



## Praying for Mogadishu

Last week, a single terrorist bomb killed 280 people in Mogadishu.

That number is greater than the combined total casualties of the Paris terror attack at the Bataclan, the Charlie Hebdo attack, the Manchester attack, the London Bridge attack, the Westminster bridge attack, the Tunisian resort attack and the Nice attack combined. Yet it was barely reported.

In a sense, to point out the difference is stating the obvious. We care more about some countries than others, and it is probably only natural to care more about one's own country than a country which few people have visited. On the other hand, it's not as if Somalia is that far away; most people have heard of Mo Farah: he didn't come from Mars.

One could also say that it is a mistake purely to focus on numbers for that imposes a crude utilitarianism on something as rich and complex as human life.

That may be true, but there is still something unnatural about our lack of interest. Or rather, our general lack of interest should make us think about the way we consume our news, and the way that skews our understanding of the world.

Partly this is simply about where journalists live.

There are over 1000 foreign correspondents who live in London, and a similar number in Paris. I am not sure there are any who live in Mogadishu. Even the BBC tend to have an 'Africa correspondent' who typi-

cally sends in a report from Johannesburg or somewhere 2000 miles away. If you were to ask 100 people which foreign city they would choose to make their living in: Washington, Paris, Jerusalem or Mogadishu, while they might have trouble deciding about the first three, I am confident that Mogadishu would be a 'pointless' answer, as the quiz show has it.

There is a second, more mysterious factor, namely the "gossipability" of the story. Take that wedded couple who had their photograph taken with the bride performing a sex act on the groom outside the church in Greece. Was it funny or appalling? Comic or offensive? This is the sort of thing that lends itself not just to newsrooms and talk-shows, but also to conversations around the office at lunchtime. It's not that it was an item of news that was especially important: it is just interesting to talk about. And so we do.

There is nothing in itself wrong with that. Where things go wrong is when we start making absolute judgements or where we fail to understand the motivations of people once they get here. What is your opinion, for example, of Somali refugees who are taking the boat across the Mediterranean to Europe when they weren't actively being persecuted in Somalia? No, they weren't, but then, they were at risk of being killed.

We all nominally subscribe to universal human equality but we don't always live it out in our thoughts.

*October 2017. Thought for the Train is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at [www.surbitonchurch.org.uk](http://www.surbitonchurch.org.uk).*