Unworthy Victims:
hostages, hostage-takers & media effect

by

Hamish Walker

This dissertation is submitted to the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media & Cultural Studies, Cardiff University, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in International Journalism.

September 2005
To the Children of Beslan
To access *Unworthy Victims*, the online forum, visit:

www.unworthyvictims.cf.ac.uk

username: **unworthy**   password: **bobsyouruncle**
Declaration A

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ________________________________ (candidate)

Date ________________________________

Statement 1

This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in International Journalism.

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Date ________________________________

Statement 2

This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to bring together a number of principle actors in the broadcasting of hostage-taking situations to discuss the role the media play in the promotion of terrorist’s demands.

Intrigued by the controversy surrounding the broadcasting of hostage’s pleas toward the end of 2004, with the capture and subsequent murder of Ken Bigley and then of Margaret Hassan, I was prompted to question the human rights issues, and sought to understand what makes a hostage a ‘worthy’ victim to the international media.

Privy to editorial discussions through my position in the newsroom of BBC World, the corporation’s 24 hour international television news channel, my research has drawn upon comments from editors, news reporters, presenters and hostage victims themselves. As the project progressed I became further attuned with the issues the channel faces when broadcasting hostage situations in terms of balancing competition with integrity, and pressure to screen pictures with the rights of the victim.

The conclusions I have drawn from the results of an online forum, an interactive questionnaire and from personal interviews are united in their opinions of the way hostage situations should be covered. Yet in reference to ‘unworthy’ victims this dissertation is a continuation of an eternal debate.
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Section 1
Chapter 1

Introduction

“Al-Qaeda thinks that Chechnya is cheap meat.”¹

- Eyewitness, Beslan siege

It was this reference in the Financial Times – during the Beslan School # 1 siege in North Ossetia in September 2004, to a person as “cheap meat”, that starting me thinking about the value of an individual as a victim. While wrong in its assumption that the Beslan terrorists were from Al-Qaeda, the citation encourage me to take note of the unbalanced statistics in television broadcasting, where a single Western victim can get extensive coverage while 100 non-Western victims are pushed down the running order.²

The eyewitness’s assumption about Al-Qaeda also drew my attention to hostage situations in Iraq and how international news coverage has evolved on this topic, particularly since the invasion of the country by coalition forces in 2003.

There is nothing new about the savagery of hostage-taking, what is changing is the reason behind why militants and extremists do it. The grim reality of hostage-taking appears to have evolved from a vehicle of extortion into an opportunity for publicity.

This dissertation will focus on television news broadcasting, looking at the ‘media effect’ to see if the reporting of a hostage event can influence its outcome. The project also asks: what factors influence the quality of a victim, in terms of their ‘worthiness’, to the media? To research this question, this dissertation has utilised literature research,

¹ Aliev (04/09/2004) Financial Times p 7
² The running order is the schedule from which a news bulletin follows.
an online forum titled *Unworthy Victims*, a group survey and personal interviews in an attempt to assess the general feeling of industry opinion.

While the project does not seek to create profound new practices in journalism, it does plan to bring together professionals to create new ideas regarding the approaches to coverage of a number of recent hostage situations. It hopes to identify how these situations have been reported and factors that influenced decisions made by editors. Due to the overwhelming number of cases of hostage situations reported, the project has attempted to focus research on just three, outline in the chapter and article summaries below.

This critique takes the form of a project-based dissertation³ which breaks down ideas into analytical features. One looks at Iraqi hostage situations, such as the taking of British hostages Kenneth Bigley⁴ and Margaret Hassan,⁵ while another examines Russian hostage situations, in particular the school siege in Beslan. The final chapter considers comparisons drawn between Al-Jazeera and BBC World.⁶

The journalistic writing of the project-based dissertation allows readers to skip through the pieces, designed to be stand-alone, except for a short link at the end of each into the next feature.⁷ Throughout the analytical features the language in the media and restraints over story production are examined.

News broadcasters are exposed to infinite variables that can work to influence a day’s agenda. This dissertation will attempt to recognise a number of them. It will do this by

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³ A ‘project-based dissertation’ is a journalistic approach, as outlined by Cardiff University.
⁴ Ken Bigley was captured in Iraq on 16 September, 2004. See Article 1.
⁵ Margaret Hassan was captured in Iraq on 19 October, 2004. See Article 1.
⁶ Al-Jazeera and BBC World are 24-hour international, television newscasters.
⁷ Ekevall (2005) Lecture
focusing on BBC World television, the commercial arm of the organisation who broadcast internationally to as many as 250 million homes.  

The project gathers some evidence of errors in broadcasting and discusses how they could affect hostage situation outcomes and the perceived ‘worthiness’ of victims. It also touches upon the affect prominent criticism from the general public, describing the media as a tool to promote hostage-takers demands, has over editorial decision-making.

**The Discussion**

The structure of this dissertation follows the discussion that unfolded on the online forum, *Unworthy Victims*. Developed as a brave new approach to research gathering, *Unworthy Victims* has been used to bring people together. It takes advantage of my position at the BBC, working in the BBC World newsroom as a media manager, where I was able to sign up potential participants. The fundamental idea behind the forum was that it allowed participants to take into account other member’s comments before posting their own.

A group survey in the form of an online questionnaire was also completed. Journalism students, mixed with a number of other media professionals, were approached for their heightened awareness of news broadcasting issues. They were asked to complete the online questionnaire after watching an edit of a number of clips broadcast by BBC World and Al-Jazeera television. Finally, a series of personal interviews with key actors in the broadcast coverage of hostage-taking situations was completed in an attempt to augment the topic and ideas.

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9 See Appendix C
10 This position requires me to record agency and correspondent feeds, and assist the newsroom to have quick access to footage.
11 See Appendix F
The dissertation is displayed as follows:

**Chapter 1 – The key players (Literature Review)**

This chapter attempts to find a hole in the fabric of academic and media research. To achieve this literature has been reviewed with the results intertwined amid a summary of the key players within a hostage story, including: the government, the media, the audience, the hostage and the terrorist.

Class analysis was also recognised as instrumental to the ‘worthiness’ of a victim. The hierarchy of victims was discussed using examples from recent news stories. This included comment on the media aftermath of 11 September, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York (9/11). And through a comparison of news time devoted to the coverage of hostage situations with the coverage of reconstruction after the Boxing Day tsunami of 2004.

**Chapter 2 – Moderating mayhem (Methodology)**

The second chapter describes the model designed for the research of the project. It sets apart contemporary study from online practical ideas. It discusses how these ideas were formulated, and the methods required for achieving satisfactory outcomes.

The methodology identifies *Unworthy Victims* as the main research tool. It is important when reading the methodology to distinguish ‘participants’ (those who comment on the online forum, *Unworthy Victims*) as separate from ‘respondents’ (those who completed the online questionnaire).
Chapter 2 explains how the other research techniques fed into Unworthy Victims, such as the group survey, used to assist with the construction of questions for the forum. It mentions the questionnaire’s editorial design, and the expectations of emotional replies respondents were supposed to give after watching news footage of the Beslan siege of 2004.¹²

Furthermore, the chapter talks in depth on the subject of the online forum and what it was supposed to achieve. It identifies Unworthy Victims as a unique research tool, understood not to have been used before at Cardiff University to gather information for a dissertation at Master’s level.

My role as moderator, controller of an online forum, was also discussed, chiefly the difficulties associated with inspiring participation.

**Article 1 – Are media helping hostage-takers?**

Article 1 focuses on recent hostage-taking situations in Iraq. It begins with a recap of the review of Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman’s book *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media*. The authors’ ideas of filters, used in their identity of ‘worthy’ news stories, are touched upon. This is followed up by treatment of their ideas, developed through media observation of: details of savagery, the lack of indignation and insistent demands for injustice, and the lack of zeal in the search for villainy at the top.¹³

Chomsky and Herman’s case study of Jerzy Popieluszko, a Polish priest murdered in 1984, is also discussed, with their quantitative analysis techniques, used in the

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¹² See Appendix F
¹³ Chomsky & Herman (1988) p 2
Popieluszko case, adopted to examine the ‘worthiness’ of Margaret Hassan and Ken Bigley, separately captured and then murdered in Iraq.

This article will also begin to decipher comments from Unworthy Victims, focusing on one line of questioning from the forum. The question selected has also been used as the title of the article: Are media helping hostage-takers?

**Article 2 – Pictures from Beslan**

This article focuses on the recent siege where up to 1,000 women and children were taken hostage at School # 1 in the town of Beslan, North Ossetia. Again the results from Unworthy Victims attempt to steer conversation with input from personal interviews also included.

The results from the group survey were also taken into account. Pictures of the tragedy, broadcast on BBC World, are displayed so as to pass on to the reader an idea of the footage the group survey watched.\(^{14}\)

**Article 3 – Proof of life**

The final article discusses the evolving policy of broadcasting hostage situations at BBC World. The article singles out Al-Jazeera as a controversial broadcaster, criticised by Western governments for its alleged anti-Western feeling.

Throughout the article comparisons between BBC World and Al-Jazeera are drawn. Schedules of the two broadcasters will be evaluated to see if output varies dramatically.

It is important to note, as Al-Jazeera currently broadcasts in Arabic, therefore research

\(^{14}\) See Appendix F
is opinion based and relies heavily on evidence gathered through discussion. The article finishes with a review of selected debates that unravelled on *Unworthy Victims*, including the affect world-wide-web\(^{15}\) technologies may have on hostage situations in the future.

**Conclusion**

In the conclusion a critique of the research techniques is offered. Particularly, an analysis of the success of the conversation on *Unworthy Victims* is given. The aim of the project is examined to ascertain whether it bridged the gap, through the accessibility of the world-wide-web, between news organisations and across oceans. Finally, the ‘worth’ of a victim is discussed to identify why some are just “cheap meat”\(^{16}\) to the media.

**Reflection**

This final section of the dissertation also reflects upon the research approach and discussion generated by the project. It examines the success of an online forum as a tool for research, discussing problems that were encountered. In particular, it refers to the persistence the role of moderated required.

Ultimately, the reflection attributes the success of this project to my position at BBC World. It recognises the access to high-profile journalist and BBC archive material as instrumental in this study of hostages, hostage-taking and media effect.

\(^{15}\) The term world-wide-web will be used throughout this dissertation as it denotes online content rather than technology in which the word Internet refers.

\(^{16}\) Aliev (04/09/2004) *Financial Times* p 7
Chapter 2

The key players (Literature Review)

“Through its use of violence, for example, the major function of television is to teach
the audience about the characteristics and status of different types of people and about
the distribution of power in society.”

- Barrie Gunter, *Media Research Methods*

This literature review represents an exploration of a hole in the fabric of journalism. In
international television media some lives appear to be valued more than others. By
examining arguments put forward by pioneers in the world of media analysis a number
of questions have been brought to light. How are certain hostages viewed by
government and terrorist organisations? Are these views independent or do
governments and terrorist organisations work within a similar set of unspoken
guidelines when classifying an individual? And are the media helping hostage-takers?

Publications on terrorism, hostage-taking, contemporary class analysis and various
reviews of broadcasters have been sought. The findings have been grouped under
headings identifying the key players of hostage events.

To begin the process of examining how a victim’s ‘worthiness’ to the media is
established we should first look at the process of how influential members of society
assign status. By analysing the relationship between these architects of ‘perceived
status’ we can begin to understand how a class structure is established and why it might
be useful and most probably essential in the maintenance of power and influence.

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17 Gunter (2000) p 204
The Government

*The Philosophical Challenge of September 11* is a collection of essays examining the causes and effects of the attacks on the World Trade Centre, the Pentagon and on the plane that crashed in a field in western Pennsylvania on 11 September, 2001 (9/11). The book examines the cause of the attacks and gathers opinion and analysis of the early days of the US government’s responses. Tom Rockmore and Joseph Margolis, the editors of the collection, exclaim:

> Though there have been other catastrophic events, 9/11 now looms as distinctly sui generis – fundamentally so.\(^{18}\)

The question of why 9/11 is considered to be unique is important when looking at the status of a victim. We could easily conclude from the extensive media coverage and political comment that the attacks of 9/11 were inflicted upon the most important people in the world. In his essay, “Us” and “them”: the politics of American self-assertion after 9/11, Andrew Norris, another contributor, questions why the date of September 11 has become important solely for the attacks on the World Trade Centre.

> Almost no one will even momentarily recall that September 11 is the anniversary of the 1973 US-supported military coup in Chile.\(^{19}\)

The concept of victim was highlighted by the US government in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Andrew Norris questions whether the plight of the terrorist was communicated to the US citizens. He asserts:

> What is widely seen as an assault upon the United States is more closely associated with the destruction of a symbol of international capitalism than it is with an attack upon the actual centre of operations for the American military; for it illustrates how profoundly disconnected the American people are from the history of what has been done with their money and in their name.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{18}\) Rockmore & Margolis (2005) p 1

\(^{19}\) Norris (2005) p 19

\(^{20}\) Ibid
Andrew Norris continues by examining the actions of the US government, comparing them with those of terrorist organisations. The author concludes that the perception of the US government is similar to that of a terrorist cell.\(^{21}\)

The difference between the notions of a government and that of a terrorist becomes unclear when considering state-sponsored terrorism.\(^{22}\) Terrorism is the unlawful use or threat of violence and the US claim that state-sponsored terrorism occurs where nations use these tactics as a means of political expression.\(^{23}\) But the US government is one of the most obvious offenders. Terrorists are known to take hostages as a method of intimidating or coercing for ideological or political reasons.\(^{24}\) The US and British governments could be considered as employing similar policies in their detaining of individuals without trial at Guantanamo Bay detention centre in Cuba and Belmarsh prison in South London.\(^{25}\)

The events of 9/11 aroused a large amount of attention across the world because they affected people with power. Power, through wealth, has the ability to influence. Kofi Annan, secretary general of the United Nations (UN), when commenting on power said: “The reality is that power and wealth in this world are very, very unequally shared.”\(^{26}\)

### The Media

Power and wealth are identified by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, founders of concepts of media analysis, as contributors to one of five filters news organisations adhere to when selecting stories. These filters have become a benchmark for the media

\(^{21}\) Ibid
\(^{22}\) Ibid
\(^{23}\) <US Department of State (200)>
\(^{24}\) <Oxford Dictionary (2005)>
\(^{25}\) Extremist Al-Zarqawi has also noted this comparison by making victims wear orange jump suits, similar to those worn by prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. See Article 1
\(^{26}\) <Annan (2002) Speech>
industry and help to understand how a victim’s ‘worthiness’ may be defined. In their book, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, they mention all five:

- the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms.
- advertising as the primary income source of the mass media.
- the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and “experts” funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power.
- “flak” as a means of disciplining the media.
- “anticommunism” as a national religion and control mechanism.  

When considering Chomsky and Herman’s second filter, identifying advertising as a source of income for mass media, we can examine the ‘independent’ news organisation. ‘Independent’ news organisations are generally required to make a profit, and to maintain healthy sales/viewing figures it must recruit and retain its readers or viewers. To do this ‘independent’ organisations establish an agenda so audiences can recognise whether the product is to their taste. An organisation striving for an audience looking for news with integrity, as apposed to one focusing on popular culture such as that of tabloid news, must avoid creating ‘worthy’ victims. This is because by placing specific media attention upon one victim and avoiding another destroys integrity as it reduces impartiality. Reputable organisations establish an audience’s trust by maintaining a level of journalistic responsibility through a perceived impartiality. The media is also a vital link for a hostage-taker to communicate information and attempt to influence government policy remotely.

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27 Chomsky & Herman (1988) p 2
When a news organisation focuses on a victim it has a great deal of control over the individual’s ‘perceived status’, and media sensitivity is often distorted. In an article titled ‘Victim, offender and bystander: crime in the sky?’ that appeared in the *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, the writers question the media’s perception.

Media often do not see incidents in terms of the realities of the event, but more appropriately in terms of an event’s significance to national values, tastes, world views and social relations.

Utilising a theory of crime and victimisation, we suggest that journalists as active agents, when facing contradictory situations and information, often try to reshape and redefine their information in order to justify the ideology and culture in which they are immersed.\(^\text{28}\)

To circumvent media perceptions, extremists can turn to the world-wide-web to publish their information. This offers an opportunity for extremists to liaise with each other anonymously and influence others they have never met before. Common interests can be explored and bonds formed; cementing ideas and their issues with society. And communication over the world-wide-web is observable, so a source of news itself.

Poignantly, the recent killings of hostages in Iraq have been able to be viewed via the world-wide-web. Captors have published images of their hostages and killings to a wider audience, while maintaining anonymity, by allowing them to be picked up by media organisations.

Yet the broadcast media receives much criticism when it chooses to air these pictures. Viewers claim that it promotes the hostage-taker’s cause, giving them free publicity. This issue is not a new one and was extensively debated when Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the UK from 1979 until 1990, proclaimed that the Irish Republican

\(^{28}\) Nakhaie & Pike (1995)
Party (IRA)\textsuperscript{29} would be prevented from having access to media and essentially denied their voices from being broadcast on air. She famously declared:

\begin{quote}
Democratic nations must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

Other arguments say terrorism is given too much attention by governments. According to Joan Smith, opinion writer for \textit{The Independent}, more attention was given to terrorism through George Bush’s “war-on-terror” than was placed on the tsunami disaster of 2004. She says: “The numbers killed in terrorist outrages are much smaller than those from natural disasters.”\textsuperscript{31} But perhaps this is what the audience want.

\section*{The Audience}

Over the last half a century audiences are becoming savvier in their selection of news output. By reflecting on the inter-war years, between the First and Second World-Wars, audiences began to recognise the media as a vehicle of propaganda contributing to the rise of fascism.\textsuperscript{32} In his book, \textit{Media Research Methods}, Barrie Gunter discusses the control the media brandished.

\begin{quote}
The media were attributed the power to create extreme dependences in respect of the basic psychic needs for identity and self-realisation. The mass audience was part of a process of control and homogenisation by the media. Real differences associated with class were concealed without being resolved.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

Nowadays education is forcing media to answer to public demand for honesty and integrity. “Audience members are active rather than passive and bring to the media a

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{29} The IRA is an Irish republican paramilitary organisation. Its stated aim has been the reunification of Ireland which it believed could not be achieved without a violent campaign directed against British rule in Northern Ireland. <Wikipedia (2005)> Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia that can be added to by anyone with access to the world-wide-web.
\textsuperscript{30} <American Bar Association (1985)>
\textsuperscript{31} Smith (5/1/2005) \textit{The Independent} p 31
\textsuperscript{32} Gunter (2000) p 13
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid
variety of different needs,” says Gunter. Yet a class structure still exists through the presence of ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’ victims.

The Hostage

A victim’s ‘worth’ can be denoted by a number of elements, depending on a captor’s ‘perceived status’ in society. A ‘good’ hostage appears to be denoted by their class and status in a community. The hostage’s age, sex and position in society could all contribute to the influence a hostage situation has over its desired audience. Hostages who have little influence in a community are likely to be more vulnerable in a hostage situation, as hostage-takers could consider them worthless in pursuit of demands. When reviewing a victim’s grasp over a television audience, Gunter refers to:

The cultivation approach departed from other analytical frameworks in its emphasis on the victims rather than the protagonists of violence.

Therefore as a general rule we can say that, to a journalist, women and children have proven to be valuable, from the perspective of a hostage-taker and an audience, and are therefore ‘good’ hostages. They are considered more vulnerable members of a community and evoke an immediate response. An example of where women and children were held hostage was in Beslan, North Ossetia, in 2004, where 331 died when Chechen separatists took around 1,000 adults and children hostage.

Another example of a ‘worthy’ hostage was Terry Waite, a Briton held in Lebanon and finally released after five year in 1992. Waite explains how he recognised the motives behind the hostage situation he had entered but maintained a role as liaison even under

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34 Ibid
35 Gunter (2000) p 204
36 <BBC website 8 (2004)>
extreme physical duress. When he was released Terry Waite returned to the UK where the nation rejoiced, throwing street parties to celebrate.\textsuperscript{37}

**The Terrorist**

Many, as Andrew Norris mentioned earlier, have questioned the importance of 9/11, while others look at it as a turning point and an inevitable action. Jean Baudrillard, a French sociologist and cultural critic best known for his notions of hyperreality,\textsuperscript{38} believes we had all dreamt of 9/11 and that governments now have to deal with a contradictory, delicate situation. In his book, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, he says:

> The whole play of history is disputed by this event, but so too are the conditions of analysis. You have to take your time. While events were stagnating, you had to anticipate and move more quickly than they did. But when they speed up this much, you have to move more slowly - though without allowing yourself to be buried beneath a welter of words, or the gathering of war and preserving intact the unforgettable incandescence of the images.

Jean Baudrillard’s account is a complex and intense analysis of the aims, thoughts and results of the 9/11 terrorists. Terrorism, according to Baudrillard, appears to be a result of a breakdown in communication and a nurtured hate of the unknown and is a normal way of life for many. So who are the terrorists?

According to Moorhead Kennedy, an American specialist in Islamic law, who was taken hostage in Iran from 1979 until 1981, terrorism is an outlet for the unskilled and poor.

> Terrorism offers meaning and excitement to rootless, unemployment, and unskilled young people without hope of opportunity in legitimate occupations… If some motives or practices of the terrorist do not live up to

\textsuperscript{37} Waite (1994) p 100

\textsuperscript{38} Hyperrealism is a symptom of postmodern culture. Hyperreality does not “exist” or “not exist”. It is simply a way of describing the information to which the consciousness is subject. <Wikipedia (2005)>
the nobler of his or her declared political, cultural, or social objectives, which does not mean that those objectives are not worth taking seriously.\textsuperscript{39}

Kennedy’s description reinforces an idea that the relationship between hostage-taker and victim are distinct. That is, if hostage-takers are generally unskilled, or less ‘worthy’ to their community, then it can be observed that the direct opposite applies to victims. For a victim to be successful to the hostage-taker and media they must be acceptable to an audience.

Overall, the media coverage of terrorism gives the impression that captors are becoming more desperate. When comparing the hostage cases of Terry Waite, kidnapped in 1987,\textsuperscript{40} and Margaret Hassan, a British care worker kidnapped and killed in Iraq in 2004,\textsuperscript{41} separated by more than a decade in their capture, there is a dramatic difference. It appears that terrorism is becoming more random and that captors consider their hostages only as “cheap meat”.\textsuperscript{42}

\section*{Cheap Meat}

The theories behind class analysis have been well documented, with it being one of the most discussed concepts in sociology.\textsuperscript{43} The question of how an individual’s life becomes meaningless, allowing governments and terrorists to consider policy and agenda more important, also appears to be well researched but not with reference to recent events. For example, only a limited amount of literature exists analysing the recent terrorist activity in Russia, particularly the case of the school siege in Beslan, North Ossetia.\textsuperscript{44} The increase in recent hostage taking in Iraq is also an area that academics have not had the time to explore. The hostages taken in Iraq have represented

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{39} Kennedy (1998) p187
\textsuperscript{40} It is thought that Terry Waite was held by Hezbollah. See Article 1
\textsuperscript{41} Margaret Hassan was held by an unknown group. See Article 1
\textsuperscript{42} Aliev (04/09/2004) \textit{Financial Times} p 7
\textsuperscript{43} Sorensen (2000) p 16
\textsuperscript{44} See Article 2
\end{flushleft}
a variety of nationalities, each appearing to be treated slightly differently by their captors.

The case of Margaret Hassan, an aid worker who held British citizenship, and was granted Irish nationality after being kidnapped, but who had lived in Iraq since the 1970s with her Iraqi husband, should be discussed in detail. Additionally, a comparison will be made between her case and of Ken Bigley, another Briton held and killed in Iraq in 2004, due to their similar capture timelines and outcomes.45

Finally, it appears that the fraying edges of society in conflict-stricken regions such as Northern Ossetia and Iraq can only get media attention through drastic means. This will be touched upon, with further discussion of whether terrorists today do more damage to their cause than they do in promoting it.

Oleg Karginov, whose niece was in the Beslan School siege, said of the guerrillas to the Washington Post: “They have to be captured. They’re just walking meat, not humans. What they’ve done with these children, even a wolf wouldn’t do that to another wolf.”46

45 See Article 1
Chapter 3

Moderating mayhem (Methodology)

To get inside the mind of the media-makers this project utilises the mayhem of the world-wide-web. Used by editors, journalist, politician and terrorist, this relatively new medium represents a complex interconnected structure allowing virtually unrestricted access to extensive information and dynamic communication.

Depending on the country of publication, the world-wide-web imposes practically no regulation, leaving editorial control of content up to the organisation or individual. The evolving technique of an online forum has been used to take advantage of the accessibility and immediacy of web technology. *Unworthy Victims*, an online forum, has been built specifically for this research project.\(^47\)

A research model was developed (see Figure 1) taking in a number of study techniques. These techniques included: a literature study, an online survey, a series of personal interviews and an online forum. It was decided, early on in the project, that research would have to be ongoing and intertwine with the write-up. This was due to the unpredictable nature of postings by participants onto *Unworthy Victims*, making it a lengthy process that lasted the duration of the dissertation timeline.

To find focus the dissertation was designed as a case-study, researching three hostage situations. It was hoped that those participating in the project would be able to find common ground through the case-studies investigated. As there were few constraints

\(^{47}\) Unworthy victims is hosted at URL: [www.unworthyvictims.cf.ac.uk](http://www.unworthyvictims.cf.ac.uk). The username onto the forum is ‘unworthy’ and the password is ‘bobsyouruncle’.
over the project it was seen as an opportunity to be bold and unique. This was accomplished by relying heavily on the world-wide-web.48

*Unworthy Victims* was viewed as the ultimate tool in which the other methods would feed into. The idea was that the initial techniques would help to fill holes in the fabric of research by providing questions that could be further discussed and possibly answered on the online forum by key actors.

Figure 1: The thinking behind the research

![](image)

**Literature study**49

To establish ideas for this dissertation particular literature has necessarily been reviewed, with the technique continued throughout the project. The initial literature review *The key players* was completed to flesh-out ideas. Due to the nature of the embryonic subject, the world-wide-web was particularly useful to keep up to date with the latest hard news and analysis of hostage situations.

This dissertation aimed to identify approaches to news presentation by touching upon the relationship between hostage-taking groups and governments. Through a continuing literature survey I have obtained greater knowledge of political events that have contributed to individuals being kidnapped.

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48 Robson (1995) p21  
49 Thomas, Castaway & Wuyts (1998) np
Group Survey

A group survey was completed through an online questionnaire, initially designed to study notions of biased reporting by comparing Al-Jazeera and BBC World. This online survey was originally conceived as an idea derived from postal survey techniques and was intended to assist in the formulation of questions for the online forum. It is an example of quantitative research practices and did not require manipulation of participants prior to the experiment. Klaus Bruhn Jensen in his textbook, *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research*, explains:

> Surveys collect data after the fact. Because they obtain information from respondents about their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviours on a *post hoc* basis, surveys cannot test cause-effect relationships directly.

The initial idea was for respondents to be unfamiliar with the content of the research prior to the experiment. But this was unrealistic, as hostage-taking, particularly the case studies I am looking at, were prominently covered in the UK which also argues their ‘worthiness’.

The original plan was to separate the respondents into two groups to watch two different broadcaster’s presentations of the same news stories. It was expected that one broadcaster would depict the stories with a higher degree of violence. The first (control) group would have watched Western footage from BBC World. The second (test) group would have been exposed to a translated copy of Al-Jazeera’s footage. But the lack of access to footage from Al-Jazeera meant that the two groups could not be achieved so the groups were brought together.

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50 Al-Jazeera and BBC World are 24-hour international, television newscasters.
51 Postal surveys involve mailing questionnaires to a predefined sample of respondents. Gunter (2000) p 144
52 Newton (2001) np
53 Jensen (2002) p 214
54 Jensen (2002) p 214
The respondents’ replies are expected to demonstrate a possible hypothesis about specific behavioural effects.\textsuperscript{55} The aim was to identify the degree to which the group was sympathetic to a hostage-taker’s cause. And could have been summed up in this question: \textit{Which broadcaster projects a more sympathetic message about hostage takers to their audience?}

As an alternative, the experiment sampled media content from BBC World. The units of measurement were defined as the ‘breaking news’ day of broadcast for each hostage situation selected. The final survey looked for an emotional response from the respondents.\textsuperscript{56} However, this qualitative analysis technique was supportive and could not stand alone. Jensen observes:

> Quantitative content analysis tend to be purely descriptive accounts of the characteristics of media output, and often make few inferences in advance about the potential significance of their findings for what they may reveal about production ideologies or impact on audiences.\textsuperscript{57}

### Personal interviews

Personal interviews were also pursued to complement the group survey. A number of personal, unstructured interviews with professionals took place. The aim of these personal interviews was to augment the topics and ideas that would be generated on \textit{Unworthy Victims} by fleshing-out ideas. The personal interviews worked together with the other elements of research because results can be subjective, as observed by Jensen.

> All interview statements are actions, arising from interaction between interviewer and interviewee.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55} Jensen (2002) p 214  
\textsuperscript{56} This was then drawn upon in Article 2. See Appendix D for questionnaire.  
\textsuperscript{57} Jensen (2002) p 222  
\textsuperscript{58} Jensen (2002) p 240
The intention was to interview a number of significant individuals who could actually help create new information. These interviewees included key actors from news broadcast, such as Zahera Harb, former journalist and presenter in Lebanon and Jalal Othman, manager of the Information Office of the Libyan/American Friendship Association in Tripoli.

**Online forum (Unworthy Victims)**

The main tool used to gather research was *Unworthy Victims*, an online forum designed and built specifically for this project. This new tool represented a unique but uncertain method of qualitative research.

It was recognised that research is becoming particularly dependent on computer technology and that the world-wide-web has established itself as a vital tool for news presentation. The world-wide-web has opened up access to high-profile actors through email, making interviewees much more accessible in that they are more likely to answer questions, being able to address them quickly and in their own time. The world-wide-web, through weblogs (blogs), also provides individuals the facilities to freely give their opinion on issues to an infinite audience.

Significantly the world-wide-web has been used by hostage-takers as a tool to contact governments and the media to forward evidence of their victims. Online forums have also proved to be an essential means, used by extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda, to recruit support and preach ideas. It was intended that the discussion on *Unworthy Victims* may evolve rather like that in the world of an undercover extremist. Forcing

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59 Online conferencing ideas stem from the MSN messenger format. <msn messenger (2005)>
60 A weblog is a web-based publication consisting primarily of periodic articles. <Wikipedia (2005)>
participants to feel a somewhat remote association with one-another, held together by
technology.

The idea, initially sparked through a conversation with Naomi Dunstan (Technical
Demonstrator, Cardiff University), was to develop a website where an online
conference could take place. Participants would have been gathered together at a set
time to talk about the subjects under consideration. The conference should have
couraged an open interactive discussion, not available in a personal interview and
allow individuals to participate from their own homes or offices. This type of
conference, in world-wide-web terms is known as synchronous,\footnote{Salmon (2005) p 31} where the
conversation is live.

But as the website was developing, it became clear that an online conference was too
complicated to achieve in the set time. An online forum was devised instead which is
asynchronous,\footnote{Ibid} where participants login to comment in their own time and is not live.
This avoided the technological restraints and eliminated the administration of bringing a
number of people together online at the same time.

Participants were invited to take part from across the world. The forum offered the
added benefit that information was instantly transcribed. There were also plans for the
content gathered on *Unworthy Victims* to be edited and published into a weblog to
attract further comment from the general public, across the globe. This was also
dropped due to time restraints. It was also felt that enough information would be
assembled through *Unworthy Victims* and the group survey to sustain the dissertation.
Unworthy Victims allowed members to interact with one-another. They could login from their own computer terminal at a time determined by them. And they could take into account evolving news issues over the period of the forum. But the online forum also hindered research by not allowing topics to be examined further, as in a personal interview where a line of questioning can be pursued. The forum was also a difficult medium in which to inspire consistent contribution. And online forums are a relatively new idea so online etiquette was not familiar to some participants, evident in the way they did not respond to each other’s comments. Alan Bryman in his book Social Research Methods, observed: “It is possible that technophobic [participants] may be a bit alarmed by their use, but, by and large, the use of computer assisted interviewing seems destined to grow.”

One of the roles of a moderator, the website controller, is to establish online etiquette. But to do this would require a list of rules which was thought to present another hurdle for participants and inhibit candid expression. Without the etiquette rules stagnation still existed and may be due to the reserved language used by members. It was evident that participants were aware their comments may be quoted so avoided being frank.

A private online forum generally requires a moderator to host it. Research has proven this to be a difficult role as participants respond unpredictably to instructions. In examples of online learning and discussion it can be extremely difficult to inspire participants to post regularly, if at all. Gilly Salmon, author of Moderating; the Key to Teaching and Learning Online, believes motivation from the moderator is essential to be successful online.

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63 Bryman (2001) p 113
The participant needs information and technical support to get online and strong motivation and encouragement to put in the necessary time and effort.\(^6^4\)

With the distinguished profiles of many of the participants who contributed to *Unworthy Victims*, the facilitator had to be aware of the fine-line between inspiring participants and being too persistent. Initially, all potential contributors were enthusiastic but having them commit their remarks to the forum has been difficult.

*Unworthy Victims*, set up as an asynchronous private forum, allowed free and uninterrupted discussion. A password was installed on the forum to prevent tampering. This was successful except that it also provided participants with one extra hurdle when posting comments. In addition, members were also expected to have a second, personal, password which enabled the moderator to see who had logged in as it registered their name next to their post. This can be seen in Figure 2 where the forum recognises Yvonne Ridley and Terry Waite\(^6^5\) by highlighting their names next to their comments.

![Figure 2: Two postings from a question on Unworthy Victims](image)

The use of online forums as a research technique appears to be in its infancy. They are not especially common on professional organisation websites, where they are found is in the gathering of comment by media organisations vox-pops.\(^6^6\) But for such comment to have a sense of balance, a journalist should sample a range of people. Automatic,

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\(^{64}\) Salmon (2005) p 31  
\(^{65}\) Participants of *Unworthy Victims*  
\(^{66}\) Vox-pop is the abbreviation of ‘voice of the people’ (vox-populi).
open, online forums prevent the publisher from being in control of vox-pop selection. Therefore, in the current climate of interaction on the world-wide-web the majority of comments come from those representing a younger audience, surfers.67

The questions placed on the forum were designed to be indistinct so as not to isolate or discourage participants. By being too specific if was felt that some would avoid questions and look only for those directed at them. Participants were informed from the beginning they would receive regular emails. The questions were sent and then uploaded onto the forum in a drip-feed over two weeks so as it encourage participants to visit the website more than once.68 The plan was that each time a member received an email they would be reminded to login and update the discussion.

The forum was given an initial two week time limit which helped to encourage the first rounds of discussion. The time limit was then extended when further questions and members were introduced. Once the forum actually began, members appeared to be initially apprehensive, with few remarks posted. The forum appeared to gather the most useful information when participants debated amongst each other.69

It has been observed in online teaching that participation is most successful when participants have something to gain through contributing. When it comes to reward, Gilly Salmon said: “Participant’s need to know what they will get out of the system when they are involved in logging on.”70 Unworthy Victims had the disadvantage in that it did not offer anything to its members other than healthy debate.

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67 ‘Surfers’ refers to those who casually click between websites.
68 For a selection of emails see Appendix H.
69 See Appendix C
70 Salmon (2005) p 30
However, one advantage of the online forum was that participants were known to the moderator. According to research by Nielsen NetRatings, providers of research and analysis on the world-wide-web, for online tools to work most effectively authors must be aware of who is online, where the user is going and what they do when they arrive at a site.\textsuperscript{71}

*Unworthy Victims* could easily be controlled through Phorum,\textsuperscript{72} the software used to construct it. This software allowed the moderator to monitor content and control access via an administration website. Members could be added and taken away as could topic threads.\textsuperscript{73}

*Unworthy Victims* generated discussion and established the building blocks for this research project. It was designed to develop lines of questioning that could be pursued by participants to flesh-out ideas associated with the broadcasting of hostage-taking. Better results may have been achieved had a synchronous forum been built where participants could have discussed simultaneously but technical limitations and time restraints prevented this from happening. Ultimately, the success of *Unworthy Victims* as an asynchronous online forum was solely dependent on the persistence of the moderator.

**Participants**

At least 15 professionals were approached to participate in the online forum and/or in a personal interview. All participants were encouraged to discuss theories behind hostage-taking as a whole and the information gathered has been channelled into three analytical features. The bulk of the information gathered came from discussion.

\textsuperscript{71}<Nielsen NetRatings (2005) p 2>
\textsuperscript{72}<Phorum (2005)>
\textsuperscript{73}‘Topic threads’ is the name the software Phorum puts to each line of questioning and its responses.
The professionals who participated in the dissertation came from a variety of backgrounds. They included people such as Terry Waite, held hostage in Beirut, Lebanon, for five years, possibly by Hezbollah, and Yvonne Ridley who was captured by the Taliban in Afghanistan. A number of journalists were approached, such as Damian Grammaticas, one of the BBC’s Russia correspondents who covered the Beslan school siege in September 2004. Experts associated with Al-Jazeera were also asked to participate such as Ehab Bessaiso, who writes regularly on the broadcaster.

Additionally, by working at BBC World, I was able to access experienced journalists employed in the newsroom. However, generally the plan was to steer clear of promoting my position to avoid possible sentiments linked to the BBC. To get around this problem identity was given as a post-graduate researcher to potential participants. This excluded those who worked within the BBC where contact was made via the corporation’s internal email.

**Access to the BBC**

Working at the BBC has exposed me to editorial meetings and given me very useful access to archive footage. Through my position as a media manager I have also been able to take note of exact times when BBC World uses footage from Al-Jazeera’s output, as one of my roles is to prepare these clips.

The footage selected for analysis and displayed to the group survey was sourced from BBC World’s library at Television Centre, London. The pictures were transferred on to digital Beta tapes from the newsroom’s server for editing at Cardiff. Three days of

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74 Hezbollah is a Shiite organization with strong ties to Iran, seeking to create an Islamic state in Lebanon. <Westcott (2002)>

75 The Taliban is an Islamic extremist group with strong ties to Afghanistan. <BBC website 2 (2000)>

76 This position requires me to record agency and correspondent feeds, and assist the newsroom to have quick access to footage.

77 Permission was granted by the editor of the programme.
broadcast were selected for analysis. They were the first day of capture of each of the prime cases under examination including; the day of the Beslan attack (1 September, 2004), the day Ken Bigley was captured in Iraq (16 September, 2004) and the day of Margaret Hassan’s capture (19 October, 2004). Extra footage held on the BBC World server and known as stock footage was also sourced, as were clips played into the BBC from news televisions agencies such as Reuters, Associated Press Television (APTN) and Eurovision (EVN).

One problem that did arise in the production of this dissertation relates to the gathering of information on Russia. Broadcasts from Russia proved to be difficult to find and translate into English. As a result footage from Russia was not collected.

Finally, there are necessary limitations in this project, but hopefully the results will go some way to establishing a repeatable method for analysing the broadcast of hostage situations. The model devised to gather information for the analytical features should also be adaptable for other projects requiring discussion from across the world.
Section 2

Article 1

Are media helping hostage-takers?

The media’s saturation coverage of a hostage situation depends on who has been taken.

“Please help me. The British people, tell Mr Blair to take the troops out of Iraq and not bring them here to Baghdad…That’s why people like myself and Mr Bigley are abducted, and we might die,” pleaded Margaret Hassan, a Briton kidnapped in Iraq in 2004, in a hostage-taker’s video aired on Al-Jazeera TV.  

When travelling abroad there are a number of countries that the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) recommend avoiding completely – unsurprisingly Iraq is one of them. On its website the FCO states that: “There have been numerous kidnappings of foreign nationals across Iraq. Some of those kidnapped have been killed by their captors. There is a direct threat of kidnap to foreign nationals, including journalists and aid workers, across Iraq and we believe that British nationals are likely to be targeted.”

According to a BBC special Panorama, a current affairs programme renowned for scrutinising the use and abuse of power, titled Hostage, which aired in the UK on June 29, 273 people from 37 countries have been taken hostage in Iraq in a new kind of warfare which exploits television and the world-wide-web. Panorama reporter Jane

78 <BBC website 10 (2004)>
79 <FCO (2005) Travel advice by country, Iraq>
Corbin talked to former hostages and the families of victims. She said: “We know their faces from the ‘proof of life’ videos created by their captors and used to devastating effect against Western governments.”

Hostage situations vary greatly, as can the way in which they are reported. Here comparisons are made of the coverage in the media of two hostages who were taken and held for similar periods. Ken Bigley was taken hostage in Iraq on 16 September, 2004 and held for 23 days before being killed and Margaret Hassan was taken hostage in Iraq on 19 October, 2004 and held for 29 days before being killed. Discussions will be made on each victim’s individual ‘worthiness’ – the level of coverage a victim receives – to an international audience in both the print media and on BBC World television, the BBC’s commercially funded international 24-hour news and information channel.

Hostage-taking is a vehicle of extortion and an opportunity for publicity. It appears to be becoming less about demands and more about providing a platform for cheap, effective propaganda. Recently, the media has been accused by Western audiences of giving a voice to hostage-takers. In an open forum on the BBC website debating the coverage of Ken Bigley’s capture one individual noted: “People running the media should have the sense not to show such things. It is indulging voyeurism at best. At worst, it is accomplishing exactly what the terrorists want.” Another declared: “The unthinking media is thus the catalyst for escalation of terror by the rendering of horror and atrocity down to everyday news.”

Criticism of media can be better understood through the study of a victim’s ‘worth’. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, authors and academics, are pioneers in the study of ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’ victims. Their investigations can be used to consider how

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80 Preston (2004) np
hostage situations are reported by the mass media. They demonstrate in their book *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media* that the quality of treatment of the ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’ victims differs considerably. Chomsky and Herman said: “While the coverage of the ‘worthy’ victim was generous with gory details and quoted expressions of outrage and demands for justice, the coverage of the ‘unworthy’ victims was low-keyed, designed to keep the lid on emotions and evoking regretful and philosophical generalities on the omnipresence of violence and the inherent tragedy of human life.”\(^{81}\)

Chomsky and Herman argue that power and control should be considered when examining whether the media is helping hostage-takers. They say that in the US wealth and power appear to control access to privately owned media, but that government and business interests penetrate the media through direct control or indirect influence.\(^{82}\) They have established five filters, for use in the US, that news must pass before it becomes mainstream news or worthy news.

Chomsky and Herman’s filters recognise the size, ownership, wealth and profit orientation of the major media firms, the primacy of advertising as an income source for the mass media, the dependence of the media on information provided by government and business, the “flak” – orchestrated attacks on media programmes or coverage by conservative organisations, designed specifically to whip any critical media voices into line, and the “anticommunism,” a political and ideological control mechanism.\(^{83}\)

Elsewhere in *Manufacturing Consent* the authors explore media coverage by identifying three points: the details of savagery, the lack of indignation and insistent demands for

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81 Chomsky & Herman (2002) p 39
82 Chomsky & Herman (2002) p 3
83 Ibid
justice, and the lack of zeal in the search for villainy at the top. They argue that by identifying the detail of savagery and degrading treatment, a victim can earn sympathy from an audience. Otherwise, by omitting details and by not reconstructing the scene with all its agony and brutal violence an audience could become complacent and avoid taking in what actually happened.

Similarly, it has been argued in a report put together by Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, looking at embedded reporters in the recent Iraq war, that British broadcasters omitted the depiction of Iraqi casualties and civilians during the conflict. The report argued that without the gory details of war, news audiences were unable to recognise or associate with victims.

Editors must also take into consideration the effect the reporting of the gory aspects of hostage-taking could have on families of victims. Peter Wilby, former editor of the New Statesman, a London based left-wing magazine, spoke of news blackouts on an online forum titled Unworthy Victims. He believes families of victims are more likely to trust the media to provide accurate information on the situation of loved ones rather than receiving it from government sources. He said: “If a government or other official body requests a news blackout, this should be seriously considered and such requests are very often accepted. But think of the victims’ friends and/or relatives. They may well believe that publicity is the best way of getting their loved ones released, and they may also trust the media to give correct information more than they trust the government.”

Chomsky and Herman’s second point looks at the search for justice. They argue the media’s lack of indignation and insistent demands for injustice can also be used to

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84 Chomsky & Herman (2002) p 42
85 Chomsky & Herman (2002) p 61
86 JOMEC (2003) p 4
87 Wilby (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 1
recognise a ‘worthy’ or ‘unworthy’ victim. And if a victim is recognised by the media then the truth is more likely to be achieved. Chomsky and Herman propose that if a hostage situation is given the media coverage and if the hostage-takers are caught then they are more likely to be taken to court. But the pursuit of justice through the media may also hype an audience into vigilante activity. In 2000, the Kosovo newspaper Dita was fined after being accused of encouraging vigilante violence against Serbs. The newspaper was found to have published names and personal details of Serbs it accused of war crimes during the 1999 Kosovo conflict.

The third point mentioned in Manufacturing Consent is the lack of zeal in the search for villainy at the top. In the US, because of the inter-relationship between ownership and finance of political parties, the media is strongly influenced by government and large corporations. Consequently, a victim becomes ‘unworthy’ if their situation does not suit the agenda or goals of the government or powerful corporation. This inter-relationship can be seen where the majority of US broadcasters are owned by large corporations. For example, the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) is owned by Disney, the Cable News Network (CNN) is owned by Time Warner and Fox News is owned by News Corp. These relationships give big-business real power in terms of recognising individuals as ‘worthy’ or ‘unworthy’. When considering inter-relationships with politicians, Rupert Murdoch, owner of News Corp, which reaches approximately 4.7 billion people through its media, has an obvious connection to the US Republican Party.

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88 Chomsky & Herman (2002) p 43
89 Ibid
90 Ibid
91 <BBC website 3 (2000)>
Frank O’Donnell, former Fox News producer, said on the controversial documentary *OutFoxed: Rupert Murdoch’s War on Journalism* about Fox News: “We received an order from one of Murdoch’s apparatchiks, if you will, that we should cut away from our newscast and start carrying a fawning tribute to Ronald Reagan that was airing at the Republican Convention. We were stunned because up until that point we were allowed to do legitimate news. And suddenly we were ordered, from the top, to carry propaganda; carry Republican right-wing propaganda.” The importance Fox News attributes certain news items hints at an underlying agenda.

Similarly, Chomsky and Herman claim that a victim’s worth can be determined by the weight given them by the mass media.\(^9^3\) In *Manufacturing Consent* the example of Jerzy Popieluszko, a Polish priest murdered by Polish police in October 1984, is compared in terms of value to the US media with priests murdered in Latin America around the same time.\(^9^4\)

Chomsky and Herman looked at the quantitative differences through the analysis of news coverage in a number of newspapers, noting the apparent placement and editorialising of the stories.\(^9^5\) Of the two case-studies examined, they were able to find ten front page articles and three editorials on Popieluszko and not a single editorial on the priests murdered in Latin America.\(^9^6\) From this scrutiny Chomsky and Herman argued that Popieluszko was a ‘worthy’ victim, as he was valued between 137 and 179 times greater than the Latin American priests. Therefore they concluded that a priest murdered in Latin America was worth less than a hundredth of a priest murdered in Poland.\(^9^7\)

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\(^{93}\) Chomsky & Herman (2002) p 43
\(^{94}\) Chomsky & Herman (2000) p39
\(^{95}\) Ibid
\(^{96}\) Ibid
\(^{97}\) Ibid
Chomsky and Herman’s analysis technique can be adapted to examine the media coverage in print and on the BBC website of the capture and subsequent murders of Ken Bigley and Margaret Hassan in Iraq in 2004. But first parallels must be drawn between these two victims to be creditable for comparison. Both were British and held in Iraq and for roughly the same period of time before they were murdered; Bigley is believed to have been held for 23 days and Hassan for 29 days. They were of similar age and they were both captured in the morning; Ken Bigley during a raid on his accommodation and Margaret Hassan on her way to work.

Chomsky and Herman’s quantitative techniques can be adapted through the use of online search-engines to establish an idea of these victims’ worth to the media. In chart below the search-engine LexisNexis, a provider of access via the web to news, legal, business information and market intelligence, was used. The search-engine singled out key words in the media, such as ‘Ken Bigley’ and ‘Margaret Hassan’, for the period of each victim’s capture. The search was restricted to major stories from major world newspapers and then from UK newspapers only.

**Mentions of victims**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Words</th>
<th>Date Captured</th>
<th>Capture Period (Days)</th>
<th>LexisNexis UK Newspapers Capture Period</th>
<th>LexisNexis World Newspapers Capture Period</th>
<th>BBC Website Capture Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Ken Bigley”</td>
<td>16 September, 2004</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Margaret Hassan”</td>
<td>19 October, 2004</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled using data collected from LexisNexis & BBC websites

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98 <BBC Website 9 (2004)>
99 <BBC Website 10 (2004)>

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The key words produced relatively consistent results. In UK newspapers and on the BBC website, from the start of the capture period until death, there were almost twice as many references to Ken Bigley than for Margaret Hassan. And in the World newspapers the results were even more extreme. There were almost three times as many references to Ken Bigley than for Margaret Hassan.

It was important only to examine the media coverage of the capture period of each victim as events after death, such as funerals, would distort figures. Also, after Ken Bigley’s death there were hundreds of references to him in relation to Boris Johnson, editor of The Spectator, a centre-right magazine in the UK, who published a controversial article criticising the city of Liverpool over its grief for Ken Bigley. The editorial said the city was wallowing in “disproportionate” grief for Mr Bigley. Events such as this increased Ken Bigley’s ‘worthiness’ after his death and should be disregarded from this discussion.

The data displayed above show that Ken Bigley was more ‘worthy’ than Margaret Hassan. When considering this there are a number of factors that should be considered, in addition to Bigley being a Westerner. Firstly, he was captured before Margaret Hassan which made it a relatively new scenario to the British media. His family, in particular his brother, were extremely proactive in their appeals for his release. He had more recently lived in the UK than Margaret Hassan who had been living in Iraq for 30 years prior to her capture. He was captured with two Americans, bringing his name into the US media and increasing his ‘worthiness’ on the international stage. He was held during the Labour Party conference in the build-up to the British election, a time when British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s response to a hostage situation would be particularly scrutinised by the media. And he was in the hands of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, one of

100 <BBC website 6 (2004)>
the most wanted men in the World. Al-Zarqawi is infamous for his alleged ruthlessness, and suspected of direct involvement in the kidnap and beheading of several foreigners in Iraq, even of wielding the knife himself.\textsuperscript{101}

The factors contributing to Margaret Hassan’s media popularity as a victim should also be considered. She was a woman which history has proven demands respect in adversity. She had Iraqi citizenship through her marriage, enabling her to gain sympathy from Westerners and Iraqis. She was employed as a key charity worker, representing the Australian leg of Care International in Iraq. However, she was consistently referred to in the media as a ‘care worker’, a title that in the UK has undertones of a menial role. And as a ‘care worker’ she had previously be interviewed about the struggle in Iraq so the broadcast media had access to footage of her. This allowed the industry to create more in-depth reports and gave the audience an opportunity to connect with her so that she became more than just a victim.

Furthermore, if you are going to give ‘worth’ to a human life and value it as an entity then perhaps the victim’s significance to others should be considered. This could be done by examining the person’s occupation. Margaret Hassan was relied upon by a number of others through her position as a care worker for Care International. As a care worker in post-war Iraq Margaret Hassan worked towards rehabilitating health centres and laboratories, providing emergency medical supplies to hospitals and restoring access to clean water. Hassan’s value was also demonstrated when Care International, in response to her abduction, closed its operations in Iraq.\textsuperscript{102} Alternatively, Ken Bigley’s position as a civilian contractor, putting up communication towers, allowed him to

\textsuperscript{101} <BBC website7 (2005)>
\textsuperscript{102} <Care International website (2005)>
make money to be able to retire to Thailand with his second wife and did not benefit others directly.\textsuperscript{103}

Additionally, it could be assumed that if the media attaches a certain value to a victim then perhaps governments do too. When looking at the response from the British government to each of the hostage situations, Tony Blair appeared to address Ken Bigley’s situation more frequently. This may be because Ken Bigley’s family were particularly effective in achieving a high profile in their plea for his release. Footage was obtained by the media of both victims pleading to Mr Blair directly. In Ken Bigley’s case he was directed to appeal for the British government to move to have alleged female prisoners released from Iraqi jails. There were a number of tapes of Ken Bigley distributed and his capture gave the impression that the hostage-takers were more organised than in Margaret Hassan’s case. Mr Bigley was also dressed in the infamous orange jump-suit, symbolic of Al-Zarqawi’s victims, and a deliberate allusion to the clothing worn by prisoners held by the US government at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

At one point in Ken Bigley’s capture, when Mr Blair was leaving the Labour Party conference he did send a message to the hostage-takers, saying that he would consider talking with Al-Zarqawi. But it is suspected by Panorama that Mr Blair did not intend to move away from his policy of non-negotiation, rather this was a ploy to keep Mr Bigley alive to allow more time for a rescue attempt. Jane Corbin, on the Panorama special said: “After the third hostage video the Prime Minister appeared to soften his stance on contact with the terrorists. ‘If they get in touch we would listen.’ Mr Blair’s words opened up the possibility of communication… with the hostage-takers. British

\textsuperscript{103} Corbin (2005) np
intelligence was working frantically to get a lead on where Ken was being held. It was hoped the Prime Minister’s offer could buy some more time.”^{104}

Poignantly, Mrs Hassan was also forced to plead for her release to Mr Blair, but this was not picked up by the mass media to such an extent. Perhaps, in the month between Ken Bigley’s capture and that of Margaret Hassan, organisations such as the BBC began to recognise the possible consequences for their broadcasting of hostages’ pleas. In fact, in terms of footage filmed by hostage-takers of victims pleading directly to politicians, the BBC has an evolving policy. John Sutcliffe, assistant editor on BBC World, said: “On BBC World we do tend to shy away from showing direct appeals to politicians. It is certainly not the editor’s duty to show footage of victims appealing to politicians and my own instinct is to include the appeal in script form without the visual brutality on screen.”^{105}

When considering BBC World’s coverage of the day of capture of Ken Bigley and Margaret Hassan, a 16-minute DVD was screened to 13 key respondents of a group survey. The footage was of BBC World’s evening output from the first day of the Beslan siege, and Ken Bigley and Margaret Hassan’s capture. These respondents were chosen because of their interest and direct exposure to news broadcasts, and it was assumed that they would be able to comment knowledgably on the topic. Of the respondents, ten felt that the coverage of Margaret Hassan’s capture was reported in greater depth while only three believed that Ken Bigley appeared more ‘worthy’. This contradicted the earlier finding that Margaret Hassan was an ‘unworthy’ victim.

^{104} Ibid
^{105} Sutcliffe (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 3
The strength of this comparison relies on the variations in the way BBC World covered the stories. One contributing similarity to the coverage was the capture of both victims in the morning, Iraqi time, giving news gatherers and producers the same amount of time, over 15 hours – taking into consideration the time difference between Iraq and the UK, to construct reports or arrange guests for their evening programmes in London. An important difference was the access the BBC had to footage of a previous interview with Margaret Hassan, enabling broadcasters to present a clear idea of her character to audiences. Also, Ken Bigley’s identity was not so quickly established as Margaret Hassan’s, he was kidnapped in a group of three, with two Americans, and it was initially unclear if there were British involved. This could have diluted his ‘worth’ to the survey respondents. The public’s understanding of an event is also paramount when considering worth.

Margaret Hassan, previously interviewed by the BBC

Source: BBC World

Increased awareness and the ability of the British public to comment on international news coverage can be attributed to 9/11.

But to appeal to an audience, broadcasters still need to show visual brutality to help viewers identify with victims. Chomsky and Herman point out that ‘unworthy’ victims are so treated by the mass media because they are killed at a great distance, and are therefore easier to disregard.106 This view is beginning to change as the West becomes more aware of international events, with particular links to terrorist events.

106 Chomsky & Herman (2000) p39
Since 9/11 interest in foreign (terrorism) news has increased. This has been noticeable across the world. Before 9/11 British news organisations concentrated their coverage on national news. According to Peter Wilby, editor of *The New Statesman* from 1998 until 2005, since 9/11 the left-wing magazine has generally had to have an international cover story to sell copies.\(^{107}\)

The frequency of international hostage-taking reporting appears to have increased. And questions surrounding the depth of the reporting and its degree of censorship have been surfacing, particularly through online comments.\(^{108}\) But, according to Mr Wilby, it is important to continue to report hostage-taking situations so as to prevent the media from becoming censors. “The media’s job is to report the news that will be of interest to its readers. Sometimes its reporting may help hostage-takers, sometimes not. Quite clearly, groups know that taking hostages is a way to bring the world's attention to a cause that many people may otherwise remain ignorant of. Quite obscure groups can suddenly catapult themselves into becoming world-renowned causes. I accept this presents the media with a moral dilemma, but the presumption should always be in favour of reporting and publication. Otherwise, journalists become censors.”\(^{109}\) However, Wilby, working in print journalism, does not have the problems that television has of being driven by footage and, therefore, the issue of broadcasting a hostage’s plea.

In discussion the BBC’s John Sutcliffe agrees with Peter Wilby. “The dangers of censorship are all too evident. Yet when we received constant still images of hostages with guns and knives pointing to their heads, the nagging fear was that we could be aiding the hostage-takers by showing the pictures around the world on BBC World.”\(^{110}\)

\(^{107}\) Wilby (2005) np  
\(^{108}\) Preston (2004) np  
\(^{109}\) Wilby (2005) online forum, Appendix C: 1  
\(^{110}\) Sutcliffe (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 1
On the first day of Ken Bigley’s capture BBC World had to rely on analysis of his situation through interviews with experts in the London studio and from Baghdad. While the channel was instantly able to put a package together, a report comprising a correspondent’s voice edited together with the latest footage, on Margaret Hassan using the interview with her and through images, filmed that day, of where she had been captured. News agencies could also download images of Mrs Hassan’s personal possessions from the hostage-taker’s website for inclusion in the report.

The respondents to the group survey were also asked if they felt the media was helping hostage-takers. Some believed that showing footage of hostage situations sensationalised the act and gave further legitimacy to their cause. Cindy Chen said: “It spreads fear and emphasises the power the hostage-takers have over the government, people and media. They know if they filmed the hostages the world would broadcast the footage and this would put pressure on the government to do something.”

Participants of Unworthy Victims were also asked this question and as influential people within the media industry they unanimously agreed that while the media does help hostage-takers highlight their cause, it is also essential to inform the public, and that editors should not withhold information. John Sutcliffe said: “I do not believe we are helping hostage-takers by giving them the oxygen of publicity – for me it is a news story, but it still has to be handled delicately, bearing in mind the families’ sensitivities.”

111 Respondent 5 (2005) Questionnaire - Answers, Appendix E
112 Sutcliffe (2005) online forum, Appendix C: 1
The survey also revealed that respondents felt that news organisations should report the taking of hostages briefly and without overplaying the emotional card.\footnote{See Appendix E} This is perhaps reflected in the BBC’s evolving policy on the issue of reporting hostage situation. On BBC World the channel will not use footage of individual hostages in its headlines, retaining these images for use within the actual story.\footnote{Bernstien [sic] (2005) Telephone Discussion} For example, when reporting Margaret Hassan’s capture, BBC World chose to limit the use of distraught footage of her capture in the headlines. Instead the channel selected footage of her prior to capture, portraying her as a ‘care worker’.

Most recently, footage of a hostage’s plea has been sources from Arab television broadcasters who receive it from either the hostage-takers themselves or from the world-wide-web. From discussions with BBC employees it is clear that the organisation does this so as to reduce the sensationalising of the situation, preventing the images from being repeated any more than what they feel is necessary.\footnote{Ibid}

Ultimately, media institutions should ensure their editors have control over content taking care to consider coverage assigned to each victim. However, ‘unworthy’ victims are essentially casualties of circumstance, where coverage of hostage situations is dependent on the day’s events. But it should be also noted that Western victims are likely to be given priority in Western media. Clearly,
Western news organisations are inclined to favour their own because this is what their readers or audiences know.

In addition to victims in Iraq, the dialogue on *Unworthy Victims* discussed the tragedy in Beslan, North Ossetias in 2004. The next article will continue to follow the online debate, and seek to understand how children are portrayed as victims. It will also look at distorted hostage and extremist figures released by the Russian and Northern Ossetian governments which angered relations of the victims of the tragedy, and how these distorted figures may have influenced the coverage.
Article 2

Pictures of Beslan

One year on and the scars of the Beslan school siege haven’t faded.
Hamish Walker discusses the victims’ ‘worth’ to the media.

On 1 September, 2004, Chechen terrorists stormed a school in Beslan, North Ossetia, one of the republics of the Russian Federation, taking over 1,000 children and adults hostage to bring attention to their demand that Russian troops leave Chechnya, as a result 331 innocent people lost their lives.116

The pain and suffering of the event continues as the children try to face their future. One little boy recounted the event to the BBC: “I had five roubles in my pocket, and my mum was feeling very ill. As a terrorist walked past, I said to him: ‘Take these five roubles and let my mother go.’ He said: ‘I don’t need your money. You keep it.’”117

To analysis the ‘worth’, of these victims it is important to establish why the hostage-takers chose Beslan School #1 in North Ossetia. A number of factors can be identified, including the motivation and history behind the hostage-taking, and the location of Beslan. Control over the media’s access to information during the siege by the governments of Russia and Ossetia will also be considered.

Beslan is located 1,000 miles south of the Russian capital Moscow.118 Beslan School #1 was taken over by Chechen and Ingush attackers and appears to be partly due to

116 Ewer & Wood head (2005) Children of Beslan
117 Ibid
118 Ibid
frustrations surrounding Russia’s control over Chechnya, and partly due to the consequences of Russia’s decision to split Ossetia in 1922. North Ossetia ended up in the possession of the Russian Federation, while South Ossetia went to the Georgian Republic. But both were still within the former USSR. The collapse of the USSR saw the two Ossetias parts of neighbouring countries. This has created a number of challenges, including the splitting of families by borders.

Nowadays, both parts of Ossetia are trying to reunite. But North Ossetia has a territorial issue with neighbouring Ingushetia, a former part of the Chechen-Ingush Soviet Republic. Ingushetia has claims to the Prigorodny district, which is located along the eastern border of North Ossetia, and part of Vladikavkaz, the capital. There was a short war in 1992, when Ingush militants invaded this district, but the Ossetians fought back. Several hundred casualties from both sides were lost, and as the resulting bitterness continues to haunt both sides.

But the recent trouble between Russia and Chechnya really began in 1995, and the past ten years has seen the taking of hostages as a means to manipulate and gain publicity. According to *Moscow News*, the first major hostage drama occurred six months after

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120 <Hope for Beslan (2004)>
121 Ibid
Russian troops entered the republic of Chechnya. In the first incident a group of gunmen, led by Chechen field commander Shamil Basaev, packed hundreds of civilians into a hospital in the southern Russian town of Budyonnovsk. They held the building for several days before the Russian government agreed to start peace talks and allow the gunmen to escape back to Chechnya. But before this happened approximately one-hundred people were killed during a failed Russian commando raid.\textsuperscript{122}

One year later, in 1996, around 250 militants led by rebel leader Salman Raduyev, held up to 3,000 people in a hospital in the Dagestani town of Kizlyar. They ordered a Russian withdrawal from Chechnya before releasing most of the hostages and taking the remaining few back to Chechnya. But again as the militants made their getaway across the Chechen border, Russian troops launched an assault. Several hostages died in the fighting.\textsuperscript{123}

In the new millennium, on 23 October, 2002, Chechen rebels stormed a Moscow theatre during a performance of the musical Nord-Ost. They took an estimated 900 people hostage, including 90 theatre staff. The rebel group consisted of 40-50 gunmen, led by Movsar Barayev. After releasing several hostages, the rebels demanded that Russian military forces be pulled out of Chechnya within a week, and threatened to blow up the building in case of a counter-attack.\textsuperscript{124}

Throughout the siege, the rebels released about 200 people, mostly women and children. The remaining hostages included up to 50 foreigners.\textsuperscript{125} The event sparked several anti-

\textsuperscript{122} \textsc{Klesczewski (2004)}
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid
\textsuperscript{125} \textsc{BBC website 8 (2004)}
war protests in Moscow, as relatives of the hostages appealed to Russian President Vladimir Putin to meet the demands of the rebels.126

Moscow theatre, taken siege on 23 October, 2002
Source: BBC World

Around five o’clock in the morning of the third day, Russian Special Forces prepared to storm the theatre. Once inside the building, members of the Special Forces used a gas to suppress the terrorists. According to the Moscow News all of the rebels inside were killed in the shootout that ensued. Most hostages, suffering from the effects of the gas, were taken to various hospitals. A total of 129 hostages died in the incident, all but two from the effects of the gas.127

The theatre siege represented a substantial loss of life, yet appears to be less memorable than the Beslan tragedy. When asking respondents to a group survey, which hostage situations they remember all mentioned Beslan and only a few referred to the theatre siege. This could be due to a number of reasons. The most obvious is that children were involved in the Beslan tragedy.

Children are recognised across the world as being more vulnerable, and when used as hostages the hostage-taker is usually not awarded much sympathy for their cause. Therefore, to take a child hostage, it can be assumed that the hostage-takers are particularly desperate.

126 <Klesczewski (2004)>
127 Ibid
According to Michael Gove, opinion writer for *The Times*, there is nothing specifically Chechen or Muslim about the deliberate mass murder of children. Gove points out that even men who have been brought up to enjoy the fruits of European civilisation have killed infants out of concern that retribution will be taken when adulthood is reached. He said: “The murder of children was not just accepted as a legitimate tactic, it was required by Nazi ideology. The enemy was bestial; it had to be extirpated lest it take revenge.”

The fact that the victims of Beslan were predominantly children over-rides the potentially news-worthy insignificance of the location of Beslan to a Western audience. Generally, the ‘worth’ of a victim has appeared to be related to the victim’s geographical relationship with the audience. Thus, Western media organisations have favoured victims of events in Western countries or of Westerners. The recent London bombings are an example. The London bombings of July 7 were reported extensively, while other bombings such as those that occur regularly in Iraq at army recruitment centres are not covered to such an extent. This is because the London bombings relate to a Western audience, affecting locations where Westerners live and work. As a result of terrorist action in Western countries, a global awareness is growing around the repercussions that can stem from events in unknown locations. And appears to have begun when two hijacked planes crashed into the towers of the World Trade Centre in New York: 9/11.

No doubt, with the aid of 24-hour news channels, the people of all nations are starting to realise that any civilian on this planet could become a victim of terrorism. With this in mind, the isolated location of North Ossetia has become relevant to Western viewers,

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128 Gove (7/9/2004) *The Times* p 16
129 <BBC website 5 (2005)>
130 <Hope for Beslan (2004)>
allowing the region to command world headlines with the more alarming news that even children are no longer safe. *Hope for Beslan*, a voluntary Canadian based non-governmental organisation (NGO) set up to help families affected by the tragedy, posted this message on their website: “On 1 September, 2004 we all learned that terrorism could also target children, toddlers and even babies. It is not about politics, it is about power. It does not matter where the attack happened: in the large and prosperous city of New York, or in the small and previously unknown town of Beslan.”\(^{131}\)

With the media coverage in mind, a report by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was devised to assess the access to information and journalists working conditions during the Beslan tragedy. This was commissioned due to criticism from families of victims, that the Russian and Ossetian governments distributed false information.\(^{132}\) The report investigated the accuracy of reports from both domestic and international broadcasters which was seen as dependent on information provided by government bodies.

Specifically, the report identified insufficient, contradictory, or incorrect information from government sources.\(^{133}\) It looked at the working conditions of Russian journalists in Beslan and cases of violence, detention, or pressure against them.\(^{134}\) The report also discussed the impact of government handling of information, on public opinion and restrictions imposed on foreign journalists.\(^{135}\) Finally, it identified the consequences of suspicious governmental information practices.\(^{136}\)

\(^{131}\) Ibid
\(^{132}\) <Klesczewski (2004)>
\(^{133}\) Haraszi (2004) p 4
\(^{134}\) Ibid
\(^{135}\) Ibid
\(^{136}\) Ibid
This presentation of false information could demonstrate remnants of restrictive control over its people by a former Communist regime. In their book *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media* Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman argue that for victims or an event to be considered ‘worthy’ in the West, there must be no trace of Communism attached to it. Chomsky and Herman say: “Communism as the ultimate evil has always been the spectre haunting property owners… This ideology helps mobilise the populace against an enemy, and because the concept is fuzzy it can be used against anybody advocating policies that threaten property interests or support accommodation with Communist states and radicalism.”

It appears families of victims of the Beslan tragedy were not prepared to accept Communist tactics and took their aggression out on the press.

Nonetheless, the OSCE found that the authorities did *not* obstruct the work of most reporters during the siege. But that problems occurred when local residents treated the press aggressively, triggered by Russian state television channels only reporting information on the number of hostages as generated by the government.

At the beginning of the siege, it was reported that 354 children were being held. This number quickly changed when parents of children in the school said that they would form their own list. This pressure from the enraged parents forced the President of North Ossetia, Alexander Dzasohov, to correct the assessment and state that there were over 900 hostages in the school. This could be argued, demonstrates the government was not keen to reveal the potential tragedy brewing at the school, and was thus an attempt to water-down media coverage.

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137 Chomsky & Herman (1988) p29
139 Haraszti (2004) p 5
The number of overall hostages was also reported incorrectly. The figure, initially given as 1,181, was changed to an equally inaccurate, but neat 1,200. In addition, there was confusion in the reporting of the number of terrorists, ranging from ten to 32. Zahera Harb, former reporter in Lebanon, spoke of the distorted numbers in the coverage. She said: “I felt how huge the incident was. It didn’t really affect me, the fact that information may have been incorrectly distributed… You know, even killing ten children, for me, is shocking.”

Furthermore, journalists and local residents were accused of aggravating the hostage-takers. Valerity Andreev, the local Federal Security Service (FSB) chief said:

“Journalists and locals provoke periodic shooting by terrorists because they want to be in the midst of things.”

Yvonne Ridley, journalist and one-time hostage of the Taliban, spoke of disorder in the reporting: “Unfortunately the chaos of the Beslan school tragedy was reflected in the quality of the reporting which was transmitted. That isn’t to put down the heroism of some journalists…. but the Russian authorities did not handle the situation well.”

She went on to say: “You can facilitate the media without controlling it and in Beslan neither happened, but that also extended to the distraught parents and other outside elements which led to the chaos, confusion and eventual massacre.”

It was also incorrectly reported that parents were not allowed to visit hospitals where their children were treated and doctors were not allowed to use their mobile phones.

And significantly, that some of the attackers who entered Beslan School #1 were Arab,

\[140\] Ibid
\[141\] Ridley (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 6
leading to the assumption that the school siege could have been the work of the Al-Qaeda.\textsuperscript{142}

To have the attack orchestrated by the Al-Qaeda would have been convenient for the Russian government. Islamic extremist, already known to take hostages to publicise their cause, would not be considered directly antagonised by the Russian government, whereas the Chechen cause is a direct result of Russian and North-Ossetian politics. The intangible “war-on-terror” may well be easier, or at least somewhat less complicated, for the Russian people to accept.

The task, according to the OSCE, for the Russian and North-Ossetian governments should have been to provide the media with information and arrange meetings between journalists and the chiefs of the release operation.\textsuperscript{143} According to correspondents working in Beslan from Russian newspaper \textit{Gazeta}, not only did the governments not cope with these tasks, they never even started to carry them out.\textsuperscript{144} During the siege, one of \textit{Gazeta}'s correspondents said: “It seems as if there are no representatives of the law enforcement agencies here at all.”\textsuperscript{145}

However, many journalists noted that local militia representatives were willing to communicate. They answered reporter’s questions – presumably hoping that the journalists could help release the hostages – many of which were relatives of the militiamen.\textsuperscript{146}

In regard to the OSCE’s report, the address of the committee noted: “While elaborating and discussing this document, we proceeded from our belief that the threat of terrorism

\textsuperscript{142} Haraszti (2004) p 4
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid
\textsuperscript{146} Haraszti (2004) p 5
should not be used as grounds and justification for imposing limits with regards to freedom of opinion and freedom of the media. At the same time, being aware of the measure of responsibility in working with information in these conditions, we proposed a range of acceptable restrictions and rules that we would willingly accept, stipulating that in extreme situations the rescue of people and the human right to live are primary and take precedence over any other rights and freedoms.”

The OSCE report also considered the terrorist’s view of the coverage. According to hostages, the terrorists were angered by the distorted information. The report noted that Yelena Milashina, a journalist for Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, wrote: “A girl [taken hostage] said that after that persistent and extremely important newscast [revealing the incorrect number of hostages] the children were no longer given tap water.”

The close monitoring of news coverage by the hostage-takers demonstrates how modern technology can be used to assist terrorists. The UK media treated the siege as an important event, and the hostages as victims worthy of our ongoing attention. On the day the siege ended, *BBC One* broke away from its schedule to report live pictures from Beslan. The footage appeared to demonstrate the reporter’s close proximity to the siege, having to duck for cover during his two-way discussion with the presenter in London. The intimacy of the news coverage, associated with the youthful nature of the hostages, made for repellent, yet fascinating, television. Awareness of the terrorist’s cause grew immeasurably.

147 Ibid
148 Ibid
The emotive value of the pictures broadcast by the news organisations such as those broadcast on *BBC One* was instrumental in establishing the victims of the Beslan School siege as ‘worthy’. When the Russian troops stormed the school and children began to escape the smouldering buildings, broadcasters were able to use the footage repeatedly. Dramatic images of children running half naked from the school with gunfire rattling in the background were used utilised to float over newscaster’s commentary.

Dramatic images of children escaping were repeated on 24-hour news
Source: BBC World

In a group survey seeking reactions to footage from the Beslan tragedy, respondents found the images “sad” and “difficult to watch”, but believed they aided understanding of the human dilemmas.¹⁴⁹

Researching the Beslan tragedy, it can be seen that there is a set of inherently illogical rules defining why some victims are ‘worthy’ while others are given less media attention. The research identifies a number of factors that allow a victim to fit into a news organisation’s agenda. They include location of the attack, the age and national origin of the victims, whether the region is associated with Communism, and if the audience can understand the hostage-taker’s motivation behind the attack.

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¹⁴⁹ Respondent 1 (2005) Questionnaire - Answers, Appendix E
The Beslan tragedy also demonstrated that victims and hostage-takers are not related in their defined ‘worth’. An audience is more likely to be sympathetic with a hostage-taker when they can identify with the cause. But a cause is likely to be overshadowed if the victims are treated badly. The Chechen/Ingush cause could be sympathised with, but for the brutality that news audiences have come to expect from the Chechen/Ingush militants. The catch-22 here is that the world audience would not be aware of the cause at all if it wasn’t for the Chechen/Ingush brutality. A respondent of the group survey noted: “[Cruel footage] can reinforce contempt for the hostage-takers for putting the hostages through such a terrible ordeal and reducing them to such a desperate state.”

The hope for the children of Beslan is that they can rebuild their lives. A small boy, another victim of the ordeal, maintained his sense of humour when interviewed by the BBC: “I could go without water, without food, but it was very difficult for me to keep quiet, because I always love to talk.”

In addition to hostages’ ‘worth’ to the media, the dialogue on an online forum titled *Unworthy Victims* compared international broadcasters Al-Jazeera and BBC World. The final article will continue to follow the online debate, and seek to understand what influences news coverage.

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150 Respondent 13 (2005) Questionnaire - Answers, Appendix E
151 Ewar & Woodhead (2005) *Children of Beslan*
Article 3

Proof of life

Recordings of hostage victims are screened regularly around the globe. Hamish Walker observes comments from key actors in the media industry on Al-Jazeera and its exclusive-footage.

“I need you to help me Mr Blair because you are the only person now on God’s earth who I can speak to,” pleaded Ken Bigley, a Briton kidnapped in Iraq in 2004, in a hostage-taker’s video.\(^{(152)}\)

Ken Bigley’s capture video appeared on Al-Jazeera, download from the web

Source: QuBit Technologies website\(^{(153)}\)

The broadcasting of hostage pleas on television news has become a hot issue for newscasters. An overwhelming number of ‘worthy’ victims, those given extensive coverage by Western media, have been taken hostage, almost weekly, and mainly in the Middle East.

When it comes to broadcasting footage of hostage victims, various methods of coverage have evolved between channels. Broadcasters have the option of showing a hostage’s

\(^{(152)}\) Corbin (2005) Panorama
\(^{(153)}\) <QuBit Technologies (2005) np>
plea in full, on camera, or can elect to cover it by having the presenter read the plea in a script. It appears that the second option is becoming favourable as the news industry begins to question a victim’s human rights.

To get an idea of the media standard, Al-Jazeera TV, an international Arabic broadcaster based in Qatar, and BBC World TV, the international commercial arm of the BBC, based in London, will be compared. Discussions between key actors about the editorial decision-making will then be taken from Unworthy Victims, an online forum.

Al-Jazeera and BBC World are two channels from among a handful of newscasters who broadcast 24-hours a day. To understand these two news organisations, it is useful to look at their historical roots, since these bring out the constraints they bear.

Al-Jazeera was established to broadcast news to the Arab world and beyond but during the Iraq war in 2003 the satellite channel quickly found itself in the headlines. The broadcaster grew in recognition during the war due to its controversial screening of dead coalition soldiers and through its access to footage sent from the Taliban, a hard-line Islamic movement based in Afghanistan. Even with an Arab perspective, this small satellite channel has had an office bombed and staff arrested.

Launched in November 1996 and based in the tiny Gulf emirate of Qatar, the strength of Al-Jazeera lies in the financial freedom it has experienced, its access to the Middle East and now through its strong brand name. Arabic for ‘the island’, Al-Jazeera was set up by the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad Khalifa Al-Thani, who noticed an opportunity

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154 El-Nawawy (2003) np
155 Miles (2005) p 13
156 El-Nawawy (2003) np
to recruit quality trained staff from the BBC when its Arabic television service was discontinued.\textsuperscript{157}

Al-Jazeera is arguably becoming one of the world’s most politically influential news sources currently broadcasting.\textsuperscript{158} This expanding media outlet has a growing influence, broadcasting free-to-air in the Middle East and via pay television internationally. It claims to have an audience of over 35 million – including up to 200,000 viewers in the US, centred mainly in the Arab heartland of Dearborn – a suburb of Detroit, Michigan.\textsuperscript{159} Additionally, Al-Jazeera’s website is believed to be among the top 50 visited in the world.\textsuperscript{160} But the channel’s greatest impact has been made through its exclusive access to footage of Osama Bin Laden, leader of Al-Qaeda during the coalition’s “war-on-terror”. Notably Al-Jazeera was also the first channel in the Arab world to interview Israelis on screen.\textsuperscript{161}

When considering the channel’s set up, Al-Jazeera expanded its schedule from six hours per day – transmitting via one satellite – to eight hours, and then, after broadcasting for almost a year, to 17 hours per day. The jump in production from eight to 17 hours was made possible through the acquisition of a time allotment when the French lost this slot by accidentally broadcasting pornography to Arab viewers.\textsuperscript{162}

Al-Jazeera’s contemporary, BBC World was also launched in the nineties but to compete with the US’s 24-hour international satellite broadcasters, and has the backing of arguably the most renowned broadcasting name in news, the BBC. The channel has access to almost 256 million homes around the world and an international, full-time,
correspondent network of over 250 individuals, plus many stingers, super-stingers and other reporters.\textsuperscript{163} Since its inception it has managed to remain relatively free of controversy, with the repercussions of the Hutton report – a government investigation that, amongst other things, looked into the editorial management of the corporation – focusing on broadcasts within the UK.

BBC World was originally known as BBC World Service Television which may have been designed to help distinguish it from, but also to ride on the credibility of, the corporation’s international radio service, BBC World Service.\textsuperscript{164} However, many people, presumably those who do not consume the service regularly, still confuse the two.

BBC World Service Television was originally set up in 1991 to serve Asia and the Middle East. In 1992 it expanded into Japan, Africa and Europe. In 1995 the service was renamed BBC World. This was quickly followed by a number of strategic changes to satellite providers which helped the channel further coverage in Asia and the Middle East, and to extend into Latin America and The Caribbean.\textsuperscript{165}

In 1998 BBC World moved to a new 24-hour, fully digital newsroom, becoming the world’s first 24 hour digital news provider. Owned and operated by BBC World Ltd, the channel is funded by advertising and subscription. It has won numerous awards including the Zayed International Prize for the Environment in recognition of its commitment to global environmental issues, and is available globally in more than one million hotel rooms.\textsuperscript{166}

\textsuperscript{163} \cite{BBClinks}
\textsuperscript{164} \cite{BBClinks}
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid
The schedules of the two channels are relatively similar. Both offer news on the hour tailored to a morning or evening audience. Editors attempt to take into consideration which part of the world is waking up and who is watching television before retiring to bed. BBC World built their schedule around GMT (mean time in Greenwich, UK) and Al-Jazeera around Makkah time (mean time in Mecca, Saudi Arabia).

Al-Jazeera and BBC World broadcast in different languages – Al-Jazeera in Arabic and BBC World in English. However, the channels have similar backgrounds in terms of editorial training as both have roots in the BBC. When the BBC’s Arabic channel was discontinued, the breakdown in this service left around 250 Arab journalists out of work; approximately 120 of them joined Al-Jazeera.\(^{167}\)

One issue that BBC World has to deal with is its standing within its corporation. BBC World is a commercial arm of the BBC but still relies heavily on assistance from correspondents assigned, and reports produced through the licence fee, a tax charged to those who own a television in the UK. The licence fee funds sections of the corporation, which include the national television news programmes One, Six and Ten and BBC News 24. And because BBC World is not directly supported by the licence fee it is generally given lower priority by correspondents in the field. This forces the channel to reschedule vital two-ways, a live discussion between the correspondent and presenter, further down bulletin running orders, giving domestic news precedence.

Al-Jazeera does not have to compete with such a ‘big domestic brother’ but at the same time does not have access to as large a correspondent base. Currently Al-Jazeera claims they have “dozens” of correspondents and up to 30 bureaux across the world.\(^{168}\)

\(^{167}\) Miles (2005) p33  
\(^{168}\) <Al-Jazeera (2005)>
Until recently, following questions raised by the Hutton report, the BBC’s editorial training was considered one of the best in the world, noted for its balanced reporting. Al-Jazeera hopes to achieve similar recognition and has enjoyed success, to a certain extent. Many regard Al-Jazeera as courageous for pushing boundaries by challenging viewers in the West and in the Arab world with the broadcasting of controversial pictures, and hosting contentious guests. The proof of their achievement lies in the criticism they have received from the West, balanced by equal vitriol from the Arab World. Jamsheda Young, a broadcast journalist on BBC World, recently returned from a placement at Al-Jazeera, explained: “Al-Jazeera has completely changed Arab media. They are pioneers in broadcasting, moving away from reporting family events of leaders in the Middle East. They are not afraid of offending and do not broadcast a diplomatic diary. They report on what they think qualifies as news.”

Al-Jazeera’s slogan ‘the opinion and the other opinion’ sums up their aspirations to cover news objectively, accurately, and with a passion for the truth. However, one of the channel’s main critics has been the US, who has slated it for its coverage of various events in the Middle East. But, Jihad Ballout, an Al-Jazeera spokesperson, believes diverse criticism shows they are doing their job. “I think Al-Jazeera has established itself – even the Arabic language – as a credible alternative source of news on issues pertaining to the Middle East which is at the very core of Western thinking.”

The popularity of Al-Jazeera has raised concerns in the US and UK. These governments worry that Al-Jazeera is damaging their credibility and deepening anti-Western attitudes. In October 2001, just one month after September 11, Colin Powell, then US

170 «Al-Jazeera (2005) About»
171 Miles (2005) p405
Secretary of State, met with the Emir of Qatar to ask him to rein in Al-Jazeera, which Mr Powell claimed gave airtime to anti-American opinions.\(^{172}\)

Hafez Al Mirazi, bureau chief of the network, speaking at the National Press Club in Washington in 2003, addressed similar complaints by pointing out that terrorists and the US government are both using the media to achieve propaganda goals. Mr Al Mirazi argued that US news agencies have biased reporting. He stated: “If CNN or Fox or others are not going to have breaking news flashing on their screens if Palestinians are killed, but only if Israelis are killed, then [terrorists] will go out and kill an Israeli.”\(^{173}\)

With a similar operating schedule, the difference in the language of broadcast prevents Al-Jazeera and BBC World from being in direct competition with one another. However, Al-Jazeera is in pre-production of an English speaking channel with a working title of ‘Al-Jazeera International’, and is due to start broadcasting in March, 2006.\(^{174}\) This new competition with BBC World may see relationships change, particularly in the negotiations of rights to exclusive-footage.

In its short history, Al-Jazeera has been able to make money from exclusive-footage, a large proportion of which features hostage victims. This has led to the channel being criticised for its “brutality uncensored”\(^{175}\) coverage of hostage-taking situations. It has also been accused of siding with the Taliban and other extremist organisations. Yvonne Ridley, one-time hostage of the Taliban and former Al-Jazeera employee argued on Unworthy Victims that Al-Jazeera’s access to such footage is due to its location within the Arab world. She proposed: “The problem – if it is a problem for a news organisation – is that they usually get the hostage tapes before anyone else. This is for a variety of

\(^{172}\) <BBC website 12 (2001)>
\(^{173}\) <PR Watch (2005)>
\(^{174}\) <Al-Jazeera (2005) About>
\(^{175}\) Miles (2005) p33
different reasons and on occasions nothing more sinister than it is easier to drop off a tape to Al-Jazeera journalists than anyone else.”\textsuperscript{176}

So the flow of media could be considered to have fallen into a pattern, where Al-Jazeera is given tapes and broadcasts the content so that it may be picked up by other international channels. When Al-Jazeera’s exclusive-footage finds its way onto other channels, restrictions usually state pictures must not be broadcast live giving Al-Jazeera a slight advantage.\textsuperscript{177} Rachael Bernstien, a media manager, responsible for recording and allocating server space for footage coming into the BBC World newsroom, said that the channel accesses Al-Jazeera’s output, on average, at least once a month depending on the quantity of news coming out of the Middle East.\textsuperscript{178}

Hostage-takers and other extremists who forward the media to Al-Jazeera may favour the channel as a way of steering attention to the Arab station. They may also feel that it is the best way for their footage to be broadcast within the Arab world. For example, if the footage was sent to BBC World rather than to Al-Jazeera then editorial policy may prevent it from making it to air. And if it is not aired on BBC World then the pictures would be unable to be picked up by Arab broadcasters such as Al-Jazeera. Yvonne Ridley believes this is the case: “Hostage-takers very often are seeking maximum publicity and they know that anything broadcast on Al-Jazeera will easily be taken by a Western media outlet rather than the other way round.”\textsuperscript{179}

In Ken Bigley’s situation, footage of him came through to the families and media organisations from the hostage-takers, two days after his kidnapping. Phil Bigley, spoke of his brother’s hostage-taker: \textquote{Al-Zarqawi was using every means possible to him to}

\textsuperscript{176} Ridley (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 14
\textsuperscript{177} Bernstien [sic] (2005) Telephone Discussion
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid
\textsuperscript{179} Ridley (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 14
stage his act of terrorism. To him it’s a war I believe, and he doesn’t have the military might of the Americans or of the British. But what he does have is the power of inflicting terror, horror and fear on people, and how do you do that? You do it through media, it’s the only way you can do that.”

Lucy Hocking, presenter on BBC World, spoke of the pressure the newsroom was feeling to broadcast footage of Ken Bigley. She explained: “In the case of Ken Bigley we were under huge pressure to broadcast the images and sound of him begging for his life, we did so and felt the backlash. Many viewers were upset, not by the pictures but by the sound of him pleading. Others just found it distasteful. In a way it created more drama for the hostage-takers and had the potential to encourage them and others. Since then the channel has made a decision to broadcast pictures only.”

In addition to television, kidnappers have begun exploiting their victims using the world-wide-web. This is important in terms of Al-Jazeera’s exclusive-footage. Zahera Harb, a former reported in Lebanon and a frequent viewer of Al-Jazeera, argued that the era of exclusive-footage for the Arab broadcaster is over. She explained: “Many of the

180 Corbin (2005) Panorama
181 Hockings (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 8
182 Corbin (2005) Panorama
news stories about hostage-taking that Al-Jazeera broadcast have been taken from the Internet.\textsuperscript{183}

The web appears to be emerging as a tool vital for publication by extremist groups. In debate on \textit{Unworthy Victims}, participants discussed its impact. Jalal Othman, Manager of the Information Office of the Libyan/American Friendship Association in Tripoli supposed: “It will help them to improve their skills in sending their demands to the world. Hostage-takers will always be able to stay one step ahead. The Internet is a double-edged sword.”\textsuperscript{184}

Similarly, John Sutcliffe, assistant editor on BBC World, predicted the web to have a major impact: “Terrorists can even now bypass mainstream organisations like the BBC and broadcast appeals and even executions directly onto the web where their audiences can view the images at their leisure. It will make it all much more direct, much quicker and impossible to control.”\textsuperscript{185}

Yvonne Ridley disagreed: “So-called terrorists go through varying cycles of modus operandi. For instance, in the 1970s hijackings were commonplace, now it’s car bombs and martyrdom operations. Hostage-taking has always been in evidence on three different levels. Firstly it is a way for gangs to raise large sums of ready cash for their cause, which may be purely criminal. Secondly, it is a way of groups maximising publicity for their cause. Thirdly, it acts as a deterrent for third parties to aid the perceived enemy. Third parties in Iraq for instance are regarded as highly paid contract workers often seen as collaborators by the resistance on the ground.

\textsuperscript{183} Harb (2005) Personal Interviews, Appendix F: 1
\textsuperscript{184} Othman (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 7
\textsuperscript{185} Sutcliffe (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 7
“I can’t really see that the evolution of broadcast or web [technologies] will have a direct impact on hostage-taking.”\textsuperscript{186}

Peter Wilby, former editor of the \textit{New Statesman}, a centre-left wing magazine based in London, particularly disagreed with John Sutcliffe. He said: “John Sutcliffe is just a little too gloomy. All sorts of awful things are on the web, just as all sorts of awful things are in London bookshops and video stores. But people’s default websites and bookmarks tend to be the BBC. This is why it’s so important that, with taste and within reason, the BBC and similar media organisations give something near the unvarnished truth.”\textsuperscript{187}

But what if the “unvarnished truth” breaches an individual’s human right? Participants of \textit{Unworthy Victims} were asked if it is an editor’s duty to show a victim’s plea. Yvonne Ridley observed: “Each editor has to use his editorial judgment on these occasions. Sometimes a particularly harrowing message broadcast by the media is enough to secure the release of the hostage.

“It is interesting to note that mainstream media, including Al Jazeera, has never shown executions on television yet this is not the impression given out by the Bush Administration. These executions are only ever shown on websites.”\textsuperscript{188}

John Sutcliffe backed-up this point: “On BBC World we do tend to shy away from showing direct appeals to politicians. It is certainly not the editor’s duty to show footage of victims appealing to politicians and my own instinct is to include the appeal in script

\textsuperscript{186} Ridley (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 7
\textsuperscript{187} Wilby (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 7
\textsuperscript{188} Ridley (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 3
form without the visual brutality on screen.” This is clearly BBC World’s policy only since Ken Bigley’s death.

Again, in terms of Al-Jazeera’s controversial output, PR Watch, an alternative voice website based in the US, has examined statements made by bodies such as the Iraqi interim government accusing Al-Jazeera of contributing to the hindrance of the Iraqi reconstruction process by justifying kidnappings and through the killing of foreigners working in Iraq.

So, should Al-Jazeera be considered a scapegoat for the US government to direct blame? Jamsheda Young believes Al-Jazeera is innocent in terms of promoting anti-American feeling. She said: “[Anti-American feeling in the Middle East] is already high and I am not sure if Al-Jazeera are contributing or confirming, they still have rolling news and don’t censor coverage of big American speeches. Al-Jazeera just reflects what people already feel.”

Also, with the increased interest in global events since September 11, the world is beginning to expect more from Western media, such as in the output of media giant Fox News. Jeff Cohen, a former Fox News contributor, believes the company is misleading its viewers. In an interview for the controversial documentary *Outfoxed*, looking at the inter-relation between the Fox News giant and the US republican party, he said: “It’s very hard on Fox News to separate news from commentary because it all blends together. That’s what makes it so ridiculous, that slogan ‘We report, you decide’, because there’s no TV news channel in history that’s ever reported less.”

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189 Sutcliffe (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 3
190 <PR Watch (2005)>
191 Jamsheda (2005) Personal Interviews, Appendix F: 3
192 Greenwald (2004) *OutFoxed*
In comparison to other media outlets, many considered Al-Jazeera a dynamic and neutral source of information that on occasion provides BBC World with access to otherwise unobtainable footage. The Emir of Qatar has been able to recognise the importance of impartiality for Al-Jazeera to develop credibility and build on the brand name. And to build this brand name the channel relies on its positioning and declining ability to attract exclusive-footage.

Its reputation for showing news as it is, particularly in the airing of hostage pleas could be said to infringe on human-rights, but for Al-Jazeera this appears to be an essential part of telling the story, and is supported by Yvonne Ridley own experiences as a hostage. She said: “The question of appearing on Al-Jazeera to make an appeal for my release was raised during my detention and I was quite eager to do it on two points. One to show my parents I still had all my limbs and digits and was in pretty good shape, and the other was that it might just work and accelerate my release. Happily, I didn't have to go through this humiliation, but given the chance in my situation I was ready to do it.”\(^\text{193}\)

\(^{193}\) Ridley (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 4
Section 3

Conclusion

This dissertation focused on television news broadcasting, looking at the ‘media effect’ to see if the reporting of a hostage event can influence its outcome. The project also asks: what factors influence the quality of a victim, in terms of their ‘worthiness’, to the media? To explore this question a research model was created where by a literature survey, a group survey and personal interviews fed into an online forum titled Unworthy Victims, to assess the general feeling of industry opinion.

As a result, this dissertation has created an opportunity for discussion among key actors in British news broadcasting. The conversation that has evolved further supports the notion that the UK carries a bias towards its own victims. The project has identified nationality, sex and age – among other things – as essential when type-casting a victim’s ‘worth’ to an audience.

Furthermore, when reflecting upon the discussion, it appeared to take on a cynical tone. This was demonstrated in the negativity of the language used and could have stemmed from the questions put to the participants, or be an indication of the grim reality of the stories journalist and editors are exposed to everyday.

In the discussion, the media professionals also generally protected their trade, defending methods of editorial decision making. They unanimously argued for the broadcasting of hostage-taking situations but generally saw that screening a victim’s plea was not necessary.
Those participating who had been taken hostage gave an insight into the emotional impact the situation had on them. Terry Waite and Yvonne Ridley spoke of avoiding self-censorship in journalism and how, as a hostage, it can be useful and encouraging to have coverage of your plight but stressed the importance of getting the information right. Yvonne Ridley remembered:

In my case *The Times* reported in one edition - before it was hastily removed - that I had been a captain in the Territorial Army, and *The Mail on Sunday* unhelpfully, and wrongly, suggested that I was married to an Israeli.\(^{194}\)

The discussions also gave an idea of how editorial decision making evolves, particularly within BBC World which, to a certain extent, has the rest of the organisation to answer to. References to actual, behind-the-scenes conversations at the BBC spiced up the discussion and made the watching of BBC World output more enlightening.

The assignment has successfully taken advantage of my position at BBC World by drawing comments from editors, news reporters, presenters, and hostage victims themselves. Privy to editorial discussions, I have become attuned to issues the channel faces in terms of balancing competition with integrity, and pressure to screen pictures with the rights of the victim.

Overwhelmingly, media-minds appear to favour the broadcasting of hostage situations, aware that if it is restricted by a news agency or broadcaster then this becomes a method of censorship. Zahera Harb, former news reporter and presenter in Lebanon, summed this up:

You can’t withhold information. You’re not creating, you are reporting. You can’t have a bomb go off and not say that a bomb has gone off. And you

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\(^{194}\) Ridley (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 8
can’t have someone claiming responsibility for the bombing and not say that you have someone claiming responsibility.¹⁹⁵

This was reflected in the discussion on Unworthy Victims, which indicates bias is not driven by self-censorship or political influence, but by what the news organisation believes the audience want. However, in relation to the broadcasting of a hostage’s plea, there was mixed reactions from the forum. This prevents me from saying outright if it is beneficial or infringes further on a victim’s human rights, which in turn, precludes an endorsement of the broadcasting of a hostage’s plea or to ban it entirely.

This dissertation also looked at Al-Jazeera’s output. It found – through the assistance of Arabic speakers and media managers recording content for broadcast by BBC World – that Al-Jazeera had similar notions of what constitutes ‘worthy’ victims as Western broadcaster. For example, according to Zahera Harb, Margaret Hassan and Ken Bigley’s capture appears to have been reported to a similar extent on Al-Jazeera. The project also found that Al-Jazeera is not offered exclusive-footage to the degree it has been in the past, and has therefore toned down its broadcasting of hostage pleas, as a means of forwarding these pictures to other newscasters.

Furthermore, the dissertation discussed the future of world-wide-web technology in hostage-taking. I found that already underground extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban rely heavily on the web for communication and to publicise their cause. But as participants of Unworthy Victims recognised, the unpredictable nature of the web brings both positives and negatives for extremist groups. Jalal Othman said: “The web is a double-edged sword.”

¹⁹⁵ Harb (2005) Personal Interviews, Appendix F: 1
Ultimately, this dissertation found that ‘unworthy’ victims are products of circumstance. Not only are they victims of terrorist acts, they are victims in the minds of the media-makers when they are cast aside, making way for bigger stories. While Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups may view Chechens and other non-Western victims as “cheap meat”,\footnote{Aliev (04/09/2004) \textit{Financial Times} p 7} so does the Western media. Initially, they may treat the victims as a prime cut, but the use-by date apparently soon expires.
Reflection

This research project has achieved what it set out to. The online forum, *Unworthy Victims*, worked toward getting a number of influential media professionals together to generate discussion. The discussion was then used to steer the write-up of the dissertation.

While the discussion does not profoundly affect practice in the field of journalism the project is likely to be among the first to talk about recent hostage situations of 2004, such as the Beslan siege in North Ossetia and Ken Bigley’s and Margaret Hassan’s capture in Iraq.

Predominantly, the project went according to plan. However, there were issues associated with the technical set up of the website and inspiring forum members to participate. But these problems were predicted prior to commencing. The idea of incorporating online technology into this project took advantage of my design and technical problem solving skills, having previously been employed as a project coordinator at a small multimedia facility.

The website was relatively straight forward once the design and technical approach had been decided upon. The initial plan was to create a synchronous, online forum where participants would interact live such as msn messenger, but Cardiff University’s Information Services department (Inserv) did not that the facilities or knowledge to build such a site. The plan was then scaled back to an asynchronous forum and used software, Phorum, that was already developed and in use within the school of journalism.
In terms of website design, this was adapted from an earlier assignment, submitted in the first semester of the degree. Initially, images of hostage victims were incorporated into the design but the copyright fee was too expensive. The images I intended for the design were owned by the news agency Associated Press who would have charged £40 per month had they been included. If was felt that while they added to the website, the expense was not worth it.

Once the website was up and running all I had to do was gather comments. This proved to be very difficult. Initially, when approaching the prospective members all but one agreed to participate. Some warned that they may be busy and unable to comment consistently. This was an understatement. Of the 14 who were asked six posted comments online. However, between them they generated 2,800 words, which was more than enough. One of the reasons for this low response could have been due to the time of year. The forum began just in time for the start of the summer holidays.

Notably, by far the most testing part of this project has been my role as moderator, controller of the online forum. The role required me to contact participants persistently. At times I felt I walked a fine-line between encouraging and offending participants. Fortunately no one contacted me midway to ask not to continue.

To resolve issues of low response, Naomi Dunstan, technical demonstrator at Cardiff University, proposed that it would be useful to post comments myself, but the role of moderator gave me authority that I was reluctant to use. I was worried that my interaction would steer the conversation and disturb its natural progression. Additionally, I was aware that 15 questions were more than enough for many of the participants. And what would I have to add? Most of the participants are my senior with
extensive experience in the industry, and I have not been taken hostage or reported from the field.

When reading the comments, the participants were bold in their postings. They told me when they felt questions were unrelated. For example, when John Sutcliffe answered a question referring to the repetitiveness of twenty-four hour news he ended his response by saying: “I think hostage-taking pictures are a slight irrelevance in the context of this question.”

The participants were also happy to question my research. Peter Wilby, when referring to my quantitative research of newspapers using the LexisNexis search-engine, he said: “My Google search turns up 53,500 for Bigley, 85,900 for Hassan!!” Peter Wilby then retracted this comment when he realised that the Google search-engine considered more than just newspapers.

When reflecting upon what the participants gained from the online experience, I believe they were presented with an opportunity to voice ideas. They were given a chance to speak within a select group on a specific subject and with the time to consider their responses carefully. They were able to develop new contacts, with a few asking for contact details of other participants. Finally, they were able to interact online in a method similar to that of the modern extremists, in a private online forum.

197 Sutcliffe (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 10
198 See Article 1
199 Wilby (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 13
The idea of using the world-wide-web as a tool to generate information was a success. It was unique and demonstrates how journalism is evolving. Journalists are frequently turning to email to gather comment or to open forums to collect vox pops.\textsuperscript{200}

From my perspective, I feel that I have been enlightened as to how extremists who meet in cyberspace feel and operate. The only contact I had, other than with those I encounter through my position at BBC World, was digitally via email or on \textit{Unworthy Victims}.

As an alternative to personal interviews, I believe the online forum required more work. The website needed approximately 40 hours work to set it up and another 40 hours to moderate. While the information gathered was useful with each participant evidently putting much thought into their posts, they did not always take note of other participant’s comments.

However, John Sutcliffe was the exception; he took note of others’ comments before placing his own. But his proactive posting may have been due to the fact that I was in the newsroom when he was working on \textit{Unworthy Victims} which, more than likely, influenced his experience.

Some participants contributed more regularly than others. The three most worthy participants, those that generated the most comment, were: Yvonne Ridley, John Sutcliffe and Peter Wilby. Through their kind persistence a discussion was able to flow. In particular the question one\textsuperscript{201} saw interaction between members. As a result of this question’s success it was chosen as the title of the first article.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[200] Vox-pop is the abbreviation of ‘voice of the people’ (vox-populi).
\item[201] \textit{Are the media helping hostage-takers?} See Appendix C: 1
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Some members of *Unworthy Victims* such as Shami Chakrabarti, director of human right’s organisation Liberty, did not participate at all. It was observed, through her contributions to BBC television, that she was extremely busy, particularly around the time of the shooting of Brazilian Jean de Menezes, commenting on human-rights issues surrounding his suspected involvement in the attempted London bombings on July 21.

Participation from members such as Damian Grammaticas and Terry Waite was also limited. They also had appropriate alibis for their lack of participation. However, the forum was designed for easy accessibility so their response was disappointing. It was also noted that a number of members found time to send emails to apologise for their poor response. The efforts their emailing took could have easily been transferred to comments on the forum. Future forums may benefit from sourcing participants with not such an alluring profile and therefore not so busy, or those who are known to sit at a computer regularly such as academics.

The other research methods designed to feed into *Unworthy Victims* worker well. However, the group survey did not achieve the desired emotional response. The plan was to screen footage of the Beslan tragedy to tug at the heart-strings and collect an emotional response so that I could attempt to reconstruct the pictures of the children for my readers. But the answers were all fairly dispassionate. The respondents were verbally asked to comment extensively, but as can be seen in Appendix E some left one word answers. The reason for this could be that a number of the respondents came from a non English speaking background.

Additionally, the idea of producing the questionnaire online became redundant as all respondents attended the screening so could have completed it on paper. The only

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202 See Appendix H
advantage was that I didn’t have to transcribe the material as it was sent to me automatically via email. In terms of the personal interviews, these were successful in that I was able to pursue a line of questioning that Unworthy Victims denied. However, approximately half a day of transcribing was needed per hour of talking. It would also be have interesting to gather comment online from strangers, outside the private forum, in a casual surfing environment.

For the future of the content gathered in this research project, access to Unworthy Victims will be opened to all surfers of the world-wide-web. This will be completed by building another website. Comments from Unworthy Victims will be used to build the foundations of a weblog\textsuperscript{203} designed to evolve into an online micro-news website.\textsuperscript{204}

Ultimately this project utilised discussion. It pursued worthy participants to consolidate and further ideas about hostages, hostage-takers and media effect. Comments to Unworthy Victims were enlightening, well conceived and sometimes entertaining.

But if you want an example of why people don’t trust the mainstream media, read Yvonne Ridley’s comments in this forum. To read most newspapers, you’d think she was some kind of lunatic, brainwashed by the Taliban. In fact, she turns out to be more concise, precise, perceptive and, of course, well-informed than most of us!\textsuperscript{205}

- Peter Wilby, Unworthy Victims

\textsuperscript{203}A weblog is a web-based publication consisting primarily of periodic articles.

\textsuperscript{204}A micro-news website is a term used for a small website, run by an individual, and has content that combines hard news with the publisher’s editorial comment.

\textsuperscript{205}Wilby (2005) Online Forum, Appendix C: 7
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Appendix B: Website – Pages

Page 1: Home – www.unworthyvictims.cf.ac.uk

Page 2: Entrance to Forum – Username: unworthy, Password: bobsyouruncle
Page 3: About Author

My name is Hanish Walker and I am currently studying for an MA in International Journalism at Cardiff University. Over the last three years I have worked as a Media Manager in the Newsrooms of BBC World at Television Centre, London. I record correspondent and agency pictures and enable the newrooms to have quick access to them.

This position has exposed me to news issues with a specific international agenda. I have participated in the broadcast of hostage-taking situations through the gathering of pictures. The grim reality of hostage-taking appears to have evolved from a vehicle of extortion into an opportunity for publicity.

Page 5: Questionnaire

For full questionnaire see Appendix D
About Participants

Ehna Barakat

Ehna Barakat was a novelist from Iraq. In Occupied Palestine, she contributed to this chapter. Al Qafira and the War in Afghanistan: A Delusory System of Perception in a Visual of the Al-Qaeda phenomenon published by Thamer Fuad.

About Participants

Chanan Chokabert

Chanan Chamrakit was a Thai activist who was involved in human rights and progressive organizations, in 2000. He was an active campaigner against the increasingly repressive anti-terrorism measures which followed the 9/11 attack in the USA.

About Participants

Radwan Grammatico

Radwan Grammatico was the BBC's Middle East correspondent in June 2003. Prior to this, he directed the BBC's Hong Kong bureau from 1998. During this time, he was responsible for covering stories from Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Moscow, Paris, Madrid, and the Philippines.

About Participants

Zakia Hash

Zakia Hash is currently lecturing at the NIH School of Journalism in Propaganda Now between Lebanon and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East. He has travelled widely and widely, including in the Middle East, the North African region, and the Caribbean. His work focuses on the reporting of the most important issues surrounding war coverage in the Middle East in the 21st century. Currently, he is working on a new book about media and conflict in the Middle East.

About Participants

Yvonne Ridley

Yvonne Ridley is a former Sunday Express reporter who was captured by the Taliban in Afghanistan and later became a Muslim.

About Participants

Tony Wake, BBC

Tony Wake has had a remarkable career as a journalist and a humanitarian. A respected and well-known agent of peace, he is committed to the power and resilience of the human spirit.

About Participants

Peter West

Peter West is the former editor of The New Statesman, having edited the publication for seven years from 1990 until May 2000.

About Participants

Steve Williams

Steve Williams has been working in BBC News since he was a teenager. He is responsible for the day-to-day running of the BBC World service in EBC's World service centre in London and for ensuring the high-quality journalism of the service is on the right track.
Page 6: Links

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Hostage-taking and media affect

links

news organisations

al-jazeera
Al Jazeera is a 24 hour news channel based in Qatar. Launched in November 1996, its channel is free from the constraints of government and
Al Jazeera offers its audiences in the Arab world much-needed freedom of thought, independence and room for debate.

bbc world
BBC World is the home of the BBC’s 24 hour television global news.

kommersant
Russian news web site - English version.

radio liberty
The mission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty is to promote democratic values and institutions by transmitting critical information and ideas.

media.ru
Russian news website - English version.

media analysts

osce
The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

non government organisations

 amnesty international
Amnesty International is a worldwide voluntary movement of people
who campaign for human rights.
The organisation is independent of any government, political ideology,
academic interest or region.
The organisation's aim is to work in a world in which every person enjoys all
of the human rights, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human
Rights and other international human rights standards.

ugt gorbachev foundation
The Gorbachev Foundation is an international non-governmental
foundation for research and educational studies. It was created by
Mikhail Gorbachev, former President of the USSR, in January 1990. The
Foundation became one of the first independent foundations in the post-
Soviet Russia.

icr human rights
ICR Human Rights are an international human rights organization in
its work, together with its sister organizations, the National
Human Rights
Unworthyvictims: 18 June 2001: revision

Page 7: Contacts

unworthyvictims
Hostage-taking and media affect

contacts

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Last Updated: Saturday, 21 June, 2008 - 5:00PM
Appendix C: Online Forum *(Unworthy Victims)*

**Unworthy Victims: List of Questions**

- How do you think the evolution of broadcast and web technology will affect hostage-taking in the future?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 09/02/05 00:49PM

- How do you assess Al Jazeera’s broadcast of hostage-taking?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 09/02/05 00:39PM

- Does the broadcasting of a hostage’s plea infringe further on their human rights?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 09/02/05 00:32PM

- Are the media helping hostage-takers?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 09/02/05 00:29PM

- According to Michael Core, in The Times on the 7 September, 2004, totalitarian motives behind terrorism and only democracy can stop them. Is he right?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 09/07/05 07:01PM

- Twenty-four hour news has been criticised, particularly for its repetitiveness in reporting hostage situations. How can 24 hour news overcome this stigma?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 09/07/05 06:50PM

- What are your experiences with the problems of reporting hostage situations?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 09/07/05 05:42PM

- What are some of the reasons that a hostage situation may not be reported?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 07/01/05 06:35AM

- The world appears to have a greater interest in global news since 11 September, 2001. Do you believe this interest has changed the reporting of hostage-taking situations?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 07/06/05 07:18PM

- How does religion affect the reporting of hostage situations?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 07/06/05 06:59PM

- A search of UK newspapers yielded 813 references to Kim bigley while there were only 431 for Margaret Hassan. Both hostages were held for similar periods. What might explain the disparity?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 07/06/05 05:53PM

- Margaret Thatcher said: ‘Democratic nations must try to find ways to tame the terrorist... of the oxygen of publicity. Is this tenable nowadays?’  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 07/06/05 04:51PM

- Do you think it is an editor’s duty to show footage of victims appealing directly to politicians?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 07/03/05 11:22PM

- In terms of the access journalists appeared to have during the Moscow theatre siege and Beslan school siege, what affect did this have on coverage?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 06/30/05 05:50PM

- Naomi Chomsky and Edward S. Herman’s research recognises some victims of terrorism as either worthy or unworthy according to the media. Can you think of instances where you might agree or disagree with their assessment?  
  Started By: Hamish Walker  
  Last Post: 06/25/05 02:50PM
Unworthy Victims: Participants Invited

Rachel Amatt, Europe Correspondent, Sky News (did not get back to me)

Ehad Bessaiso, Author (accepted)

Shami Chakrabarti, Director of Liberty, Human Rights Organisation (accepted)

Damian Grammaticas, Russia Correspondent, BBC (accepted)

Zahera Harb, Former Reporter, Lebanon (accepted)

Lucy Hockings, Presenter, BBC World (accepted)

Clive Jones, Chief Executive of ITV News (did not get back to me)

Jalal Othman, Manager of the Information Office of the Libyan/American Friendship Association (accepted)

Nigel Parsons, Head of Al-Jazeera International (declined)

Yvonne Ridley, Journalist and Former Taliban Hostage (accepted)

John Sutcliffe, Assistant Editor, BBC World (accepted)

Terry Waite CBE, Negotiator and Former Hostage (accepted)

Peter Wilby, Former Editor, New Statesman (accepted)

Steve Williams, Editor, BBC World (accepted)
Unworthy Victims: Questions and Answers (Posts)

1. Are the media helping hostage-takers?

Peter Wilby – 23/06/2005

“The media's job is to report the news that will be of interest to its readers. Sometimes its reporting may help hostage-takers, sometimes not. Quite clearly, groups know that taking hostages is a way to bring the world's attention to a cause that many people may otherwise remain ignorant of. Quite obscure groups can suddenly catapult themselves into becoming world-renowned causes. I accept this presents the media with a moral dilemma, but the presumption should always be in favour of reporting and publication. Otherwise, journalists become censors. If a government or other official body requests a news blackout, this should be seriously considered and such requests are very often accepted. But think of the victims' friends and/or relatives. They may well believe that publicity is the best way of getting their loved ones released, and they may also trust the media to give correct information more than they trust the government.”

Yvonne Ridley: 30/06/2005

“Publicity is the oxygen of many hostage-takers, however the media has a responsibility to keep the public informed.

“Governments usually prefer no publicity at all citing that any could jeopardise the life of the hostage, however there are genuine cases where hostage takers need or want the focus of world attention to highlight an injustice which is over-looked by the media.

“The media is there to report the news and that is its main function and what it should concentrate on.”

John Sutcliffe - 03/07/2005

“I agree with Peter Wilby on many of his points. The dangers of censorship are all too evident. Yet when we received constant still images of hostages with guns and knives pointing to their heads, the nagging fear was that we could be aiding the hostage-takers by showing the pictures around the world on BBC World. The point Peter makes about the families of hostages is an interesting one: would they prefer the world to see the horrible condition of their relatives or would it pain them too much? We decided NOT to show the more gruesome of the still images (now we seem to avoid showing them altogether) and I still worry about this aspect of news reporting. I do not believe we are helping hostage-takers by giving them the oxygen of publicity - for me it is a news story but still has to be handled delicately bearing in mind the families' sensitivities. Is this wrong?”

Peter Wilby - 06/07/2005

“I agree with John Sutcliffe. One doesn't show the most gruesome pictures, mainly because of the sensitivities of the relatives. But doesn't that apply to, say, a domestic rail disaster as much as a siege in Beslan? After the Bali bomb, I was much criticised (particularly by my own staff) for running in the New Statesman a particularly gruesome picture, which was also (arguably) humiliating for the woman portrayed. My
argument was that Bali was gruesome and was humiliating for those affected. The victim, who could not be identified, was not likely to see the picture, nor were her relatives. Shouldn't a small circulation magazine -- particularly a left-wing one whose readers may be inclined to duck some of these issues -- show the unvarnished truth?”

Jalal Othman: 02/09/2005

(Translated from Arabic)
“Of course, they help them to sell propoganda; sending their message to the world. I believe that some of the cases may not be real and just a method of publicity.”

2. The world appears to have a greater interest in global news since 11 September, 2001. Do you believe this interest has changed the reporting of hostage-taking situations?

John Sutcliffe: 03/07/2005

“No I do not believe it has changed the reporting of hostage-taking situations. I think the dilemma for journalists has always been there although the number of incidents has risen greatly.”

Yvonne Ridley: 06/07/2005

“I am in complete agreement with John's remarks. What I would add though is that there does seem to be a desire for more global news, or an improved service. Strangely, at a time when people want more news, media outlets are choosing to dumb down the service.”

3. Do you think it is an editor's duty to show footage of victims appealing directly to politicians?

Yvonne Ridley – 30/06/2005

“Each editor has to use his editorial judgment on these occasions. Sometimes a particularly harrowing message broadcast by the media is enough to secure the release of the hostage.

“It is interesting to note that mainstream media, including Al Jazeera, has never shown executions on television yet this is not the impression given out by the Bush Administration. These executions are only ever shown on websites.”

John Sutcliffe – 03/07/2005

“I totally agree with Yvonne that each journalist must use his/her editorial judgement. On BBC World we do tend to shy away from showing direct appeals to politicians. It is certainly not the editors duty to show footage of victims appealing to politicians and my own instinct is to include the appeal in script form without the visual brutality on screen.”
4. Does the broadcasting of a hostage's plea infringe further on their human rights?

Yvonne Ridley – 21/08/2005

“Not if it works and you are released. The question of appearing on Al jazeera to make an appeal for my release was raised during my detention and I was quite eager to do it on two points. One to show my parents I still had all my limbs and digits and was in pretty good shape, and the other was that it might just work and accelerate my release. Happily, I didn't have to go through this humiliation but given the chance in my situation I was ready to do it.”

John Sutcliffe - 27/08/2005

“I'm relieved to read Yvonne's response because my instinctive response would have been that it does NOT infringe human rights but she would know far better... I would hesitate broadcasting pictures of any hostage in a humiliating position and, of course, the feelings of his/her family should be paramount in any decision taken by broadcasters.”

Jalal Othman – 02/09/2005

(Translated from Arabic)

“I strongly disagree with the broadcasting of a hostage's plea as this is against human rights. TV stations just focus on their commercial concerns and don't care about the negative affect. Hostage-takers play editor and chief and just do what they like.”

5. Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman’s research recognise some victims of terrorism as either worthy or unworthy according to the media. Can you think of instances where you might agree or disagree with their assessment?

No posts.

6. In terms of the access journalists appeared to have during the Moscow theatre siege and Beslan school siege what affect did this have on coverage?

Yvonne Ridley – 30/06/2005

“Unfortunately the chaos of the Beslan School tragedy was reflected in the quality of the reporting which was transmitted. That isn't to put down the heroism of some journalists, including the Sky female journalist who was superb under fire, but the Russian authorities did not handle the situation well.

“You can facilitate the media without controlling it and in Beslan neither happened, but that alos extended to the distraught parents and other outside elements which led to the chaos, confusion and eventual massacre.”
7. How do you think the evolution of broadcast and web technology will affect hostage-taking in the future?

Yvonne Ridley: 30/06/2005

“So-called terrorists go through varying cycles of modus operandi. For instance in the 70s hijackings were commonplace, now its carbombs and martyrdom operations.

“Hostage-taking has always been in evidence on three different levels. Firstly it is a way for gangs to raise large sums of ready cash for their cause, which may be purely criminal. Secondly it is a way of groups maximising publicity for their cause. Thirdly it acts as a deterrent for third parties to aid the perceived enemy. Third parties in Iraq for instance are regarded as highly paid contract workers often seen as collaborators by the resistance on the ground.

“I can't really see that the evolution of broadcast or web will have a direct impact on hostage-taking”

John Sutcliffe - 03/07/2005

“I think the web will have a major impact. Terrorists can even now bypass mainstream organisations like the BBC and broadcast appeals and even executions directly onto the web where their audiences can view the images at their leisure. It will make it all much more direct, much quicker and impossible to control. Is this too gloomy?”

Peter Wilby - 06/07/2005

“John Sutcliffe is just a little too gloomy. All sorts of awful things are on the web, just as all sorts of awful things are in London bookshops and video stores. But people's default websites and bookmarks tend to be the BBC. This is why it's so important that, with taste and within reason, the BBC and similar media organisations give something near the unvarnished truth. If people suspect the BBC of censorship, they will go to other and less scrupulous sources.

“But if you want an example of why people don't trust the mainstream media, read Yvonne Ridley’s comments in this forum. To read most newspapers, you'd think she was some kind of lunatic, brainwashed by the Taliban. In fact, she turns out to be more concise, precise, perceptive and, of course, well-informed than most of us!”

Jalal Othman – 02/09/2005

(Translated from Arabic)
“The Internet as a tool is always improving. But I can't assess whether it will help hostage-takers in the future. Perhaps it will help them to improve their skills in sending their demands to the world. Hostage-takers will always be able to stay one step ahead. The Internet is a double-edged sword.”
8. What are your experiences with the problems of reporting hostage situations?

Yvonne Ridley: 30/06/2005

“Reporting on hostage-taking situations are fraught with difficulties because one careless word or phrase and you could jeopardise the life of the victim.

“In my case The Times reported in one edition - before it was hastily removed - that I had been a Captain in the Territorial Army, and the Mail on Sunday unhelpfully, and wrongly, suggested that I was married to an Israeli.

“As a journalist you also realise that the official line from the government could be purely spin, and any line from the hostage-takers could be pure propaganda. Basically the journalist is being used as a tool and there is little or no corroboration from either side.”

Peter Wilby: 06/07/2005

“Both the examples Yvonne quotes involve inaccuracies. Journalists don't need to think deeply about the complexities. They just need to get it right!”

Yvonne Ridley: 06/07/2005

“And, of course, Peter is quite correct in his observation. However, merely ‘getting it right’ is sometimes not that easy when you are being bombarded with propaganda from all directions.”

Lucy Hockings: 27/08/2005

“BBC World is under different pressures from domestic news networks as anything we broadcast can be seen by the perpetrators. We need to be wary of not becoming a tool in the hostage takers propaganda game.

“In the case of Ken Bigley.. we were under huge pressure to broadcast the images and sound of him begging for his life.. we did so.. and felt the backlash.

“Many viewers were upset.. not by the pictures but by the sound of him pleading. Others just found it distasteful. In a way it created more drama for the hostage takers and had the potential to encourage them and others.

“Since then the channel has made a decision to broadcast pictures only.

“It's vital that we distance ourselves from the intense coverage in the UK and put the hostage taking in an international context.”
9. Margaret Thatcher said: “Democratic nations must try to find ways to starve the terrorist….of the oxygen of publicity.” Is this tenable nowadays?

Yvonne Ridley – 30/06/2005

“The trouble is quite often powerful people in powerful positions who have much to hide will use this argument to control the media. Sometimes so-called terrorists do have a valid argument which would completely alter peoples' opinions of a certain situation. The mushroom syndrome - being kept in the dark and fed b******it - is not ideal and will be misused by corrupt leaders and those with something to hide.”

Peter Wilby - 06/07/2005

“Absolutely right. What is ‘a terrorist’? The French Resistance in the 2nd World War could have been called terrorists. Thatcher tried to starve the IRA of publicity. Result? The IRA now runs the Catholic areas of Northern Ireland which is what it always wanted.”

10. Twenty-four hour news has been criticised, particularly for its repetitiveness in reporting hostage situations. How can 24 hour news overcome this stigma?

Yvonne Ridley – 30/06/2005

“The only people I know who criticise 24 hours are journalists because we are basically news junkies and demand a faster turnover of news. I suppose the average person will probably dip in and out of 24 hour news with less frequency than those from a media background.”

John Sutcliffe: 27/08/2005

“Repetitiveness is a constant problem for 24 hours but we have to accept that news does not change every minute and people do dip in and out. Those who watch constantly would be driven to distraction. However, as journalists, we should be looking at changing headlines, new interviewees and altering the pace of each bulletin every hour. It's a struggle but one we owe the audience. I think hostage-taking pix a slight irrelevance in the context of this question.”

11. How does religion affect the reporting of hostage situations?

Yvonne Ridley: 06/07/2005

“I'm not sure if I understand the question correctly. Obviously a journalist's religion should be irrelevant when it comes to writing a factual account of any given situation. If a journalist is known to be impartial then they should not be used to cover sensitive situations where lives are at risk. Islamaphobia or basic ignorance of Islam - or any other religion for that matter - will obviously surface in a story very quickly. It is very important to remember that hostage takers have Internet access too and will check upon what is written. Going back to the coverage of Margaret Hassan's video - Muslim journalists or experts in the field of hostage-taking by Muslim groups would or should have recognised immediately that her video did not fall into the 'typical, Islamist
hostage-style' tape. None of the religious symbols or rhetoric were in evidence. If the known religion of the hostage could affect his/her situation then journalists should be responsible enough to write around the issue.”

12. What are some of the reasons that a hostage situation may not be reported?

Yvonne Ridley: 06/07/2005

“The only reason for not running a story is if the life and/or rescue of a hostage would be threatened by the mere publication or broadcast of any detail. The media does impose self censorship when it has to at the request of the authorities but this is very rare. Again, it is an editorial decision which should be taken at the highest level.”

Terry Waite: 11/07/2005

“The reasons are as stated in the previous answer as some reporting can certainly put the hostage in greater danger. I have found that on the whole the media have been most careful in exercising self censorship however there is little that can be done when someone for whatever reason steps across the line.”

13. A search of UK newspapers yielded 813 references to Ken Bigley while there were only 431 for Margaret Hassan. Both hostages were held for similar periods – what might explain the disparity?

Peter Wilby - 06/07/2005

“My Google search turns up 53,500 for Bigley, 85,900 for Hassan!!”

Peter Wilby - 06/07/2005

“Sorry, you're saying UK papers only. This will be explained by the campaign Bigley's relatives mounted in this country. It was a very good campaign, if ultimately unsuccessful. But newspapers aren't objective recorders, judging coverage of an event according to some divine yardstick. They report news. Bigley's relatives made alot of news!”

Yvonne Ridley: 06/07/2005

“Peter Wilby is correct in his assessment of the Bigley family campaign. Also, Margaret Hassan was not a UK citizen despite the gaffe made by Tony Blair in the House of Commons at the time of her kidnap which gave the outside world the impression she was born in the UK and not Ireland.

“There was also something very odd about Margaret Hassan's kidnap and not all journalists involved in her story were convinced that she was taken by the resistance. That may also have affected the full extent of the coverage. She had lived in Iraq for 30 years and was very friendly with the journalists who were regarded as 'Iraq veterans’.

“Both myself and Robert Fisk wrote articles questioning just who did kill margaret Hassan.”
“Unlike the usual modus operandi of the resistance, there were no Qur'anic recitals, Islamic banners or flags on her hostage tape. It was quite different to the others. Her body has still not been found but there is growing suspicion that Mrs Hassan, a leading anti-war opponent and much-loved in Iraq by ordinary Iraqis.”

14. How do you assess Al Jazeera’s broadcasts of hostage-taking?

Yvonne Ridley: 06/07/2005

“Donald Rumsfeld and other White House advisers will give you the impression that Al Jazeera gives out the whole grim deal from start to finish ... including executions and beheadings.

“The reality is quite different. As far as I am aware, and I did work for them, Al Jazeera has never ever broadcast anyone being executed. That stuff has been left to obscure websites and snuff-style videos or dvds.

“Al Jazeera does, in fact, play a very straight game on these occasions. The problem - if it is a problem for a news organisation - is that they usually get the hostage tapes before anyone else. This is for a variety of different reasons and on occasions nothing more sinister than it is easier to drop off a tape to Al jazeera journalists than anyone else. Also these hostage-takers very often are seeking maximum publicity and they know that anything broadcast on Al Jazeera will easily be taken by a Western media outlet rather than the other way round.”

Jalal Othman – 02/09/2005

(Translated from Arabic)
“Al-Jazeera as an Arabic channel with Muslim viewers is influenced by a number of cultures. Having seen their mission statement and their output, they sometimes deny stories as they are relatively conservative compared to other broadcasters.”

15. According to Michael Gove in The Times on 7 September, 2004, totalarianism motivates terrorists and only democracy can stop them. Is he right?

Yvonne Ridley: 06/07/2005

“I would have said injustice was the cause and justice is the cure ... it all sounds very simple but sadly the imperialistic ambitions of the West tends to blinker those who could work towards a solution. Democracy has nothing to do with it, since there are more 'democratic nations' in existence today than previously yet the world has become a less safe place in which to live.”

John Sutcliffe: 27/08/2005

“I think it's wishful and rather simplistic thinking by Michael Gove. The causes of terrorism must differ in every country and there can be no blanket explanation or remedy to the problem. The British bombings have no straightforward causes whilst the attacks on President Musharraf do have a strong ideological motivation. If only life was as simple as MG would wish.”
Appendix D: Group Survey (Online Questionnaire)

To be completed by journalism students as part of a research survey.

Please complete questions one to six then watch the footage before completing the rest of the questionnaire.

1. Name: 

2. Age: 

3. Nationality: 

4. Previous occupation: 

5. What previous hostage situations can you recall? 

6. What do you believe is the main reason people are taken hostage? 

7. Did the bulletins cover the hostage situations fairly? 

8. Who appeared to be given the most in-depth coverage: Ken Bigley or Margaret Hassan? Ken Bigley | Margaret Hassan

9. Regarding television news, what pictures do you expect to illustrate a hostage situation? 

10. Are you critical of the language used by the BBC coverage and in what ways? 

11. How did you react to the Estonian pictures? 

12. Are the media helping hostage-takers? 

[Submit Button]
Appendix E: Group Survey (Answers)

Respondent 1:

Name: KD Fabian
Age: 28
Nationality: Mexican/American
Occupation: Library Assistant, CNN

Question 5: Israeli Olympic team in Munich, 1972; Airplane flying out of Greece, forced to go to Arab country, 2 US Marines on leave killed; Margaret Hassan, Ken Bigley; Theatre in Russia; Beslan school; Columbine School in Colorado, US; Brazilian prison uprising in Rio; Hobart prison uprising, Australia; Italian aid workers in Iraq; French journalist, Iraq; Holocaust; American Embassy in Tehran; British Embassy in Lebanon; Western tourists in Sri Lanka and other parts of SE Asia; Japanese Americans interred in concentration camps in the US during WWII; Soviet Gulags; Attica prison, US.

Question 6: people are taken hostage for various reasons, though under one umbrella it could be said that people are taken hostage because the hostage takers are trying to make a statement.

Question 7: Yes, although the Margaret Hassan story covered her history better than the Ken Bigley story did.

Question 8: Margaret Hassan

Question 9: Pictures of police/SWAT/Military at the location; at the end of the situation pictures of the hostages being released/rescued.

Question 10: No. They used terms like "insurgents" as opposed to terrorists, which I think is appropriate for the news.

Question 11: They were difficult to watch, especially the kids as they came out, hardly dressed, wanting water. The sound of gunfire made it hard to believe these people were safe.

Question 12: They are providing them with a televised, world-wide audience. I cannot be sure if this is helping the hostage takers or not though.

Respondent 2

Name: Salman Ahmed
Age: 25
Nationality: Pakistani
Occupation: Professional Fundraiser
Question 5: Italian journalist in Iraq, who was eventually freed by an Italian secret service agent and then shot at by American troops.

Question 6: Hostage takings in Iraq: Retaliation to the occupation. Hostage takings in Russia: Due to Russian involvement in Chechnyan affairs.

Question 7: It seemed that the Beslan hostage taking was given more coverage than the ones in Iraq, that of Kenneth Bigley and Margaret Hassan.

Question 8: Ken Bigley

Question 9: Generally distressing pictures of hostages in captivity, relatives of hostage(s) pleading for the government to intervene and negotiate with the kidnappers.

Question 10: I think the BBC in itself is fairly critical of the language they use especially over the television medium.

Question 11: Fairly disturbing pictures.

Question 12: I do believe that the media is helping the kidnappers/hostage takers, however, should the media not comprehensively cover the situation it would not be fair reporting.

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Respondent 3

Name: Sarah Faupel
Age: 25
Nationality: German
Occupation: student

Question 5: previous ones not, only after Bigley and Hassan. The French journalist Aubernas, the Italian journalist and two other Italian care workers

Question 6: to achieve attention they otherwise do not get

Question 7: the background or the motivation of the hostage-takers was poorly covered,

Question 8: Margaret Hassan

Question 9: all except of dying people

Question 10: they tend to use the word terrorist very often, but otherwise I think the language was ok

Question 11: cruel but true, they have to be shown

Question 12: in a certain way, yes, they do
Respondent 4

Name: Yasmin Wilson  
Age: 25  
Nationality: British  
Occupation: Civil servant

Question 5: some sort of embassy situation - something to do with Iranians

Question 6: political reasons against the hostage’s country

Question 8: Margaret Hassan

Question 9: footage of the hostages taken, their captors, the families of the hostages, pleas by various people, political leaders condemning it

Question 10: they seemed to concentrate most on what the reaction of the leaders of the countries would be, rather than the hostages themselves.

Question 11: disturbing - especially pictures of wounded children and the dead

Question 12: suppose so in a way because the hostage takers are using the media to reach a wide audience and threaten others, but everyone has a right to know about these situations.

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Respondent 5

Name: Cindy Chen  
Age: 24  
Nationality: Singaporean  
Occupation: PR executive

Question 5: Iraq and Italian and French journalists, Iraq and Japanese aid workers, Iraq and Ken Bigley, Margaret Hassan

Question 6: Negotiate with government/police to get what they want

Question 7: I think they did. However I felt the Al Jazeera clip was rather emotional and showed Margaret Hassan very vulnerable. The BBC report was more objective and all rounded as it talked more about the Iraqi situation rather than just a scared person asking for help.

Question 8: Margaret Hassan

Question 9: Hostage takers with arms around the victims while negotiating with police/soldiers; police surrounding the area; victim(s) crying or shouting

Question 10: Insurgents was the word used to describe the hostage takers instead of terrorists. I think the BBC is careful of choosing the words used and try to be as objective and fair as possible.
Question 11: I am not sure if the victims should be filmed naked as they emerged from the school. Some girls were barely covered and being exposed in the media this way after such an ordeal is unfair on them and shows lack of media ethics.

Question 12: Yes because it spreads fear and emphasises the power the hostage people have over the government, people and media. They know if they filmed the hostages the world would broadcast the footage and this would put pressure on the government to do something.

Respondent 6

Name: Daniel Stanton
Age: 24
Nationality: English
Occupation: Clerical worker

Question 5: Iran embassy in London, Ken Bigley, Margaret Hassan, and Terry Waite.

Question 6: To gain publicity for minority causes.

Question 7: Yes, as much as they could without input from the hostage-takers.

Question 8: Margaret Hassan

Question 9: Pictures from outside the building (if it is a siege). I would not expect footage of hostages themselves to be shown. I think the footage of Margaret Hassan before she was taken hostage was acceptable, since it showed her as an aid worker and as an aid worker her kidnapping was a more newsworthy event.

Question 10: The words 'terrorist' and 'terror' are judgmental, but 'militant' is better and fairer.

Question 11: I thought they were intrusive and a little insensitive, particularly when a body was shown by the side of the road. Presumably it was too soon for the next of kin to have been notified.

Question 12: I believe it helps hostage-takers when the tapes they send to television stations are played. I think the media should try not to give more publicity to hostage-takers than they need to tell the story. As a news event, a hostage situation should be covered, but objectively, without allowing the hostage-takers to produce their own material for broadcast.

Respondent 7

Name: Khaled Gulam
Age: 30
Nationality: Libyan
Occupation: Journalist

Question 5: Margaret Hassan- Ken Bigly and the French hostage who released recently in Iraq

Question 6: pay attention to their right as they believe. Eg: taking hostage will put the American and British governments under a pressure to withdraw from Iraq Iraq.

Question 7: No.

Question 8: Margaret Hassan

Question 9: Margaret Hassan situation on Al Jazeera TV

Question 10: no.

Question 11: I felt a deeply sad about this situation.

Question 12: yes

Respondent 8

Name: Nazanin Azimian
Age: 27
Nationality: Swedish
Occupation: Student

Question 5: During the Iranian revolution - the Americans. Few in South Am, specially in Columbia. Beslan Iraq

Question 6: Perhaps similar reasons to the suicide bomber (for Iraq at least)? I guess violence is unfortunately one way to swiftly get some sort of a message through and perhaps actions to be taken place.

Question 7: You never know. Depends from which angle you're looking from. I always think it's unfair on the family and the loved ones of the hostages as the footage is generally quite descriptive and therefore can be overwhelming when they're shown on the news 24/7.

Question 8: Ken Bigley

Question 9: The hostage's family in tears, the hostage pleading for help, and some people in the background w/ black hoods. Also if the hostage-takers happened to Muslims, some uncivilised and barbaric.

Question 10: Though I don't agree with the action, I do think that the media doesn't really look into the cause, or it's root. There are generally many angles to take into consideration.

Question 11: I have seen worse.
Question 12: I would think so. Due to fact that the media is showing the films the hostage-takers wants them to show, provoking many strong emotions w/in and so on.

Respondent 9

Name: Neena Shandor
Age: 30
Nationality: USA
Occupation: Teacher

Question 5: Margaret Hussan, the American guy who was doing construction in Iraq, the two Italian girls, Columbine (not sure if that was a hostage situation, but I think it was).

Question 6: To create terror.

Question 7: I think they didn't always make it clear what the hostage-takers wanted. Perhaps that is for a reason, but I would have liked to hear there purposes.

Question 8: Margaret Hassan

Question 9: Police and military surrounding an area with guns. Pictures of the person or people taken hostage. Maybe the hostage(s) when release or pictures of them with their Eulogies.

Question 10: I am slightly critical of the language BBC uses; however, it is not just BBC, but most new sources. I think using words like terrorist is appropriate when their action do little more than create terror and don't know why they have to be so PR with "insurgents." But still, I am not a Bill O'Reiley and do not believe that the presenters should call them assholes or something of the such

Question 11: It was sad and scary. At times I was a little confused at what we were seeing though.

Question 12: Showing the public these atrocities certainly helps the hostage-takers spread the fear they want for the world, but not always making it clear what the hostage-takers demands are keeps the public from blaming their own government.

Respondent 10

Name: Naomi Dunstan
Age: 39
Nationality: British
Occupation: Web Manager

Question 5: Terry Waite, John McCarthy, Brian Keenan, Theatre- Moscow Siege, Entebbe Airport, Daniel Pearl, Sierra Leone (approx 2000/2001ish), and Embassy Siege London - Libyan
Question 6: money/politics money to fund politics

Question 7: It’s difficult to say whether they were covered fairly as they were covered differently. Seeing one individual, in the case of Margaret Hassan, provoked more emotion and so could be seen to provide the most in-depth coverage - however I think the Ken Bigley piece was more in-depth.

Question 8: Ken Bigley

Question 9: Map/pictures of the area, visual representation of suspected terrorist group, images of similar/linked events, images of the 'rescue' - if there is one, images of the relevant government officials, video of hostage (a recent expectation!)

Question 10: Not specifically aimed at this showing but I am sometimes horrified by the sensationalist attitude of some reporters – I wonder what that is communicating to hostage takers and also what emotions are being fed generally. Sometimes we 'know' something is horrific – we can see it from the images in front of us - constantly repeating those words provokes angry feelings within me. If there were no words then the images would take on more power, perhaps provoking sadness rather than promoting hatred.

Question 11: I felt sad

Question 12: I hope not – but they are providing a platform for coverage of atrocities, some responsibility is needed.

Respondent 11

Name: Adam Akyoo
Age: 32
Nationality: Tanzania
Occupation: Radio & TV Journalist

Question 5: terrorism

Question 6: revenge against foreign occupation. Creating fear getting money (from hostage relative/company or country.

Question 7: When these events occurred I was not in Tanzania. But I know that my colleague covered them. According to what they put into website: www.ippmedia.com that I had an access was convinced that they covered it fairly

Question 8: Margaret Hassan

Question 9: To me it is obvious that Margaret Hassan was given in depth coverage compare to Ken Bigley. Margaret was given more time on television to express the situation she was in. She puts message clear that could be her last moment in her life before being killed by her hijackers.
Respondent 13

Name: Sara Hadwin
Age: 44
Nationality: British
Occupation: Newspaper journalist

Question 5: Shergar - Terry Waite/Brian Keenan/John McCarthy - Entebbe airport, Uganda - Libyan embassy in London where the police woman was shot - Yvonne Ridley and various other journalists inc Daniel Pearl - Beslan and the theatre siege - Italian woman hostage in Iraq

Question 6: Used to be for money - extortion and kidnapping of rich individuals. Now more political to raise awareness for causes; a way of getting the world to sit up and take notice. Demands are political rather than monetary.

Question 7: Broadly - see 10. BBC World is more analytical than BBC1 say and provides more context but in security terms. Little was explained about the motivation of the hostage takers although their demands were mentioned with implications of their underlying grievance. Coverage is geared to a Western audience’s concerns - particularly in the case of Ken Bigley, the risk to companies operating in the area. The Hassan coverage was much more personal - partly because a charity worker is more emotive than a business man. On the practical level Hassan was also an established contact and TV companies had footage of her and her organisation from before she was kidnapped which made it easy to establish her identity and provide necessary images for a more personal approach. In the equivalent time frame journalists may not even have been able to identify the relatively anonymous Bigley let alone dig out footage of him.

Question 8: Margaret Hassan

Question 9: The scene. Negotiations. Release of hostages. File pix of those held. Poss shots related to the hostage takers. Beslan coverage was hampered because correspondent was in Moscow rather than Beslan. Had it been otherwise a vox pop of Moscow students would have been highly unlikely but was the best they could get for reaction. The problem with the pool footage was that the pictures were left to speak for themselves when it wasn't actually always obvious what we were seeing.

Question 10: No. Terror was used rather than terrorists. Militants, rebels are OK descriptions. Taking hostages is an extreme thing to do whatever the underlying cause the hostage takers are pursuing. I may well have sympathy for the Chechnyan cause and massive distrust of Putin but I would still condemn the Beslan action. Questioning what drives people to those extremes and recognising an injustice is not at odds with an abhorrence of hostage taking.

Question 11: I felt for the children and for their distraught relatives. Witnessing something of their experience can aid understanding of human dilemmas.

Question 12: No. Even the Al Jazeera footage of Hassan could provoke very different reactions. There is concern that such footage makes the audience sympathetic to the hostage takers or at least more likely to push for release. However it can reinforce contempt for the hostage takers for putting the hostages through such a terrible ordeal and reducing them to such a desperate state. I would lean to showing more rather than less.
Appendix F: Group Survey (DVD Clips)

Source: Pictures courtesy BBC World, (See Disk 2 for full edit)

Clip 1: Beslan school siege – Headlines
BBC World – 18:00 Bulletin, 01/09/2004
Presenter: Nik Gowing

Clip 2: Beslan school siege – Story/Interview/Two-way
BBC World – 18:00 Bulletin, 01/09/2004
Presenter: Nik Gowing, Correspondent: Steve Rosenberg, Interviewee: Dimitri Trenin

Clip 3: Ken Bigley – Studio Interview
BBC World – 18:00 Bulletin, 16/09/2004
Presenter: Nik Gowing, Interviewee: John Davidson
Clip 4: Margaret Hassan – Story  
BBC World/BBC 4 (The World) – 20:00 Bulletin, 19/10/2004  
Presenter: Kirsty Lang, Correspondent: Caroline Hawley

Clip 5: Margaret Hassan – Plea  
Al-Jazeera – October/November, 2004

Clip 6: Russian terrorist attacks – Footage used to float over conversations  
BBC World – 18:00 Bulletin, 01/09/2004
Clip 6: (Continued) Beslan school siege – Footage used to float over conversations
BBC World – 18:00 Bulletin, 01/09/2004

Clip 7: Nepalese hostages killed in Iraq – Story
BBC World – 18:00 Bulletin, 01/09/2004
Presenter: Nik Gowing, Correspondent: David Lyon

Clip 8: Indian hostages released from Iraq – Headlines
BBC World (Asia Today) – 14:30 Bulletin, 01/09/2004
Presenter: Anya Sitaram

Clip 9: Indian Hostages released from Iraq – Story
BBC World (Asia Today) – 14:30 Bulletin, 01/09/2004
Presenter: Anya Sitaram, Correspondent: Paul Wood
Clip 10: Indian Hostages released from Iraq – Phone Interview
BBC World (Asia Today) – 14:30 Bulletin, 01/09/2004
Presenter: Anya Sitaram, Interviewee: Edappakath Ahamad, Indian Junior Foreign Minister

Clip 11: Ken Bigley – Two-way
BBC World – 11:00 Bulletin, 16/09/2004
Presenter: Martine Dennis, Interviewee: Mike Donkin

Clip 12: Ken Bigley – Phone Interview
BBC World – 11:00 Bulletin, 16/09/2004
Presenter: Lyse Doucet, Interviewee: Alan Johnston

Clip 6: Beslan school siege – Trial Footage
APTN, 16/05/2005
Appendix G: Personal Interviews (Transcripts)

1. Zahera Harb, former journalist, Lebanon

Are you critical of any aspects of Al-Jazeera’s day-to-day broadcasting?

“Yes, there are two aspects when I went to look at Al-Jazeera. One of them is related to its coverage of internal Arab issues, or Arab/Arab relations. The other aspect is related to coverage of international conflicts, or issues that actually affect the international community – and those specific to the Muslim and the Arab world. Am I critical of the coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict? No I am not. Why is that? Because I think they are the people who are reporting come from Palestine and therefore are Palestinian reporters – playing the role of eyewitness. So with Al-Jazeera we were able to have real accounts of people who live there and are subject to Israeli aggression, and we were not able to see that live from Palestine before Al-Jazeera. On the other hand they have also Arab Israeli reporters who report from inside Israel, even though there is lots of criticism in the Arab world for Al-Jazeera showing Israel interviews on its airwaves. But I think this is their way of saying that we are trying to get both points of view of what’s happened.”

Are you critical of Al-Jazeera’s coverage of the recent Iraq war?

“I think they have been a bit sensational in the way they have covered Iraq. But the reason for that is the amount of casualties that you see in Iraq. When you start looking at things within its context you will see it in a different way. Rather than see it white or black - you will see it in perspective.

“In terms of the pictures of casualties, maybe they think that these pictures have not actually been shown on other stations.

“In the hostage cases, I think they have taken it very responsibly. At the beginning, if I remember correctly, they were not ready and there was a sense that they were juggling. But they decided that they were not going to show any humiliating scenes for the hostages. They would say that on the screen before broadcasting. What they ended up doing was taking the core of the message that the hostage is sending or just put it as a voice over, so you would have the presenter in the studio, saying what the hostage or the hostages are saying and just have a picture or quick video of the hostage in custody to show in conjunction.”

But Al-Jazeera must be broadcasting that plea or other broadcasters wouldn’t have access to it.

“No, I think there is sort of an agreement, they [Al-jazeera customers] buy or they ask for images, they don’t take it from air. Don’t forget most of them have been broadcasted as a voice over; they [Al-jazeera customers] might have got the transcript from the website.”
What about hostage pleas in headlines, do you see much of that on Al-Jazeera?

“You would hear a headline, “the group …. have released footage ….”

**BBC tends to put hostage pleas in the context of the package. Would Al-Jazeera do something similar?**

“No, it might be just a news story by itself. But it would be in the running order of what’s happening in Iraq, so it’s part of what’s happening in Iraq but not part of a report. Unless there is a huge story that needs to be packages in one piece in a report.”

**Do you think the broadcasting of a hostage’s plea infringes further on their human-rights?**

“Yes, but if I was an editor and I had a video in front of me with a piece on a hostage, first of all, I would think that maybe if I show the footage of the hostage his family would become aware that he’s alive. The other thing is – and this is probably what the hostage-takers are thinking – is that if you say that he’s pleading, this might actually help him. I don’t know how but clearly the plea is there to ask for help.”

**Is a plea newsworthy?**

“Yes, how we deal with it is another story. For instance, if he was crying, if he was in a humiliating position, I would rather not broadcast his voice. I would rather do it as a voice over and just show a picture. Because that would be humiliating, if he’s in a position where he’s pleading with a complete breakdown, I would think twice before showing the whole piece of his plea.”

**Do you think selling exclusive-footage is a priority for Al-Jazeera?**

“No, the only exclusive-footage is of Al-Qaeda but it’s not exclusive anymore because you can see the same tape on Al-Arbia and Al-Jazeera. So the Al-Qaeda people are now aware that there are other TV stations that are as influential as Al-Jazeera. So they try to hand their tape to Al-Arbia and Al-Jazeera – they see who it’s easiest to deliver the tape to. But mainly its Arabic channels because they are there on the ground and most of the people that work at the channels are Iraqis.”

**Are you critical of any aspects of the BBC’s international day-to-day broadcasting, in particular BBC World?**

“Yes, definitely there are. I see a lot of BBC News 24 and the way they report in the Middle East, in my opinion, is not giving the whole picture. It’s focusing on certain aspect of certain issues.”

**Do you think that’s because they’re not aware of the whole picture?**

“Probably.”

**Or do you think that maybe they are creating it for a British audience?**

“Yes, but as Greg Philo mentioned in his book, *Bad news from Israel*, there isn’t that much information for the British people, and that’s why the British people don’t have
the correct idea of what’s happening in the Middle East. So they have sort of a distorted view of what’s happening.”

Are the media helping hostage-takers?

“That is an eternal question. Is the media helping? Are the hostage-takers actually manipulating the media? What could the media do? You can’t skip talking about a hostage event, what you are doing is reporting, you’re not making events. The hostage-takers are actually using the media. Do we neglect that there has been a hostage incident? Our job is to report what is happening, how to report it, that’s another question.”

How do you report it?

“You report it with a bit of sensibility, you don’t actually show the whole tape, because definitely there is a message, behind the whole tape, that the hostage-takers have arranged. You might just concentrate on the news story as it stands; that a plea had been made or that they have announced that they have taken a hostage – it depends on the case in itself. You can’t generalise and say that there is only one way to deal with hostage-taking situations, it depends on each case.”

How about Ken Bigley held hostage by militant leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi? Would you broadcast his message or would you avoid al-Zarqawi’s message?

“The thing here is - I am talking now as a journalist, not an academic – I would think if I’m an editor, if I don’t broadcast it, or if I don’t mention it, someone else would mention it. I have to show some responsibility, that’s true – but the question, should I ignore it? If I ignore it I will be withholding information from the audience. Again it’s a question, how do I handle it, rather than do I broadcast it or not. I am against showing any beheading or any violent act against any human being on screen.”

In terms of the access journalists appeared to have during the Moscow theatre siege and Beslan school siege, what affect did this have on coverage?

“The thing is we don’t know how they covered the incidents in Russia. I felt that I got the whole image from the Western media or British channels I was watching. I felt how huge the incident was so it didn’t really affect me, the fact that information may have been incorrectly distributed. When I was viewing what was happening on Al-Jazeera and on many of the Arab satellite channels and then on the British channels, I felt the huge aspect of the atrocity and it didn’t affect me that the numbers were wrong.

“Maybe it was more important for the people who were actually involved or related to the events. You know, even killing ten children, for me, is shocking. And then the aftermath coverage of the stories of the children who survived and their stories was also good.”

What about the irresponsible journalists who may have incited violence at Beslan?

“Sometimes some journalists don’t think twice about the lives of other people, they just go and try to be adventurous – if that’s what you want to call it. And this might actually affect their lives and other people’s lives. But this actually stands within the journalist’s own conscious and sense of responsibility and limits and consequences of his work.”
How do you think that evolution of broadcast and web technology will affect hostage-taking in the future? For example, the Internet has become very prevalent in hostage-taking.

“You have just reminded me. Many of the news stories about hostage-taking that Al-Jazeera has broadcast have been taken from the Internet. You will hear them saying that: ‘a website has published or broadcast the picture of a hostage called …’ They usually, at the beginning, use the work claim. That a certain group has claimed the kidnapping of ….. And they show the pictures of this person on the website. And they tend to monitor websites. Yes, there have been a number of documentaries on Internet about the Internet used as a tool to recruit Al-Qaeda members.”

One of the people who came to talk at ‘Reporters & Reported’ proposed the scenario that if hostage-takers had the capability they might be able to broadcast and have it relayed live; saying that if these images do not appear live they will kill a hostage. Do you think that would ever be an issue, or is that too over the top?

“You are just giving ideas to hostage-takers - if it was a direct plea that would be up to the negotiators. If the hostage-takers had said ‘you put this on air or we kill’ then that is up to the negotiating team to decide. At that point the media should have coordination with the negotiating team. If the team asks for the plea to broadcast it then they have to broadcast it as it is helping to save people’s lives.”

Margaret Thatcher said: “Democratic nations must try to find ways to starve the terrorist….of the oxygen of publicity.” Is this tenable nowadays?

“Actually there have been lots of books discussing her issue of oxygen of publicity and she has been proved wrong. We all try to say that this is not true. You can’t withhold information. You’re not creating, you are reporting. You can’t have a bomb go off and not say that a bomb has gone off. And you can’t have someone claiming responsibility for the bombing and not say that you have someone claiming responsibility. And you can’t have someone saying I bombed because of this and this and this and for you to ignore mentioning why they committed that bombing. If you agree with the hostage-takers or not that’s another thing. You have to be socially responsible.”

A search of UK newspapers yielded 813 references to Ken Bigley while there were only 431 for Margaret Hassan. Both hostages were held for similar periods – what might explain this disparity?

“I was unsure what happened to Margaret Hassan because there was news she had been killed and then there was news that she was alive. But I didn’t hear that she was alive on the British media, I heard that on the Arabic channels.

“I don’t know. Maybe because Margaret Hassan had been working in Iraq for more than 20 years and she was married to an Arab. Also maybe because Margaret Hassan would be considered someone who’s aware of the dangerous aspect of being in Iraq. While Ken Bigley was someone who went there for the sake of work. And not aware of the dangers. He took the idea that it’s a new country now, so that also might have given him the look of innocents. That’s the only difference between the two probably.”
And the outcome of her death would have affected more people directly. She worked for Care International where as he worked putting up communication towers.

“But that’s not important. We are just making assumptions to their worthiness.”

2. Jalal Othman, Manager Information Office of Libyan/American Friendship Association

(Comments from this interview were placed on the online forum)

Are the media helping hostage-takers?

(Ofcourse, they help them to sell propoganda; sending their message to the world. I believe that some of the cases may not be real and just a method of publicity.

Does the broadcasting of a hostage's plea infringe further on their human rights?

“I strongly disagree with the broadcasting of a hostage's plea as this is against human rights. TV stations just focus on their commercial concerns and don't care about the negative affect. Hostage-takers play editor and chief and just do what they like.”

How do you think the evolution of broadcast and web technology will affect hostage-taking in the future?

“The Internet as as a tool is alway improving. But I can't assess whether it will help hostage-takers in the future. Perhaps it will help them to improve their skills in sending their demands to the world. Hostage-takers will always be able to stay one step ahead. The Internet is a double-edged sword.”

How do you assess Al Jazeera’s broadcasts of hostage-taking?

“Al-Jazeera as an Arabic channel with Muslim viewers is influenced by a number of cultures. Having seen their mission statement and their output, they sometimes deny stories as they are relatively conservative compared to other broadcasters.”

3. Jamsheda Young, broadcast journalist, BBC World

(Email interview)

How do you compare Al-Jazeera with BBC World?

“There are striking similarities between the Al-Jazeera newsroom and that of BBC World. Both newsrooms share familiar working practices such as editorial meetings at the start of each shift, the allocation of different stories to broadcast journalists by the senior editor, emphasis on breaking news and so on. Both channels will break the
schedule for important news events such as a key speech by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, or a large-scale suicide bombing. Because many of the journalists at Al-Jazeera are ex-BBC, this was no surprise.

“Key differences are that journalists at Al-Jazeera have a much greater awareness and immediate insight into certain Middle Eastern stories.

“I also found the journalists are very passionate about their profession, and found in my conversations that there was a strong belief in Al-Jazeera’s mission and its high status in the Arab media. Indeed at least two staff-members I spoke to referred to the channel, with some pride, as the Arab equivalent of the BBC.

“Al-Jazeera has completely changed Arab media. They are pioneers in broadcasting, moving away from reporting family events of leaders in the Middle East. They are not afraid of offending and do not broadcast a diplomatic diary. They report on what they think qualifies as news.

Do you think Al-Jazeera contributed to anti-American feeling?

Feeling is already high and I am not sure if Al-Jazeera are contributing or confirming, they still have rolling news and don’t censor coverage of big American speeches. Al-Jazeera just reflects what people already feel.”

What did Al-Jazeera staff think of BBC World’s output?

It was also an eye-opener to chat to television trainees from Sudan at the Al-Jazeera training centre towards the end of the visit – and hear some feedback on their impressions of the BBC’s coverage of Africa and Darfur in particular. Visits to the Al Jazeera training centre, sports channel, website newsroom and the temporary office of the new English language-news service also gave an insight into the level of resources available, and into the long-term strategy of Al Jazeera as a brand.
Appendix H: Emails

Email 1: Outbound 18/06/2005
To: Prospective Participants
Subject: Invitation

Dear Participant,

My name is Hamish Walker and I am currently studying the MA in International Journalism at Cardiff University. I am writing to invite you to participate in an online forum, as part of a post-graduate research project, designed to bring professionals together. This online forum will focus on the reporting of hostage taking situations - with particular reference to events in Iraq and Russia over 2003 and 2004. It will look at the influence the media has over hostage takers and politicians.

Each participant will be supplied with an individual login and asked to comment through the online forum. The forum will run for a couple of weeks allowing participants to visit it at convenient times. It is expected to start in the middle of June.

Other participants who have confirmed include:
Zahera Harb - Middle East Reporter / Lecture
Peter Wilby - Recent Editor of the New Statesmen
Steve Williams - Senior Editor, BBC World

I was also wondering if you would be available for a personal interview to augment the topic and ideas. If you are interested in the forum then I am asking participants to supply a digital image and a short biography suitable for use on the web site.

I hope that you will be interested in participating.
Yours Sincerely,
Hamish Walker

Email 2: Outbound 20/06/2005
To: Damian Grammaticas
Subject: His participation

Hi Damian,

Thanks for getting back to me and for forwarding the photo. I will include you in the online forum and will send web site details later in the week. The site is still under construction but will be ready for next Monday when the forum is due to begin.

I understand if you become busy that you will be unable to participate. I will be sending emails summarising the conversation with the idea being that you can take it up and leave it at your own discretion.

Regards,
Hamish Walker
Email 3: Inbound 20/06/2005
From: Doug Jewell, Campaigns Co-ordinator, Liberty
Subject: Shami Chakrabarti’s participation

Hamish

Please find attached photo of Shami as discussed. As agreed you can list Shami on the website as invited and we will confirm at the start of next week whether or not she can take part.

Yours Doug

Email 4: Inbound 20/06/2005
From: Sarah Douglas-Pennant, Terry Waite’s PA
Subject: Terry Waite’s participation

Dear Mr Walker,

I am sorry not to have replied to you sooner, but Mr Waite has been travelling and I have only just managed to speak to him.

It is quite an assumption on your part to have already listed Mr Waite as a participant on your website without having heard back from me, but I am pleased to say that Mr Waite has agreed to be a participant and will log in when time allows.

Yours, Sarah

Email 5: Outbound 20/06/2005
To: Sarah Douglas-Pennant, Terry Waite’s PA
Subject: Terry Waite’s participation

Dear Ms Douglas-Pennant,

That is very exciting that Mr Waite can participate. I am very sorry for placing him on the web site early. I think that my enthusiasm got the better of me.

Thank you very much for your time.
Kind Regards,

Hamish Walker

Email 6: Outbound 20/06/2005
To: Participants
Subject: Login details and first round of questions

Dear Participant,

Here is the link to the web site and online forum:
www.unworthyvictims.cf.ac.uk/forum.html
Please familiarise yourself with the web site and the other participants before logging on to the forum.

The initial user name and password on to the forum is:
username: unworthy
password: bobsyouruncle

Once you have entered these details the forum will appear. Once the page has opened then your personal login to the forum is:
username: ####
password: ####

I have listed three questions on the forum. Please click on each of the questions in turn and the option to comment will appear at the bottom of the page.

I will be sending occasional emails designed to inform participants of the latest questions and a summary of the discussion. This will give partakers the option of joining in when they feel they have something to contribute to the conversation. The idea is that the forum will operate in a way that allows participants to take it up and leave it at their own discretion. The forum is expected to last two weeks.

The first three questions are:
1. Are the media helping hostage-takers?
2. The world appears to have a greater interest in global news since 11 September, 2001. Do you believe this interest has changed the reporting of hostage-taking situations?
3. Do you think it is an editor's duty to show footage of victims appealing directly to politicians?

Please take into consideration other participant comments before posting your own.

If you find the emails excessive then contact me and I will take you from the list. Your email details will not be available to other participants.

Thank you very much for your time.
Kind Regards,
Hamish Walker

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Email 7: Outbound 24/06/2005
To: Participants
Subject: Second round of questions

Dear Participant,

Here is the second round of questions for the online forum:

1. Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman's research recognise some victims of terrorism as either worthy or unworthy according to the media. Can you think of instances where you might agree or disagree with their assessment?
2. In terms of the access journalists appeared to have during the Moscow theatre siege and Beslan school siege what affect did this have on coverage?
3. How do you think the evolution of broadcast and web technology will affect hostage-taking in the future?
The link to the web site and online forum is:
www.unworthyvictims.cf.ac.uk/forum.html

And the initial username and password on to the forum is:
username: unworthy
password: bobsyouruncle

Once you have entered these details the forum will appear. Your personal login to the forum is:
username: ####
password: ####

Please take into consideration other participant comments before posting your own.

Thank you again for your time.
Kind Regards,

Hamish Walker

_______________________________

Email 8: Inbound 25/06/2005
From: Damian Grammaticas
Subject: Online Forum

Dear Hamish,

I'm sorry I haven't managed to post any comments. I will try to find some time to do so in the next few days.

All the best

Damian

_______________________________

Email 9: Outbound 29/06/2005
To: Participants
Subject: Third Round of Questions

Dear Participants,

Here is the third round of questions for the online forum:

7. What are your experiences with the problems of reporting hostage situations?
8. Margaret Thatcher said: "Democratic nations must try to find ways to starve the terrorist…of the oxygen of publicity." Is this tenable nowadays?
9. Twenty-four hour news has been criticised, particularly for its repetitiveness in reporting hostage situations. How can 24 hour news overcome this stigma?

The link to the web site and online forum is:
www.unworthyvictims.cf.ac.uk/forum.html
And the initial username and password on to the forum is:
username: unworthy
password: bobsyouruncle

Once you have entered these details the forum will appear. Your personal login to the forum is:
username: ####
password: ####

Please take into consideration other participant comments before posting your own.

Thank you again for your time.
Kind Regards,

Hamish Walker

Email 10: Inbound 30/06/2005
From: Steve William
Subject: Online Forum

Hamish,

I feel extremely guilty, but I haven't done this....all I can say is it's been a couple of days from hell...and I am about to go on leave...if it can wait till July 18 I can do it. If not your best best is probably Kevin Geary. Kevin, can you please help here...Hamish, as you know, has been a media manager here for quite a while..but has taken a year out to do a post grad in journalism at the esteemed Cardiff course. He needs this online forum q and a sorting...can you help? Sorry guys...

Steve

Email 11: Outbound 06/07/2005
To: Participants
Subject: Final Round of Questions

Dear Participant,

Here is the final round of questions for the online forum:

10. What are some of the reasons that a hostage situation may not be reported?
11. A search of UK newspapers yielded 813 references to Ken Bigley while there were only 431 for Margaret Hassan. Both hostages were held for similar periods - what might explain the disparity?
12. How do you access Al Jazeera's broadcasts of hostage-taking?
13. According to Michael Gove, in The Times on the 7 September, 2004, totalitarianism motivates terrorists and only democracy can stop them. Is he right?

The link to the web site and online forum is:
www.unworthyvictims.cf.ac.uk/forum.html
And the initial username and password on to the forum is:
username: unworthy
password: bobsyouruncle

Your personal login to the forum is:
username: ####
password: ####

Please take into consideration other participant comments before posting your own.

Thank you again for your time.
Kind Regards,

Hamish Walker

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**Email 12: Inbound 18/07/2005**
**To:** Participants  
**Subject:** Penultimate Email

Dear Participant,

Thank you very much for you participation in the online forum. The two week period has obviously come to an end but the forum is still working and your comments will be accepted and of use to me until the 15th of August.

There are a number of people yet to post comments so it is recommended that you visit the forum for the latest developments.
www.unworthyvictims.cf.ac.uk/forum.html

The initial username and password on to the forum is:  
username: unworthy  
password: bobsyouruncle

Please take into consideration other participant comments before posting your own.

Thank you very much for your time.
Kind regards,

Hamish Walker

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**Email 13: Outbound 08/08/2005**
**To:** Participants  
**Subject:** Final Email

Dear Participant,

Thank you very much for you participation in the online forum. I am very keen to gather your final comments, over the next few days, to be in time for inclusion in my research project. There are a number of people yet to post comments so it is recommended that you visit the forum for the final developments.
www.unworthyvictims.cf.ac.uk/forum.html

The initial username and password on to the forum is:
username: unworthy
password: bobsyouruncle

Once the page has opened then your personal login to the forum is:
username: ####
password: ####

Please take into consideration other participant comments before posting your own.

Kind regards,

Hamish Walker

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**Email 14: Outbound 25/08/2005**
To: Doug, Press Officer at Liberty,
Subject: Shami Chakrabarti’s participation

Dear Doug,

I am writing again in regard to my online forum. I would particularly value Ms Chakrabarti’s answers and ideally to be included in the research project they would have to be posted by the end of next week.

I imagine that Ms Chakrabarti is very busy responding to the emotional output following the London bombings and have noticed a number of her recent contributions on BBC programming.

I have placed an extra question on the forum looking at human rights and hostage-taking but understand if your office is too busy to respond.

Question: Does the broadcasting of a hostage's plea infringe further on their human rights?

The link to the web site and forum is:
www.unworthyvictims.cf.ac.uk/forum.html

Kind regards,

Hamish Walker
Appendix I: Search-engine Analysis

Figure 1: Mentions of victims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Words</th>
<th>Date Hostage-Taking or Siege Began</th>
<th>Total Deaths</th>
<th>Hostage Period (Days)</th>
<th>LexisNexis UK newspapers capture period</th>
<th>LexisNexis World newspapers capture period</th>
<th>BBC website capture period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Theatre siege”</td>
<td>23rd October 2002</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Beslan”</td>
<td>1st September 2004</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ken Bigley”</td>
<td>16th September 2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Margaret Hassan”</td>
<td>19th October 2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data compiled from LexisNexis and BBC websites
Bibliography A

This bibliography identifies sources that were referred to in the text.

Books, Essays, Reports & Speeches


http://www.weforum.org/site/knowledgenavigator.nsf/Content/_S6762?open


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URL: http://www.bbcworld.com/content/template_home.asp?pageid=1

Foreign & Commonwealth Office website. Travel advice by country – Iraq.

Accessed 17/08/2005. URL:


bigley_pleads_hostage.jpg

URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

**Television Programmes**


Documentaries. BBC 2. 21:00BST. 30/08/2005.


**Discussions & Lectures**


This bibliography identifies sources that were not referred to in the text but were influential in the production of this dissertation.

**Books, Essays & Speeches**


**Newspaper & Online Publications**


URL: http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/?t=article&l=i_cried_like_a_child


