WHO IS IMPORTANT?

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We weep more for those who are close to us. Many people in the UK have visited Paris and know people who live there. An attack on the French city touches us more than one in a place we have never visited.
Category: Observations

I try to avoid posting about politics and current events, partly because other people do this better than me and partly because I like avoiding controversy. However, some of the online discussion following on from the attacks in Paris on Friday has got me thinking.

I spend a lot of my time online; Twitter is my preferred source of news because it provides me with access to stories that get little coverage in the UK. I follow a number of Africa based journalists and often retweet their stories of conflict or political problems. I'm also fortunate to have friends who have lived and worked in many parts of the world who will post news stories to Facebook that deal with issues that never make it onto the BBC.

I reckon that I'm pretty well informed about what is going on in the world and much of that is to do with social media.

On Friday, Sue and I came home from the cinema (Spectre; a bit of a let down, to be honest) and turned on the TV to catch the news before going to bed. We were immediately gripped by the news from Paris and stayed glued to the TV for a long time. I had my tablet on my knee and followed reports on Twitter and Facebook.

Within minutes I had changed my Facebook status to "Je suis parisien" out of solidarity for the French capital. Many other people did the same and within 24 hours, it seems as though half of the world's Facebook users had changed their profile picture to reflect some sort of solidarity with France.

And then came the backlash...

I lost count of the number of people who posted things along the lines of "Why are people showing solidarity with the French when they didn't do the same thing for Beirut or Kenya or...?

Normally, I would be the first to be saying that we need to take an international view of this sort of thing and not just concentrating on Europe, but let me defend (a little) those who were shocked about Paris and but apparently less so about the bombing in Beirut. I think think there are two issues at play.

The first is that we weep more for those who are close to us. Many people in the UK have visited Paris and know people who live there. An attack on the French city touches us more than one in a place we have never visited.

Secondly (and partly because of the first factor), the British media concentrates much more on local events than ones further afield. Our media have been saturated with news about Paris in a way that they would not have been for a similar event in, say, Tashkent.

The problem is that all human lives are equally to be valued and our focus on the relatively local implies that those who die far away matter less. To be honest, I think we will always mourn those who are closest to us. However,Â the more we understand about people in other parts of the world,

the more we will be concerned about them - it is a self reinforcing circle. The answer to people not reacting to a bombing in Beirut is not to complain, but to share the story from Beirut so that they can learn to care.

I started off by mentioning how I follow events around the world through social media. Following a few well chosen people on Twitter will give you a better picture of what is happening around the world than reading the British papers. If you come across news stories that are important; share them on your social media feeds.

Don't complain if I don't know a story; tell me the story!