Slide 1

News teams have to shape events into some sort of narrative that readers are familiar with in order to make a story more interesting and comprehensible for their audience.

One way of doing this is by trying to represent people as either 'good' or 'bad' thereby creating binary opposites that we expect from narratives, and also looking for problems which they can follow up after a few days with some kind of solution. Often news stories seem to have a neat resolution after a few days or weeks, even if that is not the case in the real world.

Neo: They're all just stories, right?

Skelley: The structures are different.

Neo: Not just beginning, middle, end?

Skelley: Not at all. News stories put all the important facts at the front, magazine articles maybe start with a human interest story or a question to pique your curiosity, and novels usually build up to the important facts at the end.

Look at The Guardian front covers the week following the bombing at Manchester Arena on May 22nd 2017.

What narrative strands can you see emerging here? Who is being portrayed as 'good' and 'bad' and why?
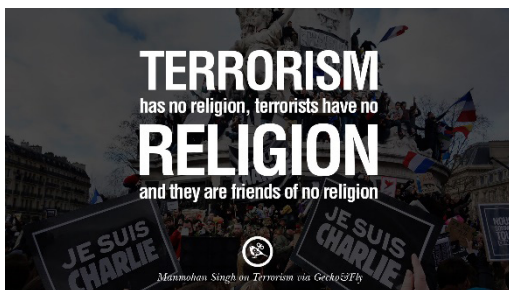
News Contexts

General Election 2017 held on June 8th.

PM at the time, Theresa May who used to be Home Secretary, made huge cuts to the police force in the years preceding this attack. Labour believes her cuts put people at risk. Tories believe uncontrolled migration allows these attacks to happen.

The two leaders have very different views on foreign policy too. Corbyn is a self-confessed pacifist and believes the "war on terror" isn't working. May, on the other hand, allows the UK to continue making Arms Trade Deals with countries such as Saudi Arabia.

At the time, anti-Muslim rhetoric was rife in the UK leading to fear of immigrants and immigration and the speedy rise of right wing groups such as BNP and UKIP. Social media is littered with xenophobic vitriol being shared but also many people trying to prevent such hatred, explaining that not all Muslims are terrorists.

Despite many people's views on Donald Trump becoming president, Theresa May appeared to get along well with him when she visited The White House in January 2017.

May believed she had to show Trump how keen Britain was to work with the USA, especially in light of Brexit.

The Guardian's mainstream left political leaning means their reports often support Labour and also seek to explain that Muslims are not the problem, terrorist are the problem.

The media has long been seen as setting the public agenda and the topic has been researched since as far back as the 1960s when studies were carried out into the agenda-setting capacity of the news media in American Presidential elections. Let's consider if this is still the case.

Look at The Guardian front covers again and discuss, 'How important were the social/ historical/ political contexts to the narratives created?'

Suggestions

The Guardian, May 23rd 2017 - Coverlines discuss a "terrorist blast". Terrorism was a big threat at the time as the attack came soon after the Westminster attack in March 2017 and the attacks in Germany, France and Belgium in 2016.

The Guardian, May 24th 2017 - Soldiers to be deployed on the streets links to Theresa May's police cuts over the last seven years and now army are having to be brought in to ensure public safety.

"Quiet Mancunian of Libyan background" gives clear indication that he was British first, showing immigration policies are irrelevant here but the link to Libya reminds readers of the attacks on Libya and Syria and the air strikes carried out by the UK and US.

The Guardian, May 25th 2017 – use of the negative verb "confront" reminds the reader of how she was keen to maintain a good relationship with the US but Trump has put the investigation in jeopardy by revealing information to the press.

The Guardian, May 26th 2017 – putting emphasis on technology experts to help fight terror shows a shift in Tory foreign policy compared with Cameron and previous governments such as Labour under Blair. This was said on the day the election campaigning restarted so she may also be looking to shift some blame as she knows the UK are complicit in these attacks by selling arms to countries like Saudi.

The Guardian, May 27th 2017 – May uses the bombing as another way to attack Corbyn in a bid to win votes. She believes his statement about such acts being linked to foreign policy are damaging and even providing excuses for terrorists.

The Guardian, May 28th 2017 – Missed terror warnings suggest incompetence or inability through lack of manpower, either way it appears to be a negative for the government.