

BOOK REVIEW

Mission Invisible: Race, Religion, and News at the Dawn of the 9/11 Era

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*Mission Invisible: Race, Religion, and News at
the Dawn of the 9/11 Era*

Ross Perigoe & Mahmoud Eid

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Mission Invisible was written by the late Ross Perigoe and Mahmoud Eid. The authors examine the devastating events of 9/11 as reported by *The Montreal Gazette* (or simply *The Gazette*), the only English-language daily newspaper published in Montreal, Quebec. In particular, they focus on biased, systemic racist reporting by *The Gazette*, analyzing a twenty-day period and criticizing how events were reported. Their findings are discouraging in terms of the journalists' unethical behaviour as a result of a lack of cultural sensitivity and professionalism. Although the authors analyze just one newspaper in Montreal, their findings raise the question of how other Western news media reported on the crisis: how did post-9/11 reports influence Canadians and the government?

Mission Invisible describes key negative attitudes that some Canadian journalists possess. The authors also explain the post-9/11 experience of Canada's Muslim communities as viewed by news media. The authors stress that although it is not their goal to single out any individual journalists, editors, or managers at *The Gazette*, they believe it is important to highlight racism in Canada and provide solutions for improving journalism. Their main concern is "how Muslim communities were imagined, constructed, negotiated, represented, and generalized" in Canadian news coverage (Perigoe & Eid, 2014, p. 1).

Ross Perigoe taught journalism at Concordia University in Montreal until his death in 2012. Prior to joining Concordia in 1985, Perigoe was a producer for CBC's national radio programming. He worked as a broadcast reporter and producer in Canada and the United States for the next 15 years. Perigoe was completing a PhD at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University in Australia when the planes struck the World Trade Centre. His friends and colleagues remember him as some-

one who was interested in supporting the rights of visible minorities; he was concerned with the depiction of Muslims after the 9/11 attacks.

Mahmoud Eid is a professor at the Department of Communication at the University of Ottawa. Previously, he taught at the University of Regina's School of Journalism. His fields of research are crisis management, war and peace studies, terrorism, ethics, social responsibility, political communication, and international relations, especially Arab and Middle Eastern politics and Islamic culture.

Perigo and Eid also consulted nine Canadian newspapers, four news services associated with *The Gazette*, twenty non-Canadian newspapers, and seven non-Canadian news services over the twenty-day examination period to demonstrate *The Gazette's* influence on other Canadian news media. They illustrate that *The Gazette's* reporting style gives the impression that they are on a mission to make Muslim cultures invisible. Their book's title, *Mission Invisible*, refers to how journalists at *The Gazette* describe the 9/11 attacks from day one of the event to the end of the observation period.

The overview at the end of the introductory chapter of their book provides a brief description of ten "invisible" missions: recognition, ambition, decision, oppression, perception, opposition, position, envision, completion, and condition.

The first mission (recognition) sets the scene for the book by defining the authors' research methodology and procedure. Their research tools were critical discourse analysis and content analysis. Readers may need to read this chapter in detail in order to understand how their research was conducted. The second mission (ambition) focuses on the scope and limitations of the study. The third mission (decision) provides the rhetorical formats and definitions of the terms used in the study.

The rest of the missions describe attitudes reflected in *The Gazette's* news reports, as well as reactions from victims' families and countermeasures by Western governments. The authors note that there were hardly any incidents reported involving retaliation to other Muslims

in Canada. The fourth mission (oppression) describes how non-Muslims seek justification for starting a war on the attackers and those who support them. The fifth mission (perception) explores in-depth the reactions of mostly white victims. There were no interviews with any Muslim victims in *The Gazette's* coverage.

The sixth mission (opposition) is critical because it demonstrates the journalists' lack of multicultural awareness. This may have been the major cause of inadequate and unethical news reporting. Mission six describes the marginalization and minimization of Muslims, who are characterized by two stereotypical frameworks: the bad Muslim and the good Muslim. The authors state that journalists refer to Muslims as Arabs, Islamic fundamentalists, Muslims, and terrorists, and categorize them in two stereotypical groups of bad and good Muslims.

The seventh mission (position) and eighth mission (envision) are the authors' analyses of the journalists' own interpretations of the events and interviews from the victims. The findings from the study illustrate that the journalists did not often use direct quotes from the victims, instead providing their own words and opinions. The ninth mission (completion) examines the ethics of journalists at *The Gazette* and their attitudes. The authors illustrate that the manner in which the journalists reported on the incidents may have been one of the factors leading to the creation of the *Anti-Terrorism Act* (Bill C-36) in Canada. The tenth mission (condition) discusses *The Gazette's* news coverage performance.

The book concludes by mentioning that the trend of rapid transmission of news media over the Internet poses a challenge to newspaper editors. Time is the essence when dispatching breaking news, and editors may not have time to verify the accuracy of the contents prior to publication, or to consider them from an ethical standpoint. Perigo and Eid question whether the use of the Internet to disseminate news media is a good approach, based on their argument of authenticity of news sources in the case of personal journalism and the necessity of publishing as fast as possible online.

I think it would have been appropriate for Perigoe and Eid to include an extra section comparing news reports from other sources with other events on the subject of invisibility of visible minorities and religions. I think such a comparison would be a useful way of illustrating the necessity of neutrality in news reporting, given that Canada is a multicultural country and that most acts of war and terrorism are religion-based. I think that how the media reports news today may be a reflection of previous lessons learned: indeed, Canada has learned many lessons from its involvement in multicultural incidents, such as the Japanese-Canadian internment in Western Canada during World War II (Sugiman, 2004), and the *Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act* of 1923 (Meissner, 2014). Perigoe and Eid (2014) mention these and other events briefly, but I think they could have elaborated more on their causes and effects, and on how the events of 9/11 differ from previous historic events relating to racism.

The 9/11 attacks were the first incidents on United States soil, and Canada has not yet experienced such an incident. Prior to the 9/11 attacks, terrorism happened mostly in Europe or on other continents. Perigoe and Eid are perhaps subtly advising Canadian news media not to draw attacks similar to the 9/11 incident. The practice of *political correctness* is important in how news events are reported in a multicultural country such as Canada, in which the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* was established in 1982 (Canadian Heritage, 2003).

Perigoe and Eid may have identified the tip of the iceberg in terms of the presence of racism in future newspaper reporting. The authors promote the “just the facts” approach to reporting news events. Other articles written on the 9/11 attacks, such as Andrew (2009), Doan (2014), Frank (2006), Nguyen (2005), and Rich (2006), have described similar biased reporting by journalists in the United States.

Mission Invisible contains rich examples of news reports illustrating racist attitudes by *The Gazette*, and the ten invisible missions that Perigoe and Eid present are interesting. Their

findings led them to confirm that Muslim communities were misrepresented in *The Gazette's* reports, effectively making this minority invisible. Most of the post-9/11 news coverage from this newspaper put a fear-mongering spin on Muslim societies and religion.

If the authors had provided a more structured explanation of prescriptive measures, readers could use this book as a journalism handbook. Nevertheless, the main objective of this book was to highlight the authors' concerns about the racism that exists in Canada and the biased journalism practices of *The Gazette*. The authors suggest remedies for reporting in a non-biased manner and for hiring non-biased and multicultural journalists and editors. Their recommendations will be valuable for future research on journalism and racism: they recommend that more research be conducted in academic communities and that multicultural awareness be increased in the workplace. If implemented, their suggested measures may provide a deeper understanding of the diverse cultures living together in Canada. Perigoe and Eid capture the true meaning of ethics in the following statement: “Islam and its believers are not the invisible enemy; racism truly is” (Perigoe & Eid, 2014, p. 253).

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