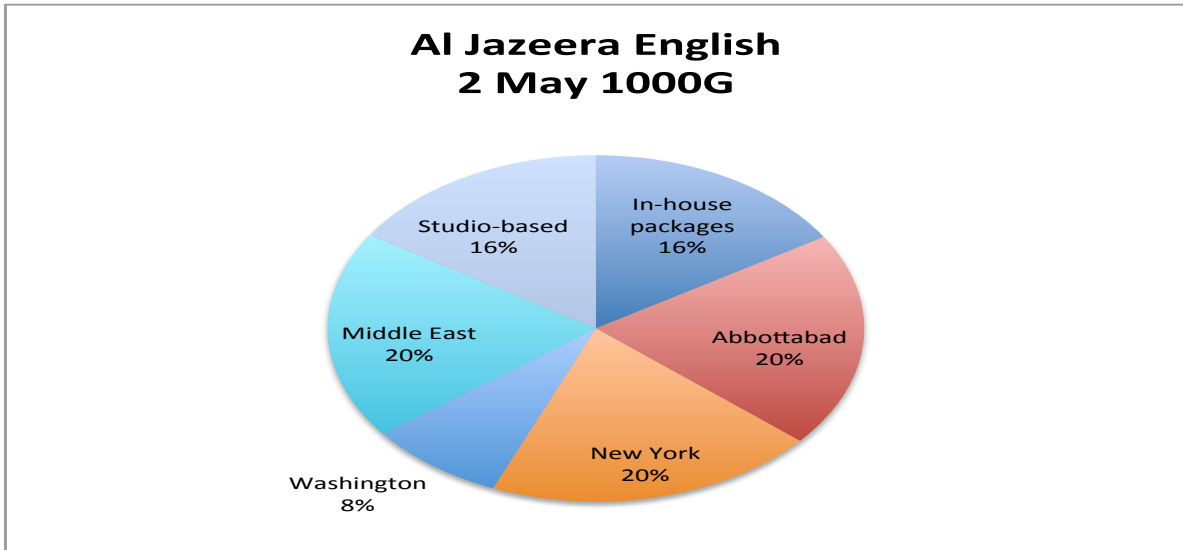
In general, therefore, Al Jazeera English and CNN International *do* reflect where they’re based in a very strong way in this first hour. Organisational and cultural factors, and above all, a reflexive attempt to provide distinctive content for particular audiences, produce output that is characterised by a ‘contextual’ form of detachment, rather than a more far-reaching ‘global’ form (the BBC, meanwhile, could be said to have a US focus, but this is far less pronounced than what we see with CNN).

What is striking, however, is that if we fast-forward a few hours to the next segment I coded, 1000 GMT on 2 May, the picture is radically different. Here is CNN International:

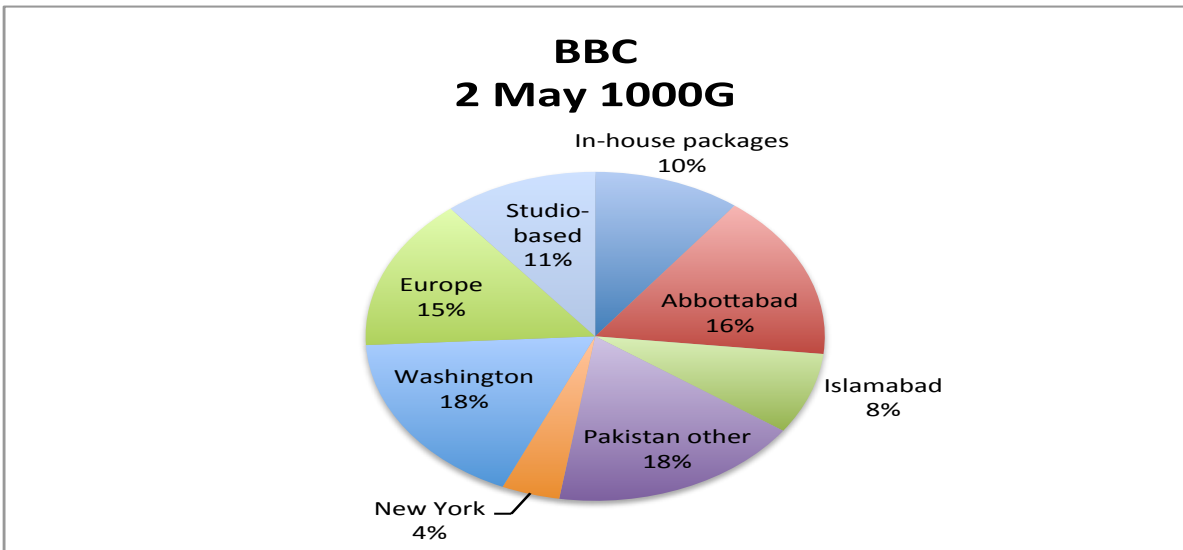


We could be looking at an entirely different channel: the coverage is now heavily *non-American*. Apart from the fact that this half-hour segment is presented from Atlanta, all of CNN's direct (i.e. entirely or mainly self-generated) coverage comes from elsewhere. There is reporting from London (which is used to explore international reaction), from Abu Dhabi, from Jerusalem, and from Afghanistan. It is interesting, too, that CNN International focuses so strongly on putting its own reporter, Nick Paton Walsh, on air, even though he is still in Kabul at this point, and has not yet left for Pakistan. Again, whereas other news outlets would be happy to talk to local journalists on the telephone as a way of covering the Pakistan angle on the ground, it seems that CNN is keen, for financial and (above all) presentational reasons, to use its own reporter, even if he hasn't actually got to the story yet in a physical sense.

Al Jazeera English now has much more coverage from the United States:



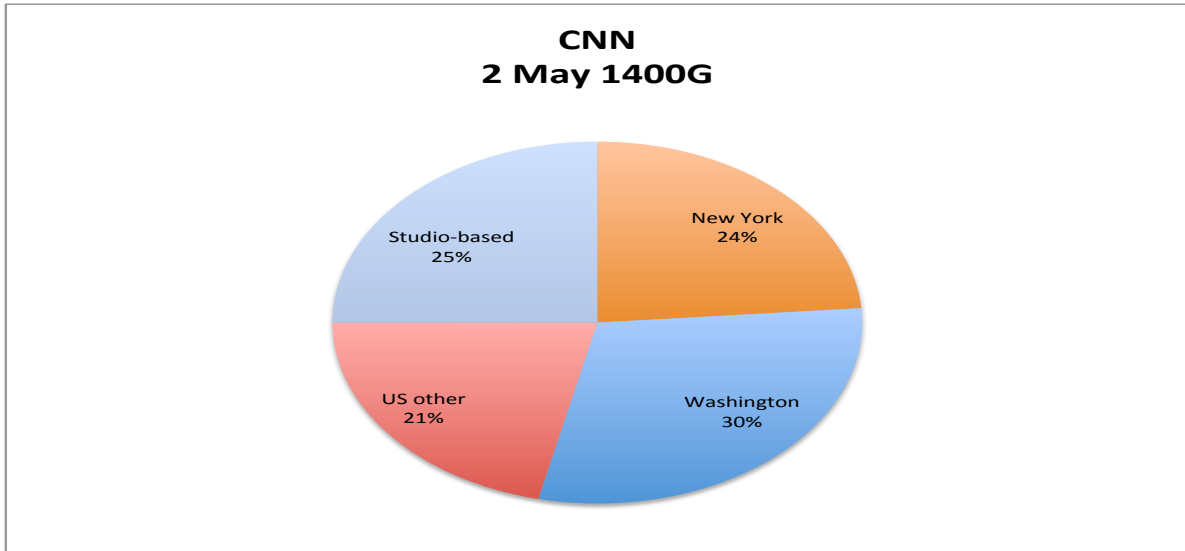
The BBC has a better geographical spread of coverage from the US, Pakistan, and Europe:



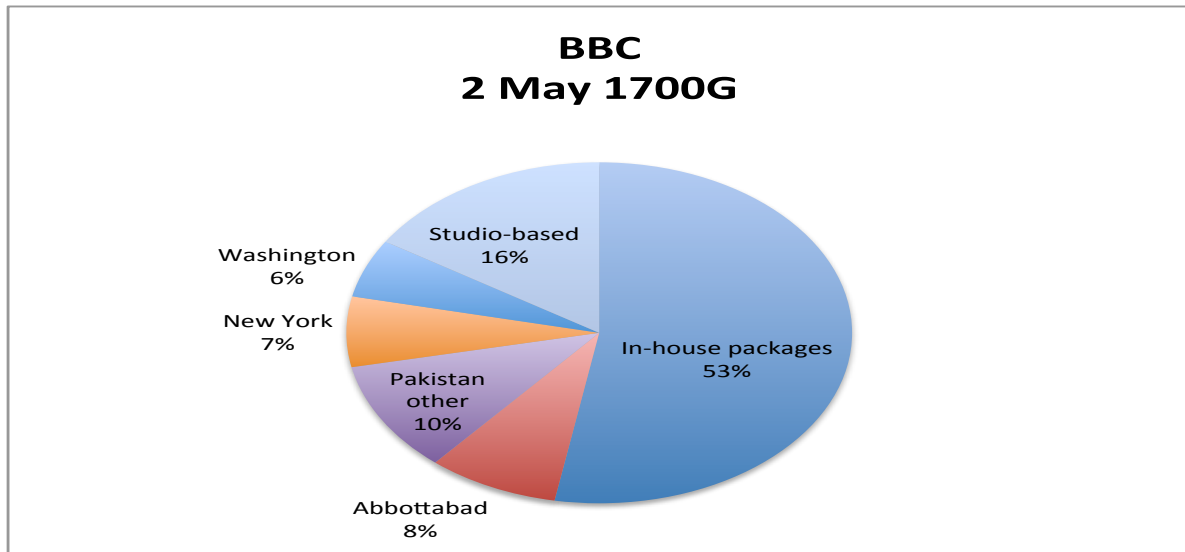
Geographically speaking, by this stage in the story, all three channels all have a far greater plurality of coverage. As they move their resources into place, the topography of their storytelling becomes more diverse. Over time, the ethic of detachment becomes

stronger vis-à-vis other economic, organisational, audience-related and cultural factors, and we seem to be moving beyond a regionally-bounded, contextual expression of detachment to a more genuinely global one.

However, at 1400 GMT, CNN International's identity swerves back very strongly into its American iteration:



Something comparable is also at work on BBC World News at various points in the day. Here, for instance, is what 1700 GMT looks like in my content analysis:



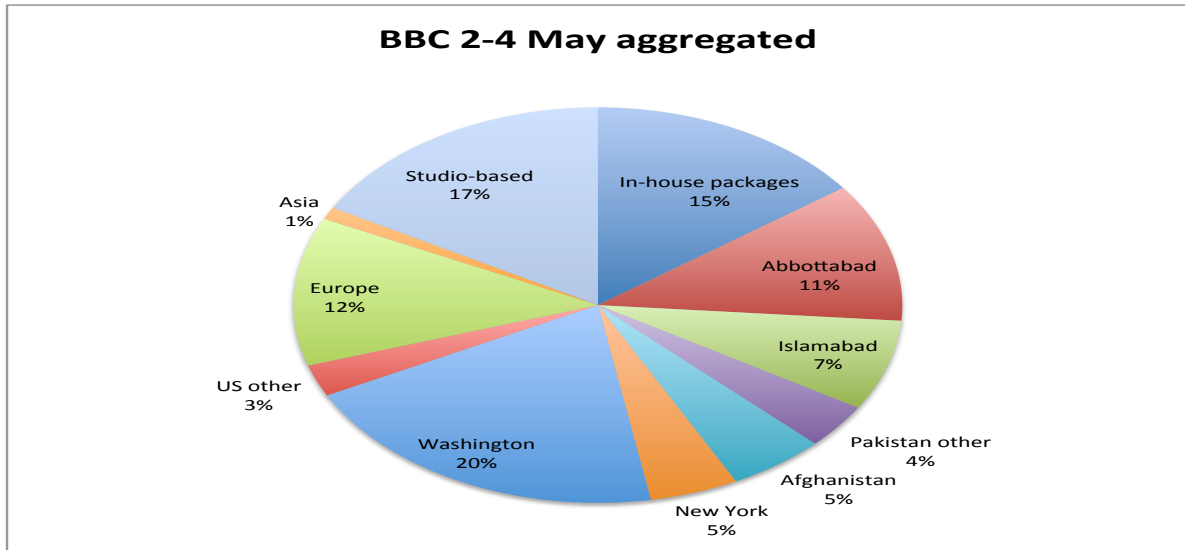
Just as CNN International has been simulcasting with CNN's US version, BBC World News has at this point twinned its output with the flagship domestic BBC Six O'Clock news. This explains the high proportion of packages, and although the BBC stands out across the course of the three days I looked at for its use of packages (CNN often has none whatsoever), this is a particularly high concentration for BBC World News output.

This twinning is relevant to the debate around using more local or 'diasporic' reporters in future, because it means that the on-screen look of BBC World News switches rapidly from being very multicultural and fairly varied in its age profile to being decidedly white, and much, much older – rather as CNN International oscillates, from being international (if Westernised) in appearance, to being firmly American when it comes together with CNN in the US. Al Jazeera English definitely stands out here. If its first hour focuses on its home region, to the detriment of other important elements, over time the Doha-based channel consistently covers a wider range of places than the other two, and it does so using on-screen talent drawn from a broad range of backgrounds. It does not suffer from a split personality: it does not find itself caught between national and international iterations of its brand.

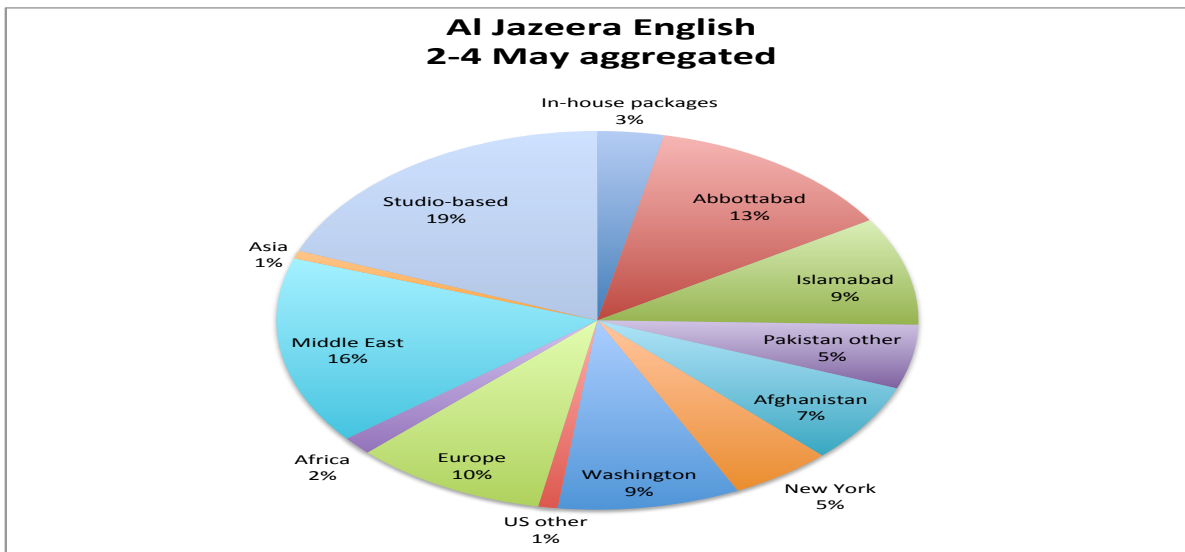
Efficiency matters here. CNN has a commercial imperative to exploit its on-air talent as efficiently as it can. Simulcasting saves on resources. The BBC as a whole is concerned with using the licence fee as rationally as possible, as a matter of policy, and this has an impact on the way World News operates. Both want to free up resources for shoe-leather journalism – and if the US or the UK side of CNN or the BBC is taking care of some of the output, teams on the ground in Abbottabad have more time to find out what is actually happening there.¹⁵⁵ Al Jazeera English, conversely, does not seem to have the same sophisticated command-and-control structures as the other two.¹⁵⁶ It may operate in a more permissive financial environment, where efficiency is not much of a concern. And it enjoys a degree of structural autonomy within its own organisation that neither CNN International nor BBC World News has.

Once more, there is the crucial question of what *audiences* are thought to want. For the time being, CNN International and BBC World News can probably argue that simulcasts of this sort are a net positive, because they reinforce on-air brands (Wolf Blitzer, John Simpson, and so on). They can argue, moreover, that they have a far better sense of their real audiences than Al Jazeera English does, and that this makes them vastly more realistic about what viewers actually want. Yet it is worth asking if there is a cultural blind spot around how well these Western presenter/reporter brands travel for non-Western audiences, who can now choose to watch a channel like Al Jazeera English, where the style of presentation is a good deal less Western. In the medium to long term, it is possible to imagine a future where the wrong approach to cost-cutting and efficiency will bring about more and more simulcasts on CNN International and BBC World News, in a way that muddies viewers' understanding of what the supposedly international channels stand for, and Al Jazeera English becomes the more coherent global news brand. These split identities certainly have clear implications for journalistic detachment, promoting domestic aspects of a global story like bin Laden's death at the expense of equally important international ones.

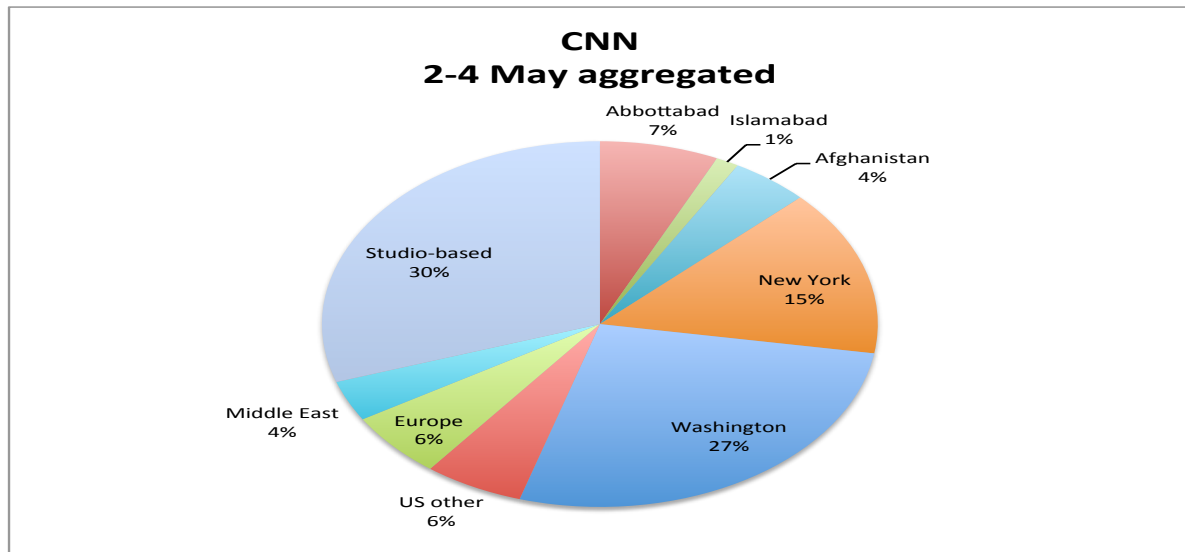
What about the geographical distribution of the channels' direct, self-produced coverage over the three-day period as a whole? Here is BBC World News:



This is Al Jazeera English:



This graph shows CNN International:



Examining the differences first, we can plainly see that Al Jazeera English directly covers the broadest range of places (hitting 11 of my non-studio-based geographical categories), followed by the BBC (9), and then by CNN (8). Unsurprisingly, this pattern follows the number of bureaux each organisation has, and it raises a provocative question about whether at times the tail is wagging the dog. Is one of the hardest journalistic challenges knowing when you should detach yourself as a programme editor from the vast, shiny, alluring resources at your disposal? Certainly, one impression I had (admittedly, a highly subjective one) whilst I was watching Al Jazeera English was that its resources were always incredibly impressive, but frankly not always wholly relevant to the bin Laden story, particularly when it came to the channel's fairly prominent coverage from Europe (which represents 10% of the output I coded, against 12% for the BBC, and 6% for CNN).¹⁵⁷ Being able to reflect a broad plurality of geographic locations is editorially invaluable, but it is essential that each element is focused and relevant, and I suspect that this is one area where Al Jazeera English's freedom not to think about its audience weakens its output, rather than strengthening it.

On a partly separate note, it is interesting that only Al Jazeera English gives the African angle of this story (the Kenya and Tanzania bombings, and the growing threat

from Al Qaeda inside Africa right now) anything more than a passing mention. No doubt this reflects an attempt to reach the channel's target audience, and its underlying cultural commitment to the global South. But it is curious that both CNN International and BBC World News miss this part of the story, given their own important audiences in Africa. This suggests that with CNN International and BBC World News editorial and cultural factors can trump audience considerations at what these channels might consciously or unconsciously see as the periphery of the story. In this case, I myself (again subjectively) found Al Jazeera English's coverage very compelling.¹⁵⁸ Perhaps the channel's resources currently work better at what other stations have seen as the margins of news coverage than they do at what Khanfar has called the traditional 'centres of power'.¹⁵⁹

Intriguingly, there was no direct, self-generated coverage of the Middle East on the BBC, whereas Al Jazeera English did 16% and CNN 4%.¹⁶⁰ In Al Jazeera English's case, this seems more or less self-explanatory. It reflects the channel's belief in countering the Western bias of other news organisations, and shows the channel playing to its strengths on its home turf. With CNN International, this statistic reflects both the way the channel's resources are organised (they have a hub bureau in Abu Dhabi¹⁶¹) and its attempt to maximise return on that investment, as well as an on-going push into the market for viewers and advertisers in the Middle East. The other differences between the three channels include the more extensive coverage of the US on CNN International (48%, against 28% on BBC World News, and 15% on Al Jazeera English) and the slightly greater weight given to coverage from Europe on BBC World News.

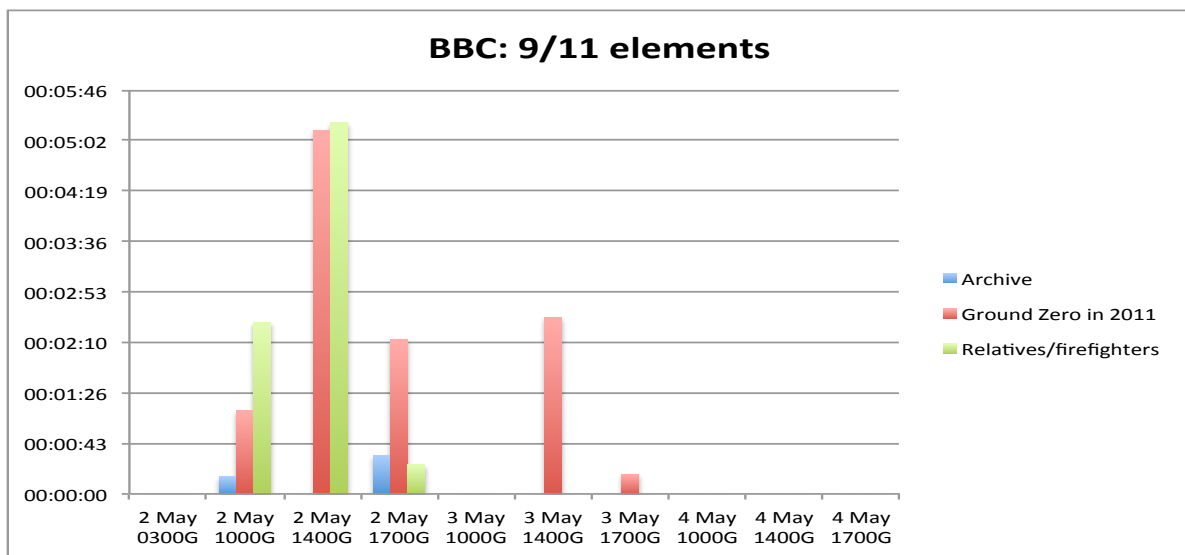
There are, in short, very clear differences between the channels, and to a significant extent, these relate to where each of them is headquartered. Of equal importance, however, is the way in which the geographical distribution of the channels' output becomes much more similar over time. It is not as simple as saying that BBC World News, Al Jazeera English, CNN International reflect their countries and cultures of origin, and that is somehow the end of any discussion of how journalistically detached each of them might be. At the beginning of the bin Laden story, the channels' origins are important, and they also influence how quickly each channel moves away from the story (CNN International, with its US roots, continued to lead with it on 4 May, but Al Jazeera English, coming from a different region, alternated between the Hamas-Fatah 'unity deal'

and Ocampo accusing Gaddafi of war crimes, and BBC World News, with its Western origins and internationalist outlook, moved between the Palestinian story and bin Laden). Crucially, however, once we are a few hours into the story, and for many hours after that, we see a clear attempt to represent the significant geographical strands of the story in a much more detached, impartial and objective fashion. We move from contextual detachment to a more global perspective.

b) framing devices

This part of my content analysis was designed to drill down to the more covert elements of the three channels’ coverage. My hypothesis was that marked divergences might highlight certain ‘framing’ strategies they were particularly partial to and subjective about.

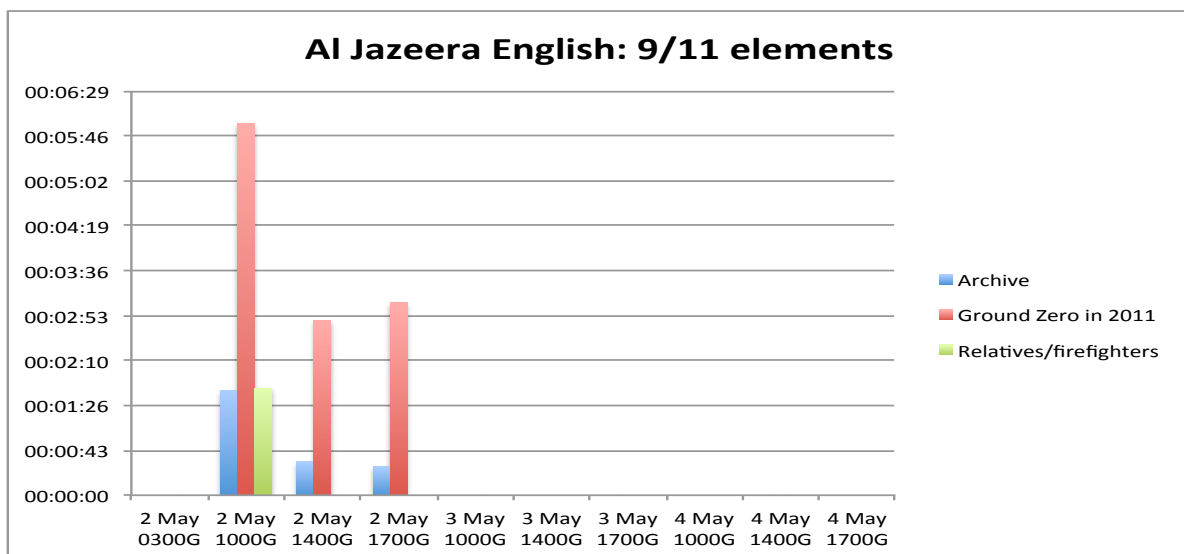
And when it comes to their use of 9/11-related elements, there are some fascinating distinctions. This is what we see with the BBC:



The vertical axis represents minutes and seconds. ‘Archive’ refers to footage from 2001, which the BBC uses sparingly, though it does show some footage from immediately after the World Trade Center was attacked. ‘Ground Zero in 2011’ means live or pre-recorded footage from 2011. The BBC shows more footage of this sort, possibly for reasons of

taste: so while the 11 September attacks do structure how we as BBC World News viewers understand bin Laden's life, this happens less in a past-orientated way (which would focus on 9/11) and more in a present-/future-orientated way (stressing the here and now, and the sense that the world may now be moving on as a result of this death). 'Relatives/firefighters' describes interviews with relatives of victims or those close to the New York Fire Department. It is the most prominent category in the BBC World News output over the three days I analysed, and may result from a common tendency of British and Western journalism to seek out the emotional side of any story, particularly where the victims are largely Western, and perhaps, also, a close British identification with the events of 9/11.

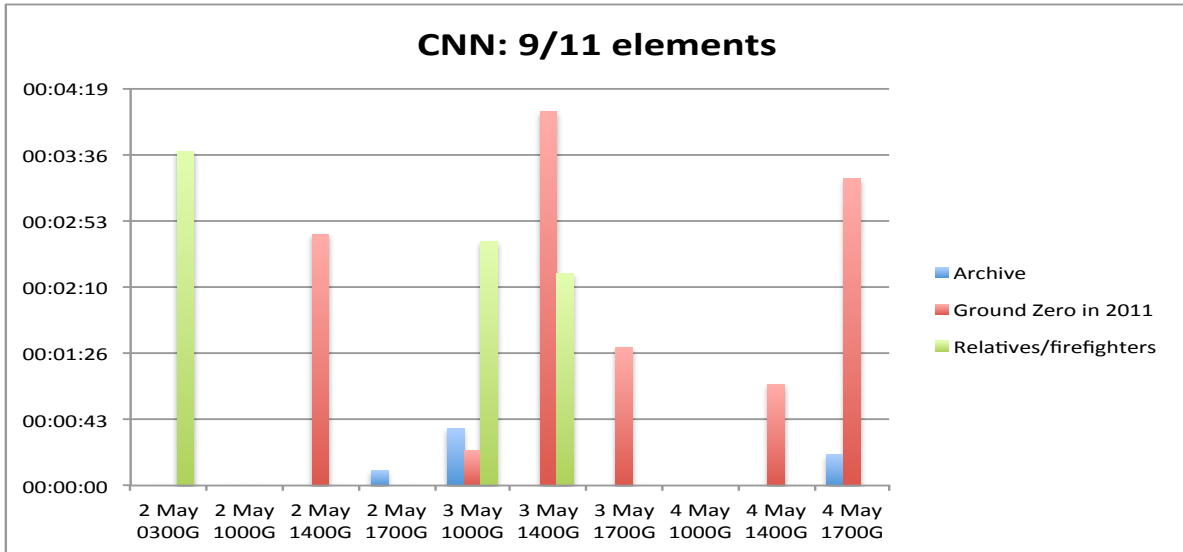
Al Jazeera English looks rather different:



There is more archive from the immediate aftermath of the attacks. This choice may reflect a sense that for much of Al Jazeera English's target audience in the developing world the 11 September attacks may not be a more sensitive subject than other atrocities. It also points to the channel's often more graphic style. There is a broadly similar amount of interest in showing images of Ground Zero in 2011, but hardly any interviews with those close to the victims. Possibly this suggests that, for Al Jazeera English, 9/11 was undoubtedly an important event, but one which has to be seen in a wider context (although the interview that Al Jazeera English did do in the time period I coded was an

extremely strong one with a US marine who lost several relatives that day).

CNN, as might be expected, covers the 11 September angle much more than the other two channels:

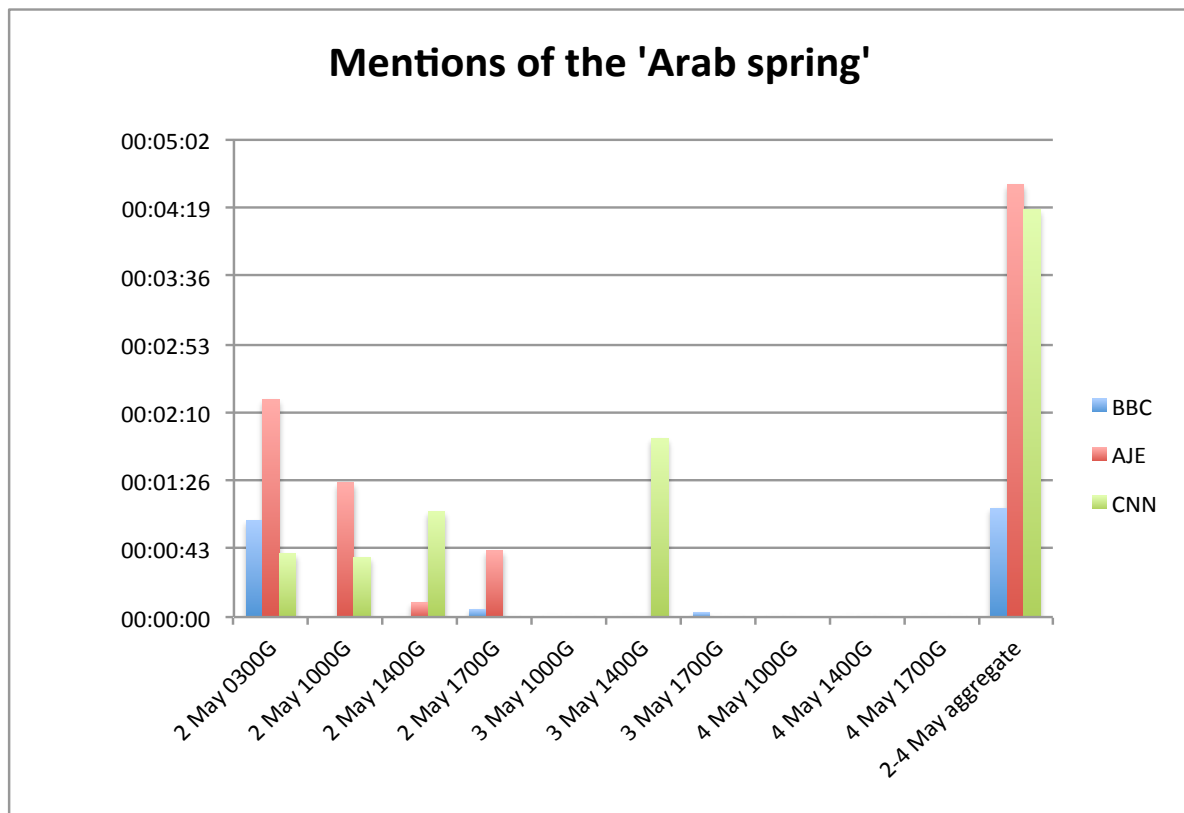


As with the other two channels, the forward-looking ‘Ground Zero in 2011’ element is strongest. There are more interviews with people close to the victims of the attacks, demonstrating CNN’s strong US contacts and its naturally very close cultural identification with the atrocity. But the most vivid difference is the absence of any archive footage showing the aftermath of the Twin Towers falling. The small amount of archive that CNN does use is of George W. Bush visiting Ground Zero shortly after the attack. This complete absence of 9/11 footage stems, I would suggest, from the sensitivities from the use of this material inside the United States. And where CNN International also stands out is in its energetic and sustained use of images of jubilant American crowds celebrating Osama bin Laden’s death. The other two channels do show some pictures of this: but CNN starts and closes programmes with them, and on the whole I would estimate that it uses these images three to four times more than Al Jazeera English and BBC World News. Whether consciously-intended or not – and there can be no doubt that these are excellent television pictures, and CNN has better access to them than the other two channels I am looking at – the overall effect is to frame bin Laden’s death in terms of these crowds, as potentially a moment for celebration.¹⁶² My content

analysis is of course suggestive rather than definitive, but the three channels do appear to contextualise 9/11 and bin Laden's death in very different ways.

I also coded how often social media were mentioned in relation to bin Laden's death, given their prominence in journalistic and academic debates about the future of broadcast news. But I was surprised to find that social media were very seldom mentioned: 1 minute and 23 seconds' worth over the three-day period on BBC World News; nothing at all on Al Jazeera English; and 2 minutes and 15 seconds on CNN International. The BBC discussions of this element involved audience reaction to the story; the same went for CNN International, which also discussed how the crowds celebrating in the United States were hearing about the news via social media. This is intriguing, on the face of it, in view of how important a story this was for social media, and the fact that the news broke first on Twitter.¹⁶³ One explanation is that once the story had been confirmed by the US authorities, it no longer made any sense to mention what was being said on Twitter,¹⁶⁴ which is after all a competitor in some ways; continually mentioning it would undermine these channels' own increasingly contested claims to authority. Another reason is that broadcasters are understandably wary of getting a story like this wrong, and they do not yet feel ready to rely on social media. Later on in the coverage, this element almost certainly was covered in the channels' dedicated social media programmes, so output editors on pure news programmes may have felt they didn't need to do very much on it. Above all, no doubt, as the BBC's Jamie Angus puts it, bin Laden's death was 'such a cracking, route one story' that editors may have simply felt that there wasn't enough time to look at social media in any sustained way.

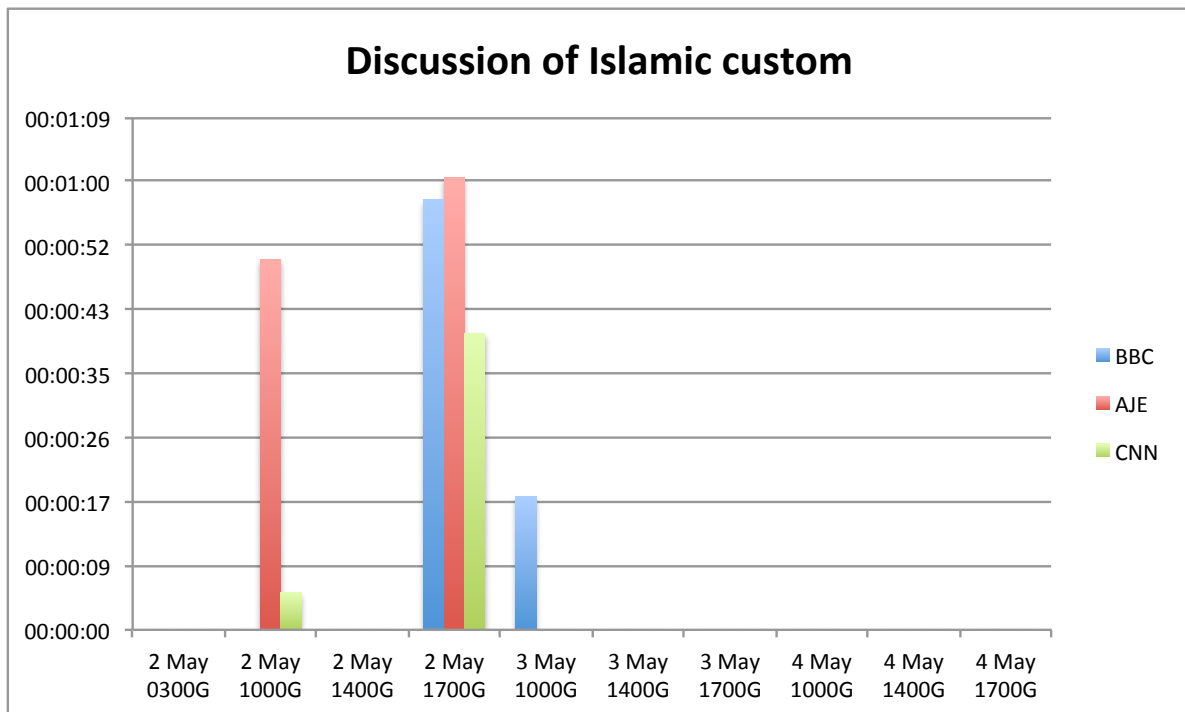
In addition, I examined discussions of the Arab ‘spring’ or ‘uprising’. This metanarrative has been seen as a fresh ‘news frame’ for the Middle East, one that might be able to replace the previous focus on Islamic extremism.¹⁶⁵ Al Jazeera English and CNN discuss it the most (although one of CNN’s discussions does so in negative terms, focusing as it does on whether Al Qaeda will benefit from the current unrest in the Arab world) and the BBC talks about it least of all:



Al Jazeera English’s cultural values are clearly at work here, and these may include a sense that Al Jazeera as a whole has been an integral part of the changes in the Arab world since 2011.¹⁶⁶ CNN’s level of interest may spring from an identification with the aspirations of its audiences in the Middle East and elsewhere in the developing world. The BBC’s apparent lack of interest, meanwhile, is harder to explain – but one theory might be that it flows from a British cultural reflex: a post-colonial reluctance to get swept up in the excitement of apparently world-historical events. Certainly this is of a piece with the BBC’s view (as suggested by first part of my content analysis) that the

Middle East is not an important part of the bin Laden story. Whatever the reasons, someone who watched one of these channels in isolation would be given a subtly different framework for understanding the broader implications of bin Laden’s death from someone who watched just one of the other two.

Then there are the very different levels of interest in whether bin Laden’s burial at sea is appropriate to Islamic custom or not:



Al Jazeera English picks up on this quickly, and discusses it at greater length, and I’d suggest that culture and part of its target audience (the global Muslim diaspora) are the deeper forces at work here. This coding does apparently point to something of an Islamic frame being at work in Al Jazeera English.

On the whole, then, my content analysis suggests that the channels ‘frame’ their coverage in different ways. Over time, they converge to a significant extent around *where* they should deploy their resources geographically, moving from contextual detachment to a more global, less nationally- and regionally-bounded form of impartiality/objectivity. As

resources move into place, and there is time to reflect on the story, the ‘view from somewhere’ gives way to something much closer to the ultimately impossible, but nonetheless vital, ‘view from nowhere’. However, there is more divergence around largely unconscious and culturally-embedded decisions surrounding how to frame a story like the death of Osama bin Laden. This is something I will explore further in my final chapter.

5. Conclusion

My aim in this paper has been to investigate what the coverage of bin Laden's death shows us about the interplay between an ethic of detachment and other economic, audience-centred, organisational and cultural factors at work in television news. In my content analysis, I attempted to test three competing overarching hypotheses about the broadcast output of BBC World News, Al Jazeera English, and CNN International. The first is that there is essentially a lack of journalistic detachment in their coverage. The second is that their output is characterised by 'contextual' detachment that is limited by the audience and/or other factors. In the third, there is a more far-reaching form of detachment, not decisively marked by the channels' cultures of origin.

As we have seen, the first full hour of coverage of bin Laden's death is strongly slanted towards the United States in CNN's case, and towards the Middle East and South Asia in that of Al Jazeera English (and towards the US, to a lesser extent, with BBC World News). This suggests that my first hypothesis (where we see a lack of real detachment) or my second (where there is regionally-bounded 'contextual' detachment) applies at the very start of the story. CNN and Al Jazeera English, in particular, could undoubtedly have done a better, more detached job of keeping a global perspective on a global story. Even journalists and academics who don't believe in impartiality or objectivity would have to agree that CNN's coverage would have been more accurate, had the channel made more effort, as Al Jazeera English did, to work out what was going on in Pakistan, using local journalists, either on air or as sources, to find out more about the raid. The same goes for Al Jazeera English's neglect of the vital US angle.

The key point about CNN International here is that it is broadcasting the output of its US counterpart. This is a way of using resources as efficiently as possible, which reflects a deeper belief that international audiences are attracted to CNN as a specifically American brand. From an American viewer's point of view, of course, the US focus of the coverage is arguably as detached as it needs to be (no matter how globalised the world may or may not have become). For the US viewer, in other words, there is *contextual* detachment. Perhaps, though, an international viewer who is interested in

‘going beyond borders’ needs a rather more globalised perspective, even on a story with a strong American component like this one. S/he may experience contextual, US-centred detachment as a *lack* of genuine detachment. Similarly, the perceived audience is almost certainly the decisive factor with Al Jazeera English, which is attempting to represent and broadcast to the global South. But its neglect of the US angle in the first full hour of the coverage does not give its viewers an adequately international sense of the story, wherever they may be. My content analysis would suggest that the channel does not go beyond contextual detachment at this early stage.

Yet we quickly move – from 1000GMT on 2 May onwards – to a much more detached perspective, as newsgathering resources are fully deployed, and there is time to reflect on the story. BBC World News and CNN International still have split personalities on 2 May, as they alternate between national and international iterations of their brands, corresponding to the second and third of my hypotheses respectively. Nevertheless, the geographical distribution of the channels’ coverage becomes similar over time, even if their national and regional roots are always subtly visible. Geographically speaking, an ethic of editorial detachment plays a stronger and stronger role. We move from contextual detachment to my third hypothesis – a global detachment that is internationally- rather than nationally- or regionally-focused.

This progression over time seems to echo Nagel’s account of detachment as a fragmentary, halting process, rather than an instantaneous state of intellectual grace. And yet there is little or no convergence over the framing devices that I included in my content analysis. While, over time, the channels give their viewers a similar plurality of datelines, their coverage transmits decidedly different perspectives on what 9/11, the Arab spring, and Islamic custom mean in the context of this particular story. Again, the perceived audience is an important factor. As a group, Al Jazeera English’s highly multicultural staff are unlikely to have a particularly Islamic perspective on the world; but in their broadcast output, as my content analysis implies, they may nonetheless emphasise an Islamic frame, in an attempt to appeal to a non-Western audience. It is also impossible here to rule out the influence of the channel’s opaque funding and governance, and its role as a PR vehicle for the state of Qatar. CNN, meanwhile, believes its audiences are interested in an American-inflected view of the world (hence the

channel's distinctive treatment of 9/11 elements). And with the BBC, intriguingly, no obvious trend emerges from this part of the content analysis. This could simply reflect the narrow range of elements I coded for. But perhaps it also suggests that on a fundamental level the BBC acts as if it thinks its audiences do not want any obvious framing. It may also imply that this aspect of World News' output is not particularly influenced by perceived audiences or other factors.

Audiences *do* appear to be the most important factor interacting with journalistic detachment, as el-Nawawy and Iskander suggest. It is highly unlikely that BBC World News or CNN International would simulcast with the domestic BBC or CNN US if they thought the result would alienate their audiences. Nor would Al Jazeera English at times downplay the American aspect of this story unless they thought that this editorial strategy would attract viewers interested in a non-Western perspective. Funding, organisation and internal cultures all matter; yet the key argument at these news organisations, I would suggest, centres on what viewers – real or imagined – are thought to want.

And, as the BBC idea of 'due impartiality' intimates, audiences and detachment have a complex relationship. The BBC editorial guidelines say 'due impartiality' means that 'impartiality must be adequate and appropriate to output, taking account of the subject and nature of the content [and] the likely audience expectation'.¹⁶⁷ Journalists at BBC World News, Al Jazeera English, and CNN International tend to be well-educated, urban, and cosmopolitan. They have far more in common with one another than with many members of their audiences. Some of their viewers may have very conservative, parochial attitudes; others may be diasporic or binational; and others may be fully globalised. If we accept what the BBC says about 'due impartiality' taking account of 'audience expectation,' then the appropriate form of detachment will look very different, depending on which set of viewers you think you are broadcasting to.

In future, it is possible that BBC World News and CNN International will face more pressure to simulcast – partly because of potential cost factors, and partly as a way of playing to their home advantages in an increasingly noisy and competitive marketplace. Maybe this will appeal to viewers who are not looking for anything more than contextual detachment. But equally, at a time when the line between domestic and foreign news is being eroded, and globalisation seems likely to continue its onward

march, producing an increasingly internationally-minded audience, this approach could damage the overall impartiality and objectivity of their journalism as a global, rather than national or regional, product.

Al Jazeera English, for its part, faces an altogether different challenge. It is in a position to be able to provide a fundamentally international product. It visibly has the money and the newsgathering power (located in the right places) to be able to lead the global news agenda in the coming years, provided that it can deal with its negative image in the United States, counter growing concerns over its governance, and strengthen its coverage of the West. All the same, it will be interesting to see how Al Jazeera English's editorial agenda develops once it has a better sense of who its real audience is. Will its viewers ultimately want contextual detachment rather than a global perspective?

To end on a personal note, I am firmly convinced that it is worth striving for the paradoxical but ultimately essential 'view from nowhere' in journalism, even if this will always remain a Sisyphean task. On a global story, this means taking a global perspective. It requires us to move firmly and decisively beyond our national and regional perspectives. But at the same time, I am aware that much of the future of global television news will depend on whether this global detachment turns out to be what global audiences actually want. In a globalising world, how many viewers will be *genuinely* satisfied, in the long term, with the 'view from somewhere'?

6. Note on methodology

I coded 3 to 4am on 2 May 2011, as this was the first full hour of output when there was breaking news of bin Laden's death. The very first coverage of the story actually began in the half hour before this, and although it would have been interesting to have analysed this part of the coverage and examined who broke the news first, it would have also meant that I was dealing with different sample sizes, so I did not include it in my coding. I coded 10 to 10.30am, 2 to 2.30pm, and 5 to 5.30pm on 2, 3, and 4 May 2011, because the times involved worked well for the time zones of the key countries involved in the story (the United States, Pakistan, and Afghanistan). They were also times when all three channels were showing news output. The only time this wasn't the case was on CNN International at 1000GMT on 4 May, when there was a sports news bulletin, despite my best efforts to check the schedule, and my prior conversations with CNN staff. I haven't included this segment in my coding.

I am conscious of the fact that while I chose half-hour segments (apart from with the first hour), some of them were conceived by their editors as hour-long programmes. I would argue, however, that the overall quantity of material analysed cancels out any unfairness here. I would also add that viewers rarely understand programmes in the same way editors do, and are likely to see what's at the top of each broadcast hour as reflecting what each channel thinks is most important about a particular story.

I knew, moreover, that there would be severe time and access limitations before I began the coding. This meant that my sample size was fairly small, and that I did all the coding myself. If I had the chance to develop this research further, I would naturally use a larger sample, and I would follow the accepted best practice in content analysis by assembling a group of coders. The same time and access restraints led me not to count very short elements of the output – short clips of press conferences and interviews (by which I mean clips that were less than 40 seconds along). This does mean that my analysis is rather more broad-brush than I would like it to be. In particular, it tends to understate the sophistication of CNN International's output, which relies heavily on

pacey, well-chosen clips. This is somewhat ironic, because it was the difficulty of getting access to CNN's archive that led me to impose these restrictions in the first place.

The unit of analysis for the geographical distribution of output includes only what I term 'direct coverage'. By this, I mean coverage produced entirely or largely by the channels themselves, rather than unmediated content from news agencies like Reuters and AP. By 'unmediated content', I mean when the channels run essentially unedited agency material (for this reason, Obama's press conference announcing bin Laden's death, which would have been distributed over Reuters or AP, is not counted in the coding of the 0300-0400 GMT segment from 2 May). 'Direct coverage' includes reporter two-ways from a particular place, reporter packages,¹⁶⁸ live studio guests, and phone interviews from a certain location. I counted the length of time these elements lasted for.

I did wonder if I should exclude phone interviews from this unit of analysis, because in principle it would be possible to have phone interviews from right across the world, irrespective of where a channel focuses its newsgathering resources. However, the counter-argument is that where a news organisation chooses to get its interviews from is highly indicative of where its cultural and geographical reflexes lie. Crucially, moreover, there were relatively few phone interviews, and as it happened the interviews that did happen on the phone were all in places where BBC World News, Al Jazeera English, and CNN International had their own reporters anyway.

I also chose to separate out the 'in house' elements – presenter-led material or reporter packages from London (with the BBC), Doha (with Al Jazeera English), and Atlanta or London (with CNN International). I counted these as a discrete category. Obviously this understates the weight of coverage from America on CNN International, to take just one example. But I know from my own experience how important a news organisation's 'base' can be as a driver and producer of broadcast content. Frequently the easiest and most efficient way to get something on air is to produce it in house. I wanted my coding to be able to capture this nuance.

For the 'framing' elements, I counted the duration of discussions of the 'Arab spring', social media, and the Islamic propriety or otherwise of bin Laden's burial at sea. The same goes for the 9/11 elements, except that some of these involved images as well,

and at points some of these elements overlapped (when, for example, there was an interview with a victim's relative, and pictures of Ground Zero now were played in split screen).

7. Select bibliography

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8. Notes

¹ Leon Barkho's study of the BBC, Al Jazeera English and CNN highlights the channels' confidence that the truth of any given story will be more or less transparent and readily available to the journalistic observer. He calls this 'an epistemological extreme of realism where veils to truth can be removed, enabling audiences to see nothing but the truth' (*News from the BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera: How the Three Broadcasters Cover the Middle East* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2010), pp. 12-13). Similarly, Barbie Zelizer notes that 'most journalists tend to take exception to the idea that they make or construct the news, preferring to see their role as one of holding up a mirror to events rather than reflecting the acts of negotiation, power brokering, and resource management that typify newsroom practices' (*Taking Journalism Seriously* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2004), p.14).

² For a detailed account of the raid itself, see Nicholas Schmidle, 'Getting bin Laden', *New Yorker*, 8 August 2011 (http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/08/08/110808fa_fact_schmidle).

³ A. Hoskins and B. O'Loughlin write that 9/11 was 'amplified as television news', which was 'used explicitly as a terrorist weapon', and 'ultimately unable to contain its own hijacking' (in *Television and Terror* (London: Macmillan, 2007), p. 15).

⁴ CNN.com, 'You are either with us or against us', 6 November 2001 (<http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/>).

⁵ Barkho, op. cit., p. 1.

⁶ I chose to study TV, rather than radio, because there is still no radio station that competes with the BBC World Service for audience reach and influence.

⁷ http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/about/how_we_govern/agreement.pdf

⁸

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/Section_04_Impartiality.pdf

⁹ <http://english.aljazeera.net/aboutus/2006/11/2008525185733692771.html> .

¹⁰ Anonymous source.

¹¹ S. Thielman, 'CNN touts web stats, impartiality at upfront', *Variety*, 14 April 2010 (<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1118017717?refCatId=1614>).

¹² Zelizer (op. cit., *passim*) argues that these have been three of the most influential academic approaches to the study of journalism. I also sympathise with her take on leaving the world of journalism for that of academia: 'Nothing I read as a graduate student reflected the working world I had just left. Partial, often uncompromisingly authoritative ... these [academic analyses of journalism] failed to capture the life I knew' (op.cit., p.2).

¹³ Barkho, *ibid*, p.23.

¹⁴ See W. Donsbach and B. Klett, 'Subjective objectivity: How journalists in four countries define a key term of their profession', *International Communication Gazette* 51 (1993), pp. 53-83.

¹⁵ Cf. P. Bourdieu, 'The Political Field, the Social Science Field, and the Journalistic Field', in R. Benson, E. Neveu, eds., *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), pp. 33, 41.

¹⁶ See P. D'Angelo, J.A. Kuypers, eds. *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, NY and Oxford: Routledge, 2010, pp. 17-26.) As it happens, it is striking how little the phrase 'war on terror' was used in the on-air output I analysed in this paper.

¹⁷ For instance, at 10.16am (GMT) on 2 May 2011, CNN's correspondent and presenter in Abu Dhabi, Rima Maktabi, quotes a former Saudi extremist who has told her that even before his death, Osama bin Laden had effectively been 'killed in Tahrir Square'.

¹⁸ M. el-Nawawy and A. Iskander, op. cit., p. 209.

¹⁹ Kai Hafez, for one, argues that TV news is still overwhelmingly shaped by nation states in *The Myth of Media Globalization* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007). But perhaps the more established position is that globalisation is one of the most important trends in broadcasting. See Oliver Boyd-Barret and Terhi Rantanaen, eds., *The Globalization of News* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998) and Ali Mohammadi, ed., *International Communication and Globalization* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997).

²⁰ M. Schudson, 'The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism', *Journalism* Vol.2 (2001), pp. 149-170.

²¹ For two different BBC takes on this distinction, see Richard Sambrook, 'Holding On To Objectivity', lecture given at Columbia University, 27 October 2004 (http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/speeches/stories/sambrook_poliak.shtml) and David Edmonds, 'Can News Ever Be Objective?', Harkness seminar talk, March 2006 (http://www.harknessfellows.org.uk/documents/TransatlanticReportSpring07_000.pdf).

²² See the entries on 'impartiality' in *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.385, and in S. Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 181.

²³ Section 4, BBC Editorial Guidelines (http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/Section_04_Impartiality.pdf)

²⁴ T. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), p.8.

²⁵ 'Impartiality,' the report says, 'involves a mixture of accuracy, balance, context, distance, evenhandedness, fairness, objectivity, open-mindedness, rigour, self-awareness, transparency and truth' (*From Seesaw to Wagon Wheel: Safeguarding impartiality in the 21st century* (BBC, 2007), p.5).

²⁶ Schudson, op. cit, p. 150.

²⁷ J. Painter, *Counter-hegemonic news: A case study of Al-Jazeera and Telesur* (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2008), p. 7.

²⁸ P. Bourdieu, *On Television* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

²⁹ N. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (Penguin, New York, 1985), pp. 84 and 105.

³⁰ For a summary of the debate around this, see M. Rai and S. Cottle, "Global mediations: On the changing ecology of satellite television news", *Global Media and Communication*, 3(1) (2007), p. 52.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 65-66.

³² Painter, op. cit., p. 1.

³³ See M. Bell, 'Truth is our currency', *From Our Own Correspondent*, rebroadcast 28 December 2011 on the BBC World Service (available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/fooc.mp>). There is also the 'peace journalism'

movement; a recent contribution to this field is M. el-Nawawy and S. Powers, 'Al-Jazeera English: A conciliatory medium in a conflict-driven environment?' in *Global Media and Communication*, 2010 (6), pp. 61-84.

³⁴ *New News, Future News*, (London: Ofcom, 2007), p. 65

(<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/tv-research/newnews.pdf>).

³⁵ The 'view from nowhere' phrase has been popularised by Jay Rosen, although he himself is not straightforwardly opposed to impartiality and objectivity, as he explains in 'The View from Nowhere: Questions and Answers' (<http://pressthink.org/2010/11/the-view-from-nowhere-questions-and-answers/>). For good links to both sides of the debate, see K. Marsh, 'Transparency is the new eyewash', *BBC College of Journalism* website, 14 December 2010 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/journalism/blog/2010/12/transparency-is-the-new-eyewash.shtml>).

³⁶ A. Sherwin, 'Mark Thompson: Britain needs a channel like Fox News', *Guardian*, 17 December 2010.

³⁷ Cf. P. Norris, M. Kern, and M.R. Just, eds., *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, The Government, and the Public*, (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 3-4.

³⁸ *Newsnight*, BBC 2, 16 May 2002

(http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2002/05_may/16/dan_rather.shtml).

³⁹ P. Robinson, 'The CNN Effect Revisited', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 22:4 (2005), p. 346.

⁴⁰ J. Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, (London: Allen Lane, 2011), p. xix.

⁴¹ M. El-Nawawy and A. Iskander, *Al-Jazeera: The Story of the Network that is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism*, (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2003), 2nd edition, pp. 25, 41.

⁴² Barkho, op. cit., p. 7.

⁴³ Cf. Rowena Mason, 'Al Jazeera English focused on its American dream', *Daily Telegraph*, 23 March 2009. As John Pullman, Al Jazeera English's former head of output, puts it, there are 'still people [in the United States] who won't see Al Jazeera as a legitimate news organisation' (author interview, 2 December 2011).

⁴⁴ G. Tuchman, 'Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 77, no. 4 (January 1972), pp. 660-679.

⁴⁵ D. Schiller, 'An Historical Approach to Objectivity and Professionalism in American News Reporting', *Journal of Communication*, Autumn 1979, pp. 55-56. D. Nolan and T. Marjoribanks summarise this debate in 'Objectivity, Impartiality and the Governance of Journalism', *TASA Conference* (2006), pp. 1-10.

⁴⁶ T. Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980); N. Chomsky and E. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent* (London: Vintage, 2006); S. Hall and others, *Policing the Crisis* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978), pp. 53-77; D. Hallin, *We Keep America on Top of the World: Television Journalism and the Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 80; Glasgow University Media Group, *Bad News* (London: Routledge, 1976).

⁴⁷ Barkho, op. cit.

⁴⁸ Nagel, op. cit., p. 68.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 7.

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 6-7.

⁵¹ J. Lichtenberg, 'In Defence of Objectivity Revisited', in Curran, Gurevitch, eds. *Mass Media and Society*, 2nd ed. (London: Arnold, 1996) pp. 225-242.

⁵² See S.D. Reese, 'Understanding the Global Journalist: a hierarchy-of-influences approach', *Journalism Studies*, Vol.2, 2001, pp. 173-187.

⁵³ For an even-handed discussion of this debate, see P. Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁵⁴ Rai and Cottle, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

⁵⁵ Painter, op. cit., p.9.

⁵⁶ John Naughton makes this case in 'The age of permanent net revolution', *Observer*, 5 March 2006.

⁵⁷ Nic Newman, *Mainstream Media and the Distribution of News in the Age of Social Discovery*, (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2011), p. 52.

⁵⁸ Nic Newman, Reuters Institute seminar in Oxford, 12 October 2011.

⁵⁹ Newman, op. cit., p. 6, pp. 30-34.

⁶⁰ CNN's international correspondent Nima Elbagir told me that 'increasingly ... and this is what the Internet has done, people generally don't tune in to hear the facts. They know what the facts are ... Often, they tune in to try and understand what it means' (author interview, 17 November 2011).

⁶¹ Henery, op. cit., p. 9, and P. Harding, *The Great Global Switch-off* (London: Oxfam, Polis, and IBT, 2009), p. 23.

⁶² <http://www.aljazeera.com/aboutus/2010/11/20101110131438787482.html> .

⁶³ Murrell, op. cit., p. 129. Jamie Donald confirmed this figure was broadly accurate (author interview).

⁶⁴ See C. Paterson, 'Global Battlefields', in O. Boyd-Barrett and T. Rantanen, op. cit., p. 86.

⁶⁵ R. Sambrook, for one, writes about a 'more fluid approach' developing, 'relying more on parachute journalism, stringers and freelancers' (see his *Are Foreign Correspondents Redundant?* (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2010), p. 18).

⁶⁶ Cf. L Vargas and L. Paulin, 'Rethinking Foreign News from a Transnational Perspective', in Perlmutter, Hamilton, eds., *From Pigeons to News Portals* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 2007), pp. 20-46.

⁶⁷ Sambrook, op. cit., takes an optimistic view. But I suspect some editors are pessimists. I have heard many anecdotes over the years about the unwillingness of certain London-based output editors to use excellent journalists with non-British accents on flagship domestic programmes.

⁶⁸ E-mail exchange between the author and Richard Sambrook, former BBC director of global news, 8 December 2011.

⁶⁹ BBC source. 'World Newsgathering' is *not* the same thing as 'World News'. It is a separate department, only partly funded by World News. Much of its funding comes from other news departments within the BBC.

⁷⁰ Email to author from BBC Press Office, 10 December 2011, and BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2010/11, p. 2-49 and p. F3

(http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/annualreport/pdf/bbc_executive_2010_11.pdf and http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/annualreport/pdf/bbc_ar_online_2010_11.pdf).

⁷¹

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/review_report_research/strategic_review/global_strategy.pdf, p. 4.

⁷² Author interview with Jamie Angus, acting head of BBC World News in May 2011, on 2 December 2011. His claim matches my content analysis. CNN, incidentally, drops its advertising from 0300 to 0400 GMT on 2 May, but not in any of the other hours I looked at.

⁷³ See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-11572171> (on the licence fee freeze),

http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2011/03/coverage_of_world_changing_eve.html (on the impact of the ‘big stories’ of 2011 on budgets), and

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/dqf/> (on ‘Delivering Quality First’).

⁷⁴ BBC source.

⁷⁵ H. Miles, *Al-Jazeera: How Arab TV News Challenged the World* (London: Abacus, 2005), 2nd edition, pp. 346-7.

⁷⁶ Mason, op. cit. M. El-Nawawy and S. Powers arrive at a similar figure in *Mediating Conflict. Al-Jazeera English and the Possibility of a Conciliatory Media* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2008), p. 33.

⁷⁷ L. Barkho, "The Arabic Al Jazeera vs Britain's BBC and America's CNN: Who Does Journalism Right?", *American Communication Journal* 8, no. 1 (2006), p. 13.

⁷⁸ ‘We were told: don’t worry about that [audiences],’ says John Pullman. ‘Just make the best programme you can’ (author interview, 2 December 2011).

⁷⁹ J. Lloyd, ‘Qatar calling’, *FT Magazine*, 4 November 2011.

⁸⁰ T. Figenschou quotes Al Jazeera sources as saying that only 15-20% of the budget of the network as a whole (English and Arabic) comes from advertising (*The South is Talking Back: Al Jazeera English as a Strategic Contra-Flow*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of Oslo: 2010)).

⁸¹ See H. Miles, ‘Al Jazeera boss steps down: strains with Qatar royals?’, *BBC News* website, 1 October 2011 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/world-middle-east-15129440>), and A. Shadid, ‘Qatar Wields an Outsize Influence in Arab Politics’, *New York Times*, 15 November 2011, p. A1.

⁸² Author interview, 1 December 2011.

⁸³ John Owen, former Executive Producer at Al Jazeera English, Reuters Institute seminar, 26 November 2011. As it happens, *Time* magazine nominated the Emir of Qatar as a contender for ‘person of the year’ in its 14 December 2011 edition, and mentioned Al Jazeera as one of his main achievements.

⁸⁴ A. Chrisafis, ‘The news through French eyes: Chirac TV takes on “Anglo-Saxon imperialism”’, *Guardian*, 6 December 2006.

⁸⁵ C. Murrell, ‘Baghdad bureaux: an exploration of the interconnected world of fixers and correspondents at the BBC and CNN’, *Media, War and Conflict*, 3(2) (2010), p. 129.

⁸⁶ Internal CNN e-mail. The general upwards trend seems to be confirmed by the *CNN Observations* blog (see <http://cnnobservations.blogspot.com/2011/12/cnns-november->

numbers.html). *CNN Observations* says it is ‘a fan website only’, with no affiliation to CNN.

⁸⁷ Author interview, 17 November 2011.

⁸⁸ Cf. Project for Excellence in Journalism, *The State of the News Media* (2011), <http://stateofthemediainfo.org/2011/cable-essay/data-page-2/>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ To see how CNN markets itself to advertisers, look at <http://www.cnnmediainfo.com>.

⁹¹ For instance, I asked Nima Elbagir why CNN International appeared to do so much British news, and she told me that the channel’s viewers in Africa were extremely interested in Britain and its politics. This, I think, suggests a fairly elite African audience.

⁹² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-radio-and-tv-12957296> and BBC Annual Report, 2010/11 (http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/annualreport/pdf/bbc_executive_2010_11.pdf).

⁹³ See http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/whoweare/mission_and_values/.

⁹⁴ Henery, op. cit., p. 12.

⁹⁵ Author interview, 2 December 2011.

⁹⁶ John Owen, Reuters seminar, and Ben Rayner, author interview.

⁹⁷ It is available in New York, Los Angeles, Burlington, Toledo, Washington DC, and San Francisco (see R. Lovler, ‘Absence of Al Jazeera English in U.S. is troubling’, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 February 2011, p. F4, and <http://www.aljazeera.com/demandaljazeera/2011/07/201173116144745180.html>).

⁹⁸ Ben Rayner, author interview.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ See Barkho, *News from the BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera*, on the channel’s transparency vis-à-vis its editorial guidelines. I would add that everyone I have spoken to at Al Jazeera English has been exceptionally helpful and open to answering questions.

¹⁰¹ Author interview.

¹⁰² Henery, op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁰³ Author interview, 13 December 2011.

¹⁰⁴ ‘I would suggest it’s the story itself [that drives content] and second of all it’s the audience,’ says Al Anstey (quoted in Henery, op. cit., p. 21.)

¹⁰⁵ Cf. this press release from July 2011:

<http://cnnasiapacific.com/press/en/content/705/>

¹⁰⁶ Ipsos Business Elite Europe survey 2011 (<http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/mediact-business-elite-europe-tables-september-2011.pdf>).

¹⁰⁷ Nima Elbagir, author interview.

¹⁰⁸ Press release cited in endnote 105.

¹⁰⁹ Henery, op. cit., p. 12.

¹¹⁰ Nima Elbagir, author interview.

¹¹¹ W. Breed, ‘Social Control in the Newsroom: A Functional Analysis’, *Social Forces*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (May 1955), pp. 326-335; E. Epstein, *News from Nowhere* (New York: Random House, 1973).

¹¹² Author interview.

¹¹³ Nima Elbagir, author interview.

¹¹⁴ Barkho, *News from the BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera*, pp. 128-9.

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- ¹¹⁵ Anonymous source.
- ¹¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁸ John Owen, Reuters Institute seminar.
- ¹¹⁹ Witness the ‘Demand Al Jazeera in the USA’ campaign on its website.
- ¹²⁰ Anonymous.
- ¹²¹ M. Zayani and S. Sahraoui, *The Culture of Al Jazeera: Inside an Arab Media Giant* (North Carolina: McFarland, 2007), p. 4, pp. 53-4, 171.
- ¹²² Nima Elbagir interview.
- ¹²³ Ibid.
- ¹²⁵ Jamie Donald, author interview.
- ¹²⁶ L. Kueng-Shankleman, *Inside the BBC and CNN: Managing Media Organisations* (London: Routledge, 2000).
- ¹²⁷ Cf. L. Kueng-Shankleman, ‘Organisational Culture inside the BBC and CNN’, in S. Cottle (ed.), *Media Organization and Production*, (London: Sage, 2003), p. 77.
- ¹²⁸ L. Kueng-Shankleman, *Inside the BBC and CNN*, pp. 132-146.
- ¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 135, pp. 148-9.
- ¹³⁰ J. Randall, ‘Crisis-prone BBC management needs management clear-out’, 27 July 2007.
- ¹³¹ Barkho, *News from the BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera*, p. 137.
- ¹³² Ibid, p. 57, and Painter, op. cit., passim.
- ¹³³ Ibid, p. 132.
- ¹³⁴ Painter, op. cit., p. 20. Ben Rayner told me that one of the defining features of Al Jazeera English’s programmes was their willingness to *stay* with a particular story for an extended period of time (author interview).
- ¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 137.
- ¹³⁶ J. Lloyd, op. cit. John Pullman, ex-head of Al Jazeera English output, told me that whilst the channel itself is impartial, it does often put strongly partial voices on air. He thinks this explains why – wrongly, in his view – some people claim that the channel has a particular editorial slant.
- ¹³⁷ This is one of Barkho’s central arguments in *News from the BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera*.
- ¹³⁸ A. I. al-Najjar, ‘How Arab is Al-Jazeera English?’, *Global Media Journal*, Vol. 8, Issue 14, Spring 2009, article 7.
- ¹³⁹ The channel’s Middle East consultant, Atef Dalgamouni, says that it ‘cannot be a copy of the Arabic channel because the viewers are different’ and ‘they do not have the same feeling about Arab issues as the Arab public does’ (cited in Barkho, *News from the BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera*, p. 129).
- ¹⁴⁰ An anonymous Al Jazeera English source pointed up the lack of any substantial coverage of homosexuality in a conversation with me. For a discussion of the coverage of homosexuality at both Al Jazeera Arabic and Al Jazeera English, see A. Krajnic, ‘Al Jazeera Arabic ignores gay news’ (<http://www.iglhrc.org/cgi-bin/iowa/article/pressroom/iglhrcinthenews/1089.html>).
- ¹⁴¹ To take one small example, its library staff were resolutely helpful with me, despite repeated technical problems, and they seemed genuinely committed to giving me a good

impression of the company. They also asked me several times what I as an outsider thought they could do better, and I was struck by the apparently very high morale of the staff I spoke to.

¹⁴² P. Seib, *The Al-Jazeera Effect: How the New Global Media Are Reshaping World Politics* (Virginia, Potomac: 2008), pp. ix-x.

¹⁴³ Nima Elbagir, author interview.

¹⁴⁴ Elbagir talks about the ‘row’ – the three-level process in which CNN editorial staff in Atlanta routinely check every line of every news package produced by CNN reporters, no matter where they are in the world. There is no equivalent of this at the BBC, where reporters in the field are expected to take responsibility for the accuracy and quality of their work, at least on a day-to-day basis.

¹⁴⁵ Anonymous.

¹⁴⁶ Kueng-Shankleman, *Inside the BBC and CNN*, pp. 150, 154, 158, 161.

¹⁴⁷ Author interview.

¹⁴⁸ It is relevant that the ‘row’ (see endnote 144) is based in Atlanta.

¹⁴⁹ By ‘two-way’, I mean a unscripted or scripted conversation between a presenter and a reporter.

¹⁵⁰ I define ‘package’ as a pre-recorded, scripted news report by a reporter, featuring soundbites from various participants in the story.

¹⁵¹ CNN’s Jamie Donald thinks ‘aspiration’ is the common thread running through the different demographics who watch CNN (author interview).

¹⁵² Nima Elbagir, Jamie Donald, author interviews.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ben Rayner, author interview.

¹⁵⁵ Jamie Angus, author interview.

¹⁵⁶ Zayani and Sahraoui, op. cit.

¹⁵⁷ I’m thinking in particular of a Nick Spicer package from Hamburg on 2 May, where the initial idea – of getting reaction to bin Laden’s death in the city where some of 9/11 hijackers met – didn’t really generate anything very strong. I thought the same about an Alan Fisher as live from Madrid on the same day, which felt rather flimsy, particularly on a day when so many other strong elements were coming out of the US and Pakistan. Naturally there were weak moments on the other channels – but I’m mentioning these because they seemed to stem from having too many resources rather than the better-known problem of having too few.

¹⁵⁸ There was an excellent Yvonne Ndege report on the Al Qaeda threat in Nigeria, for instance.

¹⁵⁹ Khanfar’s phrase is cited in Barkho, *News from the BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera*, p. 137.

¹⁶⁰ This partly reflects the limitations of my sample. I do know that there was a Jonathan Head package, providing reaction from Cairo, and that this ran at any times of the day. I doubt, however, that this significantly changes the broader pattern I describe here.

¹⁶¹ Jamie Donald, author interview.

¹⁶² CNN does also carry a long interview with a mother of a 9/11 victim who condemns these celebrations.

¹⁶³ See Newman, pp. 30-34.

¹⁶⁴ Richard Sambrook's view, conversation with the author.

¹⁶⁵ See endnote 17. This is also something Robert Fisk talks about in his 16-minute-long interview with Al Jazeera English at 0300 GMT, 2 May 2011.

¹⁶⁶ Wadah Khanfar has spoken frankly about the close relationship, as he sees it, between Al Jazeera as a whole and the 'Arab spring'. See S. Rustin, 'Wadah Khanfar: Be Patient with the Arab World', *Guardian*, 15 October 2011.

¹⁶⁷

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/Section_04_Impartiality.pdf.

¹⁶⁸ See endnotes 149 and 150.