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A Study of the Media Coverage of the Copenhagen Shootings

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# News Framing in a Time of Terror

## *A Study of the Media Coverage of the Copenhagen Shootings*

Hanne Jørndrup

### **Abstract**

On Saturday afternoon, 14 February 2015, a man attacked a public meeting at Krudttønden in Copenhagen and later the city's synagogue, killing two persons. The attacks did not take the Danish media by surprise since they had recently been engaged in the coverage of similar events, reporting the attacks at the Charlie Hebdo office in Paris in January 2015.

This article analyses how the Danish television channel DR1 framed the attacks in the newscast from the first shot at Krudttønden and for the following week. Furthermore, the analysis will discuss how the framing of the shooting as a "terror attack" transformed the news coverage into a "news media" media event, abandoning the journalistic norm of critical approach while the media instead became the scene of national mourning.

**Keywords:** framing, terror, media events

### **Introduction**

In the afternoon of Saturday, 14 February 2015, a shooting took place at Krudttønden, a public venue in Copenhagen. On that day, Krudttønden was the venue for a public meeting with the Swedish artist and cartoonist Lars Vilks. A gunman shot several rounds of bullets against the windows of the building, injuring three police officers. The gunman fled the area and, on the way out, he shot and killed a civilian who tried to stop him. From then on, an intensive police search for the gunman began, but he managed to strike again in the late evening when he fired shots at the synagogue in Copenhagen, killing a civilian from the Jewish community and injuring two police officers. The next day, the gunman was finally located near his residence, where he entered into an exchange of fire with the police and consequently died. On Monday, 16 February, a commemoration was held close to Krudttønden and later in the week the two victims were buried as well as the gunman himself.

## **The research subject**

This is, in short, an account of what happened during that week in February 2015. The way Danish media presented these events is the scope of this article. The media reported on the event from shortly after the shooting at Krudttønden and extensively over the next few days. The two national television stations went into “breaking news” mode and followed every step in the developing news story on their 24-hour news channels (TV2 News and DR2), while the major online news services had ongoing coverage on their websites. What is interesting to analyse is how the media from the very beginning picked up the event as more than just a simple shooting. In this article, I will demonstrate how a dominant frame in the news coverage interpreted the events in Copenhagen as a terror attack that was part of a broader conflict between radicalised Islamic forces and the freedom and virtues of the Western world.

The terror frame has been omnipresent since the September 11 attacks in the USA in 2001. Increasingly over the last ten years, an additional notion has emerged within this terror frame – the notion that terror would eventually hit Denmark. The assumption that *Denmark is next on the terrorists’ list* was based on previous terror attacks in London and Madrid, on Denmark’s contributions to wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, and last but not least on the so-called cartoon crisis in 2005. Asta Smedegaard Nielsen (2014) made a study of previous incidents concerning terror in Denmark since 2001. The anticipation of terrorism in Denmark was also a feature in the media coverage of these events. Nielsen describes how journalists refer to a public anticipation of terrorism – formed by the media’s previous coverage of the subject – which leads the unfolding event to be classified as a terrorist attack (Nielsen 2014).

In this regard, the intensive coverage of the attack on the Charlie Hebdo offices served for Danish journalists as the preview to this domestic attack. During the coverage of the attack on Charlie Hebdo in January 2015, Danish journalists constantly referred to Denmark, compared the work of the French magazine with the publication of the famous Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohammed, and repeatedly emphasised the French-Danish connections through these cartoons, which Charlie Hebdo had also published. This so-called “Danish angle” on international events is a common feature in reporting foreign news in Denmark – even though editors rarely want to admit it (Jørndrup & Rohleder 2013). In this case, it became almost prophetic and placed the notion (or fear) within the Danish public that something similar might happen in Denmark at any given moment.

Therefore, the combination of the dominant frame of “terror” and the anticipation of an attack in Denmark presents us with a somewhat extraordinary case compared with studies of previous terrorist attacks, like September 11 in 2001 or Utøya in 2011. Unlike these attacks, the Copenhagen shooting lacked the dominant element of shock that, according to several studies, was a crucial element in understanding the way the media reacted and why journalists willingly abandoned the role of critical watchdog (e.g. Zelizer & Allan 2011b (2002)).

The aim of this article is to examine whether the news coverage of the Copenhagen shootings followed the path of previous terror attacks even though the anticipation of a terrorist attack replaced the element of shock. In the following, I will return to some of the studies of media and journalism in time of terror and present Hillel Nosssek’s notion of “the ‘news media’ media event” combined with Daniel C. Hallin’s three spheres of

journalistic practice, which will be the theoretical concepts in analysing the framing of selected newscasts.

## Theory

Terrorism has been present in many parts of the world for decades. In Europe, organisations such as the Red Brigades and the IRA have a long record of terrorist attacks, just as various Palestinian organisations have operated with terror as part of their struggle for an independent Palestinian state. The media have reported these events over the years, but there have also been several attempts to keep the terrorists and their claims away from public attention (Carruthers 2000).

Nevertheless, it is fair to state that news coverage on terrorist attacks entered a whole new dimension on 11 September 2001, due to both the magnitude and unexpectedness of the attacks and also the transformation of the media landscape with unprecedented 24-hour news coverage both on television and the internet (Zelizer & Allan 2011b). With an unexpected attack on a city with numerous television stations and thousands of journalists, everything went on air directly to a worldwide public. Danish television stations went to live coverage shortly after the first plane crashed and cancelled all scheduled programmes for the rest of the day and more or less for the following days (Qvortrup 2002). This pattern recurred when a bomb exploded in the streets of central Oslo followed by the shootings on the island of Utøya in Norway in July 2011. For a short period, Norwegian media focused exclusively on the attacks and eliminated all other news stories from the agenda. Similarly in this case the interest from foreign media was present from the very beginning (Andenæs 2012), just as Danish media tuned in on the event in Norway (Nielsen 2014).

Immediate live coverage following the unfolding of an event is now a common feature that leaves little time for any editing or selection of news items. Zelizer and Allan describe it as a situation where the journalists have to operate far from their everyday context: “News organizations – together with their sources – lack a readymade ‘script’ to tell their stories, a frame to help them and their audiences comprehend the seemingly incomprehensible” (Zelizer & Allan 2011a:1).

These studies also reveal another common feature of how journalists reacted in the first phase of the attacks – they all worked non-stop. Even though they *lacked their script* there was a common understanding that this story was mandatory. Commercials, entertainment programmes etc., were either abandoned or down-scaled, and journalists kept on working even long after their shifts had ended (Rosen 2011). In Norway the attack happened during the holiday season, but many journalists gave up their holidays and rushed to either Oslo or Utøya to report on the attacks (Andenæs 2012). In Schudson’s words, on September 11, the feeling among journalists in New York could best be described as “‘At last!’ they seemed to sigh. ‘This is what journalism is about! This is why I am a journalist!’” (Schudson 2011: 49).

Again, when comparing the studies from New York (e.g. Zelizer & Allan 2011b) and Norway (Andenæs 2012), significant similarities in the journalistic practice appear. The first phase of these attacks exposed both a sense of operating on unknown ground simultaneously with a sense of facing a task of utmost importance, an event journalists should make their very best effort to explain to the public. How did they go about that task?

In short, journalists (both American and Norwegian) did two very different things. On the one hand, they focused on one of the core elements in journalism – the gathering of facts. This connects to a basic ideal of journalism as an essential institution in a democratic society – with the duty to inform the public about important events. On the other hand, journalists neglected another core virtue in journalism – that of being a critical opponent to the establishment, the government and its institutions. This ideal also demands journalists to separate facts from opinion and emotion (Zelizer & Allan 2011b; Andenæs 2012).

Schudson describes, with reference to Hallin (1986), how the coverage on September 11 quickly shifted from the standard ideas of how to report in a balanced and objective manner within *the sphere of legitimate controversy* to reporting within *the sphere of consensus* where a value-based *we* was considered under siege by evil forces. Authorities such as the police, the fire brigade and the US president were national heroes, and journalists did not make any effort to balance their views with those of Osama bin Laden or any others. On the contrary, the terrorists and their actions were reported within the *sphere of deviance* and demonised as the very antithesis of the national or Western *we* (Hallin 1986: 116-117; Schudson 2011). “Instead, post-September 11 journalism sought to provide comfort or reassurance, not just information or analysis” (Schudson 2011: 48). Andenæs (2012) also gives accounts of this shift in the basic journalistic attitudes from Norway in 2011. Several journalists explained how they never challenged the information from the Norwegian police even though they knew that it was inaccurate.

In Nossek’s concept, the media turn a terrorist attack into a “‘news media’ media event” (Nossek 2008: 326-327) where the media perform the same roles as in classic media events like royal funerals or weddings (as promoted by Dayan & Katz 1992). The critical approach is abandoned in favour of a role where journalists act as masters of ceremony towards the audience to ensure that tradition is upheld (Nossek 2008: 314). In Nossek’s altered interpretation, the event is clearly neither state-organised nor pre-planned, but the media act independently in accordance with the ruling values in society and master a ceremony of mourning after the terrorist attack. Critical voices towards society or the government are stifled just as they are when the media engage in traditional media events (Dayan & Katz 1992; Nossek 2008). In Hallin’s concept, a ‘news media’ media event signals a shift away from the everyday reporting within the sphere of legitimate controversy to reporting about the society within a sphere of consensus and respectively reporting the terrorists within the sphere of deviance. The shifts are not deliberate choices made by journalists or news media, but a reflection of the political consensus on the subject in the society as such (Hallin 1986: 116; Jørndrup 2012: 50).

Schudson emphasises how there are three occasions when journalists willingly abandon the idea of neutral reporting, (1) moments of tragedy, (2) situations of public danger and (3) threats to national security. In the attacks on September 11 all three aspects were in place, and journalists willingly did their best to help overcome the trauma and tragedy by lending public grief a voice, distributing practical as well as emotional guidance, as well as embracing and applauding the national *we* (Schudson 2011: 49). In Nossek’s words, media worked intensively in order to reject the terrorist message and to restore society (Nossek 2008).

Zelizer and Allan describe, with reference to Herman (1992), that journalists play a key role in a process to lead a society from trauma to recovery. It is a process with three

stages: establishing safety, engaging in remembrance and mourning, and reconnecting with ordinary life (Herman 1992 in Zelizer & Allan 2011a:2). Only at the third stage, when the imminent threat seems to have disappeared and ordinary life has resumed, will journalism reconnect with the ideals of critical, balanced reporting which includes a critical stance towards the authorities' role in and responsibility for the event.

## Methods

With inspiration from these studies, I will have a closer look at the media coverage of the Copenhagen shooting in order to see to if these different stages and corresponding shifts in journalistic praxis were present in the Danish case. To grasp how the news media interpreted the event within different journalistic spheres, I will make a framing analysis of selected news items. The concept of framing is widely used and exists in so many different theoretical and methodological varieties that it might be impossible to describe framing analysis as only one thing (D'Angelo & Kuypers 2010; Entman 1993; Hjarvard 2015). A common feature in most approaches to this concept is the basic assumption that we do not relate to the world in a direct and unfiltered way, but that we recognise and interpret events within existing ideas.

This article follows Entman's concept of framing as a specific logic that selects and interprets some aspects of an event and ignores others. To be able to identify a coherent frame and distinguish it from other frames, Entman defines a frame as constituted by : (1) problem definition, (2) causal interpretation, (3) moral evaluation, and (4) solution or treatment recommendation for the problem (Entman 1993:52). These four dimensions together form a framework, a specific gaze on the world, which constitutes the context for how news media present and interpret events. Entman also describes framing as "a way to describe the power of a communicating text" (Entman 1993: 51). Framing entails the power to define what and who are good and bad, to single out both the problems and solutions and to influence moral judgements of the events. Framing mechanisms also thereby act to prime the ways in which future events will be perceived and have an influence on both norms and politics. Kuypers refers to this as "framing extension" (Kuypers 2010).

I will use these four functions of a frame as tools to scrutinise the unfolding event that began at Krudttønden on 14 February 2015. To enhance the framework I will analyse the descriptions of the event, the actors, the motives and the reactions by asking the four questions related to Entman's four dimensions: (1) *What* kind of event is this? (2) *Who* is to blame? *Why* did it happen, and what was the motive? (3) What kind of moral evaluations refer to the event – and who has the right to pass these judgements? (4) Finally, what to do next?

The news framing of the event reveals itself in these small details, and – as I will argue – reveals itself as being exactly a frame that is not identical to the events, the actors, the utterances and other elements that made up the news story.

I have decided to focus on one medium only, television, and one channel, DR1, in particular, its regular newscast, *TV-Avisen*, broadcast daily at 6:30pm in the period from 14 February and the week that followed. This limited sample enables me to make an in-depth framing analysis on a single newscast and see exactly how the framing of the event constitutes itself through the four functions and how it evolves from day to

day. Since DR1 is part of a media organisation that also runs breaking news on another channel (DR2), I expect to get the daily summary of the whole news production from DR. One might see it as a way to perform a spot check on the framing of the event. The 6.30 pm newscast was the first regular newscast on DR after the shooting took place and the only newscast that is broadcast daily on DR1.<sup>1</sup> Since the element of live broadcast is a vital part of the concept of a media event, it is obvious to choose television newscasts for this analysis.

The analytic focus is on how the framing constitutes the event as a terror attack and how to locate shifts between the different journalistic spheres. In this regard, I am less concerned with the question of whether or not the newscast at DR1 is representative of the news coverage in the Danish media in general. DR as the leading public service media in Denmark is, however, expected to be very much in accordance with the mainstream media and consequently with the political consensus in Denmark (Hallin 1986). DR's position as a public service medium may have reinforced its role in the public mourning since DR acted as co-coordinator of the commemoration held in Copenhagen on Monday, 16 February 2015.

First, I will make an analysis of the very first newscast on 14 February, which was broadcast at a time when neither the media nor the police knew anything about the perpetrator or the scope of his crimes.

## **Saturday, 14 February 2015**

When the newscast begins at 6:30pm, it is three hours after the shooting at Krudttønden, but hours before the shooting at the synagogue. The identity of the gunman is still unknown.

The newscast on Saturday is broadcast in the regular scheduled time slot, but it reports solely on the shooting. On the screen is a bar with the headline "Shooting drama" and below that "One killed in Østerbro" – later this is changed to "One killed and several injured". In the studio are two people, the news anchor and DR1's crime reporter, who plays a role as both co-anchor and expert on the subject. During the newscast, the anchor is in dialogue with a number of journalists dispatched to different locations in Copenhagen. Two reporters are in place near the scene of the shooting while a third is located in the northern part of the same neighbourhood where the police have found the getaway car. Another reporter is at the police headquarters. There are also interviews with eyewitnesses who happened to be in the vicinity at the time of the shooting.

The number of live reporters in the field indicates that the event was significant and newsworthy, as does the absence of any other news stories not related to the shooting. The sources used in these newscasts were primarily the police and some ordinary citizens, but the crime reporter also used an iPad to access news from both international media and social media while in the studio.

## **What is the problem?**

How does DR1 present the event at this stage? First of all, the labelling on the screen tells us that it has to do with a shooting incident with casualties. Nevertheless, the crime reporter states in the first minutes that the police do not consider it a terrorist attack *yet*



**Figure 1.** Screenshot from DR1, *TV-Avisen*, 6:30pm, 14 February 2015

(DR1 14/02/2015). Hence, the idea of “terror” is active from the very beginning and is therefore present in the framework, just as the word pops up on several occasions during the newscast.

In a discussion on the kind of weapons used in the shooting, the co-anchor states that it is presumably some kind of heavy automatic weapon. To this the anchor adds: “... and without making any conclusions, we have to be cautious, we don’t know the motive or the circumstances, but it was the same we witnessed at the attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris, where the same kind of heavy weapons were used”. Again, the framing tells us that this is not just a single shooting, but also a much larger problem.

### **Why has there been a shooting – what was the cause?**

At the time of the newscast, there is still no indication of who the gunman is or whether he acted alone. Nevertheless, the journalists do speculate openly about what could be the target and the motive, and they base their speculations on the fact that Krudttønden hosted a meeting with “the Mohammed cartoonist Lars Vilks”. A couple of minutes are dedicated to explaining the role of Vilks in the Mohammed cartoon crisis of 2005 and the number of attacks and threats he has received since then. During this commentary, the anchor says, “We don’t know anything about the motive, so we have to be careful. But it is obvious that it (the presence of Lars Vilks) leads us to believe that the shooting is related to the Mohammed cartoons”. The co-anchor agrees with this assumption and confirms that the police are working with the same theory.

With reference to “voices on Twitter”, the crime reporter also states that the news of the shooting does not really elicit a feeling of shock, since people have expected an attack of this kind to strike Copenhagen at some point. Equally, the TV presenters state that media from around the world have great interest in the shooting, “not least because of this link to the Mohammed cartoons,” as the anchor states.



The repeated references to these cartoons emphasise the notion of Denmark as an expected terror target. At this stage in the coverage, a clear framework was present and articulated even though the journalists were very cautious in their wording and constantly emphasised that they “do not know this yet”, talking about the “presumed motive” or the “alleged perpetrators” etc.

### **The moral evaluation**

The newscast includes plenty of comments that condemn the shooting. These moral evaluations appear primarily in interviews with people on the streets who utter their shock and disgust towards the shootings. Many comments focus on the fact that the shooting took place in an ordinary neighbourhood full of children and families who were just going about their regular business and who could all potentially have been in danger. Children playing in the park and semi-automatic weapons fired in the street do not go well together, so according to civilians the shooting is a threat to everyday life.

These interviews with civilians were very long compared with normal standards on DR1, which also indicates the priority given to moral judgements. In addition, the reporters on the crime scene gave their personal reports on how they received the news of the attack and thereby transgressed the journalistic ideals of omitting emotions from news reporting.

### **The solution**

The major part of the newscast is concerned with the police investigation and focuses on two questions: what happened, and what will happen next? The journalists trust the police to answer both questions, and they concentrate on informing the audience on every move in the police investigation. DR1 has reporters placed close to all crime scenes and at the police headquarters. The anchor and the crime reporter also engage in an interpretation of the police work, which is supportive of the police officers and their role as provider of security. The crime reporter states that there is intensive patrolling of police cars in the neighbourhood surrounding Krudttønden and tells us that this is part of the search for the gunman. Furthermore, he explains that it is just as much a signal to the public that it is safe to walk the streets again.

By offering this interpretation of police work, the crime reporter himself engages in the reassurance and guidance of the public thereby helping to restore order in society. The journalists also actively seek to help the police, urging the public not to call 112 (the emergency number) unless an extreme situation occurs since the lines are overloaded. Equally, when the anchor asks the crime reporter what people are writing on social media, his initial answer is, “First of all, there is a widespread recognition of respect towards the authorities involved”.

To sum up: the coverage on DR1 to some extent followed the pattern from September 11 and Utøya. The journalists were very much concerned with the gathering of facts: What do the police know? What happened? In addition, they placed great trust in the police and their investigation as the way to overcome trauma and restore everyday life. The journalists at DR1 even did their bit to help the police by communicating vital information from the police to the citizens. Nonetheless, it is clear that an existing framework

of a terror attack was omnipresent from the very beginning in spite of the reservations that were continuously emphasised.

Towards the end of the newscast, the anchor receives news that leading ministers are summoned to a meeting in the special national Security Council. The journalists interpret this as an indication of a threat to national security and it leads them on to a discussion on whether PET – the national police intelligence office – will raise the national security level as a response to an ongoing terrorist attack. So whatever doubt has been uttered during the newscast in regard to what kind of event we are witnessing, it is pushed aside with this final news from government officials.

There were no indications of any alternative framework through the newscast, and during the following days, the terror framework was strengthened.

### **The following week: 15–19 February**

Between the newscast on Saturday and that on Sunday 15 February, numerous events took place. The shooting at the synagogue and the police shooting that killed the alleged perpetrator were the major events.

Just as important to the framing is the fact that the politicians now entered the news. Both the prime minister, the minister of justice and party leaders were central in the news from Sunday through the following week. More importantly, the prime minister herself named the event a “terrorist attack”. Hence, the newscast on Sunday evening was literally framed as news of *terror*, as written in the right corner of the screen and illustrated by a photograph of a police officer with a machine gun. DR1 used this graphic frame during the following week whenever stories related to the terror attack were on the newscast.

The terrorist attack was the only story on the Sunday newscast, which was extended from the usual half an hour to a full hour. The importance of the event was also noticeable by the fact that DR used its most prominent journalists as reporters. Journalists usually working as anchors appeared in live reports from the crime scenes just as a global reporter was suddenly reporting from the streets of Copenhagen. This upgrade in the prestige of the reporters might be interpreted as a signal of the importance of the event (as shown by e.g. Hallin 1986), but it could also result from the same phenomenon as in the September 11 and Utøya attacks, when all journalists flocked to participate in the news gathering.

In the following days the newscast resumed its regular time slot, and on Monday, for the first time, stories not related to the attack entered the news. But the anchor had to comment on this explicitly: “We are putting a temporary end to the news on the attack for now (...) there are after all other news to report on today” (DR1 16/02/2015). For the rest of the week various aspects of the terror attack continued as the top story, but other stories were present as well.

On Monday, the memorial ceremonies were the prime focus, on Wednesday it was the burial of the Jewish guard. Both events appeared with a special picture frame called *Commemoration* and *Funeral*, while the burial of the alleged perpetrator Omar El-Husseini received just a brief mention in the newscast on Friday. The intensity of the coverage changed during the week, but the initial terror frame dominated the entire week, just as different functions of the frame were emphasised on different days.

In the following, I will search for Entman's four functions of the frame throughout the week and show how, once again, the frame reveals itself as something more than the event.

### **What is the problem?**

On Sunday, it was obvious to all the journalists that Denmark had fallen victim to a terrorist attack. They knew it with certainty because the prime minister had said it at a press conference. The conclusion (made by her and the media) was apparently based on both the actions and the identity of the alleged perpetrator Omar El-Hussein, but the arguments for why this was an act of terror were never put forward, neither did the journalists ever inquire. The police described Omar El-Hussein as "born in Denmark" and "with a Palestinian background". He left no manifesto (like Breivik in Norway) or any other explanations of his actions before he died. This did not deter journalists and politicians from concluding on his motives, however. One of the first questions asked by the journalists when the police revealed the identity of Omar El-Hussein was whether he had been fighting for ISIL in Iraq or Syria. When news emerged that he had recently been in prison, the journalists immediately pursued the question whether the prison environment had radicalised him to become a militant, extremist Muslim. These questions reveal that the media already had a clear picture of a certain type of terrorist in mind. Since Omar El-Hussein had died, he could not object to the way the media portrayed him. On an overall level, the news framing did not primarily focus on him or his actions as the problem. Instead, the framing referred to a global problem with Islamic terrorism. El-Hussein was merely a representative of this phenomenon now present in Denmark.

This elevation or generalisation of the problem from single attack to being exemplary of global terrorism was a dominant feature in the narrative from journalists, politicians and citizens quoted in the news. The minister of justice described the attack as "part of the waves of terrorist attacks that are striking Europe" (DR1 15/02/2015) and how "terrorism reveals its ugly face" (DR1 17/02/2015). Along with the prime minister, she elaborated on the target of the attack. Omar El-Hussein fired shots at Krudttønden and the synagogue, but in the political interpretation it was an attack on freedom of speech and assembly, on the entire democratic society and on our freedom to live our lives as we wish (DR1 15/02/2015). The international community magnified this framing, when heads of state all over the world expressed their solidarity with Denmark and its democratic values. A special bond with France emerged due to the attack on Charlie Hebdo only weeks before, which DR1 emphasised repeatedly.

Journalists seemed to accept the political interpretation of El-Hussein's attack to be part of a global Islamic threat to democracy, and asked no critical questions; neither did any alternative framing appear in the week after the attack.

### **Why did this happen?**

In the newscast on Saturday the 14th, the journalists' dominant focus was on Vilks and the cartoons as the most likely reason for anyone to attack the meeting at Krudttønden. After El-Hussein's death, there was no longer the same search for an answer to *why* this happened. The reasons seemed somehow self-evident, and El-Hussein was therefore

immediately identified as a terrorist and furthermore a radicalised Muslim. Just as the framing cast the shootings as an element of global terror, the causes transposed to a different level. El-Hussein apparently did not have any individual motives, but presumably was guided by a general animosity towards democracy, freedom and the Western world as a whole. Even though many aspects of El-Hussein's life and last days were scrutinised, the interest in El-Hussein was more as a representative of all terrorists than in the man himself.

The idea that terrorism was bound to strike in Denmark was also very dominant during that week. On Wednesday, the queen of Denmark herself expressed this in an interview. She explained to a Dutch journalist how the attack "came as a shock but not a surprise", since the feeling in Denmark consisted of: "Will we be next? – and we were" (DR1 18/02/2015).

### **The moral evaluation**

In accordance with the terror framing, moral judgement is clear and undisputed. The prime minister and leading politicians are all eager to condemn the attack and the anti-democratic forces behind it, and they condemn it in the name of the whole nation. This framing is repeated when reports are made from the memorial sites that have emerged. Journalists act as masters of a mourning ceremony when they broadcast live and continuously, for instance, from the synagogue where both politicians and citizens have placed candles and flowers "in respect for the victims", as it is explained. Everyone is questioned about their feelings – pre-defined as fear, grief or solidarity. A participant in the commemoration in Aarhus tells the reporter: "It could just as well have happened here or anywhere in Denmark" (DR1 16/02/2015). The picture frame emphasises the unity with words like "Denmark stands united" or "All of Denmark commemorates the victims" (ibid.). The media participation in giving voice to the grief and fear reaches its climax Monday evening, when the scheduled programmes on DR1 are cancelled for the benefit of the commemoration held close to Krudttønden with the participation of prominent ministers and politicians as well as Crown Prince Frederik. DR1 has several reporters present, just as Danmarks Radio co-organises the ceremony in collaboration with an alliance of political parties in Copenhagen.

The notion of a united nation under siege also includes an articulated gratitude towards the police and their efforts, and the police are very often present in the footage.

### **Solutions**

The question of how to prevent further terrorist attacks became more dominant during the week as the investigation of the event and the perpetrator yielded new information. Even though there was some interest in the life of Omar El-Hussein, he was mostly a stepping-stone for general ideas of how terrorism works in our society. On Monday, an interview with a former classmate of El-Hussein appeared, but only to confirm that he also knew him as a radicalised Muslim.

The unanimous condemnation of terrorism continued in the discussions of the solutions. Both government and opposition parties suggested different kinds of political legislation to prevent radicalisation of young Muslims like Omar El-Hussein. The news-casts prioritised these initiatives, but the way these political issues are covered differs



Figure 2. Screenshot from DR1, TV-Avisen, 6:30pm, 16 February 2015

to some degree from the normal standards of political journalism, where conflicts and disagreements between political parties enjoy a favoured position. Conflict seemed more or less suspended in this period. The parties promoted different suggestions on how to fight terrorism and radicalisation, but did not meet criticism from other politicians. When the leading opposition party put forward a number of anti-terror initiatives, the journalist ask the party leader: “Are there any of these initiatives that you expect the government NOT to agree to?” To that, the party leader respond: “I hope not! We need to reestablish safety in society”. Compared with normal standards within the *sphere of legitimate controversies* the potential for conflict is restrained.

One of the political ideas was to increase the powers of the police intelligence authority, enabling PET to monitor Danish citizens and their phone calls when going abroad in order to locate radicalised Muslims travelling to fight for ISIL in Syria or Iraq. Even

though Omar El-Hussein was not known to have been an ISIL fighter, this suggestion became relevant in the framing of a general threat from Islamic terrorism.

## Conclusion

A terror frame was omnipresent in the news coverage from the very beginning and was undisputed after the prime minister called it a terror attack. In February 2015, there was a widespread consensus that Islamic terrorism menaced Denmark and our whole way of life. The consensus was so deep-seated that even the queen – who is not supposed to comment on political or controversial issues – could say it aloud. This placed the interpretation of the event in a *sphere of consensus*, while the descriptions of the event itself and Omar El-Hussein fall within Hallin's *sphere of deviance*. According to Hallin, norms of objectivity and balanced reporting are not applied in either of these spheres (Hallin 1986).

In the studies of September 11 and Utøya, the shock was a dominant feature and might serve as an explanation for why journalists abandoned the critical approach. Nonetheless, this analysis of the Copenhagen attack shows how even without any element of surprise the media turned the event into a “news media” media event” (Nossek 2008). This indicates instead that the element of *consensus* – in politics, media and public opinion – triggers the sense of a situation where critical journalism is neither required nor desired.

In this case, DR1 followed the described stages for news media after a terrorist attack (Zelizer & Allan 2011a). The first stage had the focus on the *establishment of safety*, the police investigation being the primary news subject on the first day of the attack and gradually less so in the week that followed, when the perpetrator had died, his alleged accomplices were arrested and safety was restored. DR1 also engaged actively in *commemoration* of the victims, beginning with the prime minister's visit to the crime scene where she placed flowers in front of the synagogue. As in classic “media events” DR also helped to organise memorial ceremonies and broadcast live from these events. Furthermore, with a continuous presence at the commemoration sites DR reporters guided the viewers to these locations to express their grief and solidarity by lighting candles, placing flowers, etc., live on television. The process of *reconnecting with ordinary life* began on Monday, when other stories entered the newscast even though the critical approach was less significant than usual. Even on the political initiatives to prevent terror in the future there was a sense of consensus, with a spillover effect to the media coverage.

One final question remains: What happened to the terrorist's message? In Nossek's notion, the media operate in order to reject the message sent by the terrorist by emphasising the values and the solidarity of the society. In Norway the rejection completely altered Breivik's political message in a media coverage that framed him as mentally deranged (Falkheimer & Olsson 2015). What kind of message then did Omar El-Hussein send, and to whom did he address it? At a press conference on Monday a representative of the police stated that they worked with the assumption that the perpetrator had been inspired by the events in Paris (DR1 16/02/2015). Perhaps El-Hussein was a disturbed man copying the terror attack at Charlie Hebdo, which had received enormous media attention just weeks before? Politicians and media, however, explained his actions as the wilful doings of an anti-democratic terrorist and suspected him to be in some kind of affiliation with a global terrorist movement. They formulated his message by denouncing it.

Schudson describes how journalists abandon their critical stance when met with tragedy, public danger or threats to national security. We cannot really know which of these circumstances were present in the actions of Omar El-Hussein, or which of these the media coverage constituted in their making of a “news media” media event. Danish media had anticipated a terrorist attack and that is exactly what happened – at least according to the media framing.

## Afterword

In the year that has passed, debates have arisen on central elements of the media framing. Fierce discussions on the very use of the word terror concerning Omar El-Hussein’s actions appeared a couple of weeks after the attack. The trial of El-Hussein’s alleged accomplices began in 2016 and revealed a story of an attack which seemed much more arbitrary in nature than the work of any well organised terror cell. Nevertheless, the initial framing persists and Danish media now commonly refer to the Copenhagen shooting as “the Copenhagen terror attack”.

## Note

1. The DR1 newscast at 8.30pm is only broadcast from Monday to Friday, while there is a special Sunday newscast at 9.00 pm.

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