

## Visualizing a Mass Murder

The portraits of Anders Bering Breivik in Danish national dailies

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### Visualizing a Mass Murder: The Portraits of Anders Bering Breivik in Danish National Dailies

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## VISUALIZING A MASS MURDER: THE PORTRAITS OF ANDERS BERING BREIVIK IN DANISH NATIONAL DAILIES

National dailies in Denmark covered the trial of Anders Behring Breivik extensively because the Scandinavian countries are historically, politically, and culturally close.

Mass murderers are at once frightening and fascinating. Their pictures and life stories are exploited by the entertainment industry and news media. While fiction writers have the freedom to depict the true devil in all forms, journalists are concerned about the ethics involved when covering criminals. Relevant professional norms in Denmark and the United States include the willingness to contribute to fair trial; to exchange views, including those that seem repugnant; to respect victims (Society of Professional Journalists [SPJ] Code of Ethics, 2012); and to communicate the democratic goals and values of society (The Commission of Freedom of the Press, 1947). Throughout history, whenever journalists have faced new ethical problems, lessons have been learned and new, more specific moral norms have been developed and passed on. Each new case creates new challenges and an opportunity for fine-tuning the professional norms. Much was learned from the retrospective discussions related to the coverage of September 11, 2001 (Mogensen, 2011, 2007), and some of that insight has clearly helped the profession deal with the ethical issues related to the Breivik case.

Breivik used mass murder to create attention to his political agenda just as Al-Qaeda uses terrorism as a form of communication. So once again journalists are faced with the ethical challenges of how to cover an event where people use violence to hijack the news agenda. In Denmark, journalists discussed to what extent the media should hand the perpetrator the microphone and let him direct the cameras so that he could communicate with the mass audience.

Before Breivik appeared in court, the news editor at the national daily *Ekstra Bladet* wanted to interview Breivik to hear his explanation for the attack (Goos, 2012). Editor-in-Chief of the regional daily *Fyns Amts Avis*, Troels Mylenberg, argued against it. He wrote that Breivik was in his opinion merely a mentally sick criminal and not a leader of a movement as Hitler, Stalin, Ceausescu, and Pol Pot had been. If Breivik had been successful in leading a racist revolution, a retrospective might have been important to investigate how he could influence others (Mylenberg, 2012). Following this argument, mass murderers' thoughts are not relevant from a journalistic perspective unless they have seduced the masses and thereby created a threat to democracy. This argument is in the line with the professional understanding of public enlightenment as a foundation for democracy and justice (SPJ Code of Ethics, 2012). Journalism is often perceived as sensational and entertaining, but the core values that the profession claims to support are democracy and justice.

Press photos play an important role in coverage of terrorism and other forms of mass murder. In many cases, the images are what audience remembers most from coverage of tragedies. A press photo ought to emphasize the framing of the text as well as tell a story in itself, so the press photos used may most clearly express the message that Danish editors wanted to communicate.

A search in the newspaper database *Infomedia* showed that seven national dailies published a total of 61 articles related to Breivik's judgment,<sup>1</sup> illustrated with a total of 66 photos, eight drawings, and a graphic illustration. With few exceptions, the photos were printed in color. See Table 1 to view the topics of illustration.

TABLE 1  
Topics of Illustration

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Number of Pictures</i>
Beivik	33
In court	22
Face front	20
Salute	5
Plus other men	16
Plus women	8
Relatives/victims	19
General public	9
Crime scene	6
Jail	7
Police alone	1

Most of the pictures of Breivik showed him in court surrounded by lawyers and police: a handsome young man with a well-trimmed beard, dressed in spotless black suit with vest, shirt and tie, often depicted with an open glance and a small smile.

Five pictures showed Breivik do the salute related to the Knights Templar network that he claimed to be part of. *Berlingske* and *Jyllands-Posten* both published pictures of Breivik doing his salute as part of their report from the court on judgment day. Three dailies used archive photos of the salute in connection with advance notice of the trial.

The first press photos of Breivik's salute are from April 2012 when he was questioned in court. At that time the salute came as a surprise, most dailies considered it newsworthy and published it. Claus Blok Thomsen, who covered the case for *Politiken*, explains that a solid democracy with a rule of law can afford to let accused people with extreme views express themselves in court, and that journalists should cover it as long as it is news worthy based on normal professional standards (C. B. Thomsen, personal communication, November 22, 2012). However, *Politiken* did not publish the salute because the editors did not think that it added relevant information to the story (T. Borberg, personal communication, November 22, 2012).

Danish editors were conscious about the risk that they might be misused as communications outlets for Breivik's philosophy. *Kristeligt Dagblad* published no pictures of the salute or any posture that Editor in Chief Erik Bjerager described as sensation seeking.

"No readers could be in doubt that the man has an extreme ideology, so we considered it an unnecessary propagation of man's attempts at propaganda to bring these images," Bjerager said. "For the sake of historical evidence and common historical consciousness, we will of course never fail to bring pictures of German Nazis meetings, marches and so on in the 1930s."

Journalists shared their concerns in published editorials and discussed it at editorial meetings (T. Borberg, personal communication, November 22, 2012). When Breivik did the salute again on judgment day (Haslund, 2012), some Danish journalists no longer perceived it as news. Journalist Astrid Søndberg, who covered the case for the daily *BT*, explains that her staff found Breivik's reaction to the judgment much more interesting than the salute (A. Søndberg, personal communication, November 21, 2012). This focus on Breivik's emotional reaction is

clearly illustrated in *Ekstra Bladet* who published five pictures that showed Breivik breaking into a smile. Translated, the headline of the story reads “Norway’s happiest man.”

According to the images presented, Breivik was treated with dignity by everyone in the courtroom. As an example, *Politiken* showed him talking seriously with his female defender. In the three-column picture, they are both standing with folded hands, looking at each other. In another context one would hardly have noticed the handcuffs under Breivik’s sleeves. *Kristeligt Dagblad* printed a six-column picture showing Breivik standing to the right facing three women, including the female judge who is also facing him with a serious but not hostile expression. While the newspapers described the grief present in the courtroom, and many pictures depict sadness and disbelief, none of the pictures shows any sign of anger or hostility.

Journalists made an effort to find and interview relatives and friends of the victims; give voice to the general public; and remind the readers of the crime scene as well as the conditions in the jail. Forty-two pictures illustrated such societal viewpoints while 33 showed Breivik. Two Danish broadcast journalists who covered the case and later published a book about it said that their focus was on the victims (Frandsen, 2012). In other words, to some extent Danish journalists tried to balance their focus on the court venue with a focus on the society that Breivik harmed.

Dailies explicitly made it clear that Breivik’s behavior was not acceptable. *Ekstra Bladet* mentioned the “Devil” in two headlines; *Politiken* talked about “evil” on the front-page; *Jyllands-Posten* referred to him as terrorist; *Kristeligt-Dagblad* called the judgment a victory for ethics, justice and democracy; and a psychiatrist in *Berlingske* questioned if Breivik could be considered a product of the welfare system (Poulsen, 2012).

Just as American journalists sided with the democratic society and its leadership in their coverage on September 11, 2001, journalists in Denmark sided with the democratic society and its rule of law against Breivik and his terror.

## NOTE

1. Search words “Anders Breivik,” August 22–26, 2012. Newspapers: *Berlingske*, *BT*, *Ekstra Bladet*, *Jyllands-Posten*, *Information*, *Politiken*, *Kristeligt Dagblad*.

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## THE SPANISH MEANING OF THE MURDERER'S SALUTE

The Utoya killing as well as the trial of Breivik have received wide media coverage in Spain. The ethical meaning of Breivik's salute in Spain may be considered by analyzing the Spanish public broadcasting service and the two online national newspapers with the largest circulation, *El Mundo* and *El País*.

Spanish people immediately empathized with the victims of the Utoya's tragedy because of their experience during years of terrorism perpetrated by ETA (Basque separatists) and the experience of witnessing Europe's largest massacre in recent history in 2004 at the Atocha train station in Madrid, where 191 people died and 1,858 were injured.

Memories of fascism are woven into European history over the past century and the Spanish consciousness, especially the atrocities in Nazi concentration camps. In that context, the Spanish audience immediately connects the symbolic meaning of Breivik's salute as a manifestation of the ideological context that motivated his criminal action. Within the Spanish context, these facts relate with the fascist ideology and reinforce its repulsiveness.

Spanish media recognized the risk of perpetuating these fascist ideologies, applauded the ability of the Norwegian population to maintain a peaceful atmosphere despite the horrors of these events, and carefully considered the ethical decision to not broadcast the trial.

In the public Spanish broadcasting services, a weekly news program *Informe Semanal* reported on the Oslo march: "Flowers Against the Hatred" (2011). The story briefly shows the salute of "a young ultra far-right" who "executes a macabre plan" and explores his online connections to extreme right movements in the United Kingdom and Poland. However, the story also stresses the response of "unanimous solidarity" of the Norwegians and the heroism of those who helped the victims. The huge demonstration that filled the center of Oslo, organized by a single person through social networks, showed Norwegians carrying flowers and candles as the cry of a nation that does not want to lose their peaceful identity as a result of the attack.

In the digital version of the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo*, the photos showing Breivik's salute appeared in four news stories and in a multimedia gallery with more than 30 articles devoted to the Norway attack. *El Mundo* labeled the salute in three different ways: "extremist," "ultra," "Nazi," and "medieval."

The piece "*The diabolical are the other*" (2012) made a reference to Breivik statements, and the story compels shocking quotes of the perpetrator and its psychology side. The Breivik's saluting is qualifying as a "moment of exaltation."

The fact that there are no articles in the newspaper arguing about the decision to publish the salute photo instead of avoiding it for the possible harm to the victims or to the exaltation