

AFTER THE TSUNAMI

Crisis Communication in Finland and Sweden

EDITED BY

ULLAMAIJA KIVIKURU & LARS NORD

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After the Tsunami

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Ullamaija Kivikuru & Lars Nord (eds.)

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Foreword

After the Tsunami is a book about media coverage of a very exceptional event in the Nordic mediascapes, the Boxing Day 2004 Tsunami, which was distant, but at the same time of great relevance to the Scandinavians seeking some sun during that winter holiday season. The dramatic event disappeared from the news arena very quickly, however. The goal of the book is to reflect on some changes that took place in the Nordic countries, owing to the fact that the tsunami touched on or operated as a catalyst for a variety of phenomena related to the welfare state, citizens' rights and public information. This huge news story provided material for the eternal theme of man versus nature, but was also a concrete case that served to highlight problems of democracy.

The tsunami created big headlines in all the Nordic countries, but we only found larger-scale research on it from Sweden and Finland. Fortunately, the authors were willing to refocus and partly rewrite their work, which was originally produced immediately after the tsunami. We are grateful for the extra effort they have put into making *After the Tsunami* possible.

As the editors of this volume, we wish to thank Nordicom for inspiration in the initial stages, for giving us the chance to pursue this kind of reflection and for publishing the book. Ulla Carlsson and Karin Poulsen have been very supportive during the production process. We sincerely hope this volume will encourage further research on public communication practices during and after dramatic events.

Helsinki and Sundsvall, September 2009

Ullamaija Kivikuru

Lars Nord

Introduction

Ullamaija Kivikuru & Lars Nord

In the morning on Boxing Day, December 26, 2004, an earthquake west of Sumatra caused two enormous sea waves, or tsunamis, which struck the coastlines of the Indian Ocean. In total, more than 286,000 people were killed in one of the worst natural disasters in history. Heaviest hit by the tsunami were the poorest people in the poorest coastline regions of the poorest countries. Worst hit was the Aceh Province in Indonesia, although Sri Lanka, India and Thailand also suffered heavy losses in human lives due to the disaster.

However, the Asian tsunami also affected a large number of tourists from other parts of the world, who were spending their Christmas and New Year's holiday in resorts along the coastlines of Thailand and Sri Lanka. Thus, the effects of the Asian tsunami reached societies very far away from the disaster area.

There were many Finnish and Swedish citizens in the area when the tsunami occurred. In total, 178 Finns and 543 Swedes were killed in the catastrophe. Thus, the Asian tsunami caused the largest number of lost lives in Finland since the Second World War. In Sweden, the tsunami disaster caused about as many deaths as when the Estonia ferry sank in the Baltic Sea in 1994. In both countries, the tsunami disaster can be described as one of the worst catastrophes experienced during the post-war period.

Against this background, it may be of great interest and importance to examine how this dramatic and unexpected event affected public communication patterns and practices in countries like Finland and Sweden. The communicative relations between government actors, media and citizens always make significant contributions to the development of crucial democratic values such as trust, accountability and legitimacy. However, it is also reasonable to believe that these values are more difficult to maintain when public communication is under hard pressure, as is most often the case during serious crisis situations. Thus, it would seem to be highly relevant to analyse and discuss the effects of stress within the public communication system in the case of the tsunami disaster.

This time, Finland and Sweden were deeply affected by a natural catastrophe of the first magnitude in another part of the world. Furthermore, the tsunami occurred during the Nordic Christmas holiday, when most people

in official positions in these countries were on holiday. It is reasonable to presume that no official routines or preparations existed for handling such an unexpected situation. Official actions, crisis management, public information and media relations had to be more or less improvised during the first days after the event. The same was probably true for both media activities and citizens' communication.

Generally speaking, the Nordic countries are often described as almost ideal for comparative research strategies. The basic similarities in political systems and media systems in these countries make them useful for systematic comparisons. In this book, Finland and Sweden are compared with regard to the patterns and practices of public communications that developed after the tsunami disaster. Different aspects of public communications are considered, such as news media coverage of the disaster, the role of new media in public information seeking and dialogue, government communications strategies and public trust in societal institutions and actors.

When looking at the basic public communication conditions in Finland and Sweden, the similarities between the two countries are definitely more striking than the differences. Both countries are among the most advanced and mature democracies in the world, with well-established democratic and parliamentary traditions, and both rank high in international evaluations of national democratic efficacy (Pharr & Putnam 2000). Furthermore, both Finland and Sweden are governed within the principles of multiparty political systems, although their electoral practices are slightly different. Both countries joined the European Union in 1995.

Additionally, the media systems in the two countries are very close to each other, even within the context of general comparisons of Western media systems. According to the models of media and politics developed by media scholars Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, Finland and Sweden may be referred to as near archetypes of democratic corporativistic countries with a well-developed mass press, a shift towards media independence from political parties, strong journalistic professionalization and strong state intervention in media systems through press subsidies and public service broadcasting. However, in some limited areas, such as commercials on television and the existence of political TV ads, the public communication settings in the countries do differ (Hallin & Mancini 2004).

Nevertheless, when exploring the basic relations between media and politics, both Finland and Sweden are characterized by a high degree of mediatisation, where information and knowledge about what is going on in society are largely influenced by mediated communication in different forms. Furthermore, political actors in the more advanced phases of mediatisation are expected to integrate the media logic and predominant standards of newsworthiness into the governing process (Strömbäck, Ørsten & Aalberg 2008).

At the same time, both Finland and Sweden are among the countries with the highest Internet penetration in the world (Norris 2000). For the first time

ever, Internet was a frequently used information source during a crisis among ordinary citizens. Consequently, old media monopolies on news gathering and dissemination were challenged, at least to some extent, by new media platforms created by organizations and individuals providing information and user-generated content. Thus, the Asian tsunami was probably the first global crisis in which a new generation of interactive and instant media proved to be an effective alternative to traditional news journalism.

Despite the above-mentioned predominant similarities in the political and media contexts in the two countries, it is evident that the evolution of public communications during this crisis displays significant differences, not least when the structures and strategies of government communication are considered.

Finland succeeded fairly well, although there was considerable room for criticism. A system of the government's regular press conferences was established immediately, but governmental offices' websites did not offer the possibility to pose questions and make comments, and the Information Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – the government office chiefly responsible for the operation – first restricted itself to official bulletins only. These bulletins conflicted with the information available to the general public and published by the media. The Ministry had three telephone lines available for the public. Within the first days, some 60,000 attempts to reach the Ministry by phone were made, the vast majority unsuccessful.

In short, the Finnish government with its various offices exercised a classic top-down communication model. This in itself was quite a contradiction, because a long renewal process in government communication had recently been completed (VNK 2003). It had started already in 1987, after the total disaster experienced in public communication in connection with the Chernobyl accident. The change process had two main goals: to increase openness toward citizens as well as the media, and to create preparedness to meet crises. The basic idea was to meet citizens transparently and on equal terms. However, when the first real test case came – the tsunami – the newly established policy and its rules were forgotten. Governmental offices communicated with the public in their old top-down style, with scarce and formal information distribution, avoiding discussion. Afterwards, the government offices gave the Christmas season as the main reason for the failing information system, and no doubt it was a partial explanation, but obviously the system as a whole pulled the emergency brake, and all the elaborate and polished policies were, perhaps unintentionally, put aside.

However, not a single civil servant was fired afterwards, and the tsunami process was not among the themes discussed during the presidential election campaign in 2006. The government offices' scarce and formal information policies were criticized both by the public and the media for a short while, but in fact to a far less degree than, for example, journalists remember afterwards. Far less than 10 per cent of the 15,000 press stories published during the first month after the catastrophe included some criticism of the crisis management.

Further, government offices remained the main source for reporting also for those media that criticized the government's activity and policies. After the first wave of excitement, the criticism calmed down among those citizens who did not have to deal with the tsunami directly, while those with friends and relatives involved in the catastrophe dwelled on the Web and were considerably more irritated. Interestingly, these people often considered the media to be part of the public system.

In contrast, criticism of authorities and politicians in Sweden was almost deafening. There was a general outcry of public complaints about the authorities' and government's handling of the tsunami disaster. Generally, public opinion was based on the perception that political action was delayed, and that central governmental control actually prevented authorities from acting independently in the first stages of the crisis. True or not, these public perceptions were probably partly generated by huge strategic communication mistakes and early misjudgements concerning the magnitude of the catastrophe and its implications for Swedish society. Thus, the initial combination of the absence of effective governmental information routines, delays in press conferences and news media comments and perceived lack of compassion and strength among the political leadership, all proved to be devastating when the public evaluated Swedish governmental performance during the tsunami disaster.

The reasons for these different communicative patterns in Finland and Sweden are well worth discussing. On the surface, it is plausible to believe that the similar political and media system contexts should have encouraged more uniform communication practices in this situation. Instead, with regard to the differences observed, it may be reasonable to go beyond the system approach and consider possible disparities between the two countries as regards their political culture.

The political culture in Finland has traditionally given the state a strong position in social life, while citizens have often adopted an object rather than a subject position. The situation has been changing, but safety and security – on the collective as well as individual level – are still highly valued. The state is considered as a safety net for citizens, and decision-making machineries usually operate hierarchically. On the other hand, the strong state also enables unexpected procedures. The bureaucracy may take quite pragmatic and unorthodox stands, if the situation so requires, and such manoeuvres are generally accepted in the name of safety and continuity. For example, in the tsunami case, the operation based on the Coordination Board of Government Chiefs of Preparedness totally lacked the support of laws and regulations. The plan was hastily drawn up by a small group of civil servants, and the mandate came from the Prime Minister. The Finnish political culture is sometimes inconsistent and unpredictable, lacking the sophistication of the Swedish system.

One could claim that loose notions of safety and security might explain both the procedures developed by the Finnish state apparatus and the critique

presented by the media and frustrated citizens. The state started the practical operations, but wanted to publish only such information that was “right” and credible. The critics were disappointed that the state machinery was unable to exercise transparency in this process. The majority of citizens, however, were fairly satisfied with the “Finnish way” of dealing with this new type of catastrophe – in this case one that turned their Christmas season upside down. It was essential that the state system show its preparedness in the face of this challenge. The rescue operation as such went fairly smoothly, but the information surrounding it was scarce and inadequate. This did not seem to matter a great deal to most people, as long as Finns were brought home safely.

In contrast, Sweden has one of the largest public sectors in the world, based on a public administration system with great independence for authorities and with well-established and decentralized decision-making processes. The cabinet is not expected to use its executive political power to interfere with the exclusive implementing power of the state bureaucracy. The system is principally based on power-sharing structures, delegated responsibilities and sophisticated arrangements for determining liability. Thus, during normal conditions, public affairs are expected to run smoothly and without interruption due to the advanced mechanisms designed to steer and govern in the most efficient way.

Notwithstanding, a system such as the Swedish one, which is stable on the surface, may prove insufficient when faced with deviations from normality and routines. Obviously, there is a risk that an urgent need for action and adequate responses to unexpected events may be delayed, as existing routines and responsibilities are too focused on the effective handling of expected events. Consequently, completely new conditions may impose too much stress on a political culture based on the belief that all future demands can be prepared for and faced in a similar way. The tsunami disaster of 2004 was not the first time Swedish government and authorities failed in transforming and adapting routine public administration practices in a truly urgent and unexpected situation. The same confusion was seen when former Prime Minister Olof Palme was murdered in 1986 and when the ferry *Estonia* sank in 1994. In all cases, political actions were contradictory and vague, and the responsibilities of different governmental bodies were disputed.

Accordingly, a political culture ‘made for comfort’ may experience considerable communication challenges when faced with extraordinary realities. If communicative responsibilities are not settled and if strategies for communication crisis management are not formulated, the public sector will probably be very unsuccessful in meeting public needs for both proper political leadership and accurate and comprehensive information about the event. Taken together, politicians who act slowly, authorities who await political initiatives, institutions and civil servants who are afraid of doing ‘too much’ and going beyond their obligations as well as unclear rules about who should decide and who should implement surely do not constitute the best conditions for

effective public communication practices. On the contrary, these factors drive government communication into a defensive position that is highly vulnerable to both media criticism and negative public evaluation of governmental performance.

However, there are more sophisticated dimensions of communication patterns and practices that are important when analysing communication in Finland and Sweden in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster. In this book, the following chapters focus on different aspects of government communication, media coverage and public opinion in both countries.

In the first chapter, 'When a Natural Disaster Becomes a Political Crisis: A Study of the 2004 Tsunami and Swedish Political Communication', *Lars Nord* and *Jesper Strömbäck* focus on how the public perceived the Swedish government's communications after the disaster, and how these perceptions affected public confidence in political institutions and political leaders. The authors conclude that the disaster proved to be something of a worst-case scenario for the Swedish government, where all the different variables used in explaining political confidence were working to the disadvantage of the government.

In the chapter 'Rhetorical Defence Strategies After the Tsunami Flood Disaster', *Jesper Falkheimer* discusses the media strategies of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the travel agency Fritidsresor, with a particular focus on how critical questions were treated and answered. The author notes that the two agents under study used totally different communicative defence strategies after the disaster, not least because they were automatically associated with different sectors of society and with different amounts of trust capital.

The chapter by *Johanna Jääsaari*, 'Restoring Consensus after the Blame Game. The Reception of Finnish Tsunami Crisis Management Coverage', examines the reproduction and re-creation of power relations in the interactions between the Finnish government, the mass media and citizens in their various roles during and directly after the disaster. The author analyses why the Finnish government was moderately successful in mobilizing trust and support among the general public. Furthermore, the interplay between established mass media organizations and new social media in this mobilization process is addressed.

Using Finnish press coverage of the tsunami as an example in the chapter 'Wave of Compassion: Nationalist Sentiments and Cosmopolitan Sensibilities in the Finnish Press Coverage of the Tsunami Disaster', *Mervi Pantti* explores how representations of suffering and humanitarian aid were engaged in shaping public compassion. The author asks how the newspaper discourse connected the reader to the suffering and how readers were positioned in relation to distant suffering. Newspapers made sense of suffering by focusing on both collective and individual emotions, including the emotions of journalists.

In the chapter 'Solidarity Trumps Catastrophe? An Empirical and Theoretical Analysis of Post-Tsunami Media in Two Western Nations', *Lynn Letukas*, *Anna Olofsson* and *John Barnshaw* compare how newspapers in Sweden and the

United States framed the short-term response to and recovery from the tsunami. The authors examine why social solidarity was fostered and maintained in the press by developing a predictive model of social solidarity, linking media reporting to audience social solidarity.

In another comparison, this time between television channels, 'Transnational News and Crisis Reporting. The Indian Ocean Tsunami on CNN and Swedish TV4', *Maria Hellman* and *Kristina Riebert* analyse crisis reporting on CNN and Swedish TV4. News coverage, newsroom cultures and news reception of the tsunami at the two channels are compared. The authors show that CNN and TV4 played different roles during the disaster. Additionally, the tsunami case indicates that the more therapeutic role played by national television news channels still prevails in the more transnational communication system.

In the chapter 'Popular Magazine and Responsive News Journalism. Is There Space for Both?' *Ullamaija Kivikuru* addresses the role of magazine journalism by examining Finnish magazine reporting on the catastrophe. Taking into account the challenges of changing news reporting traditions and new media, the author asks whether there is still space for magazine journalism. In this case, magazine journalism proved to be quite an insignificant factor, in that it mainly used conventional routes, echoed the news media and avoided picking up on truly dissident stands.

Salli Hakala and *Hannele Seeck* analyse the use of cell phones and the Internet in Finland after the disaster in their chapter 'Crisis and Web-enabled Agency in Practice. The Cases of Sukellus.fi and Thairy.net'. The authors discuss how the agency of active citizens' materialized through these communication tools. Thus, the rapid development of Internet and mobile technologies is thought to have changed crisis communication into strategic communication, where citizens demand fast action and communication above and beyond the mere dissemination of information.

In the final chapter, 'Independence – Then Adaptation. How Swedish Journalists Covered the Tsunami Catastrophe', *Tomas A. Odén*, *Marina Ghersetti* and *Ulf Wallin* offer a detailed description of how nine major Swedish media companies responded to the disaster and how the newsrooms organized their coverage. In this case, the authors find that new media technology played a greater role than ever before in the news processes. However, a clear, flexible and effective news organization is also important for the quality of news reporting during major, dramatic events.

As editors, we sincerely hope this volume will offer a better understanding of public communication patterns and practices in Finland and Sweden in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster. It is also our hope this volume will stimulate new and fruitful research approaches in the area of crisis communication in the future, both in the Nordic area and in other countries.

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When a Natural Disaster Becomes a Political Crisis

A Study of the 2004 Tsunami and Swedish Political Communication

Lars Nord & Jesper Strömbäck

One of the countries most severely affected by the tsunami – besides those that were directly hit – was Sweden. Thus, the disaster rapidly became a major news event in the Swedish media. However, the response from Swedish politicians and governmental authorities was rather slow, according to several observers (cf. Grandien, Nord & Strömbäck 2005), and it took 24 hours before the Swedish Government announced a press conference. Consequently, the government was highly criticized in the media only a few days after the tsunami struck.

The Swedish Government and governmental authorities – particularly the Prime Minister Göran Persson and the Foreign Minister Laila Freivalds – were criticized because of the perceived failure in crisis management with regard to the tsunami, and subsequent polls also showed dissatisfaction with Prime Minister Persson and the Swedish Government. Against this backdrop, the purpose of the present chapter is to study the Swedish case with regard to the crisis management of the tsunami disaster, focusing on the public's perceptions of the media, the government and the political leadership, and how it affected public confidence in political institutions and leaders.

Crisis Management and Political Confidence

During recent decades, political trust has declined in a range of modern democracies (Klingemann 1999; Dalton 1999; Nye, Zelikow & King 1997). However, political support is a multi-dimensional phenomenon including different types and objects of support. According to Easton (1965), one should differentiate between the political community, the regime and the authorities as three different objects of support. This framework has been expanded by Norris

(1999, p. 10), who identifies five levels of political support, ranging from diffuse to specific support: the political community, regime principles, regime performance, regime institutions, and political actors.

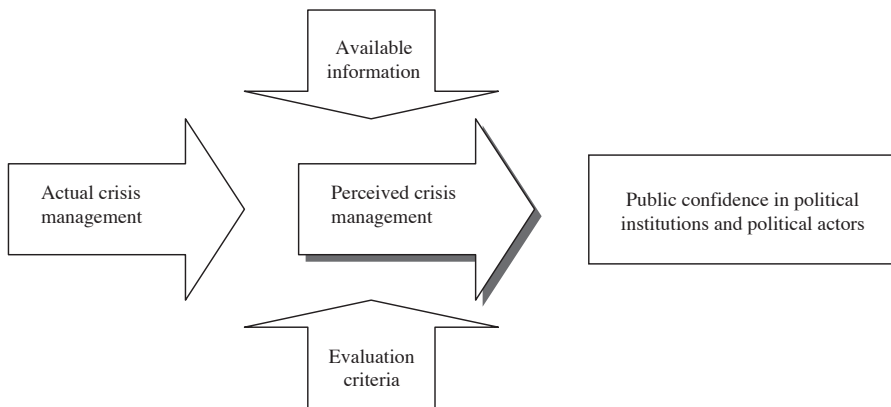
Whether or not political confidence or support has declined depends on the level being referred to. With regard to the political community and regime principles, evidence from comparative research shows a generally high level of support. In all 'old' democracies, people clearly approve of the idea of democracy and think that it is the best form of government (Thomassen 1998). However, it is equally clear that a multitude of countries have experienced declining trust in government institutions as well as in political actors (Listhaug & Wiberg 1998; Listhaug 1998; Klingemann 1999; Newton & Norris 2000). Sweden is no exception. On the contrary, as Holmberg (1999, p. 105) notes: "Trust in politicians has been plummeting more or less constantly for the past thirty years in Sweden".

Whether or not this declining support for political institutions and political actors constitutes a problem is not self-evident. Whereas it is perceived by some to be troublesome, others think it is less important as long as support for the political community and the regime principles is widespread (Putnam 2000; Norris ed. 1999; Nye, Zelikow & King 1997). However, from the perspective of actors and institutions experiencing declining trust, this does constitute a problem, because a continued level of legitimacy and support is essential to their ability to reach their objectives. For example, if people do not trust political institutions, they may be less willing to pay their taxes and comply with governmental regulations (cf. Rothstein 2003). Additionally, if people do not trust politicians, it becomes more difficult for politicians to reach out to the electorate, to pursue policies that people will follow, and to survive politically during times of hardship. Low or declining support creates stress in the system, which threatens the stability and perhaps even the survival of the system (cf. Easton 1965). Thus, a particular set of institutions, political parties, governmental and power coalitions may become vulnerable due to the stress created by low or declining confidence.

This is particularly true in political systems where the persuasive power of the executive is essential to its ability to govern. As the process of presidentialization (Poguntke & Webb 2005) has become widespread, even in parliamentary systems, political leaders have become more dependent on their own persuasive powers to ensure success in winning and exercising power. If the key to winning and exercising political power was previously considered to be the standing of and confidence in the political leadership within the party or parties, it has now shifted towards being the public standing of and confidence in the political leadership. The internal party arena has become less important, whereas the electoral arena and the media arenas have become more important for success within the parliamentary arena, where authoritative decisions ultimately are being taken (Nord & Strömbäck 2003).

Unravelling the causes of low or declining confidence in political institutions and actors is by no means an easy task. Within the context of crisis management and this particular study, however, it is essential to recognize the importance of the *perceived performance* of political institutions and political actors, which follows from a combination of the evaluation criteria used and the available information (cf. Putnam, Pharr & Dalton 2000). If the information people receive about the handling of a particular crisis is critical and focused on failures, and if people expect the institutions and political leaders to be able to manage a crisis ‘better’ in some respects than the information indicates that they have done, then declining confidence is the likely result (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Explaining Political Confidence in Crisis Situations



Thus, what ultimately matters in the context of how political confidence is affected by crises is the *perceived crisis management*. This offers an explanation as to why even a natural disaster might evolve into a political crisis, as measured by declining confidence or approval ratings, which in turn might create new obstacles to the exercising of political power.

The importance of available information to people’s perceptions of the management of a crisis points towards the crucial role of the news media. As noted by Graber (2005, p. 129): “During crises, the public depends almost totally on the media for news and for vital messages from public and private authorities. The news media are the only institutions equipped to collect substantial amounts of information and disseminate it quickly”.

In such situations, a complex interaction between the supply of and the demand for information occurs. If the event constitutes or is perceived as a major crisis, then there is an almost insatiable demand for almost any information related to the event. The media both respond to and fuel these demands

by interrupting their regular programming, rushing to the scene and reporting as extensively as possible, the result being that almost everything that is or can be covered in relation to the crisis becomes newsworthy (Nord & Strömbäck 2005). Whether the news media respond mainly to an already existing demand for information or do in fact create a need is an open question, and the answer is mostly likely to be a context-specific one.

With regard to the tsunami, the crisis was undoubtedly real. However in other cases, the news media might cover a particular event as though it constitutes a crisis not because of its severe real-world consequences, but because it creates increased audience interest. This is not only because crises provide drama, action and excitement. More fundamentally, it is because a crisis, regardless of whether it is objective or subjective, "creates an information void. Nature abhors a vacuum. Any information void will be filled somehow and by someone" (Coombs 1999, p. 115). Through the mediated construction of crises, the news media can increase the public's interest in and consumption of news.

From the perspective of crisis management, it is therefore absolutely fundamental that crisis managers respond as quickly as possible, particularly as the "first impressions form quickly and colour the remainder of the crisis communication with the stakeholders" (Coombs 1999, p. 114). If crisis managers do not manage to fill the information void created by the public's demand for information and the media space devoted to covering crises, this void will be filled with information provided by others – information that may prove to be critical and may indeed be factually incorrect. Moreover, even if the media coverage tends to be chaotic in the initial stages, there is only a brief time-span before particular media frames start to evolve.

The media framing of a crisis is particularly important, as research shows that media frames can be highly influential with regard to people's opinions and attitudes (Iyengar 1991; Capella & Jamieson 1997). A news frame can be described as "a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration" (Tankard 2001, p. 100-101). By selecting some aspects, some perspectives, some words and some images, news frames activate "some ideas, feelings, and values rather than others", and "encourage particular trains of thought about political phenomena and lead audience members to arrive at more or less predictable conclusions" (Price, Tewksbury & Powers 1997, p. 483).

This process might be particularly consequential in political processes, as frames tend to promote particular "problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman 1993, p. 52). If crisis managers in general, and political leaders in particular, respond quickly and forcefully, they can fill the information void in the media and shape the framing of the event so that it emphasizes their strength as leaders. This may in turn increase public support for and confidence in them. If, however, they

are slow to respond, or do so in a way that it is deemed inappropriate or insufficient by the media, they may find themselves depicted as part of the problem rather than as part of the solution.

This implies that crisis management is essentially equal to media management. This does not mean that the actual crisis management is unimportant; rather, it means that the actual crisis management is important only insofar as it informs the media coverage of a crisis and its subsequent management. Most modern crises are mediated crises, hence, modern crisis management must adapt to the preconditions shaped by the importance of the news media and their "media logic" (Altheide & Snow 1979).

Crisis Response Strategies

The literature on crisis communication and crisis management is extensive (Fearn-Banks 2002; Coombs 1999; Benoit 1997; Blaney, Benoit & Brazeal 2001; Arpan & Pompper 2003; Shenkar & Yuchetman-Yaar 1997; Dolnik, Case & Williams 2003). Because this study focuses on the tsunami disaster of 2004 and its crisis management in Sweden, we are dealing with an 'objective' crisis where the pre-crisis stage is of less relevance (cf. Coombs 1999; Grandien, Nord & Strömbäck 2005). The risks associated with a tsunami had previously been felt to be rather small, and thus its actual occurrence took everyone in Sweden, including the public, the news media, political institutions and the government, by surprise.

When a major disaster calling for crisis management occurs, it has the potential to both disrupt normal operations and affect the reputation of those charged with some responsibility for managing the crisis (Coombs 2002). The first step in managing the crisis is therefore to get to the root of the problem, i.e. to define the character of the crisis. Failure to do so may result in either insufficient or incorrect response strategies. Thus, if it is important that the initial response be quick, as the "first impressions form quickly and color the remainder of the crisis communication" (Coombs 1999, p. 114), it is equally important that the response also be based on a sound assessment of the crisis.

According to Coombs (1999, p. 114-121), the initial response should be quick; the messages should be consistent; the organization should be characterized by openness and it should provide instructive information. Additionally, it should also express sympathy with those who have suffered physically, mentally or financially. Silence is never a recommended response, especially not when political and governmental institutions and actors will be involved, as it is to them that the public turns in times of crisis, such as that created by the 2004 tsunami. Coombs (1999, p. 115) notes that "The use of silence reflects uncertainty and passivity", and that is the last thing people expect when a natural disaster has occurred and thousands of people are in desperate need of help.

Silence may also be taken to indicate that the organizations have not recognized that an event indeed constitutes a crisis, or at least not a crisis with ramifications for the organizations. For instance, when the tsunami hit the shores of Thailand, Indonesia, India and other countries, it was obviously a natural disaster, but it was not until it became apparent that several thousands Swedish citizens were in fact tourists in these countries that a response was required from Swedish political and governmental institutions and actors. As this became clear, and the event was defined by the media and the public as a crisis involving Sweden, a quick response and swift action by the government, governmental and political institutions as well as by the political leadership were necessary.

Silence in such a situation has the potential of turning a natural disaster into a full-blown crisis with political ramifications. That is, lack of crisis recognition and crisis management, as manifested by silence and inaction, may turn the natural disaster into a political crisis.

If and when that happens, several different crisis communication (Coombs 1999) or image restoration (Benoit 1997; Benoit & Czerwinski 1997) strategies have been identified. Efforts to evade responsibility include defeasibility, claiming that a lack of information or lack of control is to blame for the (in)action. The accused can also claim that the offensive (in)action occurred by accident. Furthermore, the (in)action that has offended people can be explained in terms of good intentions (Benoit & Czerwinski 1997, p. 40-42). Finally, the accused can try to shift the blame onto others.

The accused can also try to reduce the offensiveness of the (in)action. Tactics used here include bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, compensation or attacks on the accuser(s) (Benoit & Czerwinski 1997). For example, if an organization is accused of not doing the right things or of inaction, they can try to bolster their reputation by stressing what they have done or what they have done correctly, now or in the past. They can attempt to minimize the negative feelings associated with the (in)action. Transcendence means that the organization tries to place the (in)action in a "more favourable context, either a broader context or a different frame of reference" (Benoit & Czerwinski 1997, p. 43). Compensation means that the accused offers reimbursements to the victims or those offended by the (in)action, whereas counterattack involves efforts to damage the credibility of the accusers.

Another response involves promises to take corrective action so that problems can be solved or prevented. In such cases, the accused accepts responsibility but attempts to minimize the negative feelings and to compensate by promising that what is still possible to do now, or to do to prevent similar situations, will indeed be done. The final response is mortification, that is, to confess and apologize and hope that the public will believe the apology is sincere (Benoit & Czerwinski 1997, p. 44).

What is always essential to remember, regardless of which strategies or tactics are used, is that it is the perceived and not the actual crisis manage-

ment that matters: "Perceptions are more important than reality" (Benoit 1997, p. 178). These perceptions are to be found firstly among journalists, editors and those responsible for the news coverage of the event, and only secondly among the public. If an organization fails to convince the news media to incorporate their response strategies into the framing of the event, it will also fail to convince the public, which can lead to a backlash. For example, if the accused organization attempts to shift the blame onto others and fails to convince the news media that it would be more accurate to blame others, the result might be a news framing that depicts the organization as evasive, rather than as having assumed the appropriate responsibility, and this can be expected to be offensive, especially to those harmed mentally, physically or financially by the crisis.

Thus, it is essential to consider the media in these situations, adapt to their needs and be prepared to answer their questions, and it is seldom a good idea, particularly not for organizations accused of some kind of (in)action, to "wage a war with an enemy who buys ink by the barrel, paper by the ton, and controls the airwaves" (Fearn-Banks 2002, p. 67). Instead, having readily available answers to the most common questions asked by the media could prevent or minimize a crisis. In the context of natural or physical crisis, some of these questions are: what happened, what is the extent of the damage, how many have been killed or injured, who or what is responsible, what is being done about it, and were there any warning signs (cf. Fearn-Banks 2002, p. 67)? By being proactive and providing the news media with the information they are asking for, organizations can fill the information void and shape the news framing. Another successful strategy may be to "steal the thunder" by providing negative or damaging information that, as yet, has not been asked for by the news media, but that is likely to become public information sooner or later (cf. Shenkar & Yuchetman-Yaar 1997; Dolnik Case & Williams 2003; Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen 2005). By thus doing, the organization can enhance its credibility and build confidence, both among journalists and the public (Arpan & Pompper 2003).

Objective, Research Questions and Methodology

Against this backdrop, the objective of this chapter is to study the Swedish case with regard to the crisis management of the 2004 tsunami disaster, focusing on the public's perceptions of the media, the government and political leadership, and how it affected public confidence in political institutions and leaders. More specifically, we ask three research questions:

- RQ1: How did the Swedish public perceive the crisis management and the crisis communication of the Swedish Government after the tsunami disaster?
- RQ2: How did the Swedish public perceive the Swedish media's perfor-

mance after the tsunami disaster?

RQ3: How can the Swedish public's perceptions of government and the media after the tsunami disaster be explained?

Methodologically, the study partly builds upon a telephone survey carried out between February 8-23, 2005, approximately two months after the tsunami. The survey included 1001 citizens between the ages of 18 and 74, randomly selected from a national population register (PAR), and was carried out by the polling organization IFS AB in cooperation with the Swedish Emergency Management Agency and the Centre for Political Communication Research at Mid Sweden University. The response rate was 90 percent, and the final sample reflects the population with regard to geography and gender.

Additionally, the study also builds upon a focus group study, including a total of nine focus groups and 44 individuals. The focus group discussions were held in March, 2005, in three separate cities: Stockholm, Göteborg and Sundsvall. Each focus group interview lasted for approximately two hours, and the focus was on the questions central to this study: attitudes towards and perceptions of the management of the tsunami disaster by the media, politicians and governmental agencies. The participants were mainly recruited by IFS AB, and the groups were led by experienced interviewers.

Whereas quantitative surveys are useful when studying *what* people think, the strength of focus groups is that they enable a deeper understanding of *how* people think and of their chain of reasoning. By drawing upon both these sources of empirical data, the present study allows both generalizations and a deeper understanding of the Swedish public's perceptions of the crisis management of the tsunami disaster and of the media's performance while covering the disaster.

Setting the Stage:

A Brief Description of the Initial Stage of the Crisis

The first Swedish media reports concerning the tsunami arrived at 03.35, December 26, 2004, when the news agency TT sent out a newsflash. The first news report on the national radio was broadcast at 04.00, and the first news article on the Web from the leading Swedish broadsheet, *Dagens Nybeter*, was published at 05.55. At 11.48, the first special TV news broadcast was aired, and then the reporting continued throughout the entire day. It soon became clear that thousands of Swedes were on vacation in Thailand, and at 14.50, the news agency TT reported that at least one Swede had been killed by the tsunami.

At this initial stage of the crisis, the media realized that this was a major news event, and they interrupted their regular scheduling in order to broadcast news updates as frequently as possible. All major news organizations at-

tempted to move their reporters to the region where the tsunami had struck, particularly to Thailand, as it was known that the majority of the Swedes were there. In spite of the fact that this happened during the Christmas holiday period, and that the majority of people in both the media and governmental agencies were not at work, most media organizations managed to focus on the evolving news event.

However, there were no reactions from the political leadership or from the governmental agencies. The only governmental official who appeared at the scene was the Swedish ambassador in Thailand. Instead, the most important source of information became a spokeswoman from one of the leading travel agencies.

The first press conference with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister was not scheduled until Monday, 27, more than 24 hours after the crisis had occurred and most Swedes following the media had realized that there had been a disaster. It took two more days before the first rescue teams were sent to Thailand, and yet another day until the Foreign Minister visited Thailand. Already by this time, the Swedish Government was being criticized for not responding quickly enough, for its lack of help to the survivors, for its confused messages, and for the difficulties encountered by people attempting to obtain information from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

On January 13, the Swedish Government set up an independent commission – The Swedish Tsunami Commission – to examine how the Parliament, the Government and the Authorities, including the Cabinet Office of the Ministries, had acted in response to the tsunami. These results show that a number of mistakes and miscalculations were made during the initial stages (Swedish Tsunami Commission 2005a, 2005b). For example, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) did not realize the magnitude of the disaster quickly enough; nor was the information available as early as the morning of December 26 gathered sufficiently rapidly. Furthermore, the PMO did not assemble civil servants who were competent in analysing the needs and resources associated with emergency aid. Medical assistance for the injured was insufficient and appeared too late. As a report to the commission by a medical expert group concludes: "It is unequivocal that Swedish medical teams would have been of great benefit to reduce suffering and anxiety for Swedish citizens in collection and evacuation areas", and "The Swedish authorities did not recognise the early requirement for medical support. Qualified medical staff that volunteered their services were not deployed, despite the wide availability of seats on commercial aircraft" (Swedish Tsunami Commission 2005c, p. 7). Moreover, the information available for the families, relatives and friends who contacted the State Department was insufficient. The switchboards at the call centres utilized for information dissemination by the government were insufficient, and at times it was nearly impossible for those calling for information to get through, which created frustration, worries and anxieties.

Accordingly, the actual crisis management and crisis response during the initial stage could be characterized as "too little, too late and too uncoordinated". Not surprisingly, it was not long before the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister were being criticized in the news media. This criticism was fuelled by the fact that the Foreign Minister went to the theatre on Sunday evening, thus symbolizing her lack of empathy and engagement. In addition, neither high level officials nor politicians immediately cancelled their Christmas celebration to respond to the disaster. The criticism was further fuelled when the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister attempted to shift the blame for the slow response to lower-level governmental officials (Grandien, Nord & Strömbäck 2005). This attempt to evade responsibility did not succeed, however, as was proven by a Sifo poll published on January 12, 2005, showing that 52 and 37 percent, respectively, said that their trust in the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister had declined as a consequence of the management of the tsunami crisis.

Results: The Fall of Public Confidence

As outlined above, public confidence in political institutions and actors in a crisis situation depends on the perceived crisis management, which in turn is affected by the actual crisis management, the information available to the public and the criteria used in the evaluation of crisis management.

Although it does not constitute part of the present study, the above description also suggests that the actual crisis management was characterized by being "too little, too late and too uncoordinated". However, during the initial stages, the public knew very little about the actual crisis management, as such information was as yet unavailable.

The 2004 tsunami disaster struck on a Sunday in the middle of the Christmas holiday, when most people were at home celebrating with friends or family. Thus, when the news about the tsunami broke, people in general had both the time and the opportunity to follow the news. They were also almost certainly interested in the breaking news, as many would have known others who were tourists in the disaster areas, particularly Thailand.

As is often the case when breaking news occurs, people turn their attention to the media that offer the quickest updates: television, radio and, increasingly, the Internet. Somewhat unsurprisingly, given the overall importance of the media for the dissemination of information in advanced modern democracies, the results confirmed the view that most people mainly received information concerning the tsunami from the media, and that the majority followed the television news (Table 1).

Table 1. News Consumption Concerning the 2004 Tsunami Disaster (percent)

<i>Media</i>	<i>Very often</i>	<i>Fairly often</i>	<i>Not so often</i>	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Total</i>
Television	57	37	5	1	100
Local press	27	32	17	24	100
Radio	15	32	35	18	100
Tabloids	17	24	26	33	100
Internet	9	15	17	59	100
National dailies	11	12	11	66	100

Note: The question was: "To what extent have you followed the news regarding the tsunami in the following media?" (N=1001).

Television was obviously the most important media for information about the tsunami disaster, followed by the local press and radio. During the initial stages, however, television, radio and the Internet might have been even more important than is indicated by the above results. According to all of the focus groups, when people first heard the news, they turned to these media for rapid updates. As noted by one participant: "The most important thing here is fast news. When you read a newspaper about the tsunami you feel that you have seen this many times already, and on the previous day. I only watched television and used the Internet". Another participant also said "I was checking television and radio, as they were fast and fairly good at analysing the event".

However, the focus groups revealed that there were several reasons for following the news on television rather than using other media. Rapidity is one important reason, but the importance of pictures and sound was also underlined: "You absorb what happens to a much larger extent when you are watching television. You even feel somewhat... as you become part of what happens. I almost felt that the Swedes that were down there suddenly had become my family, in a strange way". Thus, the information void created by the tsunami disaster was filled not only by factual information, but also by pictures, sound and the feelings created when people watched images of the disaster and its aftermath.

When there is less breaking news, people in general become more interested in in-depth and follow-up reporting, and for this, they increasingly turn to newspapers. In this case, the Internet was also important, especially for those who wanted specific information relating, for example, to particular places such as hotels in the disaster areas or to what was being done for those who had survived and wanted to return home to Sweden. Generally speaking, no matter which medium people preferred, the survey shows that the public had confidence in how the media covered the tsunami. When asked, "How much confidence do you have in the way the media covered the tsunami", nine percent expressed very great confidence, 69 percent fairly great confidence, and

18 percent fairly little confidence. Only two percent answered that they had no confidence at all, whereas two percent had no opinion.

As there were many Swedish tourists in the disaster areas, it is reasonable to believe that interpersonal communication via cell phones, instant text messages and e-mail was also of some importance to information dissemination. From a larger perspective, however, the media in general and television in particular were the most important sources of information about the tsunami disaster. This indicates that the available information was essentially equal to the information provided by the media, and also that this was the information people made use of when forming attitudes and opinions with regard to the crisis management of the tsunami disaster.

When people evaluate how institutions, organizations or actors behave, evaluation criteria are always made use of. These may be explicit or implicit, and they may be more or less consciously held. However, more often than not, they tend to be rather subconscious. It is when expectations are not fulfilled and people have to reflect on why they feel frustration or disappointment that the evaluation criteria become more explicit.

Thus, the available information may be positive, neutral or negative, but what may be of greater importance is whether or not the behaviour of institutions, organizations and actors lives up to the current standards and public expectations. Hence, decisive political action and rapid response in a crisis situation may result in decreased political confidence if public expectations are high, but if they are low, poor crisis management may not affect political confidence at all.

Furthermore, public expectations may vary within different segments of the population. If such heterogeneity of public desires increases, either by polarization along a single dimension or by divergence across multiple dimensions, then it becomes more difficult for government to identify any feasible set of policies that would satisfy its constituents (Putnam, Pharr & Dalton 2000).

In the case of the tsunami, it is surely relevant to consider whether the Swedish public actually expected inspiring political leadership and a government able to act even in such a serious crisis. Low political trust indicates low expectations and a sceptical public opinion. On the other hand, political wisdom suggests that both ordinary people and the media usually attempt to rally round their political leaders in difficult times, in spite of everyday criticism. This happened after September 11, 2001, in many countries in the Western World, and particularly in the U.S. (Norris, Kern & Just 2003). To some extent, people in Sweden also appeared to expect political leaders to be decisive when urgent situations require it.

From the moment the Swedish Government first heard of the disaster, I think both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister have acted in a way you would not have expected them to. Instead of taking initiatives, they put a brake on governmental action.

The politicians at the top have the responsibility. The Foreign Ministry and the Government failed to meet expectations. They acted too slowly and could not help the affected people.

These comments from the focus groups reveal that the Government was expected to react rapidly in order to help those affected by the tsunami, i.e. rapid response was part of the evaluation criteria people used when judging the crisis management. However, even allowing for the fact that political confidence in Sweden has been declining throughout the past few decades (Holmberg & Oscarsson 2004), scepticism rather than cynicism (Strömbäck 2001) seemed to characterize the focus groups' general attitudes towards politicians. There was a fairly widespread belief that the typical elected representatives did try their best. Even if ordinary citizens do not trust them all the time, they expected them to be effective and hard working, especially in difficult and dramatic situations.

I think the majority of the politicians really want to do their best. They sacrifice a lot in their work for better living conditions in Sweden. Generally speaking, I think we have fairly good politicians in this country.

We have elected the politicians, maybe they should have acted in other ways, but we have elected them. And I think the majority of them are doing their best. They do not have the simplest job in the world.

However, the focus groups indicate that people do differentiate between politicians in general and specific politicians. Although many participants expressed some degree of trust in politicians in general, they were critical of how particular politicians acted when dealing with the tsunami. In the case of management of the tsunami disaster, people seemed to be more critical of the government, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister than of other governmental institutions and other politicians. To several participants, the lack of a rapid response was symptomatic of a larger problem – that the current Prime Minister and Foreign Minister have formed a centralized power base, in which lower-level ministers and governmental officials are afraid of being critical or of delivering bad news. As one of the participants in the focus groups stated:

I have not met the Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs in person, but to me they appear to be two personalities who encourage cautiousness and fear in their political environment. When people don't dare to take initiatives without checking with everyone else, then the situation becomes dangerous.

Several similar statements were made in the focus groups, even though others maintained that politicians, including the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister,

are hard-working people who try to do their best. Thus, public expectations with regard to the political institutions and politicians during the tsunami disaster differed somewhat. Some people expected politicians to be decisive and effective, while others were more disillusioned in this regard. Perhaps the explanation for the diverging expectations, which appeared in this case, has more to do with differing standards for different situations. When it is 'business as usual', political mistrust and low public expectations dominate, but in a perceived crisis, people forget about ordinary circumstances and demand more effective governance and crisis management. Accordingly, evaluation criteria change and expectations spiral uncontrollably upwards.

When attempting to understand why citizens feel the way they do about their government, it is important to note that their subjective appraisal of governmental performance is what ultimately matters. In a crisis situation, public perceptions of governmental crisis management are indeed more important than the actual crisis management, with regard to how public confidence is affected. In the case of the tsunami crisis management, these perceptions led people to believe that there were very or fairly strong reasons to be critical (Table 2).

Table 2. Public Perception of the Swedish Management of the Tsunami Disaster (percent)

	<i>Very strong reasons to be critical</i>	<i>Fairly strong reasons to be critical</i>	<i>Not particularly strong reasons to be critical</i>	<i>No reasons to be critical</i>	<i>Sum</i>
To what extent do you think there are reasons to be critical of how Swedish authorities and organizations managed the tsunami disaster?	20	51	26	4	101

Note: The entire question was: "Some people think that you can never make preparations for dealing with catastrophes like this better, while other people think there are reasons to be critical of authorities and organizations in such situations. To what extent do you think there are reasons to be critical of how Swedish authorities and organizations managed the tsunami disaster? (N=967).

The participants in the focus groups also believed that there were strong reasons to be critical, particularly with regard to leading politicians. They were perceived as having acted too slowly, and indeed having failed to realize the magnitude of the disaster. The participants also believed that leading politicians and governmental agencies failed to give citizens accurate information

about what was happening. Some participants complained about the efficiency of the evacuation of Swedes from the disaster region, and compared this with the more definitive actions of other countries.

It was so bad. In a country as regulated as Sweden is you expect things to happen. Even in Italy, which is different from Sweden in many ways, things happened quickly. I noticed that. It was actually a matter of hours and they reacted immediately. Here, everyone waited for somebody to do something.

Leading politicians, particularly the Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, were accused of being poorly informed, too slow to act and even completely out of touch with public emotions.

As early as on December 26, I realized that the Minister for Foreign Affairs was not particularly interested in knowing what was happening and did not have professional people around that could tell her. In my opinion, you really have a communication problem then.

It is remarkable how you can be a Foreign Minister without watching foreign news on television during Christmas. If she had followed the news, she would have realized the magnitude of the disaster much earlier.

Considering that 78 percent of the respondents in the survey expressed very or fairly strong confidence in the media coverage of the tsunami, whereas 71 percent thought there were very or fairly strong reasons to be critical of the Swedish management of the disaster, it appears obvious that when the media were critical of the authorities, and when politicians tried to shift the blame or to defend themselves, people chose to believe the media reports. It also appears obvious that the media lived up to the standards expected by the public, whereas the authorities and political actors failed in this respect. The media delivered instant news, as required and expected by everyone in a crisis situation. In contrast, the government did not deliver the political leadership expected at this time of greatest need.

Public Perceptions of Government and Media

Political confidence can be judged to be the product of the perceived crises management, the available information and the evaluation criteria decided upon by the public. During the tsunami disaster, public confidence in politicians and political institutions was affected, to a greater or lesser extent, by the perception of unsuccessful governmental actions. This was, in turn, reinforced by the media coverage, which depicted a crisis management that did not meet the evaluation criteria people used to judge the various organizations and

authorities. This is evident from the survey responses to the question: “How much confidence do you have in the following governmental agencies’, organizations’ and individuals’ management of the tsunami disaster?” (Table 3).

Table 3. Swedish Public Confidence in the Crisis Management of the Tsunami Disaster of Different Governmental Agencies, Organizations and Individuals (percent)

	<i>Very high</i>	<i>Fairly high</i>	<i>Fairly low</i>	<i>Very low</i>	<i>Total</i>
Aid organizations	45	52	3	1	101
Swedish health service	35	58	6	1	100
Swedish Rescue Services Agency	34	58	7	1	100
Travel agencies	45	46	7	2	100
Swedish Lutheran Church	24	61	10	5	100
The Swedish King	27	52	15	6	100
The Prime Minister	3	34	42	21	100
The Government	2	31	48	19	100
The Foreign Ministry	2	24	46	28	100
The Foreign Minister	1	18	39	42	100

Note: The question was “How much confidence do you have in the following agencies, organizations and individuals with regard to their management of the tsunami?” (N=770-982).

These results suggest that the crisis management of the tsunami created both winners and losers in the court of public opinion. The public have great confidence in how aid organizations, the Swedish health service, the Swedish Rescue Services Agency, the Swedish Lutheran Church, the Swedish King and the travel agencies managed the crisis. On the other hand, the explicitly political agencies and actors were not particularly trusted for their management of the tsunami disaster. Very few expressed very high confidence, and whereas about a third express fairly high confidence in the Prime Minister and the Government, only about a fifth felt the same with regard to the Foreign Ministry and the Foreign Minister. Approximately 80 percent expressed fairly or very low confidence in the Foreign Minister and her management of the tsunami disaster, which is somewhat astonishing.

Similar attitudes and opinions were prevalent in the focus groups, which also displayed generally low confidence in political actors and authorities. In a country with a rather centralized structure with reference to the exercising of political power, many participants felt that the Swedish Government was ultimately responsible for the actual management of the event. It was repeatedly claimed in the discussions that political action was delayed, and that central control and fear of reprisals prevented authorities from acting independently

and perhaps from saving the lives of some Swedish citizens. Thus, the already low level of political trust among the public was actually reinforced by poor government performance.

I think it is impossible to have confidence in politicians after the disaster. I don't know, I am no expert in politics, but I do not feel like they act in the interest of the public now.

On the whole, I am very critical I have to admit that. Once upon a time, I think there were more of ideological beliefs in politics. Nowadays they appear to focus on their own career. Personally, I have lost my confidence in politicians.

As the evidence above suggests, the two main players in the trust game were in fact two of the most prominent members of the Social Democratic Government, namely the Prime Minister Göran Persson, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs Laila Freivalds. The trust in these two particular politicians appears to have decreased significantly during this national crisis. However, whereas the majority of the criticism in the survey is directed at the Foreign Minister, the Prime Minister receives more criticism from the focus groups.

I think the Prime Minister has handled this poorly. He is blaming other members of his cabinet and some officials at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Sweden appears to be a very centralized country with very centralized political power.

This quote is interesting, as it shows that the attempt by the Prime Minister to shift the blame onto others seems to have created a backlash. Instead of shielding him from criticism, it exacerbated it.

However, both the survey data and the focus group discussions indicate that general political trust in Sweden has not declined due to the tsunami. When asked the question "Generally speaking, how much confidence do you have in Swedish politicians?" 32 percent responded very or fairly great confidence. This result is rather similar to or even somewhat higher than in other surveys carried out before the tsunami disaster, even though no survey dealing with exactly the same question was carried out immediately prior to the disaster (cf. Holmberg & Weibull 2005). Accordingly, politicians from the opposition parties and local politicians seem to be unaffected by the events. People appear to distinguish between different political actors. Thus, the lack of trust appears to be specific, rather than general. From a democratic perspective, this should be seen as positive.

A substantial part of the Swedish debate after the disaster has focused on the political responsibility for the (mis)management of the disaster. Obviously, mistakes were made during the days immediately following the disaster; thus,

there is a general feeling that there must be a means of determining liability. Judging from the discussions in the focus groups, people are united in their view on the need to determine liability. The participants also complained about a political culture in which a willingness to claim responsibility has become rather rare. There was a remarkable feeling of resignation among the participants when it came to questions about political responsibility, and people perceived a considerable gap between the rules that are applied to powerful political figures and those applied to people in general. This perception was expressed in different ways:

I think some people in the government should resign. People in other professions have to resign if they do not meet expectations. I don't think the government has been doing a good job here so I think they should resign.

What I remember is everyone at the top blaming someone else. Sadly, this is a classic situation in our country. You blame someone else, and nobody is responsible for what went wrong.

On the whole, existing valuation patterns and attitudes have been upheld in spite of the tsunami disaster. The roles played by societal actors on this occasion confirmed the general public's expectations. There was great political mistrust in Sweden before the tsunami, and the low level of trust remained more or less unchanged after the disaster. The series of events did not provide any surprises that would upset this pattern. As can be noted from Table 3 above, there were also opportunities for unexpected players, such as travel agencies and the church, to step into the limelight and take advantage of the confidence gaps that opened up during the disaster. Even the Swedish king, who has no political power at all, gained increased popularity by expressing his feelings and concern for those affected by the tsunami.

According to the general public, the media behaved in a generally trust-inspiring manner. Most people do not feel that their trust in the media has changed as a result of the way the event was reported. There was a widespread perception in the focus groups that most journalists acted in a professional manner, even in this highly pressurized environment where working conditions were extremely difficult. Systematic and ethical violations in the media were perceived to have been rare.

I think the journalists and the reporters in the field acted in a responsible manner. I can't have any other opinion. It must have been very emotional even for the journalists in the disaster area.

Generally, criticism of the media was notable by its absence during the focus group discussions. In contrast to the political sphere, the media's image remained positive throughout, and the perception was that initially they were

holding the nation together. Intense coverage of the event during the weeks following the disaster exhausted the audience somewhat, but the media managed to maintain their position as being basically fair and responsible in their news reporting. There were a few objections to the watchdog function of the media during a national crisis such as this, but most people seemed to support the idea of the free press 'checking the balance'.

It should be important for media to focus on political responsibility in a situation like this. I understand this as a basic function of the media, to focus on what went wrong and try to get some changes made.

However, the particular and often discussed relationship between journalists and politicians – and its importance for public trust in the two groups – was also addressed in the focus groups. Even if trust in journalists was generally much higher during the discussions, some participants expressed concern about the conditions of the media in a democracy, where the media are sometimes perceived as being an obstacle to improving public discourse given their veneration for simplifying and dramatizing political events.

Partly, the media have to scrutinize, but they also sometimes exaggerate this function and turn it into a one-sided search for scapegoats.

I have to admit that I have very limited confidence in politicians. But on the other hand, I think the media are to blame as they are always putting pressure on politicians. Politicians are afraid of expressing their real opinions in public.

To conclude, the public described a Swedish Government unable to handle unexpected serious events. People thought the government was too slow to act and too disorientated during the first dramatic days. Thus, it did not follow any of the guidelines with regard to successful crisis response strategies. The government did not manage to get to the root of the problem; it did not respond rapidly enough, and did not gather relevant information; and too much time elapsed before it started offering reimbursements to the victims and those affected or offended by its general inaction. The decision to appoint the Swedish Tsunami Commission was taken somewhat reluctantly, and the evidence presented by this commission reinforced the impression of mismanagement. Instead, the government, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister concentrated on evading responsibility, which was not seen as credible by the media and the public. Far from assisting them, this backfired and created more criticism.

At the same time, the media probably benefited from the clumsiness of the political system and its abdication from the public sphere. Journalists were considered to be acting as professionals in comparison to leading politicians,

who were not. Journalists delivered their stories. Politicians did not arrive at the correct decisions.

The Tsunami as a Political Problem

Dramatic events do sometimes result in dramatic surges in trust in government, confidence in governmental institutions and in social trust. For example, in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, confidence in government increased in the US, as well as in many other Western democracies. However, this is not the only possible effect of dramatic events. On the contrary, political confidence in national governments sometimes declines as a result of external threats. This happened in Spain after the train bombings on March 11, 2004, where people voted for a new government in the election that took place only a few days after the terror attacks.

Obviously, crises can be related to political confidence in different ways. This study of public trust in the Swedish Government after the tsunami disaster confirms something of a status quo situation. Political confidence was low before the disaster and the government did not succeed in improving the figures by their management of the event. There was no rallying around the flag and no general public support behind the political leadership. Instead, there was widespread public criticism of the government, and particularly of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister.

Unravelling why political confidence has varied in different crises scenarios is a complex task. The present chapter discusses a model for explaining confidence in political institutions and in politicians that focuses on public perceptions of crises management. It is assumed that these perceptions are based on the interdependent influences of the actual crisis management, the available information and the public evaluation criteria. Thus, changes in political confidence could be due to a change in any, or indeed all, of these variables.

In this case, the Swedish Government was not particularly successful in its crisis management. The crisis response strategies were totally insufficient. Accordingly, almost every action was at odds with the standard recommendations of crisis communication. First of all, the government remained silent for far too long. No general press conference was announced until the Christmas holiday was over. The governmental response to what had actually happened was very slow and inconsistent from the very beginning. Furthermore, official information capacities were poorly developed during the most urgent phases immediately after the disaster. By not acting appropriately, the government contributed to the diffusion of further uncertainty and passivity in its departments and among the authorities.

However, perceived crisis management is probably much more important in explaining political confidence than is the actual crisis management itself.

Thus, it is relevant to analyse both the information flows and the existing standards for public evaluations of political actors during the tsunami disaster.

News reporting of the event was extensive and largely professional. Live reports from the disaster area were delivered from the first day. Instant information was available from websites and text television. The broadcast media were delivering uninterrupted news and commentaries. There was a substantial increase in the audiences for news, as the majority of people were at home during the holiday period. The reports quickly confirmed the magnitude of the disaster and the fact that many Swedes were probably among the victims. In contrast to the official information flows during the first critical days, the news media appeared to deliver consistent and accurate information. Thus, the general public perceived that it was provided with a reasonably good overview of what had happened and this might have contributed to the low level of political confidence. In reality, in this case it was relatively easy to obtain accurate information through independent and reliable sources, thus making it more difficult for the government to claim that they have done everything in the most efficient and relevant way. Accordingly, public trust in the news media was considerably higher than public trust in the government.

The bad result for political confidence in this case can also be partially explained by the public evaluation criteria. However, the criteria appear to be paradoxical to some extent. Generally speaking, political confidence is low in Sweden, even in international comparisons. This indicates that public expectations for politicians are generally low. In this context, political mistakes are not seen as entirely disastrous, as the public perceives that they are merely par for the course, confirming their view of the usual less-than-satisfactory governance. On the other hand, the present data illustrate a more general critical attitude towards the government and notably high expectations of governmental performance. The government did not meet these expectations. There was probably a void of political confidence that could have been filled in this dramatic and exceptional situation. There was a great opportunity to win the public over by acting decisively, but the government was unable to seize the initiative.

It is probably reasonable to discuss the differing evaluation criteria with regard to different political situations. It may be that people change their expectations according to the current political conditions. Even if expectations are generally low, the present results indicate that citizens do have high expectations during a political crisis. Paradoxically, the low expectations for everyday politics and decisive actions taken in normal situations appear to be transformed into high expectations in a crisis situation, when the options for acting appropriately are generally considerably more limited. Thus, many Swedes who usually have a low trust in government expected leading politicians to take initiatives and give the public accurate information as soon as possible. When this did not happen, other institutions in society, such as the news media, travel agencies and aid organizations, filled the void and gained more confidence.

This case study of the tsunami disaster illustrates something of a worst-case crisis communication scenario for the Swedish Government. Initially, the crisis response strategies failed. At the same time, a considerable amount of accurate information was available from the news media, and the public expectations for government action were considerably increased. Thus, all the different variables used in explaining political confidence were working to the disadvantage of the Swedish Government. Accordingly, the perceived crisis management was 'too little action, too late and too uncoordinated'.

Natural disasters occur randomly. It is hardly reasonable to expect national governments to be completely prepared to handle crises of this type efficiently. No matter how well developed crisis management strategies are, there is a great risk that important challenges and emerging problems have not been taken into consideration. Thus, it is not unusual for ordinary citizens to express support and sympathy for their government during an external threat or a natural disaster.

At the same time, modern democracies are mediated democracies in which a global flow of information is instantly available. This increases the public's ability to check government actions and also facilitates public judgments of what is reasonable to expect from a government in a specific situation. A rather well-informed citizenry is then able to evaluate the performances of different societal actors and to separate these performances from each other. As noted in the present case study, this can result in specific mistrust in members of the government, while political confidence in general appears to be unaffected by the dramatic event.

Natural disasters can surely reinforce political confidence in government under certain circumstances and may even vitalize the public discourse. But natural disasters may also accentuate political crises when crisis management is perceived as having been poor and when people have reasons to believe that much more could have been done in the specific situation.

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Rhetorical Defence Strategies After The Tsunami Flood Disaster

Jesper Falkheimer

The tsunami flood disaster of 2004 had consequences stretching well beyond the physical event and put the trust in authorities as well as companies at stake. The media image is of course of utmost importance to the opinion processes stemming from the event. According to a survey looking at how the disaster was depicted in the media (Andersson Odén et al. 2005: 28), it was “the single event receiving the most space in Swedish media during the past decades”.¹ But the present chapter is not focused on media narrations; instead it looks at agents’ planned or unplanned communication efforts in relation to the mass media. Here, communication efforts mean, above all, how critical questions were treated and answered by the agents involved.

The study makes no claims of being exhaustive, but mainly intends to shed light on a number of examples from the course of events that are relevant from a communication perspective. The analysis is based on theories of rhetoric – partly from the classic genre *genus judiciale*, and partly from a modern theory in PR, *image repair theory*, developed by the American scholar William Benoit (1995). This defence theory is founded on *apologia* of rhetoric, i.e. the theory of how best to defend oneself in a situation of crisis. Initially the background is discussed more thoroughly. Then the rhetoric theory, which is later applied to a number of communication efforts, is presented. The main aim of the chapter is to increase our understanding of how two actors, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the travel agency *Fritidsresor*, communicated to the media in the days following the disaster. This communication is analysed in the theoretical framework of image repair strategy, as mentioned above. The chapter begins with a short summary of how the selected actors were framed in the mass media after the tsunami flood disaster. Then earlier and relevant research concerning rhetorical *apologia* and image repair strategy is discussed. Finally, an empirical textual analysis is conducted in which I apply the strategies of the communicative actions of *Fritidsresor* and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. My material consists partly of a TV broadcast from one of the first press conferences arranged by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, on December 28, 2004, and partly of press releases from *Fritidsresor*.

The Heroine and the Scapegoat

After the tsunami, the Communications Director of Fritidsresor (a Swedish travel agency) was celebrated for her ability to answer questions posed by the media quickly, clearly and with empathy, while the Minister of Foreign Affairs Laila Freivalds was increasingly criticized for her dilatoriness and non-chalance. Two media quotes illustrate the character descriptions:

Resign now, Freivalds. Over 3000 e-mails of protest against the Foreign Minister's actions [headline]. Full public outcry now prevails against Laila Freivalds not acting in time with remedial measures. Over three thousand people have sent e-mails to the UD (the Ministry for Foreign Affairs), most demanding Freivalds' resignation. (*Aftonbladet* December 31, 2004)

Lottie Knutson celebrated by the people. Receives many letters from grateful people every day [headline]. Lottie Knutson was almost canonized when the worry and uncertainty were the most intense after the tsunami in Asia. Now she gets prizes and distinctions, just the other day Stora informationspriset (Big Information Prize). (*Borås Tidning* March 29, 2005)

The reasons the government was considered as having mismanaged the situation were numerous and quickly discussed in the media. People were particularly upset by the fact that Laila Freivalds went to a theatre on the evening of December 26, despite having been informed about the disaster. Indistinct and dilatory decision-making meant that *Räddningsverket* (Swedish Rescue Services Agency) did not send a rescue team to Thailand straight away. The evacuation of affected Swedes took longer than necessary as well. Parallel to the growing criticism of the government and the authorities, Lottie Knutson of Fritidsresor was increasingly being honoured by the media.

The results of the opinion polls were clear. For instance, about a week after the disaster, a representative selection of Swedes were asked about their views on the crisis efforts of the authorities and the companies involved. Thirty-two per cent declared that their confidence in the authorities had decreased, especially their confidence in the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Eighty-two per cent, however, declared that their confidence in the disaster reports of the media was great and 82 per cent thought that the ability of the travel companies to act had been rather or very good (Swedish Emergency Management Agency 2005). But there is obviously reason to question opinion polls of this kind. Opinions are always relative and socially constructed phenomena of varying value. In an analysis of Swedish people's opinions about agents connected with the tsunami flood disaster, Grandien, Nord & Strömbeck (2005: 23) extend Bourdieu's criticism of opinion statements. First, everyone asked might not have an opinion at all. Second, all these opinions are of varying importance. Third, the choice of questions is a decisive factor in itself.

When it comes to operational crisis management, there were circumstances that were important to the media narrations and pictures. It would be cynical to assert that people's views are only based on rhetorical narrations created in harmony with different sources and media. But there is reason to emphasize the strategically communicative dimension, which is important both to the actual development and to how immaterial values change or are strengthened. In relation to risk and crisis communication, the concepts confidence, trust and credibility are always in focus. Like opinion, confidence is a concept, which is abstract and hard to deal with. Quantitative measurements of people's confidence in societal institutions, companies and each other can be reflected on in a similar fashion: Everyone might not have a real attitude towards confidence, existing attitudes are of different importance, and the questions are difficult to operationalize for each and every person. In any case, confidence is largely created through communication, provided that, with this concept, one is referring to meaning-creating processes between people that involve an exchange of symbols (in the form of language, but also actions). Like trust, confidence emanates from the party who creates meaning in the communication process, in contrast to credibility, which is a concept more closely related to the addresser. In other words, strategies and techniques are used to create credibility (Hedqvist 2002), which, in turn, influences people's confidence and trust.

The tsunami flood disaster is obviously associated with different confidence effects depending on which cultural context we are talking about. In Sweden, the starting-point for confidence may be said to be rather positive. During recent decades, different measurements (Holmberg & Weibull 2007; Palm & Falkheimer 2005) have shown that Swedes' confidence in one another is stable – between 60 and 70 per cent of the population claim that they trust their fellow citizens. But measurements also show slowly falling general confidence in authorities, companies and central social institutions, although there are exceptions. This development need not be interpreted in accordance with pessimistic ways of thinking. It can also be seen as an effect of late-modern social developments, in which individualism, globalization and increased reflexivity have made us more independent. Naturally, however, the development can also be interpreted in negative terms, in the sense that the foundations of the national society are questioned and that people's life worlds are filled with worry and insecurity.

Information Play between Sources and the Media

To many of us, the image of the disaster is still a media image that is constructed in relation to a number of different influences. The perceived course of events is an obvious influence, but in addition the communicative efforts of the sources, journalistic logic and political-economic conditions of the media have a great impact. The media cannot be separated from the social, economic

or political environment, and their activity and selection are influenced by different sources. This societal perspective has become more common in media studies, which have long proceeded from a so-called media-centric perspective, in which the technologies and organizations of the media are considered as separate from the environment.

The societal perspective is also separated from the popular debates that often make single editors and journalists, as rationally acting individuals, responsible for media selection. But having said that, it is not only structures that govern the processes outside journalists' practice. There are, however, other agents apart from journalists that are important to analyse. A fitting metaphor of the media is in this case a *stage* – not a square, however, as a stage cannot be seen as a public space for everyone – where what the audience encounters often hides what is happening behind the stage. The information play, to use a concept coined by Goffmann (1959: 16), includes role-play and routines that the sources can choose to adapt to.

In modern terms, the activities of sources can be seen as a kind of public relations, which includes theories and practices focused on communication processes and relations between organizations and interested parties in their world. In contrast to traditional marketing, particularly relations that are of indirect importance to the actual activities and the images of the organization created by different media are accentuated. Nowadays, public relations is a developed management function, which includes many different genres. Originally, however, public relations dealt with defence strategies to be used when companies were accused of having bad conditions.

This field, called *damage control* in the early 1900s (Ewen 1996), still constitutes a central part of the practice. In newer media studies, investigations of power relations between sources and journalists constitute a part of the field that is usually summarized as *news management*. According to Palm (2002: 83), news management means “all the techniques and strategies that are used to try to influence what becomes news and how it is designed”. News management has received increased importance in late-modern society as a strategic tool for all kinds of organizations (Falkheimer 2004). Growing production demands, competition and media speed have increased the possibilities for different agents to influence and shape agendas and publicity (Cottle 2003). News management can be seen as a field of research on news production that has a long tradition in sociology and political science. Research on news management and sources can be divided into two dimensions (Manning 2001: 107). First, an instrumental dimension, which identifies different agents' deliberate attempts to govern the media. Second, a structural dimension, which instead focuses on mechanisms in the political-social system, for example dominating discourses practising and governing political communication, often on an unconscious level for the single agents.

Apologia of Rhetoric

One way of approaching news management, or the information play, is to use the theory of rhetoric. In recent decades, there has been a renaissance for rhetoric in various fields. On the one hand, applied rhetoric, mainly associated with presentation technique, has become increasingly popular in the form of courses and bestsellers. Author Göran Hägg's *Praktisk retorik* (Practical Rhetoric) (1998) is a good example. On the other hand, rhetoric as a communication theory has become an obvious reference in social and human sciences during the past decades as part of the linguistic turn. Interest in the power of and through language and symbolic capital in, for example, discourse analysis has led to use or reuse of the concepts of classical rhetoric. From a theory of science perspective, rhetoric contrasts the objective and rational ideal of positivism. Scientific text, too, can be analysed as rhetoric, in the sense that there is room for different wording possibilities and communicative functions in all texts and expressions. The criticism of rhetoric as a way to manipulate reality is as old as rhetoric itself. In antiquity, Plato criticized the rhetoricians – called sophists – for twisting the world around. But the dichotomy between rational language and rhetorical language is exaggerated. Rhetoric essentially concerns a human quality: the desire to be understood, the will to persuade. This does not at all exclude rational knowledge, which, of course, also has to be argued for. Fafner (1992: 13) states:

As long as it is still human language (and not for instance computer language) we produce it aiming at being understood in a given situation. And where there is such an aim, there is also rhetoric. When Plato or Descartes wanted to argue against rhetoric they were forced to use it.

According to Johannesson (1998: 37), classical rhetoric was organized in three genres of rhetoric: accusation or defence speech (*genus judiciale*), consideration or advice speech (*genus deliberativum*) and eulogy or condemnation speech (*genus demonstrativum*). In practice, the division is vague. In a political speech, which traditionally counts as *genus deliberativum*, accusations as well as eulogies are normally included. In a trial there is an element of consideration speech. And so on.

In the present context, defence speech is the centre of attention. The Latin concept is associated with the environment in which it, presumably, is the most common – in court. But defence speech is used in all social forums: from the family (“he hit me first”), schools (“my alarm clock did not ring”), work (“I was not informed”), to politics (“we inherited the budget deficit from you”). Hellspång (1992: 39) also points out that defence speech is particularly visible in the public debate when “one justifies one’s actions in front of the general public, for instance a decision that had unfortunate consequences, or when putting the blame on opponents, for instance for lying.”

Regarding companies, the rhetorical ability to defend oneself is seen as a central aspect of customer relations at the micro as well as macro level (Westerberg 2004). It may concern how criticism is managed in direct interaction with a customer at a service meeting, but also debates with a public impact. One example, apart from the tsunami, is when *IKEA* in Norway was criticized for supporting “oppression of women in Muslim countries” (Aftonbladet, March 10, 2005). The background was the Norwegian newspaper VG’s inspection of the directions for assembly included in *IKEA* products. According to VG’s article, of the 2000 brochures examined, there were only drawings of men screwing the furniture together. According to the Norwegian communication manager of *IKEA*, this is motivated by the fact that depicting women is in conflict with Islam. “We have more than 200 department stores around the world and have to take culture into account. In Muslim countries, it is problematic to use women in directions for use” (ibid.). Norwegian top politicians, among others Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, claimed that this was untenable and supported contempt of women. The Norwegian debate led to a minor Swedish debate in which the Swedish communication manager of *IKEA* chose another defence strategy. In *Aftonbladet*, the day after the Norwegian debate, the communication manager apologized for giving out false information (there are women in directions for use in Muslim countries too) and promised to look into the distribution of drawn men and women.

The defence strategies developed during the glory days of rhetoric in antiquity were meant for defence lawyers in court. Analogies between the theatre of war and the court were prevalent. A primary task was to choose “the point of the battle field where one had the greatest opportunity to defeat the enemy” (Johannesson 1998: 39). A similar analysis should be made by every agent in any communication situation; the important thing is to examine the possibilities for defence. In a situation of crisis, quick answers are of the utmost importance, and there is rarely time to analyse the basic question carefully. There is a great risk that the agent will speak before thinking about what should be said. The quote by the Norwegian communication manager of *IKEA* above may be an example of this.

Around 200 B.C., the Greek rhetorician Hermagoras constructed a basic defence system emanating from four possible stasi (app. controversial question, see Marsh 2006) from which the speaker could choose.

- Defence by facts (*stochasmos*).
- Defence by definition (*boros*), for instance by redefining the problem.
- Defence by quality (*poiotes*), for instance by motivating the action that is opposed by claiming that the end justifies the means.
- Defence by responsibility of authorities (*metalepsis*), by questioning whether one has the right to judge.

Johannesson (1998: 32) emphasizes a number of possible strategies that connect with these *stasi*. An obvious possibility is to oppose the probability of the attack due to false or contradictory premises or evidence (*status coniecturae*). An extreme of this strategy is the so-called *apoteos*, total denial, which often has religious associations. Or one could choose to admit having committed an act, but question defining the act as wrong (*status finitionis*). A third strategy can be to admit to the act and its definition, but to try to put the blame on something or someone else (*status translationis*). This strategy is not far from comparing the act with other acts to defuse its negative nature or consequences (*comparatio*). Another possibility is to blame the act on another agent who, for instance, has provoked and thereby caused it (*remotio criminis*).

Classical rhetoric more seldom recommended taking the blame and apologizing in public (*deprecatio*). This is, however, a considerably more common recommendation in our time, when most advisors regard the apology as an effective alternative. A classic example is when the former minister of migration Jan O. Karlsson was subject to criticism in the autumn of 2002 for receiving two salaries. First, he was being paid for being a cabinet minister, but he was also being paid by the EU Court of Revision, which he had left. Initially he defended his two salaries, but soon thereafter he apologized. At a press conference in November, he said he understood the indignation and anger, and that he would give his EU salary to the Olof Palme memorial fund every month – as it was not possible to stop that salary. A PR consultant then coined the phrase “making a poodle” to illustrate his rhetoric defence strategy, referring to his turnaround in the matter.

A tragicomic contrast to this apology is statements made by the then Iraqi minister of information Mohammed Saaed Al-Sahaf when Iraq was being attacked by the U.S. and their allies in 2003. Al-Sahaf denied over and over again, despite the fact that the journalists could see what was happening, that the Americans were making military progress. According to Roer (2003), he used a rhetoric *apoteos*, total denial. When confronted with the news that American forces had reached Baghdad International Airport he declared: “They are not in Baghdad. They do not control an airport. That, I can tell you. It is a lie. It is a Hollywood film. You should not believe them”. His last appearance took place on the roof of a hotel with American tanks and soldiers below. Despite this he asserted that: “There are only two American tanks in this town. Their forces are committing suicide by the hundred. The battle is very hard and God has made us victorious. The battle continues”.

Image Repair Theory

The American communication researcher William Benoit (1995) has worked out a modern categorization of the defence speech of classical rhetoric (so-called *image repair theory*). He has conducted a large number of studies on

how well different defence strategies work. Subject, context and situation are obviously always decisive for which application is considered the most effective. But most of his studies indicate that collective humiliations (apologies and promises concerning what is regarded as wrong or immoral) are most profitable from the perspective of the organization. Benoit has summarized the defence strategies, or “image repair strategies”, in a typology consisting of five different types.

Figure 1. Benoit's Typology of Image Repair Strategies

Denial • Simple Denial • Shift the blame	Did not perform act Another performed act
Evasion of responsibility • Provocation • Defeasibility • Accident • Good intentions	Responded to act of another Lack of information/ability Mishap Meant well
Reducing offensiveness of event • Bolstering • Minimization • Differentiation • Transcendence • Attack accuser • Compensation	Stress good traits Act is not serious Act is not offensive More important values Reduce accuser's credibility Reimburse victim
Corrective action	Plan to solve/prevent recurrence of problem
Mortification	Apologize

Source: Benoit 1995.

The first strategy, *denial*, is of course an unethical strategy if one knows that one is guilty. But in practice it is rarely obvious what is right or wrong – it depends on perspective and the interpretative horizon. Rhetoric is, as mentioned earlier, the art of *possibilities*. It is often a matter of value judgement. An alternative to denial is *blaming someone else*, which is a dangerous strategy not having valid and relevant arguments to rely on.

Evasion of responsibility is a strategy more commonly used. It can, among other things, mean explaining the real or imagined error as being based on lack of information or as an accident. The third strategy is called *reducing offensiveness of event* and is a sophisticated strategy. It entails trying to avoid criticism, for instance by emphasizing one's background, confidence capi-

tal or by acting proactively using symbolic management. Sending the most prominent representative of the organization to a place of crisis is one example. Another alternative is differentiating from the accusation by blaming the organization and the person who is accused of the error. In political rhetoric, frontal attack against the person or persons doing the accusing is common.

The fourth strategy involves trying to correct the problem and thus avoiding further criticism. It does not necessarily mean admitting the truth of the accusation explicitly. The fifth strategy is total humiliation, which means apologizing with emphasis.

The Agents' Strategies after the Tsunami Flood Disaster

In this concluding part, I intend to try to relate the above strategies to the actions of the travel agency Fritidsresor and The Ministry for Foreign Affairs. My material consists partly of a TV broadcast from one of the first press conferences arranged by the government and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, on December 28, 2004, and partly of press releases from Fritidsresor.² There is obviously a methodological limitation here in that the material cannot be scientifically compared. There are two main reasons for this. First, the medium is different: a text in a press release is produced in a quite different way than a speech (or defence) during a press conference. Second, the effects of these two genres may be hard to generalize as they are complemented with other communicative actions. Furthermore, The Ministry for Foreign Affairs was in a more obvious defence position than was Fritidsresor. Nevertheless, the analyses can each give a reliable picture. Even with these limitations in mind, the analysis may increase our understanding of the agents' strategies as independent cases.

The press conference took place the same day, as the government's actions had been criticized for the first time (Andersson Odén et al. 2005: 83). The criticism of Expressen (Swedish tabloid) was the sharpest, partly in an editorial with the headline *Ruthlessly*, partly in a debate article by EU Parliamentarian Maria Carlshamre (fp) (app. Liberal Democrats) with the headline *The Government Does Not Bother About People in Need*. In the editorial it was stated that: *The Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the government were unforgivably cruel to the hundreds of thousands of relatives in Sweden who have their nearest and dearest in the area*. The analyses are mainly concerned with the linguistic statements. When it comes to the press conference, a selection of statements and other elements in *actio* (realization) are only commented on to some extent.

The press releases I have chosen to analyse are the first five that Fritidsresor sent out to the mass media between December 26 and 29, 2004. During this period, there is also a notice to attend a press conference (December 29) that is lacking in rhetorical value and is therefore not discussed. The press releases

were mailed from the company to the editorial offices. Apart from the press releases that are the centre of attention here, the communication manager of Fritidsresor was interviewed in television and radio. The conventional website of the travel agency was immediately closed down and replaced with a temporary site (grey colour with updated information about the disaster).

Press Conference December 29, 2004. Rosenbad (The Swedish Government). The Minister for Foreign Affairs Laila Freivalds, Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Hans Dahlgren and Under Secretary of State Lars Danielsson (from www.regeringen.se)

The Minister for Foreign Affairs Laila Freivalds begins by explaining the situation strictly descriptively “collected information”. “It is about the fact that there are thousands of people in our country affected by this tragedy and we must all help to help those who are suffering.” Freivalds’ introduction (*exordium*) is a kind of initial defence, an effort to create solidarity, a “we”. Then a direct statement follows. “At The Ministry for Foreign Affairs we are doing everything we can to help people in the area help people to get home.” More active sentences follow – we “are creating an airlift”, etc. Freivalds then refers to it as a “difficult job we all have to do”. The entire introduction appears to be a veiled defence speech. No questions have been asked so far and no one in the area has questioned the actions of the authority, but there is little doubt that today’s media criticism serves as the starting point. In Benoit’s terms, Freivalds’ introduction constitutes a denial of possible criticism. Little by little, this denial is complemented by an evasion of responsibility strategy, which can partly be linked to arguments of fact.

The Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs speaks after Freivalds; he informs about what they know and he also emphasizes active efforts, for instance that a *call centre* has been created. He also mentions planned flights, which “we have arranged”. Then there are questions answered by the Under Secretary of State. Now the defence becomes explicit. A journalist wonders: “There is information about bureaucratic problems with the national rescue flight being... with sending airplanes. What do you say about that?” Freivalds answers in, what may seem, a somewhat bureaucratic way: “It is the system that is not operational yet, but the resources are tried in another plane. That is what is going on... looking into whether one can use that resource”. There is no tendency to admit deficiencies. In addition, the problem is assigned to a diffuse agent, according to *status translationis*, to “one”, which is separated from her and the ministry. Immediately thereafter, Freivalds refers directly to Under Secretary of State Lars Danielsson, “have you got any more information?” All the agents of authority communicate rather formally and give a fairly reactive impression. Danielsson continues informing about the offers of different authorities, establishing that the meeting with travellers returning to airports seems to have worked out fine.

Then follows a clearly critical question, which can almost be interpreted as a leading question, thus far based on a tacit premise (that the agents have not been coordinated and effective): "How coordinated and effective do you think you have been in the government..." (The question ends with something inaudible). Freivalds answers:

A little more than 48 hours have passed since we received information about... We are talking about 48 hours. During the first 24 hours we had problems answering all the calls that came in, and that was not good since it is extremely important that people get a chance to, at least tell about people who are missing. But it took about 24 hours before we had the capacity that was needed. Yes, we did not have the capacity to manage about 90 calls a second. But after that it has worked.

She is interrupted by one of the journalists, who comments "the exchange was not working". The quote above illustrates a somewhat changed defence strategy. Now the initial denial is complemented with various evasions of responsibility, above all by assigning the problem to lack of information (see Benoit's "I was not informed"). For a leading agent such as a minister this strategy is of course risky. The resulting question is: who is responsible for the information? It is also a fact that this strategy later led to an inquiry as well as criticism.

Freivalds uses judicial rhetorical language and balances between stressing arguments of fact and the dimension of authority. "I think, by the way, that it is about using the structures and basic planning that can be found in the administration for foreign affairs. We have consulates and embassies around the world, among other things to help Swedish people abroad. But they are of course not dimensioned to manage...." After defending herself through evasions of responsibility, Freivalds does not go further in the hierarchy of defence by stressing arguments that reduce offensiveness (the third main strategy according to Benoit), but returns to denial. She accentuates that the job started right away. "I cannot see that there was any delay whatsoever in getting started..." A journalist then compares with other countries that are said to have acted faster. But Freivalds sticks to her strategy, stating that she has contacted other governments and that:

There is no reason to say that Sweden has in any way been slower. And I even know that in many countries Sweden has been used as an example of quick action and reaction.

Several times questions are posed to the travel companies as a kind of rhetorical transfer. Then the atmosphere grows more intense. One journalist wants to know when the first plane will land. Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Dahlgren answers that he does not know. "I do not have that information." There are more critical questions about why they did not act two days

earlier. There is no straight answer, but, on the other hand, a comparison is made with Finland that has 2500 travellers on their way home. "Now we have ten times as many... one can always discuss... but there is a great increase in capacity that has been made possible in consultation with the travel companies, not least SAS." Freivalds makes another statement, she "wants to emphasize that this requires cooperation with many different agents in our society, and I think this cooperation has worked *extremely* well." "Not more than 48 hours have passed since this *enormous* disaster happened and..." The words in italics are hyperboles that are deeply rooted in the strategy of denial. This in conjunction with the lack of information previously shown appears to be rather paradoxical. The three spokespersons do not seem to be coordinated.

A reporter from *Expressen* gives an account of an email from two doctors criticizing the dilatoriness and medical chaos at the site of the disaster. Freivalds stresses that the Thai medical service is excellent but, of course, "under pressure". She concludes by saying that she "intends to accompany the staff of the Swedish Rescue Services Agency who will fly to Thailand tonight to speak with Thai authorities and look into how we can cooperate with them to provide the best help for Swedes who need it."

There is not space enough here to analyse other press conferences and statements that were made during the period after the disaster. One assumption is, however, that the defence strategy used on December 28 became the standard for further discussions of responsibility. Dominating the press conference was denial balanced with evasions of responsibility (mostly lack of information) based on facts as well as arguments of authority. Looking back – at opinion polls and the public debate – this strategy was not effective.

The Press Releases of Fritidsresor

The first message of the company was headlined: "The extent of the disaster that has hit major parts of Asia is still not possible to fathom" (December 26, 11.55 p.m.). Here, the company does not start from its own role as an agent, but instead emphasizes the "unfathomable" and stresses *pathos*, a dimension of emotion. The text is, on the contrary, a more concrete and logical presentation of the situation, though still in a clearly emotive tone (see word choice "are struggling"). "The staff of Fritidsresor in the area are struggling together with local authorities and The Ministry for Foreign Affairs to make contact with and help the areas that today cannot be reached by road or phone: mostly Khao Lak, on the mainland north of Phuket."

In the next section, they act proactively when telling about their difficulties answering all telephone calls from worried relatives. "It is hard to answer the thousands of calls pouring in from worried relatives, which we are sorry for and are trying to attend to by employing more staff." In Benoit's terms, mortification is initially used (being sorry for), then an explanation that can be related to the accident and, finally, the fourth strategy, corrective action (trying

to attend to). The rhythm in this section is of great importance. In the rest of the press release, Fritidsresor inform about not having contact with over 800 Swedish people in Phuket and Khao Lak. No aspect is underestimated and they do not fall into a defence position. Nor do they transfer any real responsibility to The Ministry for Foreign Affairs or local authorities, even though they do state that “Local authorities and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs have not been able to confirm any deaths but, according to local testimonies, there is unfortunately reason to believe that among the travellers with Fritidsresor there are seriously injured as well as dead people”. Through this sentence, the company fulfils the demand for total publicity (in contrast to suspicions of black-out) placed by the mass media. Some additional factual information concludes the main text of the message. But in the last sentence, as in the headline, empathy and pathos are again emphasized. “Our thoughts and our compassion are with the affected travellers and their relatives. Out of consideration for those people, no information about individual travellers will be given to the media.”

One assumption is that just as the press conference seems to have become the standard for the communication that the government and the authorities had with the media and the public during the first period following the disaster, the press release from Fritidsresor became a standard for the communication efforts and relations of the company.

The second press release came the next day, on December 27 (10.22 a.m.). The first sentence emphasizes that they are doing everything they can.

Everyone at Fritidsresor, the staff in place in Thailand as well as all available staff in the Nordic countries are still doing everything possible, together with local authorities and The Ministry for Foreign Affairs, to help the affected travellers in Thailand and their relatives.

As before, Fritidsresor does not transfer responsibility to other agents; there is no denial or doubtful evasions of responsibility. “The accident” as the explanation, also as before, is in the centre of attention. The rest of the communiqué consists of reports of the situation, which give an emotional dimension through the use of various emotive words. They write, for instance, “the devastation is vast”, and “many people are deeply shocked and missing their entire family or parts of it”. Reading these lines, it is hard not to feel compassion.

The third press release has a fact-oriented headline (agency is stressed): “Another three extra evacuation flights to Thailand and so on” (December 28, 1.45 p.m.). This press release differs considerably from the two preceding ones in the sense that now it is logos that is stressed. Using short sentences, Fritidsresor inform about what they are doing and what is going to happen.

Hundreds of people have contacted Fritidsresor to help out. They are recommended to contact their local community where they have specialist know-

ledge of crisis management. To those who want to help materially, we recommend contributions via for instance Radiohjälpen [The Radio Help] or Röda Korset [The Red Cross].

The fourth press release (the same day, 8.28 p.m.) is of the same kind, and the primary aim is to inform about Fritidsresor having succeeded in finding more airplanes.

The fifth press release is a call for help by MD Johan Lundgren. “Hard situation in the area and appeal for ambulance flight.” Because the explanation “the accident” is still used consistently, no other agent is blamed for the situation. Instead it is still an acknowledgement of the responsibility of the company itself that applies. At the same time, the strong portrayal of the place (compare *evidentia*, which means touching the audience by an eye-witness account) has a strong rhetorical element. “The situation at Phuket airport is very serious. / This, in turn, has led to thousands of travellers gathering at the airport: with open wounds, bleeding and in a state of shock. The information has for obvious reasons been inadequate, even from Fritidsresor.” Then delays are explained as “problems with permission in the airway and insufficient communication between different authorities and airline companies due to overloading”. With the same consequence as before, deficiencies are admitted and explained in relation to the enormous dimensions of the accident. They also apologise. “The efforts of Fritidsresor to get food, water and the support of priests and doctors were far from sufficient. The suffering for the already badly hurt travellers on their way home has been great, which we deeply regret.” The intensifier *deeply* gives the apology a higher value.

Then the press release returns to pointing to what has really been done (compare corrective action). But here, for the first time, there is a transfer of responsibility by explaining that some problems cannot be assigned to the company. The text expresses a strong sense of frustration.

The appraisal of Fritidsresor is that hundreds of stretchers and air transports, i.e. ambulance planes, are needed immediately for travellers who are so badly wounded that they cannot travel in normally equipped evacuation planes. This information has been given to Swedish authorities. As a travel organizer, we cannot do anything more about this.

Conclusions: Two Different Approaches

It is evident that the press releases of Fritidsresor expressed a totally different communicative approach than did the press conference of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Fritidsresor’s approach of admitting problems, regretting deficiencies and referring to the accident as the central explanation appears logical and rhetorically effective in hindsight. The press conference of the Min-

istry for Foreign Affairs represents a clear contrast. Consistent denial and evasions of responsibility were used as defence strategies. One crucial question is in what way the actions of the two different actors influenced the publics' conceptions of the crisis? It is not possible to make any causal analysis based on the limited empirical material presented here. But one hypothesis is that the actions had a strong impact on how the crisis developed. Another crucial issue, which may nuance the differences, is the fact that the actors were automatically associated with two different systems and different amounts of trust capital. Fritidsresor is associated with leisure and holidays, while the government obviously is associated with political and judicial matters and responsibilities. "In times of crisis, citizens look to their leaders: Presidents and mayors, local politicians and elected administrators, public managers and top civil servants. We expect these policy makers to avert the threat or at least minimize the damage of the crisis at hand" (Boin, Hart, Stern, Sundelius 2005: 1). In other words, the public's expectation of public leaders and governmental institutions is much higher than its expectation of commercial companies, which leads to higher pressure.

This demarcated rhetorical analysis can hardly form the basis for a broader judgement of the communication efforts of the agents. But a reading of the final report of Katastrofkommissionen [The Disaster Commission] undeniably strengthens the conclusions of the analysis. "It is not easy to communicate about risks and crises with the public, the mass media and other public authorities when there is a lack of information. But we have a lot of learning to do." (SOU 2005: 104, p. 353).³

Notes

1. Here and henceforth the translations of quotes are mine.
2. Thanks to PR officer Jim Hofverberg and communications director Lottie Knutson of Fritidsresor for letting me study the press releases.
3. Thanks to Martin Malmström for helping me with the translation.

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Restoring Consensus after the Blame Game

The Reception of Finnish Tsunami Crisis Management Coverage

Johanna Jääsaari

Crisis management in the event of natural disasters has become a crucial aspect of contemporary governance. While the examination of crisis management is in itself important for highlighting relationships and patterns of power in society, natural disasters provide an opportunity to research new, emergent forms of power. When disaster strikes, public leaders are expected to act promptly in order to diminish the impact of the crisis at hand, while critics and competitors see an opportunity to take advantage of the situation. Natural disasters are a special case, as there is no obvious enemy force on which to focus attention.

In both the Hurricane Katrina and Southeast Asian tsunami cases, criticism of the government was instigated and fuelled primarily by journalists who were either left without access to government sources, as in the Katrina case (Durham 2008), and/or who lost their confidence in them, as evident from the media's reaction to the government crisis management of the tsunami disaster in Sweden (Andersson Odén et al. 2005; Nord & Strömbäck 2005; Strömbäck & Nord 2006), and in Finland (Accident Investigation Board 2005; Huhtala et al. 2005; Möre 2005).

There were, however, important differences in these two Nordic countries in the scope and duration of the blame game in the aftermath of the tsunami, and these differences deserve our attention. These ranged from a temporary phase of confusion and mistrust between information officials, journalists and members of the public in Finland to a prolonged national political crisis in Sweden. The government's poor handling of the tsunami crisis is seen as one of the most important factors leading to the defeat of Prime Minister Göran Persson's Social Democratic party in the Swedish general election in 2006 (Henderson & Sitter 2007: 207). The accusations concerning crisis management continued in harsh terms in the Swedish media throughout the entire investigation process, which was also extended after the new government decided in February 2007 to reopen the investigation to examine new evi-

dence. That the tsunami serves as a historical marker of a significant change in Swedish society and political culture has by now become clear (see Nord and Strömbäck in this volume).

Despite the similar turn of events, things in Finland were quite rapidly restored to normal. Centre Party Matti Vanhanen's coalition¹ government escaped almost unscathed the accusations of sluggishness and ineffectiveness that were levered against its crisis management operations by the news media, especially during the first week of the catastrophe. Criticism waned quickly, however, and media attention in the months after the crisis was only sporadic (Kivikuru 2006). Finnish government leaders did not suffer at the hands of the media even after the official investigation commission confirmed that many of the media's assessments were essentially correct and the criticism thus justified. Publication of the Accident Investigation Board's final report in June 2005 received only scant public attention, although this is partly because its critical conclusions were leaked out earlier in the spring (Kivikuru 2006: 501-502).

The Finnish government's problems in handling the crisis established by both the media and the investigation process were in no way detrimental to the public's trust in government or its political leadership either during or after the crisis. According to a Gallup poll published on January 20, 2005 in *Helsingin Sanomat*², Prime Minister Vanhanen and President Tarja Halonen received very high marks for their performance in managing the crisis. The actions of Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in general were graded as the least satisfying, but even their performance was judged to be mostly satisfactory. Matti Vanhanen formed a new government with the conservative National Coalition after the Parliament Elections in spring 2007. Although Vanhanen has since had his share of media scandal³ and his relationship with the media is – to put it mildly – strained, the tsunami affair does not figure into this in any way.

Yet to conclude from this that the tsunami was an isolated event, and had no lasting consequences for Finnish society, would be misleading. On the contrary, in terms of contingency planning and recognition of the need to improve government crisis communication, the tsunami provided a learning experience (Finland 2007). Still, the fact that the tsunami did not alter the status quo of politics when elements of a crisis of confidence were in place and when the media's spotlight was on them is still interesting in relation to crisis management and "governing by looking back" (Brandström et al. 2004).

The present article asks how consensus and a sense of normalcy could be so rapidly restored despite the failures that were detected and exposed during the emergency. How could the Finnish public come to see the actions of government leaders in the tsunami crisis in mainly a positive light despite the media's harsh criticism? There are of course a few potential answers to this question, which are related to the specific characteristics of the Finnish political culture. One is that belief in government and the overall trust in political

leaders and figures of authority is high in Finland, whereas confidence in the media is low, explaining why the media's criticism failed to make an impact. This is partly the case. According to comparative survey research, Finns display strong confidence in their national institutions. With regard to political institutions, however, the record is ambiguous. While trust in the President of the Republic remains very high, the government⁴ and especially the Parliament and political parties have lost some of the trust they previously enjoyed (Pesonen & Riihinen 2002). In terms of approval, the popularity of Prime Minister Vanhanen's government was at its peak in December 2004 (Akkanen 2006).

The question of public trust in the media is a somewhat more multifaceted one, depending on the context in which the question is posed and how 'the media' is defined. On the one hand, rated on an institutional scale compared with other political and social institutions, trust in 'the media' referred to as a single entity is usually low (Jääsaari 2004). On the other hand, if the question is posed in terms of established news organizations, the Finnish news media enjoy high credibility (Jääsaari 2004; Karppinen & Jääsaari 2008). More to the point, however, is that according to the poll referred to earlier, the Finnish news media received high marks for their handling of the tsunami events. Radio and television received the most favourable media rating, even higher than Prime Minister Vanhanen, and newspapers took third place. Thus perceived successful crisis management in the tsunami case does not necessarily follow from a failure of the media's criticism to take root among the general public. It suggests a more complex process, whose mechanisms are nevertheless intrinsically linked to the role of the media. After all, most people had little opportunity to directly evaluate the efficiency of decision-making and the emergency response either on site in Thailand or in government offices in Finland, and they were thus dependent on the reporting and commentary in the media to make sense of the event.

While the reasons for the rapid recuperation of the Finnish government after the criticism by the media can be and are numerous, here I discuss how perceptions of 'successful' vs. unsuccessful crisis management were shaped among the Finnish general public in part owing to media criticism, not despite it. That the media's criticism did not undermine people's faith that Finnish government could solve the tsunami crisis also raises questions about the limits of the power of the media in society, or more precisely, in shaping public opinion, in this case about crisis management. I first present a conceptual framework, which I use to illustrate the media coverage and government crisis communication during the crisis. Against this background, I then proceed to trace the formation of perceived crisis management through the reception of the crisis by 'ordinary' members of the public in order to form an understanding of the creation of consensus around tsunami crisis management.

Media Events and Disaster Marathons

Media and communications researchers have drawn attention to how the news media works in concert with political and social institutions (Elliot 1982). Journalists tend to unite with the government by transmitting and replicating the themes and values put forward by government and other officials (see, e.g., Edelman 1993; Hutcheson et al. 2004), creating a sphere of consensus (Hallin 1986), and fostering unity between the people, the media and the government. This largely takes place through the routines news journalists and public officials employ in the performance of *media ritual*. The traditional concept of media ritual is normative or 'centred'. The news media, through their routine workings with a structural 'centre' – political and social institutions, shift their position between objectivity, controversy and consensus in reproducing meaning as social power through a reflexive process of meta-narrative. In times of catastrophe, this meta-narrative ultimately translates into a reflection of the stability of the social system within a national setting (Durham 2008: 97–98; see also Schudson 2002; Becker 1995; Ettema 1990; Hallin 1986).

Outside news journalism, the media have contributed to creating a centred national 'sphere' through ritual processes related to the national 'centre' by categorizing and creating boundaries between the everyday and the extraordinary. The division of newspapers into different sections (national/domestic, international, metropolitan, commentary, etc.) is but one example. Paddy Scannell (1996) demonstrates how broadcasting created an annual, a weekly, and a daily calendar by scheduling and carefully portioning news, entertainment, and 'specials' such as coronations, royal weddings, sports finals, etc., according to a predicable pattern so as to better manage the behaviour of the audience.

Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan introduced the concept of the *media event*, public ceremony broadcast live on television, to mass communication research. Three types of media events – *Conquests* (great steps for mankind), *Contests* (major sports events, election specials), and *Coronations* (weddings, funerals, commemorations marking the role-changes of the powerful) – punctuated television during its first decades (Katz & Dayan 1986). These shared a common core: 1) the live broadcast, 2) the interruption of everyday life and everyday broadcasting, the pre-planned and scripted character of the event, 4) the huge audience, 5) the normative expectation that viewing is obligatory, 6) the reverent, awe-filled character of the narration, and the function of the event as 7) integrative of society and 8) conciliatory.

In their seminal study *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, Dayan and Katz (1992) analysed how the broadcasting of media events has marked turning points in history. Dayan and Katz emphasized that their classification was limited only to ceremonial events, excluding major news events. After September 11, 2001, one of the most dramatic turning points in recent history, the centrality of ceremonies in the construction of social reality has been challenged. Revisiting the concept of media events, Elihu Katz and Tamar

Liebes argue that traditional, ceremonial media events have been “upstaged” by disaster, terror and war on television (Katz & Liebes 2007). To succeed, media events require the assent of their organizers, broadcasters and their audiences – “affirming that they are worthy of this kind of special attention – otherwise they are doomed to failure” (Katz & Liebes 2007: 158). By contrast, in disaster, terror and war, the ‘perpetrators’ are out of the control of the establishment and the media (Katz & Liebes 2007: 164). Failure is written in the scripts of *disaster marathons* (Liebes 1998).

The role of the media as transmitters and interpreters of the social centre has been questioned in the context of disasters. In his analysis of the coverage of Hurricane Katrina, Frank Durham (2008) invokes Nick Couldry’s (2003) conception of the de-centred ritual space afforded by a more audience-oriented media. Couldry criticizes the contemporary view that the media speak for an organized centre of the social world by promoting an idea of ritual that may serve for a more localized, even populist social power for the individual. According to Durham, Hurricane Katrina produced *a de-centred media ritual*, which portrayed the local, state and federal government officials engaged in a blame game on television news. Instead of acting as the upholders of dominant social norms, television news journalists turned to a populist mode of coverage, appealing directly to the people in an effort to focus the government’s attention on the effects of the disaster on the people of New Orleans.

For the Finnish media, the breakdown of the chain of official communication during the onset of the tsunami crisis was the main factor in creating a climate of mistrust towards the government. Mismanagement of communication during the first phase was also largely behind the disappointed, even angry reactions of Finns who had been confronted by the tsunami themselves or whose family members were affected by the tsunami, an issue that was seized by the media. The opinion of the general public regarding crisis management was, however, much more moderate.

The present article analyses how the “de-centered media ritual of critique” (Durham 2008; Couldry 2003) was re-centred through media events sponsored by national television (Dayan & Katz 1992), which united the government, various organizations, the media and the people in a consensus that the crisis was being solved in a way that honoured the traditional ‘Finnish’ values of efficiency, equality and fairness.

Background: Interaction between the Media and Government Actors

The Derailment of the Centred Media Ritual

When the tsunami wave hit the coast of Thailand and Sri Lanka on the morning of December 26, 2004, it was the middle of the night in Finland. It was

a Sunday and Boxing Day. The first reports of an earthquake in the Indian Ocean were broadcast early in the morning, but for many hours newsrooms in Finland were without a clear picture of what had happened, and were piecing together bits of conflicting information from several sources. Most of them dropped this exercise after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a press release in the afternoon that it had received no reports of Finns missing in Phuket. This piece of information, referring to an earlier statement that three Finns were missing, was misunderstood by the press as a confirmation that all Finnish tourists were accounted for everywhere in the area. The statement, transmitted by the Finnish news agency STT to virtually all mass media outlets in Finland, set off a passive routine phase in the reporting of the catastrophe that was broken a day and a half later (Huhtala et al. 2005: 130).

The fact that the information was passed on and transmitted by other media without further scrutiny or comment was the most crucial factor in instigating the blame game within the media against the Ministry, and especially its press secretary. After eyewitness interviews from Phuket airport were shown on the commercial channel MTV3's evening news on December 27, the earlier statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was discredited once it became clear that the situation for Finns was much worse than had been thought until then.

This failure of communication between the mainstream media and the Ministry was crucial in creating a sense of overall mistrust. As the Accident Investigation Board summarized it:

Public communications by the authorities were less than successful. The Information Unit at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs restricted itself to official bulletins; these conflicted with the information available to the general public and published by the media, and the latter were subsequently proven correct. The result was a loss of confidence in official communications, which could not be dispelled during the critical first week (Accident Investigation Board 2005)

Once the chaotic situation in Thailand became evident, the Finnish media launched into wall-to-wall coverage of the tsunami. Newly awakened to the crisis, the rest⁵ of the Finnish newsrooms began sending their own reporters to Thailand (Mörä 2005: 69, 78). During the disaster marathon, every opportunity was taken to scrutinize the government's actions. Three features were characteristic of the criticism levelled against the government: 1) the Finnish media criticized both official information and rescue efforts, 2) this assessment of both the authorities' communication and rescue operations began "in a surprisingly early phase, when the crisis was at its acutest and when evacuation was still in progress" (Huhtala et al. 2003: 130), and 3) the Finnish media monitored faithfully Swedish media, which had started covering the crisis extensively already on Boxing Day morning. The Finnish media used comparable examples of mismanagement by the authorities discovered by the

Swedish media to pass judgment on the (in)action of Finnish authorities. This criticism was then played back again in the Swedish media (Accident Investigation Board 2005: 122).

*Re-centring the Ritual: Staging Tsunami Crisis Management
as a Media Event*

Once the government apparatus was alerted to the crisis, in addition to sending out dozens of press releases it arranged a series of daily press conferences. These were mainly arranged by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but were clearly joint government events in that cabinet ministers were present at all except the first one arranged on December 27. Four out of six conferences were lead by Prime Minister Vanhanen. The final press conference was arranged on January 3, 2005, marking the end of the acute crisis management phase.

By arranging these briefings, the government staged a set of *media events* that served to re-centre the media ritual and recover the attention of the media that had been led astray from the realm of official sources.⁶ The press conferences or at least parts of them were broadcast live on national television as specials. The 'frame' that was put forth in the briefings, ostensibly arranged to disseminate official information, was clearly one of a dedicated government of a unified nation taking responsibility for management of the crisis. The press conferences followed essentially the same script, beginning with factual information about the number of Finnish victims and estimates, followed by condolences to the families of the victims, what was being done about the evacuation flights, the identification of victims and flying them back to Finland. This was usually followed by reporters mainly asking questions about the number of dead and how the different lists of missing persons were compiled.

In the press conferences where they were present, the persons who responded to the questions were the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, Erkki Tuomioja. As the Accident Investigation report describes the press conferences, "Credibility was raised to the highest pedestal. The highest authorities were brought to vouch for the information" (Accident Investigation Board 2005: 158). The press directed their questions to Vanhanen and Tuomioja, instead of addressing the persons present who were actually in charge of the rescue and aid operations. This was a conscious decision on the part of the Coordination Board of Government Chiefs of Preparedness, which had been assigned the operational leadership of the rescue effort. After it was acknowledged that public communication by issuing bulletins was "not working", the ministers took responsibility for communication from January 28 onwards (Huhtala et al. 2005: 57). The strategy paid off: Vanhanen and Tuomioja were by far the most important sources in the entire media coverage of the first week of the crisis (Mörä 2005; Huhtala et al. 2005).

By then the biggest problems of evacuation were actually already solved. Thus it comes as no surprise that press conferences led by the Prime Minister

framed the ongoing evacuation operation as a *conquest* over time and space. The Finnish rescue teams, medical personnel and police were flown to Thailand to restore order to the chaos at Phuket airport. The briefings celebrated victories over bureaucracy, red tape and legal matters, as in the case of the publication of the missing persons list. Both Vanhanen and Tuomioja repeatedly emphasized that cooperation with various counterparts was working smoothly in all cases. In the press conference arranged at the Helsinki-Vantaa Airport to mark the landing of the final evacuation flight, Vanhanen opened the event by expressing his thanks to all the parties involved in the management of the crisis: the Thai and Sri Lankan officials and citizens, tourists and diving teachers, the Red Cross, Finnair, travel agencies, the church, associations providing psychological counselling, the Foreign Ministry, the police, the emergency forces, the airport organization, hospitals in the capital region, the reception centre at the airport, the emergency organization of the FM and its command, and the mass media – in this order. A conciliatory note was also sounded in Vanhanen's appeal to continue the national effort in the aftermath of the crisis, "Now is not the time to stop dead, there is still need for support" (Huhtala et al. 2005: 307).

In addition to framing the crisis management operations as a conquest over the difficulties of the situation, the press conferences also played up the elements of a *contest* regarding the speed of the evacuation process in different countries. This competitive element of the press conferences was prompted by on-site criticism of government strategy. The critical scrutiny of the actions of government officials was taken up only in response to the direct questions asked by the representatives of the press (Huhtala et al. 2005: 91). Foreign Minister Tuomioja, on December 31, replied to a question about how the Foreign Ministry reacts to the criticism it has received by pointing out that it was already known that the operation in Sweden was more poorly managed. On January 2, when confronted with the question of where the information delaying aid for 24 hours was lost on the first day, Tuomioja replied that action was taken immediately after the information was received even though there was no clear picture of the situation, but nowhere else in the world was action more rapid.

The press conferences took on a competitive character when the main adversaries were the reporters and the Ministers. For instance, on December 28, PM, Vanhanen was asked how he would grade the actions of government officials during the crisis. He replied that now is not the time for giving marks; no provisions for this kind of a crisis were made. Minister Tuomioja emphasized that no one was prepared for such a crisis. On a later occasion, when the publication of the 'official' list of missing persons was announced in the briefing on December 30, PM, Vanhanen appealed to the media to use the list of the missing "properly". When asked by a journalist what was meant by proper use of the list, he replied: "respect for grief and hard experiences, use of common sense", hinting at his doubts about the ethics of the media.

Concurrent with the disaster marathon, and in addition to the press conference specials, different ceremonies marked the event as one of national sorrow. After the large number of Finns missing became clear, church services were organized and attended by the political leadership of the country, and these were shown either live or on the news to demonstrate unanimous support for the rescue efforts. Despite the fact that the holiday season had initially hampered both the media's and government's communications, the traditional media events attached to the New Year offered ample opportunity to express sorrow and grief. In the traditional speech by the President of the Republic, televised live on New Year's Day, Tarja Halonen dwelled exclusively on the tsunami⁷. On a more popular front, the president and leading politicians took part in fund drives in the form of TV concerts to collect money to aid the victims.

The final touch to the national frame was provided by the news reports of the reception ceremonies, which the government honoured with its presence. The memorial events were arranged at the Helsinki-Vantaa airport on the arrival of the first deceased tsunami victims. The reception ceremonies began at the airport on December 10, 2005, when the first deceased was flown in. The actual service was not televised, only a short glimpse of the arrival of the coffin and the reception committee standing at the airport were shown in the news on television. In accordance with Dayan and Katz's typification of coronations, Prime Minister Vanhanen and Minister of the Interior Kari Rajamäki stood solemnly in line to receive the coffin. By this time, public criticism of the government had quieted down and the media had turned to self-inspection.⁸

The Reception of the Tsunami as a Media Event

The Official Investigation Report concludes that the public administration's attempt to "conduct a fairly old-fashioned press conference-style communication towards the media" (Official Investigation Board 2005: 158) was a failure, serving to reinforce mistrust among journalists and citizens. In the following section examining the reception process of the crisis, I propose that despite the coverage of these press conferences, the government succeeded in re-centring the disaster marathon within the national ritual media space. The focus is on the reception process and defining patterns of media use, creation of meaning and interpretations that served to clear the government of the media's accusations of mismanagement in the eyes of the general public.

Data and Methods

The present aim is to demonstrate the effectiveness of the government's crisis communication strategy in shifting the tone of the coverage towards a more favourable framing by mirroring the media events described in the previous section against the texts produced by members of the general public.

The data concerning the reactions of the public to the media criticism consist of texts produced by the members of an 'audience correspondence' panel maintained by the former Audience Research Department of Yleisradio (YLE), the Finnish public TV and radio broadcaster.⁹ The analyzed texts were written in response to a request sent to members of this panel to describe what kinds of thoughts and emotions the media coverage concerning the Asian tsunami catastrophe had raised in them. The request was originally motivated by the company's intent to use the responses as an aid in assessing its internal coverage of the crisis. The results were summarized in a report published in spring 2005 (Jääsaari 2005).

The request to write about the tsunami resulted in responses from 162 panel members, where middle-aged respondents were slightly overrepresented. Although the 200 members of the panel were originally invited to represent different age and occupational groups and people living in different regions of Finland, but the data do not constitute a statistically representative sample of all people living in Finland, nor can they be used to measure media consumption during the crisis. In contrast, these qualitative data illustrate how the perception of adequate crisis management was formed by members of the public who neither themselves nor through their families were victims¹⁰ of the tsunami. The data tell us primarily about how people as cultural actors related to the media coverage.

The letter sent to the panel stressed that respondents could freely choose what to write about the topic, but it also provided some questions they could answer if they wished to. Most of the respondents chose the latter option, which, of course, made the analysis much easier. The texts vary from a few lines directly answering the guideline questions to almost literary compositions comprising several pages. In a sense, the data are a hybrid between a postal survey and a collection of essays. The material resembles data gathered through focus group interviews and related techniques, but what the writers of these texts see fit to comment upon or to leave out is not the product of interpersonal or group dynamics – issues often left unproblematic in research relying on focus groups or interviews – but that are otherwise socially and culturally determined. The material demonstrates how media coverage of catastrophic events is received through the routines and ritual of ordinary life and interpreted through cultural meanings set in a specific time and place.

The majority of the texts were written in the first half of February¹¹, approximately a month after the height of the crisis. Thus the analysis also covers the aftermath of the crisis that is missing from the reports on media coverage, which focus exclusively on the first week immediately after the disaster (December 26, 2004 - January 5, 2005). The data complement the picture of "citizen's experiences" reported by Huhtala and her colleagues (2005: 133-161), which focuses on the views of people who both directly or through their relatives had been confronted by the tsunami, and who had had contacts with public authorities and rescue personnel. If Huhtala et al. were the only

source of information on public response, there is a danger that misleading generalizations would be made about the Finnish public's opinions on crisis management during the tsunami. It could also lead to misguided conclusions about the role of various media in triggering and influencing response, and hence about the whole meaning of the crisis.

The texts written by the panel members cover the events of the crisis from Boxing Day 2004 to the beginning of February when the first preliminarily identified corpses were flown home to Finland. By this time, there was a great deal of information available about the events themselves in the tsunami zone and the crisis management operations in Finland, including a report published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs evaluating its own actions during the crisis. In this report given out on January 28, 2005, it was admitted that there were several communication problems during the first days of the crisis. Perhaps because of the recent coverage concerning this particular report, the respondents were aware of the breaches in the flow of information. Nevertheless, it was chiefly the criticism practised by the media during the crisis that was commented upon. The time lapse is significant for the respondents, who take the trouble to point out that although they may not exactly recall the facts of what had happened and what exactly had been criticized, they do remember how they *felt*. Thus they think they are well qualified to present their views about the crisis and its coverage. The panellists often also claim to speak for others because they had discussed the catastrophe with their family, friends and workmates.

The data were coded and organized thematically using *Atlas.ti* qualitative analysis software according to the main narratives that emerged after a close reading of the entire body of texts. While several other themes were identified, mostly reflecting the suggested topics but also others such as emotional responses to the coverage, the present article focuses on the evaluation of the performance of government as experienced through the mass media. The main focus is on television, which emerged as the most important source of information in terms of actual references to it as being "most important" and in terms of description, detail and comments in the texts. In the following, respondents' reactions to the coverage of the press conferences and the ceremonies at the airport are analysed in more detail in relation to the findings on the content of media coverage and government communication as described above.

The Press Conferences: Havens in the Flood of Disaster Coverage

Calling off regular programmes is one of the most dramatic forms of punctuation that television has at its disposal (Dayan & Katz 1992: 10). The TV audience's routines are disrupted when the 'normal' flow of programming is dramatically interrupted by news of a crisis, compelling everyone to pay attention. On December 26, programming on YLE TV1 was interrupted in the

afternoon by a short news bulletin about the tsunami, followed by another in Swedish between the ballet *Nutcracker* and *Lovejoy*. On MTV3, an extra news bulletin was transmitted just before a live Christmas music special. Although both were watched by a sizable audience estimated at around 300,000 viewers, the ratings did not significantly differ from the relatively popular scheduled programmes that followed¹².

Most of the press conferences, however, or at least parts of them were broadcast live on national television after the TV channels' schedules were adjusted to allow for more continuous coverage of the tsunami on December 27. By this time, most people were aware of the crisis and were actively looking for news. In any case, the main information from the briefings was repeated in clips in the evening news on television, and was commented on in the newspapers on the next day. Broadcasting of the press conferences was announced sometime in advance on newscasts, on teletext and web pages so people both at home and at their workplaces knew when to tune in. The sizable national audience characteristic of the media event was in place.

For the panellists, the press conferences represented the rational approach as opposed to the emotional drama of the disaster coverage. They provided a cool breathing space that punctuated the urgency of the disaster marathon. The following quote describes the meaning of these live broadcasts for the public among the various sources of competing information and interpretations in the situation:

Because the need for information is great, several sources of information are necessary. *On one hand, the cool expert statements on TV's press conferences bring clarity and form frames*, on the other hand the uncertainty of the fate of some friends (one family we know were in Thailand, experienced the wave but escaped unharmed) drove us right away to the Internet's *Sukellus.fi* pages and *suomi24* discussion site to monitor the situation and the lists that were updated hourly. The news on radio in addition to the Internet kept us up to date. *I watched all the news and the press conferences on TV.* W1963.

The frame of a dedicated government shouldering responsibility for management of the crisis was well received by the majority of the public in so far as these texts are representative of the general mood. In four of the six press conferences, Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen had taken the leading role by answering questions, assuming responsibility in areas that were not his field, often even when experts, including members of the emergency task force and various organizations, were present.

The performance of the Prime Minister is commented upon very often in the panellists' recollections of the coverage of the briefings, suggesting that he had found the right manner in which to address the public, thus meeting expectations as to how political leaders should behave in a crisis situation:

Vanbanen and Tuomioja handled the informing right, behaving with dignity and seriousness as is to be expected of the government: strong leadership in a difficult situation. W1936

Sincerity in these things is more important than learned 'as if' wisdom. *I managed to be proud of the information the government was giving out*, because we haven't experienced this before and couldn't have known we had to be prepared for it. W1938

The character of the government briefings changed during the days of the catastrophe. How to react to unofficial information? Especially, when rumours turned out to be better than official news. *Prime Minister Matti Vanbanen's performance and gaze spoke of empathy.* M1941

These extracts from the texts are reactions to the display of conquest over the crisis and the show of national cooperation in the face of disaster. The actions of the political leaders clearly fulfilled expectations of following the proper "Finnish way" of solving problems: action before reflection and contemplation.

Betrayed Media Professionals vs. Reasonably Well-Informed and Satisfied Public

For the general public, the coverage of the press conferences on television formed the centre stage for the government's response to criticism, bringing on the dimension of competition between journalists and the authorities.

An attempt to shoulder responsibility was evident from the official press conferences, even though one could sense caution in all statements even to the point of annoyance. But I would have settled for shorter and different style performances from the government. In Finland, journalists start looking for someone to blame even before they know that there is a problem. W1963.

Bringing in the news was successful. One couldn't know the magnitude of the event here (...), taking that into account, *I must say that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister could go on and on until exhaustion and it was well in their hands, and Finnair, the Red Cross, and all the important help, and of course the TV channels and radio.* My strong opinion is that now that we know how wide an area the disaster struck, NO ONE FROM FINLAND could have made it in time to do enough to stop it. M1927

I think it was distasteful, how the political leadership and other people who were responsible for handling the crisis were accused of coldness and insensitivity. I saw sad and tired, tearful faces in the press conferences. On

the other hand, *feelings were controlled and one aimed to create a sense of security by stating clearly and factually what had happened and what had been done. Pathetic display of sentiment in the style of bad soaps doesn't belong to Finnish culture, at least in the case of people who should be able to make responsible decisions.* Tears are shed hidden from the public view. The Prime Minister expressed it something like that in such serious cases there is no time to think about images. W1936

The differences between the Finnish and Swedish responses to the catastrophe were indirectly referred to in some texts, but they were not as important as in the media coverage of the first week of the disaster (Mörä 2005). Instead, any differences were somewhat neutrally commented upon in passing. Some respondents appear somewhat puzzled about why the Swedish authorities did not publish the lists of missing persons until later, but the main amazement concerned how the tsunami turned into “a political and power-political issue” (M1965).

The main contest that the respondents identify is precisely the one between the media and government representatives over the success of crisis management. Although one woman expressed her gratitude that the media coverage “did not turn into a public bashing competition like in Sweden” (W1949), the contest was about who gets the final say in whether official information was adequate or the evacuation measures efficient.

Regarding the specific criticism of the government's leadership in rescue efforts, many panellists reacted strongly to accusations of mismanagement of the crisis, and not in the way that could be anticipated from the comments of media professionals. In several of the texts, it appears as if people were less concerned about the credibility of the claims of information mishandling and management of the rescue operations and more irritated about the accusations themselves. The sympathies appear to be clearly with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, especially for those who had watched the television coverage.

Once the news reporter on channel three gave me goose-bumps by interrogating Matti Vanhanen in a somewhat hard style and in a way accused him of being unfeeling, criticizing that the prime minister did not look into the camera and say anything consoling to the people. Or that's how I saw it; maybe I'm a bit sensitive in my interpretation. W1974

It was annoying to watch the accusation of people in public and in biased talk shows, also otherwise this public disgracing of people should be stopped on TV. Some journalists even try to excel in this area. The viewers do not enjoy it, “information” like that does a disservice to many issues. W1930

Especially the accusations levelled by the public broadcaster's reporters were thought to be unnecessarily harsh and condemning. The criticism did not, as the respondent assume was intended, draw attention to the aptitude of the reporters to act as the watchdogs of public officials. Instead, the "overzealousness" of the "interrogation" was felt to be out of proportion considering the time and location of the disaster.

The only thing, which I didn't like and where I think the boundaries of fairness were crossed, was the accusations about the slow handling of things and especially about the slowness of giving out information. *I didn't like at all the snappy lines made by some YLE's journalists, which were aimed at finding scapegoats at all costs.* I think everybody involved did at least what they could, and even beyond. When one takes into account the magnitude of the event, which no one could have even imagined, and the time of the event, Boxing Day, when even the government machinery is resting, I think it is unreasonable to say that anyone has made a muck of it. M1941

While the media's accusations against the government for mishandling information dissemination were acknowledged to be accurate, the present respondents were dissatisfied with the media for not 'moving on' once the period of confusion was over and the rescue operations had started. The general public could see "with their own eyes" that the situation was under control from the coverage of the rescue efforts on the news and from the broadcasts of the government's press conferences.

I first learned about the catastrophe from Yle's text-tv, but I didn't understand the seriousness/magnitude of the event right away. I mean I read the headline, but it didn't sink in. On Monday 27.12., I got information from television (YLE, MTV3) and from the net. I watched the Foreign Ministry press conferences and countless newscasts, even though I didn't know anyone who was in the area in question. Only an acquaintance. I read the missing persons lists right after they were published. I think communications were successful. In a way I was irritated, when officials and the media were criticized so much. I was rather satisfied. W1974

The press briefings provided opportunities for the Prime Minister and other representatives of the government to respond directly to the criticism of the press and to present their own assessment of the current situation. Prime Minister Vanhanen and Foreign Minister Tuomioja invoked their institutional role as representatives of the state, and through their televised performance undermined the power of the news media to determine how events and actions should be interpreted. This appealed to viewers who themselves had not experienced the horrors, but who were seeking assurance that the Finnish society could work together and who were comforted by political leaders taking responsibility.

Ceremonies at the Airport: An Endnote of Discord

The twists and turns of the tsunami coverage also served as a foundation for re-examining time-honoured perceptions about credibility, authenticity and appropriate behaviour in time of crisis, calling for new ways to envisage the 'connectedness' of a society no longer confined within national borders.

The coverage of the Asian catastrophe in Finland reminds me of some other new phenomena such as that people bring flowers to places where accidents have happened and selected victims are honoured with silent moments. This is some sort of new communality, a new type of showing feelings in public. I don't really know how to react to it. On the other hand, there is something positive in this dragging the whole country into mourning and being shocked. We are one large family. Everybody knows the same thing, talks about the same thing and runs together to put their coins into the box, crying together. But is it still too much like a sort of questionable entertainment? And, isn't this also fuelling group hysteria, not just dissemination of information or empathy? The coverage of the catastrophe in Asia showed what the media are capable of. W1949

The reception ceremonies at the Helsinki Vantaa airport on the arrival of the deceased provide a glimpse of this. The panellists' reactions to the ceremonies at the airport were quite surprising. In contrast to the views about the appearances of the ministers and other government officials in the press conferences and on the news, the response was rather negative. Especially more senior panellists reacted strongly to the display of national imagery, which reminded them of the ceremonies that take place when receiving dead war heroes.

When the first victim was brought home, TV1 showed a special newscast. Viewers were shown how the prime minister and the municipality or internal affairs minister stood at the airport in front of the flight crew by the car that carried the coffin. The relatives did not want publicity, thus the aforementioned inherited it. The whole ceremony gave a somewhat idiotic effect. The only moving element was the solo on cello (...). The ministers have stood at the airport on a couple other occasions. It made me wonder why they don't have the time to honour the heroes that leave the War Veteran's hospital on their last journey. M1930

Whereas the press conferences succeeded in convincing respondents that the situation was under control, the reactions to the ceremonies at the airport reveal that government crisis communication was not a modern well-considered strategy in tune with public sentiment. The reliance on traditions and routines, which was an asset in the formation of nationalist frames in the press conferences, was totally amiss in the ceremonies at the airport. Staging the reception ceremony as a national media event was seen as wrong and in bad taste.

The use of military symbols such as the presence of soldiers and the trumpet solo was considered grossly inappropriate for “beach holiday tourists” even if sympathy was extended to the victims. As one respondent commented, “At least they didn’t cover the coffin with the national flag like they did in Sweden”. Other respondents thought that the ceremonies were over the top or just plain ridiculous. In any case, the ceremonies offended the sensibilities of Finns who want people to be treated equally, whether they are dead or alive. The experience was almost insulting to many, as if the organizations of the event had assumed that people today wished for or were in need of such stiff formal ceremony.

The transportation of the deceased was rather strange, a ceremony at the airport like one for war heroes, a reception by ministers. It just came to my mind, what is the worth of people who died on trips at some other time, as if no one has ever died on a tourist vacation before. Some of the fuss was probably because those travelling to Asia were wealthier than average and all sorts of celebrities. M1966

That the deceased are identified and brought back to be buried in Finland is a good thing, but I do at all not understand the almost military ceremonies, which are given to each of the deceased at the airport, no matter how I try. Everyone who travels to foreign countries does so, despite insurance, on their own responsibility. W1948

It appears that the government realized it had miscalculated the advantage of participation in the ceremonies, perhaps owing to disappointment over the relatively weak attention in the media. The presence of ministers was dropped after the first few victims were received and more junior representatives of the government took their place. This reinforced the views of panel members, who suspected that the ministers were trying to score political points from their appearances by being on display as if they were attending “some market square event”. Had the official investigation or the media discovered gross negligence on the part of politicians in handling the crisis, the ceremonies at the airport would certainly have been interpreted in this way also by the media. As it happened, however, the blame game was over and was not to be restarted. The investigation process had also begun. The public’s reactions against the excessiveness of the airport ceremonies dissolved into nothing in the absence of a public forum in which to air them out.

Timing of the Media Events and Public Reactions

In addition to the content of the coverage analysed above, the time frame of the reception of the media events was crucial. The criticism concerning crisis management in the tsunami disaster mainly focused on the first phase of the

catastrophe. Regarding both official information and the adequacy of rescue efforts, “criticism focused on what either happened or did not happen during the first day and a half after the tidal wave” (Accident Investigation Board 2005: 115). The texts received from the panel, however, suggest that in the final evaluation of the success of the government’s crisis management from the general public’s point of view, the first two days were not all that important.

The general public was largely in the dark during the first phase of the disaster, partly because of the delay in media coverage, but also because a large number of people were just simply not within reach of the media. For many Finns, Boxing Day is traditionally a day when they emerge from spending Christmas at home and go out to visit family and friends. In cases where they had spent their holidays with relatives further away, they were preparing to leave for home. Given the nature of that particular day, it is unsurprising that recollections of receiving the first bits of information about the crisis are patchy for most respondents.

26.12. was a day, when we do not usually expect to hear extraordinary news. During Christmastime we have stepped out of the media’s news flow for a moment. W1969

Many did not find out about the disaster until they watched the main evening television newscasts, which in many households still serve the function of winding up the day. For those waiting for the media to acknowledge what they had learned from their relatives and friends in the tsunami area who had phoned them, the discrepancy between the news broadcasts and what they themselves had heard from others was understandably unacceptable. The letters from citizens involved with the actual victims reveal a strong sense of being betrayed by the authorities. This has been regarded as a certain loss of innocence regarding the relationship between the welfare state and the individual citizen (Accident Investigation Board 2005).

For the panellists, however, the fact that things did not move very quickly in the beginning was not difficult to understand even in retrospect. When the disaster marathon had come into full gear, the public who had no relatives or close friends in the disaster zone was still largely unaware of the irregularities and problems in communication. By the time the assessment of actual crisis management operations was underway, the general public was prepared to forget and forgive the lapses in both government communications and news coverage. The respondents admit that they themselves were not prepared to receive such news and when they did, all the information took some time to digest. For these Finns, the tsunami did not represent a betrayal of any kind, either by the media or the government. The delays and lapses could be explained by the fact that the events occurred far away and at a time when neither the media nor the audience expected anything to happen. The coordination problems and the breakdown in communications were accepted as a fact.

The Multimedia, Multilevel and Diverse Reception Process

Despite the fact that the media's criticism of the crisis management was largely unappreciated by the respondents, the media were credited with highlighting the meaning of the disaster from different viewpoints. The texts draw attention to the multimedia (press, broadcasting, Internet, etc.), multilevel (mass, peer-to-peer, interpersonal communication) and diverse (traditional news coverage vs. popular and populist) character of contemporary media exposure, use and meaning-making. Rather than directly scrutinize the actions of the government in handling the crisis, the tsunami gave the Finnish public an opportunity to re-examine their own patterns of media use and trust in government in principle.

The reports investigating the crisis reveal that, during the disaster marathon, the print media were concerned with the assessment of rescue and information operations. On TV, however, this kind of critical assessment received much less attention. After the holiday TV schedules had been reorganized around the tsunami, there was no escaping the news of the catastrophe. But this was only what people expected to happen once the magnitude of the catastrophe and its effects on Finnish citizens were no longer in doubt. In the news, the main focus was on reporting the events, including footage from the tsunami area, in particular Thailand and the village of Khao Lak, where the majority of the missing Finns had been vacationing (Huhtala et al. 2005: 113). For the general public, television, and in particular public service television (YLE), was the main source in the search for credible information, 'the facts' about the missing Finns, the state of the affairs in rescue operations and the overall situation in the tsunami zone.

I especially followed the situation through YLE TV news and Text-TV, because in this way I got the most up-to-date and frequent grasp of things. I did read about the events in the newspapers, but there the information was of course mostly old on the next day and far behind the actual rise in the death toll. To some extent, I also followed the situation on the Internet.

I wished of course to get the most accurate insight into the catastrophe as soon as possible and that is why I relied on the channels that I assumed transmit the most reliable impressions most rapidly. Nobody close to me was travelling at that time in those areas so I wasn't waiting for the worst news. I did browse through the list given out by the police many times and hoped that the missing were found alive. M1956.

The importance of television, and of receiving visual images of the catastrophe, may also partly explain why the media's criticism did not register as strongly with the general public during the crisis, as can be seen in the poll figures mentioned earlier. The afternoon tabloids (and their sales posters served as an important source for the human-interest side of the catastrophe

and eyewitness experiences, but they did not serve as an important source for evaluating the government's actions in managing the crisis. In describing their feelings after learning of the magnitude of the crisis, the respondents reported being drawn into something like a trance for a week, during which they were tuned in to the flow of information, speculation and drama from every available media outlet. That so many of the missing were little children and in some cases even whole families made the situation tragic, transforming the anticipation of New Years' festivities into a national period of mourning. When people could sort out their feelings, the main overriding impression was that everyone had done their part: the government in bearing responsibility for the organization and financing the evacuation, various organizations by providing medical, technical and spiritual assistance, and the people themselves by giving money to charities.

Discussion

Dayan and Katz (1992) highlighted how the broadcasting of media events has marked turning points in post-war history. On the basis of the texts written by ordinary citizens who experienced the catastrophe via the media, the tsunami has clearly made a lasting impression. Whether the tsunami serves as a turning point in Finnish history is less certain, but nevertheless some remarks on the impact of the tsunami on relationships of power between the media, the government and the people can be made on the basis of the present research.

The emphasis here has been on how coverage of the tsunami and the blame game launched by the Finnish media were received by the audience and on how these aspects affected people's perceptions of the government's crisis management. The texts written by the panellists were analysed in terms of how a conciliatory climate in Finland was constructed through the elements of conquests, contests and ceremony, referring especially to the television coverage of press conferences arranged by the government. Broadcasting the briefings as live specials and clips on the news transformed the coverage into media events that punctuated the disaster marathon and forged a contract between the "event sponsors" (the government crisis management task force), the TV channels and the audience that was necessary to create an atmosphere of consensus around the national importance of the crisis. Through these media events, the government accomplished one of the main strategic tasks of effective crisis management: *meaning-making* – authoritatively explaining the government's response to the community (Boin et al. 2005).

The breakdown of government communications and official sources was a crucial factor in creating a climate of mistrust towards the government within the media at the onset of the tsunami crisis. The mismanagement of communication was also behind the angry reactions of those Finns who had been confronted by the tsunami themselves or whose family members were affected.

However, the analysis presented here shows that the opinions of the general public were much more moderate. While the media's accusations against the government for mishandling information dissemination were acknowledged to be accurate, the present respondents were dissatisfied with the media itself for not 'moving on' once the initial confusion was over and the rescue operation had started. The general public could see "with their own eyes" that the situation was under control from the massive television coverage of the rescue efforts.

The broadcasts of the government's press conferences in extra live specials or shown during normal newscasts were an important element in re-centring the media ritual of consensus. The analysis shows that the evaluation of the actual actions of the government is not easily isolated from the evaluation of the specific performances, however. The live coverage of press conferences and the public mourning ceremonies clearly confirmed expectations of appropriate conduct on the part of political leaders in a crisis situation. The expectations of the general public towards the government in power were apparently rather realistic, and 'miracles' were not demanded. Through its public appearances on television, the government succeeded in convincing Finns that the tsunami was a top priority and the situation was under control. The press conferences reinstate the bond between the government, the media and the public. The power to define the challenges posed by handling the tsunami crisis was taken back into the realm of official sources and authorities. For the TV-watching public, this was far preferable to the unsettling and distracting atmosphere created by the media's criticism of the crisis management. As far as the actual crisis management operations of the government were concerned, the broadcasts of the press conferences served to 'upstage' the disaster marathon rather than the other way around.

It was especially on these occasions that the Prime Minister and other representatives of the government could respond directly to the criticism of the press and present their own assessment of the current situation. Prime Minister Vanhanen and Foreign Minister Tuomioja invoked their institutional role as representatives of the state and through their televised performance undermined the power of the news media to determine how events and actions should be interpreted. This appealed to the viewers who themselves had not experienced the horrors, but who were seeking assurance that the Finnish society could work together and who were comforted by political leaders taking responsibility.

The representatives of the media, on the other hand, exhibited behaviour that was not considered suitable in a state of crisis. The respondents interpreted the criticism levelled by the media as a show of professional vanity rather than a performance of their watchdog role. The panellists emphasize that the media and the government were on an equal footing, both had failed in the beginning, but after the magnitude of the disaster had become clear, they should have been on the same side and not working against each other. The

coverage of the crisis management operations turned into a contest between the media and the government in the eyes of the public. It was a contest that the government won by declining to 'play' the blame game.

When weighing whether the tsunami had a greater impact on people's perceptions of the government or the media, it can be said that the consequences of the tsunami were greater regarding the latter rather than the former. Respondents often drew attention to the mismatch between Finnish and foreign sources. People felt that pictures and video clips produced by the media of other countries, including the Swedish media, showed more illuminating material, though not exactly to their taste, as many carefully pointed out.

As for information specifically about the Finnish victims and the meaning of the disaster for Finns, people turned to domestic sources. But here as well, the usual hierarchies between old and new media, public service and commercial, traditional news journalism and emotional, sensational journalism shifted – and perhaps with lasting consequences. Television and the broadsheet newspapers have for many years been the most trusted news media for Finns, whereas the two tabloids, *Ilta-Sanomat* and *Ilta-Sanomat*, have been perceived as the least credible (Jääsaari 2004). The tsunami exposed the weaknesses of these traditionally trusted domestic sources. Below, a middle-aged woman describes how the tsunami coverage changed her previous perceptions of which news sources are to be trusted:

The most reliable information seemed to be on Helsingin Sanomat and YLE's TV channels. Looking back, that is not how it was. Official information, as it turned out, was at first too cautious, and the news that seemed sensational was closer to the truth. The video clips seen on foreign TV channels gave a much better sense of the totality of the destruction compared to the one single clip that every Finnish channel showed. Also the otherwise so trivial news in the tabloids was very informative in their photo material. W1959

Exposure to 'sensational', even melodramatic and populist tsunami coverage was also perceived by many respondents as 'informative' in its own way, and some admit that it was even necessary for people to realize the magnitude of the crisis. It also reminded one of the need for emergency aid and funding for recovery later on, as many respondents remark. Appreciation of the more sensational content is, however, difficult to show in terms of consumption – which is in any case no measure of trustworthiness or even source preference – because apart from the TV ratings and sold copies of tabloids, there is no feasible way to measure actual *exposure* to various media content.

Communication to the general public via the media is an essential element of crisis management. Deficiencies in this area can have dramatic and far-reaching consequences for trust in government and political support due to the complexity of today's media environment. As Arjen Boin and his colleagues (2005) point out, crisis management today is even more significant

than before, given the advent of a 24-hour news cycle and an increasingly Internet-savvy audience with ever-changing technology at its fingertips. On the other hand, the task of creating national unity in the face of a crisis has become increasingly difficult for much the same reason.

To create an understanding of the role of the media in contemporary crisis management in its entirety – which is essential if we are to learn from crises – the reception process in all its complexity must be considered. This is vital with regard to the proliferation of different forms of communications media and to the extent our lives have become media-saturated during the past few decades. This is important also in terms of government communication policy, an area in which policy-makers often rely on crude and outdated assumptions about the workings of the media and its effects on its audiences (Harrison & Woods 2001: 479-480). The Internet, broadband and mobile communications have changed the preconditions of crisis management in terms of dissemination of information. On the other hand, the findings of this study suggest that national mass media outlets still have an important and independent role to play in opinion formation, especially in times of crisis.

According to a recent survey, the ranking of the most trusted news organizations in Finland has not changed a great deal (Karppinen and Jääsaari 2008). The question of communication and crisis management, however, is not necessarily even about the trust in and credibility of respected sources in the conventional sense, but about acceptance of a larger number of sources, including ‘popular’, even marginal ones among the ‘potentially’ relevant. This is important especially regarding the emotional side of media events, to which media researchers have devoted increasing attention after the death of Princess Diana (see, e.g. McGuigan 2000).

‘Multimediated’ disaster marathons and media events of the more traditional sort play on and even aim to reinforce the emotional element of communication. Capturing the interest of a wide audience is where the greatest power of national television lies, but media owners and government no longer have control over the direction in which sentiments sway (if they ever did). As Brian McNair (2006) has pointed out, dominance over the control of media output is relatively difficult to achieve and maintain in contemporary conditions, which he argues is best described as “cultural chaos”. For Finns, the tsunami provided a lesson in the opportunities and potentials, as well as some of the dangers, presented by this state of chaos. In a sense, the experience was empowering for ordinary citizens, in that they could themselves choose what to learn and whom to trust. As for expressing their feelings and communicating them to media decision-makers or government authorities, the system still leaves much to be desired. In the aftermath of the disaster, ‘ordinary’ people were left with an odd sense of powerlessness. And in the end, they were also denied a voice in the official investigation process, their experiences and thoughts about the meaning of the crisis lost behind cold media use and sales figures.

Notes

1. Along with the Centre Party, the Social Democrats and the Swedish People's Party were represented in Vanhanen's Government 24.6.2003 - 19.4.2007.
2. The newspaper with the largest circulation in Finland.
3. These mainly relate to his personal life, especially concerning the publication of his ex-girlfriend's diary. More recently, a campaign funding scandal in which top Centre party officials in particular were implicated began to unfold in Spring 2008.
4. The Council of the State comprising the Prime Minister and the Cabinet.
5. MTV3's journalists had their own contacts in Thailand from which they could glean more information. A decision was made to send a reporter to the area on the first (empty) evacuation flight in the evening of December 26. The newspaper Aamulehti also took a different track and chose to rely on its own contacts and eyewitnesses in the area rather than on official sources (Möra 2005: 69, 78).
6. The description and details of the media coverage result from a secondary analysis reconstructed mainly from two sources: a report evaluating communication in the tsunami crisis (Huhtala et al. 2003) that the government commissioned separately from the official investigation process and a report analysing mass media coverage of the disaster (Möra 2005).
7. New Year's Speech by the President of the Republic of Finland on 1 January 2005. <http://www.tpk.fi/netcomm/news/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=31520&intSubArtID=14213>
8. For the Finnish newsrooms, in addition to self-defensive and gratulatory expressions of getting through the massive task of reporting the crisis despite the holidays, the tsunami gave an impetus to exercise some soul-searching regarding the importance of holding on to basic journalistic values. Discussion was carried out, for example, in Yleisradio's inhouse magazine *Linkki* 1/12.1.2005 and the trade union's paper *Journalisti* 2/2005.
9. The panel members were recruited in 2002 from the over respondents to a joint research material gathering effort by Yleisradio and the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society. They were contacted and asked to write freely about approximately four different topics related to the media each year and to send the text either by e-mail or post. Sometimes the request to write was targeted, for example, to the members belonging to the baby-boom generation. The panel was dismantled in 2005 after audience research was reorganized to fit in with the company's new 'customer-oriented' management strategy.
10. Some panellists had had family or relatives vacationing in the tsunami zone, but as it turned out they had not been in danger. One respondent was still waiting for news of the fate of some acquaintances.
11. The letters of request were sent during the final week of January 2005, and a reminder in late February.
12. Ratings are from Finnpanel's TV Peoplemeter Research.

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Wave of Compassion

Nationalist Sentiments and Cosmopolitan Sensibilities in the Finnish Press Coverage of the Tsunami Disaster

Mervi Pantti

In recent years, several humanitarian disasters have claimed our attention and action. The Indian Ocean tsunami disaster on Boxing Day 2004 stands apart from other disasters, such as earthquakes in Kashmir and in Bam, Iran, hurricane Stanley in Mexico, or the conflict in Darfur, Africa, in that it generated more extensive and continuous interest in the global media. Besides being extensively covered by the media, the tsunami disaster also resulted in the highest-funded relief response ever. According to the Carma report (2006), reporting on the tsunami was exceptional because there was an unprecedented amount of coverage of the humanitarian dimensions of the disaster, including the relief response and the impact on the local people and area. However, humanitarian organizations also believe that the impressive visibility of the tsunami in the media had a negative effect on the extent to which other humanitarian concerns, in the rest of the world, were covered.¹ The tsunami demonstrates some key issues of public compassion, understood here as a moral demand to address distant suffering (Sznaider 1998: 117). First, the media offer the main locus for mobilization of compassion, and second, public compassion is not unqualified. The willingness to respond to the suffering of distant others typically comes at the expense of another disaster, both in the realm of representation and political action.

Media attention is as unpredictable as public compassion, and one does not always follow the other. The response of governments, for example, does not necessarily correlate with the quality or extent of media coverage, but rather, it is strongly influenced by geopolitical and national interests (see, e.g., Natsios 1996; Höijer et al. 2002). Finland, for example, having used its annual funding for humanitarian aid almost completely on helping the tsunami victims, provided only 5 million EUR to help the victims of the Pakistani earthquake – and no aid at all to the Niger famine. Tellingly, a Finnish official from the unit

for humanitarian aid argued that even if the undernourished children in Niger had “become a sexy media topic” the Foreign Ministry operated solely “on the basis of cold facts” (*Helsingin Sanomat* 18 August 2005).

In context of the tsunami disaster, there were several factors that are usually thought to contribute to the amount of media coverage. These include the scale of the disaster, political and economic interests in the area (global tourist industry), connection to a domestic audience (presence of large numbers of Western tourists), and the availability of dramatic images. Inherent to the politics of compassion in the modern period is the problem of dealing with suffering from a distance, the mutual otherness between the donors who live in rich countries and the recipients in poor countries (Boltanski 1999: 189). What was distinctive about the tsunami was that the contrast between the reality of distant others’ suffering and the safety of our own lives became less striking than usual, as Western audiences witnessed ‘people like us’ getting hit by death, pain, and trauma. About 300,000 people were killed by the flood waves, most of them from Sri Lanka and Indonesia, but the tsunami disaster was also the worst peacetime catastrophe in Finnish history.

In the debate over compassion fatigue, the news media more often than not come out as sellers of human tragedies in a global market place. Commodified news of distant others’ misery is commonly viewed as leading to a blasé attitude; the members of the audience cease to be morally stimulated and to feel compassion based on what they see and read (e.g. Moeller 1999). Then again, there are events like the tsunami disaster in which the media seem to be a key driving force in triggering public compassion, creating a sense of social responsibility for the distant sufferer. Therefore, global media representations of suffering and humanitarian aid can be seen as part of the process of cosmopolitanization (see, e.g., Beck 2002; Delanty 2001; Levy & Sznaider 2002; Tester 1999; Chouliaraki 2006).

Based on a study of Finnish newspaper coverage of the tsunami disaster, the present article examines how the mediation of suffering and humanitarian aid is involved in shaping the relationship between the reader and the distant other. I share the view of Lilie Chouliaraki (2006: 14) that “who we care for is a matter of whether or not their suffering is presented as relevant and worthy of our response”. The fact that some suffering becomes an object of media enthusiasm and stimulates compassion and willingness to act, whereas other suffering does not, invites questions that a text-based analysis may provide answers to. If we agree that the media play a major role in increasing awareness of the suffering and in collecting funds for disaster victims, what made the tsunami coverage morally compelling? How does news coverage evoke moral involvement with distant others, in other words, how does it invite members of the audience to become cosmopolitan citizens? In particular, I am looking at how the narratives and rhetoric in the news reports on suffering and relief response create compassion and encourage readers to make a difference in the lives of people in a crisis.

Compassion in the Public Sphere

Distant suffering, the emotions it arouses and the moral commitment it induces constitute the public sphere in which global solidarity with others is embraced (Boltanski 1999; Höijer 2004). According to Natan Sznajder (1998), public compassion is an essential part of the cultural value system of modernity: addressing the suffering of distant others is born out of a revolution in sensibility and bound to a rational and secular idea of shared humanity rather than to the Christian doctrine of charity. According to Sznajder, “Public compassion demands the performance of beneficent actions involving a certain kind of imaginative power to reconstruct others’ conditions, *an act of empathy implying a fundamental equality in human experience and moral status*” (Sznajder 1998: 123; my emphasis).

Therefore, modern compassion is connected to the belief that others are similar to us and that the suffering of some is an offence to a common humanity, and therefore, a condition that ought to be resolved (Sznajder 1998; see also Tester 2001). As moral sentiment, compassion is shaped by history and changes under different political conditions. Sznajder traces the roots of public compassion to the democratization processes, in particular, to the 18th -19th centuries’ humanitarian movements, which addressed different forms of suffering and attacked old practices of public cruelty, such as public executions and slavery. Moreover, Sznajder (1998; see also Levy & Sznajder 2004) connects the emergence of public compassion to the emergence of the rational market society, claiming that the market society extends the sphere of public compassion by “defining a universal field of others with whom contracts and exchanges can be made” (pp. 121-122). This is a significant argument, as the market society, with its individual self-interest and profit-making attitude, is usually viewed as incompatible with moral responsibility.

Public compassion has also been interpreted as symbolic violence (e.g., Foucault 1977; Baudrillard 1994). Critical views underline that suffering and the desire to relieve it do not only provide a common ground for moral universalism, but also the means by which significant differences among people are articulated. As Elizabeth Spelman (1997: 89) states, there are complex issues of power involved in public compassion:

Invoking compassion is an important means of trying to direct social, political, and economic resources in one’s direction. [...] Interpretative battles over the significance of a person’s or a group’s suffering reflect larger political battles over the right to legislate meaning. The political stakes in the definition, evaluation, and distribution of compassion are very high.

In studies on morality, more often than not, the real objection of compassion is the rejection of emotion. Immanuel Kant (1991) rejected compassion as a motivation for moral action, because unlike reason feelings have no propor-

tion. According to Kant, a moral duty cannot be based on any feeling, because acting on one's feelings for others is no more than an exercise in self-gratification. Accordingly, truly good acts were those taken simply because they were right, not because of how one feels about them. Hannah Arendt (1977) shares the Kantian view that emotional responses have no place in public and political life, as passion differs from reason in that it can only understand the particular instead of being able to generalize. In her view, real compassion is a response that leaves no doubt as to the meaning of suffering, and hence there is no reason for public discussions and competing perspectives, which for Arendt are definitive of public life. Arendt stresses the political risks involved in public compassion, arguing that our concern for others' suffering cannot become public and discussed without being dangerously distorted. She argues that public compassion is by its very nature bound to degenerate into pity, which works to accentuate the inequality between sufferers and those claiming to have feelings for them. This is because those who are the objects of alleged feeling are not equal participants in the discussion and have no say about what their suffering means (Arendt 1977: 119). However, the solution to this problem of inequality between the unfortunate and the fortunate does not need to lie in separating compassion from political life, but may lie in trying to include those who are suffering in the discussion as equal moral and political agents (Spelman 1997: 88; Chouliaraki 2006).

Another concern for Arendt – and characteristic of all criticism targeted at public compassion – is the fact that public compassion is often a disguised form of pity, which, unlike real compassion, is not about co-suffering, but can be enjoyed for its own sake (Arendt 1977: 89). In Baudrillard's (1994: 67) words, "We are the consumers of the ever delightful spectacle of poverty and catastrophe, and of moving spectacle of our own efforts to alleviate it". So, what is presented as authentic concern for other human beings can actually mean using the suffering of others to produce an enjoyable feeling in oneself, or a parade of one's political virtue. The recent attacks from the neo-conservative camp against public compassion are drawn from this very distinction between wallowing in self-centred sentimentality and taking deliberative action on the behalf of suffering others. For example, the British report *Conspicuous Compassion* (West 2004) claims that public expressions of compassion are a pastime comparable to going to a football match: They are not about doing good, but about feeling good about oneself and hence they indicate the inflation of compassion (West 2004: 66).

These views are problematic, although they may be helpful in describing some of the risks public compassion may entail. However, they repeat the limited view that emotion and reason as well as emotion and action are mutually exclusive. A strict distinction of emotion from reason does not acknowledge that compassion is capable of being informed by knowledge. On the other hand, keeping emotional life separate from public life disregards the fact that emotional investment is needed to arouse political commitment to action.

A new understanding of emotionality assumes that emotions trigger public deliberation and public actions, for the latter only survive if held up by firm emotional commitment (e.g., Williams 1991; Barbalet 1998; Goodwin, James & Jasper 2001). As Luc Boltanski (1999: 11) writes:

Pity is not inspired by generalities. So, for example, a picture of absolute poverty defined by means of quantitative indicators based upon existing conventions of equivalence may find its place in a macroeconomic treatise and may also help define a politics. It will not, however, inspire the sentiments which are indispensable for a politics of pity. To arouse pity, suffering and wretched bodies must be conveyed in such a way as to affect the sensibility of those more fortunate.

Media and Public Compassion

At present, the media governs the representation of humanitarian action, as well as its necessarily accompaniment, the representation of suffering of distant others. Media-driven public compassion responding to humanitarian crises is not just a recent phenomenon – in the late 1960s, the world was shocked as terrible pictures of starving children in Biafra appeared for almost the first time on television – but since the 1990s, the victim and his rescuer have had an increasing value in the media (Boltanski 2000).

We can begin to understand the role the media play in creating compassion for distant others by looking at the precondition Sznajder drew attention to – *imaginative power to reconstruct others' conditions*. Obviously, distant others can become objects of public compassion only if their suffering is disclosed. As Thomas Cushman and Stjepan Mestrovic point out in their book *This Time We Knew* (1996), which examined genocide during the Balkan War, the readily available information and the images of suffering and violence make it impossible to excuse indifference and inaction using the infamous Second World War claim, “We did not know”. But as many neglected emergencies prove, awareness of the suffering is not enough. If it is to lead to emotional and ethical engagement, distant suffering needs to be constructed as being worthy of our concern (Chouliaraki 2006: 43). In other words, the media do not only inform us of *what is happening*, but they also suggest *which emotions we should react with, and what kind of action we should take in response*. Proposing a solution to a problem of action at a distance is essential, as it is action that makes the distinction between those who indulge in their feelings when watching or reading about suffering and those who act upon those feelings (Boltanski 1999). Perhaps we can compare the function of the news to the “well-written tragedies” illustrated by David Hume (1757), which are employed in “rousing and supporting the compassion, indignation, anxiety, and resentment”.

There is consensus on the fact that the mediation of suffering can indeed incite compassion and action by bringing audiences closer to the sufferers. According to Andrew Natsios (1997: 125), the media play an important role in relief response in three ways. First, “if coverage is particularly thoughtful and continuous” it can educate the public about the reality of the people living in a disaster area. Second, the media coverage, the narratives of suffering and disaster relief, can serve as a mechanism for mobilizing the resources needed in an NGO’s disaster response operations. Third, the media can encourage policymakers to appropriate more funds for relief aid. At the present time, in addition to functioning as an intermediary between the public, governments, and humanitarian organizations, the media also work as an independent humanitarian actor (Minear, Scott & Weiss 1996). This moral role, which extends across different media, can be seen as adding to both the profitability and symbolic power of the media.²

However, the moral consequentiality of the media is controversial. On the one hand, we learn about distant suffering by means of media representations, and it is through the mass media that the audience can imagine others’ conditions and, hence, incorporate the suffering of others into their daily life. Yet, on the other hand, the ever-present media spectacle of suffering is claimed to lead to emotional overload and subsequently to diminishing the audience’s empathy toward suffering (e.g., Sontag 1977; Kinnick, Krugman & Cameron 1996; Moeller 1999). However, some argue that “compassion fatigue”, that is, audience indifference to distant suffering, has more to do with the ways in which the news portrays suffering than with the overexposure to suffering (Tester 2001: 43; Chouliaraki 2006: 97). Contemporary market-driven news values and practices are claimed to have relevance for compassion fatigue. David Morgan (2002: 315), for example, states that it is the representation of suffering “as a conscious form of ‘infotainment’” that reduces moral sentiments to aesthetic judgments.

The pitfalls of media representations can be tied to the hierarchical ranking of humanity. The abundance of victims requires a setting of priorities concerning not only political actions to relieve suffering, but also media representation. Representing suffering means sending a moral message about its meaning. It is the suffering that can be appropriated as *our loss* that is routinely announced as most tragic and therefore worthiest. The crudest form of the construction of a hierarchy between worthy and unworthy victims is that some stories of suffering are told, and some are not. Many emergencies receive little media attention at any stage (Natsios 1997: 124). One basic argument is that the prioritization of disasters, and therefore their visibility in the media, is a result of how their economic and political impact on Western markets is perceived (Carma 2006: 6).

Main areas of criticism targeted towards disaster reporting have been the overlooking of political and historical context of the suffering, emphasizing the sensational, focusing on bad news, and presenting problems but not solutions.

Narrative conventions in covering a disaster, such as attracting attention by hyperbole and comparison, or focusing on helpless sufferers and Western heroes who bring aid, are claimed to serve to naturalize human suffering and reduce the peculiarity of events (Hammock & Charny 1996; Tester 1999, 2001; Seaton 2005). The naturalization and de-politicization of suffering lead the audience to believe that nothing can be done about this or other problems. According to Boltanski (2001), this sense of political impotence is particularly threatening to the emotional engagement, which is needed to move the public into action.

Tsunami Disaster in Finnish Newspapers

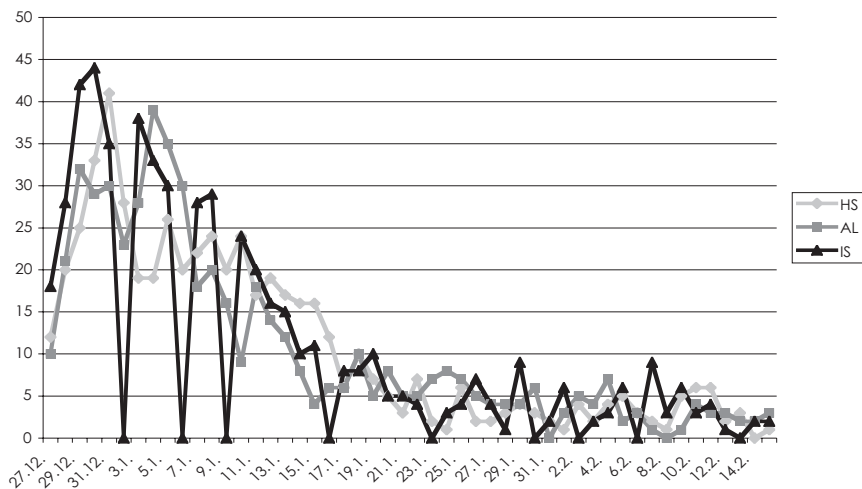
Media representations participate in constructing our understanding of social life; they are central cultural and social products through which values, norms and opinions are expressed and reproduced. The present study explores how suffering and compassion are represented in the Finnish newspapers' coverage of the tsunami disaster, and how these representations are involved in shaping public compassion and moral citizenship. In scholarly debates over the relationship between the media and public compassion, most attention has been paid to television news. Moreover, television is usually seen as more emotionally arousing than the print media: Formal features such as motion, the combination of audio and visual tracks, the real-time reporting and live performance of newsmakers, are claimed to lead to a collective emotional experience that is uniquely different from the experiences transmitted through print media (Cho et al. 2003). This study, however, focuses solely on the newspapers. This is because, first, the newspaper readership in Finland is particularly high, ranking first in the EU with levels at 87 per cent of the population aged over 12 years reading a newspaper daily and, second, the tsunami disaster was a media event that attracted outstanding coverage not only by television and on the Internet, which allows for instant global reporting, but also by old media such as newspapers and news magazines.³ During major media events, citizens are bombarded with the same messages. However, it is important to recognize that each news media outlet represents suffering by taking advantage of its specific capacity to provide information and to appeal to emotions. Newspapers' strengths include provision of in-depth analysis and context, which I understand to be essential to reconstructing others' conditions and arousing moral sentiments.

The design of the present study is based on the idea that a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis offers the most useful approach when studying the meanings and possible impacts of media texts (Shoemaker & Reese 1996). Quantitative analysis is employed here to examine how the amount of coverage developed during the sample period, what themes are covered, from which perspective the tsunami disaster is presented, and who the main actors are. Guided by the idea that narratives are means of under-

standing the social world, the qualitative narrative analysis aims to identify what kind of moral narratives were constructed in the Finnish newspaper coverage. News reporting on the tsunami dominated Finnish media well into January. I have designed a sample that looks beyond the most extensive reporting period and that furnishes the material for making a comparison between tabloid and quality broadsheet papers. I have analysed the coverage of the tsunami disaster, from 27 December 2004 to 15 February 2005, in three newspapers: *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS), the largest national daily broadsheet, and *Aamulehti* (AL), the largest regional broadsheet and second largest morning dailies, were chosen as quality papers; while the 6-day afternoon paper *Ilta-Sanomat* (IS), the second largest newspaper in Finland, is a populist tabloid. All the items on the tsunami disaster – news stories, editorials, columns, reportages, letters to the editor (including SMS messages), polls and announcements – were included; the number of articles was 1605 in total (AL 529; HS 538 ; IS 538) and the number of images 1213 (AL 265; HS 295; IS 653).

Almost 50 percent of all articles (HS 41%; AL 46%; IS 50%) appeared during the most frantic phase of reporting, which was between 27 December and 5 January. The newspaper coverage started to diminish after the first week of January, during which the evacuation of all Finns was completed. By that time, however, the tsunami had already succeeded to last longer in the headlines worldwide than any other prior disaster (World Disasters Report 2005). The first wave of reporting on the disaster, which was on initial rescue efforts and the suffering of victims, was followed by another flow of stories concerning the response to the disaster: first mourning and then expanding goodwill among both the powerful and common citizens. Figure 1 below shows how attention paid to the tsunami disaster developed over time.

Figure 1. Number of Tsunami-related Articles in the Studied Papers

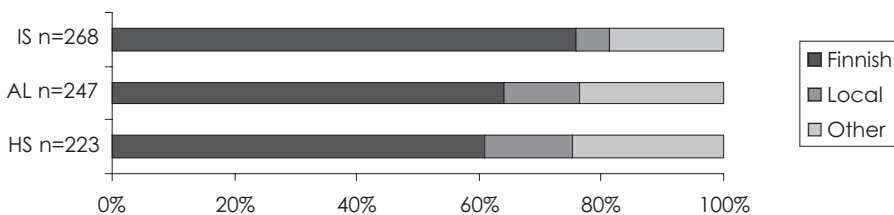


Focus of the Coverage

Newspapers did not have a clear picture of the scope of the disaster in the beginning, and the reporting started as a general description of the natural disaster with international news agencies as the main sources. By 28 December, all three newspapers had reporters in the area, and the volume of coverage started to increase significantly. The rapid increase in coverage, accompanied by a more dramatic style, was mainly due to the growing awareness of the unthinkable death toll, in particular, Finnish fatalities. On the day of the disaster, the Foreign Ministry, passing on only confirmed information, stated that no Finns were known to have died or been injured, and the media based its first reports on this information (Kivikuru 2005).

The development of the coverage is clearly seen in the headlines at that time, which played a familiar number-game with the death toll – thereby feeding the news wave. For example, on 27 December, HS wrote, “Over 11,000 died in flood waves in Asia” and “No Finnish tourists known to have died”. The next day headlines stated, “At least 23,700 died in waves” and “At least one Finn died, tens injured”, but on 29 December, HS offered numerous dramatic headlines about the fate of Finns, such as “Fourteen Finns confirmed dead, hundreds still missing in tidal wave catastrophe” and “Finns fight for their lives”. Together with new information from the reporters who had recently arrived at the disaster scene, reporting on injured Finns waiting to be repatriated and searching for their missing family members, the focus of the coverage changed drastically from global disaster to a Finnish tragedy. As seen in *Figure 2*, in the tabloid paper IS, which wrote excessively about the Finnish victims and their relatives, the Finnish point of view was strongest, almost 80 percent. Consequently, only about 10 percent of the articles published until 5 January focused on human losses and the economic and social consequences of the tsunami in the countries around the Bay of Bengal.

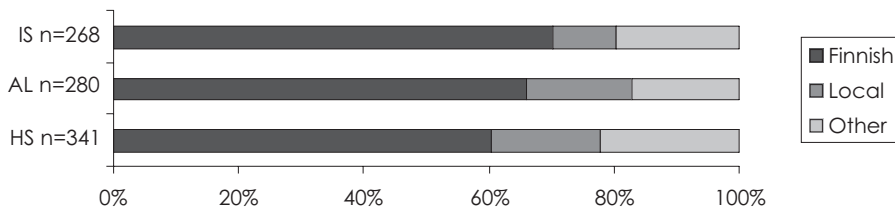
Figure 2. Focus of the Coverage of the Tsunami Disaster (27.12.2004-5.1.2005) in the studied papers



During the first wave of reporting, the domestication of the tsunami disaster can also be viewed from the amount of attention paid to fatalities. In contrast to news on Finnish fatalities (AL 9.7%; HS 11.2%; IS 13.4%), the news paid

significantly less attention to local losses (AL 1.2%; HS 7.2%; IS 1.9%). The Finnish frame also applies to how the different affected areas were covered in the newspapers; the worst areas affected were Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and India, but in the beginning, almost 50 percent of the stories focused on Thailand, where most Finnish tourists were (Accident Investigation Board 2005). After 5 January, the national perspective was still disproportionately strong, however, the amount of stories focusing on affected areas and local people increased slightly (HS 17 %; AL 16%; IS 10%). HS, for example, published a series of reports examining the consequences of the tsunami crises in Sri Lanka.

Figure 3. Focus of the Coverage of the Tsunami Disaster (6.1.2005-15.2.2005) in the studied papers



The continuing strong focus on domesticity in the coverage is firstly due to the dominant Finnish frame of reporting on humanitarian aid, which also becomes the most dominant theme of the coverage. When it became apparent that the public were deeply moved by the tsunami's devastation, the newspapers began a second numbers game on donations made to the disaster appeal. In January, newspapers reported extensively on the acts of compassion and monetary contributions from ordinary citizens, governments, and celebrities; any rock concert or other public event organized to collect aid money was newsworthy. Second, the Finnish perspective persisted in governing the coverage because of the extensive critical attention (especially by IS) paid to Finnish authorities', in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, performances during the most acute phase of the disaster.

Connecting the Reader to the Sufferer

The tension between proximity and distance is a central theme in the study of mediated suffering. In disaster coverage, it is a familiar issue of emotional and political geography that a few casualties in one's own country get more attention than many casualties in a far-away place. As stated earlier, the capacity for identification, or the imaginative power to reconstruct others' conditions, plays a major role in connecting the reader or spectator to the sufferer. The tsunami disaster was exceptional because the Western audience was not only in the

position of a witness and a helper, but also of a sufferer. This, on the one hand, allowed the Western media to capitalize on cultural proximity and create emotionally arousing and ethically involving stories about the suffering of others like *us*. However, on the other hand, the local resonance also brought those normally experienced as distant others closer and focused on what all people have in common, for example, their shared vulnerability.

Constructing the Tsunami Disaster as a Finnish Tragedy

Finnish newspapers constructed the disaster primarily as a Finnish tragedy. The victim narratives were the main means for constructing a sense of national togetherness, which in some comments promoted the culture of taking care of one's own. As stated in one column (HS 31 December 2004), "[W]hen a family in Espoo, Lahti or Jyväskylä loses their loved ones, who were on holiday in Thailand, global grief must give way to the personal. Uncertainty, concern, and grief for our own are rights that should not be tempered. It must be allowed to grow to an experience that brings the nation together." The grief became a form of nation building, represented by strong national imaginary, such as pictures of a solemn President, Finnish flags, candles, and so on. The newspapers easily adopted the role of co-mourners and national healers, offering a public forum, first for national shock and grief, and later for collective mourning and working through the trauma.

The press was by no means free from public criticism for stressing the plight of Finns and other Westerners instead of the native population of the countries affected. Newspapers dismissed the criticism by pointing to "universal" news values, such as cultural proximity, as well as to the mass media's "higher" task to construct togetherness and thus to heal the nation. But the focus of reporting was not predetermined, instead it was a choice made by Finnish journalists. For example, German broadsheet newspapers did not adopt a national viewpoint on the tsunami disaster in which Germany lost more lives than any other European country (Rahkonen & Ahva 2005; Carma 2006). In the editorial of HS (29 December 2004), the media's role is portrayed in terms of national needs and interests, "All glory to the global viewpoint but in every country, in the midst of the distress and shock of their own citizens, mass media's and public officials' duty is to focus on those things." AL, on the other hand, having adopted a strong regional perspective from the start, defended its leading story of a local family recovering through pony riding, by emphasizing its role in contributing to the healing of a shattered (national) community and creating hope and faith in the future (8 January 2005).

Finnish newspapers did not ignore the Asian victims, but their suffering was told, for the most part, through mortality and casualty figures, or through the numerous and ethically questionable accounts of "sickeningly stinking piles of bodies". Finnish victim stories, in contrast, were kept at a personal level and were featured dramatically. This certainly shows that not all disaster victims

came out as equally worthy in the media. As Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988: 35) state, “Worthy victims [–] will be humanized, and [–] their victimization will receive the detail and context in story construction that will generate reader interest and sympathetic emotion.” Some Finnish victim stories became serial narratives circulating in all newspapers. There was a grandfather who lost two generations of his family, and who would have “gone to the sea” himself instead of his little grandson. There were children who had lost their parents, and a popular pop singer, taken away by the tsunami with his family, who came to represent the “face of the grief” (IS 5–6 January 2005).

When reporting on the suffering in Asia, the circle of victims consists of direct victims, people who had lost everything: all or most of the family members, homes, and livelihoods. This is a typical story from Reuters (AL 5 January 2005): “Said Taufik, 40, lost nine family members, among them wife, son, father, cousins and grandfather. His house was shattered and there is nothing left from his furniture shop.” The circle of Finns entitled to victim status was much wider, extending from those personally affected and their families to the friends, neighbours, classmates, people from the same area, people who could have been there, or had been there earlier – basically all Finns. For example, AL (31 December 2004) reported on local people attending a ceremony in a church, writing “Hilkka Ladau was looking for strength from the church. This disaster touched her more than any other major accident because so many Nordic people were involved.” In the national newspaper HS, picturing the mood of the nation across the country, the tragic subject is indeed Finland:

Finland, perplexed from grief, awakens on Saturday to the year’s first morning with a different face. Common people raise the flag to the top and then clumsily lower it somewhere down. [–] In Helsinki, a memorial cross for the victims of Asia is being set up in front of the Cathedral. Lots of candles are gathering under it. ‘I feel bad’, confesses Tomi Satta, 19, next to the sea of candles. ‘Father’s workmate was on a trip with his family and is probably not coming back’. (HS 2 January 2005)

IS, which was highly engaged in producing “other news” (Langer 1998), turned both reporting on suffering and relief aid into celebrity news. The paper reminded its readers that the tsunami had touch celebrities as much as it did ordinary people. Broadsheets without a doubt adopted a more emotional style than normal, but respectively, IS also pushed the drama and Finnish point of view to an extreme. For example, around the New Year, covers were inclusively dedicated to the Finnish tragedy. The headlines, for example, spoke of hundreds of missing Finns (accompanied by 9/11-style photographs of the missing), the death of a “famous actor”, a 13-year-old Finnish girl who died of injuries just before the evacuation flight, and an ex-minister’s “fight against the death”. Besides focusing extensively on Finnish tragedies, IS tended to

erase other subjects of suffering. Here is a telling example of highlighting the Finnish view; the journalist meets a Buddhist monk who holds a mourning ceremony in Khao Lak:

After asking where the guests come from, he [monk] becomes silent for a moment. "A lot of Finns died here", he says. When he hears how many are missing, Chanyoot invites us to a new ceremony. This ceremony he wants to hold only for the Finnish victims. All Thai people on the beach seem to know the tragedy of Finns and other Scandinavians. (IS 7 January 2005)

Communicating Cosmopolitan Sensibilities

As stated earlier, crucial differences among humans can be articulated by representing suffering, and it certainly seems that it was the pain of the large circle of Finnish victims that counted the most and that was constructed to generate reader interest and sympathy. However, it cannot be claimed that the tsunami coverage blindly worked to separate worthy Finnish (or white Westerner) victims from unworthy Asian victims. Instead, I want to claim that in spite of, or because of, the dominant Finnish frame in reporting, the newspapers actually brought readers closer to distant 'others' by fleshing out the human commonalities and hence establishing a more cosmopolitan basis for compassion (see also Raittila 2005: 21).

In the tsunami coverage, there were two main ways of producing closeness between Finnish and Asian experiences and thus eliciting compassion that would persuade readers to help relieve suffering. First, strong sub-narratives about common humanity and cosmopolitan values arose from within the stories of Finnish victims and witnesses, the latter including journalists' and columnists' accounts. Second, following the representation of suffering, the story line on donations created commonality by linking global and local efforts, and generated more willingness to help by teaching readers about the right feelings and response.

In victim stories, there are always heroes, and in reporting on disasters this status is more often than not given to Western rescuers, whereas Asian and African people affected by disasters are portrayed as helpless victims who are dependent on international assistance (e.g., Hammock & Charny 1996). In Finnish newspapers, going against the standard narrative, the status of beneficent actor was most often given to the local people who unselfishly and generously helped tourists in the midst of their own suffering. Thus, the local people were not only recognized by their suffering, and accordingly as objects of Western compassion, but they also became moral agents in the disaster narrative. The message of the following SMS from a reader (AL 10 January 2005) was expressed over and over again in columns, letters to the editors and interviews: "Real heroes in Asian catastrophe were locals who gave everything from nothing."

Finnish victim stories invoked compassion as a ‘composite sentiment’ (see Boltanski 1999; 2000): The moral attachment communicated in these stories of local heroism is based on care and gratitude. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Smith 1759: Part II, Sec 1, Chap. II), Adam Smith depicts a situation in which a sufferer is placed next to a benefactor, with the result that the spectator’s sentiments will be a composite of compassion for the beneficent agent and for the sufferer’s gratitude:

When we see one man assisted, protected, relieved by another, our sympathy with the joy of the person who receives the benefit serves only to animate our fellow-feeling with his gratitude towards him who bestows it. When we look upon the person who is the cause of his pleasure with the eyes with which we imagine he must look upon him, his benefactor seems to stand before us in the most engaging and amiable light. (SOURCE MISSING)

For example, a seriously injured Finnish woman told her story about the hospital where she was treated, remembering a 10-year-old local girl who helped her. It is typical in that it shows not only the generosity and suffering of local people and the gratitude of Finnish tsunami victims, but also their awareness of the inequality between Westerners, who can go back to their lives, and locals, who are left with nothing:

“There was horrible screaming and suffering. There were small children without mothers and fathers. Many were really seriously crushed.” “Oh, that one ten-year-old little girl who cleaned sand from my ear”, Kivi sighs. “But that [Kivi’s own suffering] is nothing in the end as I still have my family and home. Thousands have their whole lives totally shaken”, Kivi thinks. (AL 3 January 2005)

The local people also gained the status of moral agents and identifiable subjects of suffering through the stories of ordinary Finns who had already become true world citizens because of their personal ties to the people in the disaster area. This kind of “mutual visibility” and seeing the distant others as equal agents seem to be the elements that are needed for action to relieve suffering (Seaton 2005).

Reportage on a 29-year-old baggage handler at Helsinki-Vantaa International Airport, with friends and relatives living in Thailand, was especially telling regarding the cosmopolitan values (HS 8 January 2005). Jani Holland is said to have left his work because the news of the disaster began to get to him. In Thailand, he helped the victims and rescuers in the disaster area without an official position. In Holland’s story, there is a strong moral underpinning to the connection of the global with the local. An opposition is constructed between the people with cosmopolitan sensibility and concern for the suffering others, and the selfish Western tourists who lack solidarity, empathy and cultural knowledge:

On some beaches, you could see a backhoe or a bulldozer pulling down a house where people have died. A hundred meters away, a fat German orders a piña colada and a massage. [--] In the evenings, in the bar quarter of Patong Beach, things are much as they always were. Styrox glass-holders keep beers cold, the booze and the parasol cocktails flow, AC/DC hits belt out from the loudspeakers, and tourist men have their hands all over their local girlfriends. One of Holland's acquaintances, working in a bar, is as competent at her job as ever. She carries drinks, arranges chairs and tables, smiles at everyone, cracks jokes. When closing time comes around, the young woman breaks like a twig. She starts crying and throws herself on Holland's shoulder. Her two sisters are dead, one of them in the basement of a shopping mall in which dozens of people drowned. Holland buys two shots of Thai whisky and pours them on the ground in memory of the dead. It is the local custom.

In contrast to cosmopolitan Holland, who has developed a knowledge of and empathy towards other cultures, a German sipping piña colada and tourist men groping and grabbing local girls are portrayed as voyeurs without any lasting attachments or compassion for others.

For the journalists working at the disaster area, as well as on the home front, the need to make sense of the horrible suffering was obvious. From the reports and columns of shocked journalists, a narrative emerged that highlighted the common humanity based on shared vulnerability and suffering, on the one hand, and on compassion as a natural feeling that brings people together on the other:

After following for one week the uttermost suffering, I started to believe in the goodness of people. [--] I was most deeply impressed by the volunteers who were repairing the damage. Next to the locals in this horrible effort were working volunteers from all over the world. They had come from Malaysia, South Africa, Mexico, Norway, Taiwan, Australia, Jordan, and tens of other countries. [--] I never heard any volunteer complaining. Everyone said that they were happy to be able to help. They get their reward from the looks of the suffering people. (HS 8 January 2005)

Borderless grief showed that all the boundaries we try to create between nation-states are artificial. Happiness and safety are universal, as well as pain and insecurity. (IS 5-6 January 2005)

As these examples show, the tsunami and the suffering it caused were seen to bring out the best of human nature and to teach a hard lesson of our common humanity. As one columnist wrote, ultimately the disaster could even result "in a revived idea about the world and globalization, which benefits also the underprivileged" (HS 31 January 2005).

Acting on Others: The Goodness of Finnish People

The sense of political impotence – the belief that nothing can be done – is usually seen to be the biggest trap of representing the suffering and therefore for public compassion. Just depicting suffering is not enough; in order to take action, audiences need to be able to imagine a solution to the problem and believe they can actually do something (e.g., Moeller 1999: 23; Boltanski 2001; Chouliaraki 2006). When discussing what political action to relieve suffering could be for the audience-witnesses, Boltanski (1999: 153) promotes the idea that one can commit oneself through speech, “by speaking out in support of the unfortunate”. According to him, speech belongs to the world of action, and action is crucial to preventing emotions from drifting towards the fictional or remaining in the world of representation. He argues that we can make an attempt to become engaged subjects and bring compassion back into our politics, which is always particular and practical, by, for example, lobbying and pressuring governments to take action, participating in a demonstration or protests that display our commitments and answering a poll (pp. 184-185).

We can connect this problem of acting at a distance to the role of ordinary citizens in the news media. Ordinary people’s viewpoints serve the function of positioning the audience in a more direct relationship with the events and those involved, and thus add force to the emotional intensity of the event (Langer 1998: 87). Current journalistic practices, however, have been claimed to conflict with an engaged citizenry; citizens are only allowed to express basic emotions, not political opinions and solutions to problems (Lewis, Wahl-Jorgensen & Inthorn 2004). This hierarchy of voices can be reversed in the reporting of shocking events like natural disasters, and the normally subordinate views of ordinary people may be treated as the nation’s point of view (see Couldry 1999). This was the case in the tsunami coverage: Ordinary citizens became more important to the telling of a story than were governments and other authorities. Compared with routine reporting, ordinary citizens – including Finnish tourists in Asia and their concerned relatives and friends at home – were given far more space in the media than usual, comprising around 25 percent of the volume during the first phase of reporting (Kivikuru 2005; Accident Investigation Board 2005). In the second phase, the voice of ordinary people was equally important and exceeded the voices of national authorities in the reporting of humanitarian aid.

The presence of ordinary people was not merely limited to providing disclosures of excruciating grief, exciting rescue and nonsensical “it was close” stories, or satisfying newspapers need for dramatic visuals with their holiday pictures turned into the disaster pictures (all these were, however, important in particular to IS). Ordinary people were also heard as a moral voice participating in discussions about the relief efforts and politics of compassion. Citizens participated in several ethical debates, starting with a seemingly trivial dispute over New Year’s fireworks. There was an almost complete consensus

of opinion that setting off fireworks at a time when so many people were suffering and mourning was totally inappropriate, and consequently, people were encouraged to donate the money reserved for fireworks to the crisis aid. The following comment from a reader was typical, "I'm really shocked about all that banging and crackling that was heard in Orivesi on New Year's Night. The message was not received that that money too should have been given to the victims of Asia" (AL 4 January 2005). What followed this particular issue were larger questions of politics of compassion regarding, for example, the hierarchical ranking of sufferers (should the Finnish victims of the tsunami be in a better position than other victims) and disasters (is the tsunami getting too much attention, at the expense of other emergencies).

Citizens also directly proposed different solutions through letters and SMS messages. The solutions proposed ranged from particular short-term ways to help tsunami victims, such as releasing a postmark with an extra charge to commemorate the Asian flood catastrophe, to adopting a more deliberate way of helping sufferers by giving a percentage of one's income every month to humanitarian organizations. So, it is fair to say that the newspapers cultivated an idea of the public as activists.

One of the most predominant stories told during the tsunami coverage was the unforeseen generosity and common feeling of Finnish citizens. The emergency is repeatedly said to have led to a "unique wave of compassion and help" in Finland (HS 11 January 2005). Two large reports in HS (9 January 2005) are especially telling when it comes to moralizing the reader. First, a half-page report with a typical breaking-records-style headline, "Gains of Finnish collections will rise over 20 million euros", tells a story of Tuulikki Hynynen, manager of the Red Cross division in the small municipality of Siilinjärvi in Eastern Finland, collecting money for the tsunami disaster:

"Is this going there..." asks a middle-aged woman before she drops a fiver into the box.

"Yes, to the disaster area of Asia. Thank you." [...]

People who donate money make eye contact with the collector already from a distance. People who are going to pass the collection don't look into her eyes.

"I have already participated," many shout. [--]

"One has to give something every time", says a smiling woman and coins clack into the box. Children get a FRC sticker on the back of their hands as a thank you.

The story ends when Hynynen is back at the Red Cross office. She is speculating as to how much money she has collected, although she knows that the exact amount will not be known until she brings the box to the bank "where the seal will be broken and the money transferred to the RC's catastrophe fund".

The other report, one and half pages long, has almost the identical opening. This time we are in the city centre of Helsinki, and we meet Pentti Viljakainen, wearing a Red Cross red vest and shivering from the cold:

Nurse **Sini Martikainen**, 23, from Vantaa, puts money into the box for the second time. Last week she gave coins, now bills.

“Twenty. I thought that we have that much.”

Empathy does not help reads the collection container in the middle of the square. True, billions are probably needed for this.

Seija Kivilaakso from Veikkola puts a folded twenty-euro bill into the box. Her husband gives the same amount. It was agreed. It was also agreed that the money should be given specially to the Red Cross.

She hasn’t been thinking about where her 20 euros will go.

“I don’t think about what it gives, only if I can help.”

With the question, “Where do Seija Kivilaakso’s 20 euros from the FRC’s box end up?”, the article then turns into an extensive story about the biggest relief operation in history and the role of the International Red Cross in humanitarian aid, followed by a detailed answer to the posed question:

Hundreds of relief airplanes and boats have arrived to the disaster area. Helicopters are dropping food boxes and water bottles. In Indonesia, the only landing strip in northwest Sumatra is cramped because of aid transportations. They bring clean water, medicine, first aid goods, breathing masks, rubber gloves, body bags. Injuries are patched. Limbs amputated. Dead buried. Suddenly there are hundreds of aid organizations and an uncountable number of volunteers on the move. Appeals are published, money collected, records are broken everywhere. [–] “The world is really joining together in a way we almost certainly have never seen before”, says Jan Egeland, Norwegian UN emergency relief coordinator, solemnly.

These in-depth reports and all the coverage communicate three dominant messages. First, what becomes clear from these stories, as well as record-breaking news about aid collections (always including “mobilization information” details such as bank account numbers of aid organizations) and full-page advertisements from humanitarian organizations, is that donating money, not teddy bears or old clothes, is the right way to respond. Focusing on reports of volunteers collecting money on the streets and people giving money, donation stories show how to move from the position of a member of the audience to that of actor. The audience is empowered by giving a straightforward model of moral action, how they can do something as individuals. The altruistic commitment and generosity of ordinary people, as well as Finnish celebrities and companies, is often contrasted with the “shamefully” stingy pledge of the

Finnish government (which was raised significantly after the public criticism) or the selfish strategic political agenda of other governments, and in particular of the U.S, which stood to gain from the global generosity contest.

Second, donation storylines strongly communicate that relief organizations like the Red Cross are reliable and legitimate – people can trust them with their 20 euros. Finnish journalists did not stress the inefficiency of aid organizations or problems and dangers they face when delivering aid to the disaster area, which is a standard narrative in disaster reporting (Hammock & Charny 1996), but instead promoted their legitimacy and competence.

Thirdly and most importantly, the reporting on the tsunami communicates that suffering can be turned into the joy of feeling compassion and acting on it. The reporting showed that emotions can translate into action, which in turn translates into new positive feelings. The people who care and give can feel good about themselves: People who donate money can look into other people's eyes.

Discussion: The Meaning of the Tsunami

The media are apparently giving more coverage to disasters than in the past and, to be sure, media coverage is vital to humanitarian non-governmental organizations because it tends to shape the public response (e.g., Oxfam press release 17 October 2005). Yet many forgotten emergencies and under-resourced humanitarian relief operations, such as the Pakistani and Indian earthquake of October 2005, make clear that awareness of suffering is not always enough to garner compassion and support for distant others. As Keith Tester (2001: 65) writes, "Compassion is like a jack-in-the-box, waiting to spring and create an appearance of activity but kept in the dark all the time no one opens the lid". If neglected humanitarian emergencies, as well as some success stories of humanitarian aid, teach us anything, it is that there is not necessarily anything "natural" about compassion. As a public discourse, compassion has become so naturalized over time that it is seen as an inherent universal quality and an indisputable aim of human life (Sznaider 1998: 128; Tester 2001: 51-54). Nevertheless, as an empirical reality, compassion has a political dimension in that it works to align or separate individuals and communities, *us* and *others* (e.g., Spelman 1998; Ahmed 2004; Chouliaraki 2006).

After the Pakistani and Indian earthquake, the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* printed a tricky headline, referring to the low public response compared to the tsunami disaster: "Sorry Pakistan, your disaster just doesn't have *it*" (Heijmans 2005, my emphasis). So, should we accept that some emergencies just inherently have *it* – the elements needed to open hearts and wallets? Or, should we place the moral responsibility to establish a political connection – that is, to provide such representations of suffering others that can facilitate the reconstruction of others' condition and move public to action – upon the

media? Because there is no pre-existing global public feeling that is moved by and acts on the suffering of others whichever suffering, the way in which distant suffering is represented in the media is imperative (Chouliaraki 2006: 14). Representing the suffering of distant others inescapably suggests a way of understanding and responding to the suffering depicted.

The tsunami disaster became one of those global events, in which the media seemed to occupy a position at the centre of social life (Couldry 2003), acting as an organizer of both moral sentiments and humanitarian aid. This time, it successfully participated in inciting that unpredictable feeling of compassion. What emerged in the tsunami coverage could be defined as a moment of “internal globalization”; a transformation of the public sphere at the national level, as global concern became part of local experiences and moral life worlds (Beck 2002). Representing suffering with a strong national reference, with locals featuring as moral agents in the role of collaborators, resulted in a wave of compassion. This confirms the claim that the ethnocentric focus on events causes a wider shared morality and willingness to act. However, my study shows that the national angle of media coverage does not automatically block the option of compassion for the suffering of people who are not like us (see Chouliaraki 2006: 196). As Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2002) argue, strong identifications and feelings towards others are only produced when distant events have a local resonance. It is fair to say that Finnish newspapers, in particular the tabloid paper *Ilta-Sanomat*, overstressed the Finnish point of view, but in the process of narrating and portraying *our* suffering, it also succeeded in producing proximity with distant *others*. The suffering of *others* was made relevant and worthy of our response by emphasizing human commonalities instead of differences, including distant others in the discussion and, most importantly, acknowledging their status as equal moral agents – and not only victims and objects of charity.

The question of agency is crucial also in portraying the public response. Finnish newspapers were feeding the “wave of compassion” by telling about the generosity and compassion of Finnish citizens, celebrities, and foreign governments almost within a format -of competition. News on relief response forcefully created an active public and invited the readers as citizens to participate in public action. This was done, on the one hand, by giving citizens an opportunity to participate in the moral discussion about the meaning of the tsunami. On the other hand, the news offered plenty of models for feeling right and solutions for practical action.

At times of crisis, the need for meaningful interpretations of the world intensifies. David Morgan (2002: 319) claims that modernity has been trying to deal with its inability to make moral sense of the escalating suffering by focusing on the rationality of science, assessments of risk, and attributions of liability and blame. Questions of fault and negligence (errors in rescue and humanitarian operation, faulty economic practices, and the destruction of ecosystems), as well as attempts to make the world more predictable and safe

through technical systems (whether the tsunami disaster could have been prevented by an early warning system), were part of the tsunami story. However, explaining the ecological, economic, and political aspects of the disaster was by no means the main task of journalists, columnists, and editorial writers. The tsunami disaster was not comparable to man-made disasters, which could be explained through rational assessment of the causes and consequences. Newspapers made sense of suffering by focusing on both collective and individual emotions, including the emotions of journalists.

The prevailing ideological message communicated was human commonality, based on vulnerability, suffering, and compassion. In this sense, reporting on the tsunami imagined a cosmopolitan future based on compassion, because becoming a 'citizen of the world' involves new affective and cognitive orientations to others. In a column in HS (3 January 2005), one journalist expressed it as follows:

The actual cruel wound of our globe reveals just how thin the idea of globalization as just a matter of money and economy is. It challenges us to remember how connected everything is here. How we all belong together as a whole, and how dependent we are on each other and on nature. How fragile and easily broken both our lives and our dreams are.

Notes

1. The tsunami disaster attracted more media attention in 200 English-language newspapers during the first six weeks than the world's top 10 'forgotten' emergencies (from wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan to HIV/Aids) did during a year (Jones 2005). The tsunami disaster resulted in a record for relief aid collected, while, for example, relief funds are still needed for the Pakistani and Indian earthquake victims.
2. The tsunami disaster is said to have persuaded editors that humanitarian news can be a profitable niche. In Britain, the tragedy boosted newspaper sales by 10 per cent during the traditionally slow holiday period. One of the biggest beneficiaries was the *Daily Mail* (an extra 150 000 copies were sold), especially because 5p of the cover price of each paper sold was donated to its Flood Aid campaign to help victims of the disaster (Gidley 2005; Plunket 2005).
3. In Finland, the sales of tabloid newspapers increased by 25-40%, and the ratings of all national television channels were 20-60% higher than the year before (Kivikuru 2005; Tutkintalautakunta 2005: 115-116). Most broadsheet newspapers are bought on subscription, and it is therefore difficult to estimate the extent of their consumption.

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Solidarity Trumps Catastrophe?

An Empirical and Theoretical Analysis of Post-Tsunami Media in Two Western Nations

Lynn Letukas¹, Anna Olofsson² & John Barnshaw¹

Following the catastrophe, immediate assistance in the form of search and rescue efforts came from survivors, as those in the most heavily impacted regions were largely without any assistance from nearby communities due to the substantial loss of professional responders and critical infrastructure (Cosgrave 2007; Fritz Institute 2005). However, in the hours and days that followed and as the devastation and destruction became more apparent, newspaper, television and Internet media became increasingly influential in raising awareness and influencing public opinion (Quarantelli 2005). In response to this intensive media coverage, particularly in Western nations, unprecedented amounts of material and financial assistance arrived from individuals, organizations and governments in geographically non-impacted nations across Europe and North America (Clark 2005; Cosgrave 2007; Inderfurth et al. 2005; Red Cross 2007).

The aim of the present chapter is to explore how mass media construct the short-term response and recovery phase and to investigate how and why geographically non-impacted countries provided unprecedented amounts of material and financial assistance. Specifically, we explore what themes emerge as salient in explaining and predicting how and why such relatively high levels of social solidarity were fostered and maintained in geographically non-impacted Western countries following the Indian Ocean tsunami. Further, integrating theory and empirical analyses, our research also aims to develop a predictive model of social solidarity. Since prior research has focused on Scandinavian media coverage of the tsunami, it is both empirically and theoretically important to offer comparison to another Western, non-impacted nation. The United States was chosen because of its greater experience with disasters in general, despite experiencing actual and proportionally fewer deaths and citizens trapped from the tsunami than Sweden. In addition, previous research has found differences in newspaper coverage and content between US and European media, providing an additional point of comparison between the

two nations (Bantimaroudis & Ban 2001; Hopple 1982; Washburn 2002). Despite these differences, both Sweden and US media were influential in raising public awareness, reporting on relief and recovery efforts and fostering community solidarity.

Social solidarity is an important sociological concept dating back to Tonnies ([1887] 1965) and perhaps most systematically articulated by Durkheim ([1893] 1997; [1912] 1995) in his attempts to understand how individuals are able to remain integrated in a society that is increasingly individualistic and increasingly technologically complex. Social solidarity is also an important concept in the study of disasters, as research has consistently found that following a disaster impact, community members come together to share resources and work to solve common problems, sometimes even among groups where collaboration did not previously exist (Barton 1969; Dynes 1970; Fischer 1998; Fritz 1961; Mileti, Drabek & Haas 1975; Prince 1920; Siegel, Bourque & Shoaf 1999; Tierney, Lindell & Perry 2001). Despite this considerable literature on social solidarity in the aftermath of disaster, almost all of the extant research has focused on solidarity produced by those who experienced the disaster first hand (cf. Fritz & Mathewson 1957; Raker et al. 1956). The present chapter breaks from this research tradition by exploring how social solidarity is fostered within geographically non-impacted nations. Specifically, we find that social solidarity is fostered through an intensively narrow and nativist focus and is maintained through a collective response of assistance. However, a more detailed analysis of the extant literature is necessary before proceeding to our model of social solidarity.

The Concept of Social Solidarity

Social solidarity was an important sociological concept for many classical sociologists including Comte, Spencer, Tonnies, Simmel and Durkheim, as it was often closely associated with community. Of the classical sociologists, perhaps Durkheim's concern with social solidarity is of greatest importance today. Throughout his career, Durkheim sought to understand how and why solidarity is maintained, a line of investigation he concluded in his final major study on the collective consciousness (Durkheim [1912] 1995). For Durkheim ([1912] 1995), the collective consciousness represented a substantial unifying process of symbolic action that strengthened both the individual and the community. Thus, according to Durkheim ([1912] 1995: 379), a community is often at its strongest when a substantial portion of the community engages the "collective consciousness" of symbolic acts of collective response.

Since Durkheim, many other scholars have studied social solidarity in a variety of theoretical frameworks and contexts (cf. Bay & Pedersen 2006; Parsons 1951; Perry 1986; Sobieraj 2006; Turkel 2002). Although scholars have been studying social solidarity for more than a century, we could not find any

instances of a predictive theory of social solidarity. Each theoretical analysis of social solidarity we encountered offered either a meta-theoretical or an analytical scheme for *describing* or *explaining* social solidarity (Turner 2003). Although descriptive or explanatory theory is useful in understanding what social solidarity is and why it occurs, these types of theory are not particularly useful in *predicting* conditions under which social solidarity is likely to emerge and how it is maintained over time. A predictive theory of social solidarity enables researchers to not have to wait for social solidarity to serendipitously occur while in the field, or to study social solidarity post-factum. By knowing under what conditions social solidarity is likely to occur, researchers could engage in more en vivo social solidarity research, which would allow for more comparative theoretical analyses and a better understanding of what conceptualizations best explain social solidarity, rather than the conventional post-factum analyses, which often focus on one theoretical perspective on social solidarity.

As noted previously, disaster research has consistently found that following a disaster, community members come together to share resources and work to solve common problems, sometimes even among groups where collaboration had not previously existed (Barton 1969; Dynes 1970; Fischer 1998; Fritz 1961; Mileti, Drabek & Haas 1975; Prince 1920; Siegel, Bourque & Shoaf 1999; Tierney, Lindell & Perry 2001). In addition to the extant research on disasters and social solidarity, some research has also focused on the role of media following a catastrophe (Jarlbrog 2004; Quarantelli 2005; Strömbäck & Nord 2006). Quarantelli (2005) found that following a catastrophe, the media takes on increasing importance in the construction of the occasion. Beyond disaster research, media and communication studies offer insights into the construction of news and public responses. Generally, the closer the audience is, both geographically and culturally, to an impacted area, the greater chance the occasion will be covered by media (McQuail 2005). Prior communications research (Hammock & Charny 1996; Jarlbrog 2004; Livingstone 1996; Moeller 1999) has found that when disasters and humanitarian catastrophes occur, national and international media in geographically non-impacted regions play an important role in drawing larger audiences to the occasion, thereby initiating donor aid and relief action beyond the impacted and surrounding communities. Frequently, attention is given to the relief assistance of the donor nation, as information about the impacted area is often limited, which increases the likelihood of rumor distortion, *simplification* and *personalization* (Allport & Postman 1947; Hernes 1995; Nord, Shehata & Strömbäck 2003; Özden & Bjerre-Andersen 2005; Shibutani 1966; Strömbäck 2000). *Simplification* refers to the media utilization of simple structured stories that are often decontextualized and lacking in substance or complexity (Dickerson 2001). *Personalization* refers to the media utilization of human-interest narratives to promote similarity between the audience and the media construction (Dickerson 2001).

For example, the Indian Ocean tsunami received more media coverage in Swedish media than any other disaster occasion in the past few decades (Andersson Odén, Ghersetti & Wallin 2005). Since the tsunami occurred on a Swedish public holiday, it was covered first by direct media such as television, teletext and Internet (Grandien, Nord & Strömbäck 2005). The Swedish media played an important role in framing both public discourse and governmental policy, as mass media were the primary source of information about the catastrophe for the public as well as for Prime Minister, Göran Persson, and Secretary of Defense, Leni Björklund (Daleús 2005). Following the tsunami, the Swedish public reported relatively high trust in media reporting, particularly during the initial short-term response and recovery phase (Grandien, Nord & Strömbäck 2005, Strömbäck & Nord 2006). During this period, the only major critique was the one-sided reporting of Sweden and Swedish victims, which was relatively similar to media reporting in Finland (Kivikuru 2006), Norway (Eide 2005) and Denmark (Özden and Bjerre-Andersen 2005). Thus, similar levels of nativist interests were overrepresented by media reporting in all Scandinavian countries.

In contrast to Sweden, relatively little scholarly research has examined the US media response to the Indian Ocean tsunami (cf. Brown & Minty 2006; Byron 2005; Cosgrave 2005; Kadrach & Laituri; Letukas 2006; 2008; Ngo 2005). It is important to note that in contrast to Sweden, which has had a number of official investigations and scientific studies examining media coverage of the catastrophe (Andersson Odén, Ghersetti & Wallin 2005; Daleús 2005; Grandien, Nord & Strömbäck 2005; Jonsson 2005; Olofsson 2007a), no official inquiries by the United States Government have been opened, and US media coverage has fostered relatively little social scientific coverage. Some of these national differences in media coverage and policy response may have to do with the number of Swedes impacted relative to the number of Americans, the class and political capital of Swedes impacted and the differences in the perception of assistance provided to impacted nations by private citizens and governments. However, such differences lie largely beyond the scope of this chapter, as their effects are best evidenced in the longer-term recovery phase. As noted previously, the goal of the present research is to explain and predict how social solidarity has been fostered and maintained through media in geographically non-impacted Western countries following the Indian Ocean tsunami.

Data and Methods

A content analysis was performed to explore the emergence of social solidarity within the geographically non-impacted nations of Sweden and the United States, following the Indian Ocean tsunami (Krippendorff 1980; Neuman 2003). First, two of the most widely circulated national newspapers in Sweden were selected for analysis. *Dagens Nyheter* is Sweden's second largest

daily newspaper, the largest morning newspaper and the third largest daily newspaper in Scandinavia, with an average daily circulation of 350,000 and a total daily readership of 800,000 (Tidningsutgivarna 2007). *Dagens Nyheter* is considered by many as the opinion-leading newspaper in Sweden (Lindström 1996; Nord 1997; Strömbäck 2000). *Svenska Dagbladet* is Sweden's fifth largest daily newspaper, and third largest morning newspaper with a daily circulation of 200,000 and a total daily readership of nearly 500,000 (Tidningsutgivarna 2007). Next, two of the most widely circulated national newspapers in the United States were selected for analysis. The *New York Times* is the largest metropolitan newspaper in the United States, with an average daily circulation of 1,120,420, and is known for its international reporting and general news coverage. The *Washington Post* is one of the top seven daily newspapers in the United States, with an average daily circulation of 699,130, and is known for intensive coverage of the United States Government (Burrelles-Luce 2007). The time period of study includes the eight days following initial impact, December 26, 2004 to January 3, 2005. This period was chosen because it allowed for detailed analyses of the immediate post-impact period and short-term rescue and recovery phase (Andersson Odén, Ghersetti & Wallin 2005; Tierney, Lindell & Perry 2001).

It is important to note that there are some difficulties in comparing media in different countries. In the case of the United States and Sweden, the media systems are not entirely similar (Dimitrova & Strömbäck 2005). For example, Sweden has high readership of newspapers, but a comparably low level of television viewing; in the United States, the pattern is reversed. Further, Sweden still has a strong public service broadcast sector and state subsidies of newspapers, while the United States has a highly competitive media sector dominated by commercial broadcasting and newspaper businesses. Journalistic norms and values differ to some extent as well. Earlier research has shown that American journalists view objectivity as being impartial and relying on official sources, whereas Swedish journalists see it as their role to find out the 'truth' independently of official sources (Dimitrova & Strömbäck 2005; Patterson 1998). Also, symbolic differences, both linguistic and cultural, influence the media construction of any occasion. It is often difficult to convey symbolic differences rooted in language, culture, geography, and identity, although such differences are important in the reporting and construction of claimsmaking activity for both Swedish and US media. Therefore, in the present research, we have tried, wherever possible, to standardize and control linguistic and cultural differences by focusing on commonalities between the two nations. For example, we standardized all newspaper accounts to the English language rather than utilizing each newspaper's native language. Although this process introduced some bias toward the English language in symbolic constructions, the effect of such bias is limited due to controls that fix the variability of interpretation. For example, we utilized three search terms in each country, "tsunami", "catastrophe", and "flood wave" for Sweden and

“tsunami”, “catastrophe” and “disaster” for the United States. In addition to the first two terms (“tsunami”, “catastrophe”) being the most frequently used words to describe the tsunami for both countries (cf. Andersson Odén, Ghersetti & Wallin 2005; Letukas 2006; 2008 Olofsson 2007a), utilizing identical search terms allowed for a standardization process in understanding how each country’s media constructed claims around those terms. To allow for some variability in linguistic difference and cultural understanding, “flood wave” and “disaster” were also selected. The term “flood wave” was frequently used in Sweden to explain the tsunami, while “disaster” was more frequently used in the United States. Thus, by controlling for some difference and the variable effects at other points, we were able to produce a methodology that was both sufficiently replicable while maintaining a level of linguistic and cultural variability that was measurable.

Data were analyzed using a deductive approach (Berg 2007; Neuman 2003), involving the development of coding around themes of donor relief, social solidarity, and location emphasized within the article. Additionally, an emergent thematic code was utilized for data that did not fit within these codes. After preliminary analysis for substantive content, a combined total of 594 articles remained, 224 from the United States and 370 from Sweden.³ Notes and memos were also used in the coding process to capture emergent themes, such as issues related to the disaster like death toll, emergency management and warning systems. The software program ATLAS.ti 5.2 was used for the coding and analysis of these articles. After the initial coding, all codes, notes and memos were read through and analyzed. Representative quotations were then selected, some of which have been used in the presentation of our findings.

Solidarity Fostered through Simplification and Personalization

Although it may seem counterintuitive that media would focus more attention on promoting social solidarity than on devastation, destruction and death, this is the case. Consistent with prior literature (Entman 1989), we find that both Sweden and US media use strategies of simplification and personalization to create an intensively narrow and nativist frame that ultimately promotes social solidarity in readers beyond those directly impacted by the Indian Ocean tsunami. Taken together, simplification and personalization provide mechanisms for understanding how a narrow and nativist context is developed in an effort to reinforce social solidarity among geographically distant and non-impacted nations.

In Sweden, a number of official investigations and scientific studies have found that following the Indian Ocean tsunami, Swedish media concentrated on Swedish tourists in Thailand (Andersson Odén, Ghersetti & Wallin 2005;

Daléus 2005; Grandien, Nord & Strömbäck 2005; Olofsson 2007a). Similarly, we find that although *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) and *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD) cover the devastation in all tsunami impacted countries, Thailand is mentioned twice as much as any other country. By providing a dominant frame focusing on Swedish tourists trapped in Thailand, the Swedish media substantially narrow the scope of the catastrophe from thirteen nations to mainly one. In addition, the Swedish media further simplify accounts with simple structured stories such as “*A Paradise Smashed to Pieces* (DN 050103: A07)” and “*The Tourists’ Paradise Island Wiped Out* (SvD 050103: A08).”

Consistent with simplification, we observed several examples of Swedish media attempting to de-contextualize Thailand from the tsunami. In Swedish, the prefix “swed-“ [svensk-] is used to highlight nativist or national interests in an effort to bring the catastrophe figuratively closer to the Swedish readers. For example, an article in DN (2004-12-28: A11) notes that it was a Swedish paradise that was destroyed, despite being geographically located in Thailand: “*The hotel was in the Swede-paradise in Pong Suk, at the beach of the wonderful bay that once again lays calm and glittery.*” Similarly, in SvD (2005-01-02: 12) an area of Thailand is referred to as being a Swedish tourist area and is coupled with a personalized message of loss: “*05.42: Tourists missing in Thailand. Already there is information about fatalities in the area of the Swede-hotels.*” In the US media, social solidarity is also fostered through simplification, although the frame takes on a different form.

In contrast to Swedish media, which focused largely on the nativist interests of Swedish nationals in Thailand, media accounts in the *New York Times* (NY) and *Washington Post* (WP) simplify stories for the US audience by consistently referring to the catastrophe as impacting “South Asia.” By adopting a “South Asian” frame, the United States media are able to de-contextualize and simplify accounts as part of a homogenous catastrophe impacting a geographically distant region of the world, ignoring the complex religious, cultural and ethnic differences between Indonesians, Indians, Sri Lankans and Thais, among others. This use of simplification is exemplified in headlines such as “*A Tragedy Affects All Corners of the World*” (NY: 2004-12-29) and “*One Face of Relief*” (NY: 2004-12-30: A1). The “South Asian” frame is a simple and familiar one for the American audience, as it is largely consistent with contemporary racial dynamics and how most white Americans think about Indonesians, Indians, Sri Lankans and Thai in the US racial classification system, immigrants and nationals of tsunami impacted South Asian countries have been classified in a “pan-ethnic” racial classification of “Asian”, rather than by their nationality or ethnic origin (Boheme 1989; Espiritu 1992; Feagin 2000; Omi & Winant 1994; Portes & Rumbaut 2006; Takaki 1993). This “Asian” frame de-contextualizes cultural differences between groups and emphasizes physical similarities between members in an effort to simplify the cultural and historical differences as homogenous to the dominant white majority in the United States (Espiritu 1992; Feagin 2000; Halter 2006; Omi & Winant 1994; Portes & Rumbaut 2001).

Of course, South Asians or Asians are not fully integrated into the dominant white racial hierarchy. This is often explained through the myth of the “melting pot”, where the United States is portrayed as a diverse collection of traditions and cultures that, over time, assimilate or “melt” into a single culture, mirroring the dominant white group in language, culture, education and income (McKee 1993; Park 1914; Steinberg, [1981] 2001). Despite voluminous research refuting the notion of the melting pot from a variety of perspectives (Glazer & Moynihan 1963; Novak 1971; Portes & Rumbaut 2001; Takaki 1993; Waters 1990), the US media are acutely aware of the power of the “melting pot” myth in fostering social solidarity. For many, assimilation remains the process through which one becomes “American”. We find the construction of the “melting pot” myth in both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, but it is perhaps best exemplified through this article in the *New York Times*:

For every disaster and killer wave in the world, there are ripples in New York. So while it may be too soon to measure the economic and social impact of the South Asian tsunami on the city, it is not too soon to predict that the city will feel repercussions. A century ago, New York neighborhoods were defined by the traditional ethnic cocktail of Irish, Italians and Jews, and to some degree, those groups still define the city. But their dominance is receding as fast as the floods on beaches half a world away....The waves were also felt among the 43,000 Bangladeshis concentrated in Astoria, Woodside and Elmhurst; the 68,300 Indians in places like Richmond Hill; the 4,000 Burmese in Elmhurst, Bensonhurst and Midwood; the 4,200 Thais in Astoria and Elmhurst; the 7,600 Malaysians centered in Flushing; and the 2,800 Indonesians found mainly across Queens (NY 2005-01-02).

By highlighting the ethnic assimilation of a century ago with more recent immigrant groups, the US media masterfully personalizes this catastrophe to their audience’s own immigrant experiences as more recent immigrants experience loss from afar. Although there are no eyewitness accounts in this passage, the effect of personalization is achieved through the identification of ethnic groups who experience a collective loss of identity. However, the collective frame of ‘immigrants in America experience loss in their homeland’ is not sustainable without action. Thus, the United States, according to the “American Dream”, is a nation of doers, and although solidarity may be fostered through similar traditions and the personalization of loss, solidarity is maintained through action, in this case through a collective response of assistance in the form of donations.

The Swedish newspapers also use de-contextualization as a way of personalization, as de-contextualization signals to the reader that the catastrophe has drastically impacted not only Thai, but also Swedish cultural traditions and institutions of tourism, recreation and leisure. As such, Swedes must come together to repair what was lost. Equally important and often mutually re-

inforcing is the simplification and personalization of eyewitness accounts of loss and destruction. Such stories often promote the similarities between survivor and reader and foster a shared sense of loss, which reinforces solidarity. Eyewitness accounts appearing in the Swedish media were more often from Swedes in Thailand than from native Thais, as exemplified from this article in SvD (2004-12-30: 8): *The situation is still very chaotic says Thorleif Håwi, a Swede living in Phuket, who, like many other Thaiswedes, has made voluntary contributions.*

The historical, racial and ethnic differences between Sweden and the United States are reflected in the ways the mass media personalize catastrophe. Contrary to the US media, the Swedish coverage was so narrowly focused on native interests that neither DN nor SvD published any human interest stories on people from the impacted area living in Sweden, and only two interviews of people with foreign backgrounds in the tsunami impacted area were interviewed during the first eight days. Thus, experiences of Swedes with a foreign background are not accounted for, on the contrary, the coverage focuses only on native Swedes' experiences and characteristics. Thus, the media construct Sweden as a country without prior experience of natural disasters. The scientific reporter Karin Boys writes in DN (2005-01-02: A33):

For the first time we Swedes have been forced to understand what a tsunami is. The phenomenon does not exist in our own calm waters. But it is well known in other parts of the world.

However, the intensively narrow and nativist focus was not lost on the Swedish readership, as evidenced by Sophia Müller, who wrote a letter to the editor of SvD (2004-12-31: 31) highlighting who was not accounted for by Swedish media reporting, while generalizing about the treatment of foreigners in Sweden:

When I visited the largest Pressbyrå [newsstand] in town today I noticed through at a simple look that the newspapers of the world all wrote about the catastrophe and all the misery it causes for the people living in these regions, who have lost everything, if still alive. But no country – except Sweden – only mention (or mainly) their own fatalities and victims. The other victims are therewith discriminated – which is in line with the prevailing way of handling Non-Swedes in Sweden.

Although Sophia Müller offers an interesting perspective on Swedish media coverage, the dominant institutional perspective is one of narrow national interests, which sought to foster social solidarity among native Swedes. The traditional view of Sweden as an ethnically homogeneous country prevails, as representatives of other ethnic groups are ignored or marginalized through simplification (Olofsson 2007b; Petersson & Hellström 2004). Perhaps these

sentiments are best expressed by an editorial in DN (2004-12-30: A02), which emphasizes the “natural” personalization of Swedish loss and the solidarity of response in Sweden:

To focus so much on the Swedish victims is sound and natural. It is in our country, in our fellowship, that we have to deal the incomprehensible tragedy that neighbors, friends, relatives and colleagues have experienced. It is the strength of the nation state to feel solidarity and empathy outside of the immediate circle, to participate in the larger community that is made up by our fellow citizens.

In both countries, the newspapers simplify and personalize the Indian Ocean tsunami through de-contextualization and referring to cultural myths and symbols.

Solidarity Maintained through Collective Response

As noted previously, for Durkheim ([1912] 1995: 379), the highest form of social solidarity in an increasingly individualistic and technologically complex society was found in the “collective consciousness” of unified symbolic action. Through such action, Durkheim ([1912] 1995: 379) noted that *the group periodically revitalizes the sense it has of itself and its unity; the nature of the individuals as social beings is strengthened at the same time*. Thus, according to Durkheim ([1912] 1995), social solidarity is maintained through symbolic acts of collective response. Similarly, we find that in Sweden and the United States, social solidarity is maintained through a collective response of providing assistance to those impacted by the Indian Ocean tsunami.

In the United States, social solidarity was maintained through persistent news articles detailing the collective response of financial and material assistance provided by the government, military, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), corporations and individuals. So prominent were articles of collective response of assistance in the United States that our manifest coding revealed 179 references during the eight-day period under investigation. Frequently, articles exploring the collective federal response source a senior level official of the United States Government, mention the amount or type of assistance provided, and highlight the superiority of US contributions compared to other Western nations.

The United States has raised its commitment from an initial figure of \$15 million to \$350 million, and Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said Friday that it was likely to go higher still. “The United States, the wealthiest nation in the world, is doing a phenomenal job in this unprecedented challenge, not only with a very large cash donation but also bringing in military and civil defense

assets that is precisely what we need," he said....Secretary of State Colin L. Powell's response yesterday was partly reassuring: He said that "clearly the United States will be a major contributor to this international effort. And, yes, it will run into the billions of dollars. (NY 2005-01-02: 1)

President Bush made similar public statements captured in NY (2005-01-01: A6) about the federal collective response of assistance. His comments underlie the centrality of American assistance in the international community, while linking the collective response of assistance from United States citizens:

Mr. Bush noted that the United States had created and coordinated a "core group" with Australia, India and Japan. "I am confident many more nations will join this core group in short order," Mr. Bush said in his statement. "Reports of strong charitable donations are also very encouraging and reflect the true generosity and compassion of the American people."

The notion that US citizens are exceedingly generous in their collective action of providing assistance emerged as a predominant theme in the US media. Continuous media coverage of US donations generated a level of social solidarity, as some stories documented how much more assistance the United States was providing than other nations. Such media coverage of the collective response of assistance maintained social solidarity, while providing an expression for action. Similar to Durkheim ([1912] 1995), who found that the highest forms of social solidarity are expressed through the collective conscience of religious ritual, we find that the apex of the collective response of assistance was embedded in the religious institutions and rituals in the United States as evidenced by this article in WP (2005-01-03: B01):

A week after the tsunami hit, its victims were uppermost in the minds of many worshipers in the Washington area. Catholic parishes in the Archdiocese of Washington set up special collections in response to the devastation, said Susan Gibbs, an archdiocese spokeswoman. Clergy from many denominations spoke of the disaster from the pulpit. Church and synagogue bulletins and Web sites were updated hastily to include information on how to donate. Among those who heard the call was National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, who regularly attends National Presbyterian and was at yesterday's 10 AM service.

"This is the way that Americans respond. They respond through their churches and through their communities," Rice, whom President Bush has nominated to succeed Colin L. Powell as Secretary of State, said in a brief interview. "What the government does is important, but what each individual American does is even more important." Micah King, 29, a law student who also attended the service, said he took comfort in the outpouring of generosity in

response to such an epic act of nature. "It's so nice to see how people come together," he said. "People don't even think twice about it. They just dig in their pockets."

Similar to the United States, Sweden also developed and maintained social solidarity through the collective response of providing assistance through the generosity of Swedes to promote the unprecedented level of solidarity in providing assistance to a foreign disaster, while simultaneously acknowledging the shared sacrifice of Swedes in foregoing traditional New Year's rituals. SVD (2004-12-31: 12) writes:

The phones go red-hot at Sweden's NGOs and millions of krona to the impacted areas are coming in. At the same time, many traditional New Years Eve's fireworks will not come off. The Swedes donate money to the impacted areas instead for buying New Years Eve's fireworks.

In maintaining social solidarity, Swedish media framed the catastrophe as a local, domestic occasion rather than a distant, international occasion. Swedish media coverage consistently portrayed the effect of the tsunami as if Sweden were impacted. This kind of personalization is similar to how the American media focused on domestic relief assistance and shifted the focus from the impacted area to the United States.

In sharp contrast to the US media, which emphasized government officials as agents in providing commentary and maintaining the collective response of assistance, significant media coverage in Sweden focused on the slow and ineffective leadership displayed by the Swedish government.⁴ Interestingly, instead of disrupting the social solidarity of Swedes, the slow collective response of the government appears to have increased social solidarity, as thousands came together to write about the ineffective relief and rescue efforts.

The anger over how the government has handled the relief aid is growing among the Swedish citizens. The Prime Minister's Office receives more than a thousand e-mails this week. And the Foreign Office receives three times as many. The message in the letters is tough and clear and the angry mail continues to pour in with an increasing speed. Some want the Prime Minister to resign. Most demand that [Minister of Foreign Affairs] Laila Freivalds be fired. (SvD (2005-01-02: 12).

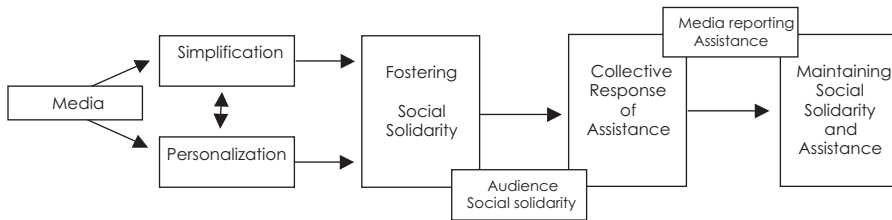
This unexpected collective response of anger and frustration at the slow pace of government response is indicative of a deeply embedded social solidarity fostered in Swedish media and maintained through the collective response of thousands of Swedes demanding that more should be done for those trapped in distant lands. The Swedish media localized the issue and framed it as a domestic rather than global catastrophe, which explains the generosity and

anger among many Swedes. Such a collective response is unprecedented among Swedes, especially because the catastrophe did not geographically impact Sweden. However, our analyses show that such social solidarity does not appear to be aberrant, as similar behavior is observed in the United States.

Explaining and Predicting Social Solidarity

Our model (Figure 1) for explaining and predicting social solidarity demonstrates that print media are influential in fostering social solidarity through simplification and personalization and that once solidarity is fostered, the audience maintains social solidarity through collective action of providing assistance, which in turn, the media report on, which reifies the previous collective action of assistance.

Figure 1. Explanatory and Predictive Model of Social Solidarity



Thus, the media are active in fostering and maintaining social solidarity by focusing audience attention through the social solidarity process.

The present chapter explored how newspaper accounts frame the short-term response and recovery phase. Our research found that print media were able to foster and maintain social solidarity throughout Sweden and the United States, two geographically non-impacted nations. Solidarity was fostered through an intensively narrow and nativist focus and a collective response of assistance. This chapter makes at least three contributions to the extant literature on media and disaster. First, we offer a cross-national comparison of Swedish and US print media coverage, an area that until now has been grossly understudied. Second, we link the theoretical literature on social solidarity with disaster and media research and demonstrate that social solidarity can be fostered in geographic areas that have not even experienced a disaster impact, a topic that, until now, has seldom been investigated. Finally, we offer a model (Figure 1) for understanding how social solidarity may be fostered and maintained. In almost all of the prior theoretical literature dating back to Durkheim ([1893] 1997), theorists have *described* what social solidarity is, but few have provided a *predictive* model for understanding how social solidarity occurs, as we have done.

It is important to note that given the brief duration of our research and the narrow national sample (Sweden and the United States), we are tentative in our ability to propose a theoretical model based on a post-factum analysis. It is possible that subsequent analyses may not support our findings, which conclude that all or even most Western print media are able to foster social solidarity following a catastrophe and are able to maintain such efforts through reporting collective response. We view this as both a theoretical and methodological concern that requires further research. For example, a stronger methodology including diverse donor nations from Western Europe and developed nations such as Japan could provide greater confidence and theoretical unity in explaining how widespread solidarity is fostered in geographically non-impacted nations. Similarly, conducting subsequent research over a longer duration would greatly enhance our ability to predict how long social solidarity can be maintained following a catastrophe in donor countries.

Further, the use of print media as the only source of information is problematic, as electronic and broadcasted media were the first to cover the catastrophe (cf. Grandien, Nord & Strömbäck 2005). The initial reporting from the occasion is therefore not complete, and further research is needed to investigate possible divergence between print and other mass media. Also, by broadening our methodology to include additional media sources such as television, radio and Internet coverage, we may gain additional theoretical insight into how similar or competing messages of social solidarity may amplify or reduce social solidarity following a catastrophe. The notion that similar or competing messages in the media may influence social solidarity is a potentially important aspect of media construction that went largely unexplored in this chapter. Apart from this, the investigation of print media, particularly elite newspapers as in this case, has advantages as well. For example, stories printed in newspapers such as *New York Times* are often agenda setting for other national and international news (cf. Dimitrova & Strömbäck 2005). Future research on the variability of news cycles within Sweden and the United States or between countries across content, geographic distance and time may significantly influence the explanatory or prediction capabilities of our theory of social solidarity. Nonetheless, despite these considerable shortcomings, the present research has sought to go beyond descriptions of social solidarity in the past century and make tangible progress toward a more predictive theory of social solidarity.

Finally, it must be noted that our research represents one theoretical perspective on the Indian Ocean tsunami. Focusing on theories of social solidarity at the expense of other theoretical insights may have led us to emphasize certain aspects of print media coverage following this catastrophe, while limiting other theoretical insights due to a lack of overwhelming support or coding biases. Just as this chapter offered cross-national comparisons of print media coverage, subsequent analyses should offer cross-comparisons between theories. Media and sociological theories of globalization, symbolic interaction-

ism and theories of public and private communicative action offer excellent sources for testing alternative explanations of social solidarity, or offer potential bridges to a broader context of social solidarity than conceptualized here. Despite these issues, the present chapter does offer insights into how social solidarity emerged and what effect it had in providing tremendous amounts of material and financial assistance in the aftermath of one of the greatest catastrophes of this century.

Notes

1. University of Delaware – Disaster Research Center
2. Mid Sweden University
3. A preliminary analysis for substantive content was conducted to remove superfluous articles that used “tsunami” as a metaphor to convey an overwhelming amount for a variety of topics ranging from business to sports. Since these articles had little or nothing to do with any issue related to the Indian Ocean tsunami, they were dropped from our analysis in both Sweden and the United States. The total number of these articles was small enough to have little to no effect on the overall substantive content or generalizability of our findings.
4. Although Prime Minister Göran Persson and other representatives of the government were frequent commentators in Swedish news media, they were often questioned and criticized for their perceived lack of action (Andersson Odén, Ghersetti & Wallin 2005).

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Transnational News and Crisis Reporting

The Indian Ocean Tsunami on CNN and Swedish TV4

Maria Hellman & Kristina Riebert

In what ways is the news culture of a transnational channel suited (or not suited) to global mediated crises as compared to a national broadcaster? In exploring this question, the present article draws mainly on a study comparing the news coverage, newsroom cultures and news reception of the Indian Ocean tsunami at the transnational channel CNN to that of the Swedish national channel TV4.¹ Because Sweden was one of the Western countries with the highest number of deaths in this catastrophe, TV4 differs from CNN not only by having a national home base and a national audience, but also by addressing its news coverage to an audience containing a great number of people who were directly or indirectly affected.

In the kind of mobile and globalized world we live in, we are likely to become aware of more global crises than ever before, that is, crises involving the large-scale loss of human life, affecting citizens far away from their home locations and generating significant pressure for intervention to alleviate the situation (Shaw 1996). As we see more global crises, we might also start turning more to the increasing number of transnational news channels on offer. Transnational channels have proven to be most successful under circumstances where they can make the most of their competitive advantage in terms of technology, journalistic resources, organization, geographic reach and unlimited airtime.

The News Cultures of CNN and TV4 during the Tsunami

The CNN news culture is well prepared for covering a global crisis like the Indian Ocean tsunami, which was unexpected, widespread and disastrous. With an organization that prioritizes up-to-date technology, developed logistics schemes and a work ethic emphasizing speed and risk-taking, CNN has an organization that is well prepared for covering unexpected breaking news.

As a commercially driven network, CNN is money conscious and expects a dedicated staff, yet the management is willing to commit enormous resources to major crises. The Indian Ocean tsunami involved over 100 CNN staff members working in more than 12 teams on the ground, and with 'more cameras in the field than at any other time in history' (Cramer 2005: 13-14; Bindra 2005). When the waves struck, CNN correspondents were already in Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia and Thailand, either on vacation or in their New Delhi and Bangkok offices, enhancing the speed with which they started broadcasting. Equipped with new satellite digital newsgathering capabilities, these reporters – some of whom were Indian and Sri Lankan – also had the technical resources to go live before most other channels.²

The hybrid commercial Swedish channel TV4 markets itself as willing to take risks and as fast on their feet. TV4 is a relatively small national channel, whose newsroom is not staffed during parts of the early morning hours. It has few correspondents stationed abroad, preferring to fly correspondents out to hot-spots when something happens. The news chief – who was the first to receive the 'flash' from the Swedish news agency TT in the early morning hours of December 26 – was set with the task of getting her newsroom, which was literally asleep, in motion. One hour after the flash, the TV4 web editor had the news posted on the web. An hour later, a correspondent residing in northern Sweden was assigned to go to Thailand and cover the event. The newsroom struggled all morning to find pictures for their extra news bulletin, which was not broadcast until noon – eight hours after the wave struck Phuket. Thus, though TV4 immediately dispatched one team (two reporters) to Thailand, and one team to Sri Lanka, they were not in the region, but had to fly over nine hours to get there (Andersson Odén, Ghersetti & Wallin 2005: 32-34 and 40).

Even for CNN, it took several hours after the initial earthquake before the scope and implications of the waves became clear. CNN then moved to 'breaking news', meaning that all airtime was devoted to the tsunami – an advantage the transnational news channel has over national broadcasters, whose news section has to negotiate for more time with broadcasting and programme directors.³ Küng-Shankleman has called CNN a 'news missionary', in that its culture is imbued by the self-perception of having a 'global outlook' and that in bringing news to the world, it should also try to 'make a difference' in the world (Küng-Shankleman 2003: 95). CNN thinks of itself as having 're-invented' new forms of news, one of which is live presence, being 'there' for people across the world from the moment a crisis happens. Viewers are called upon to watch or they will miss an opportunity to become part of 'history in the making'. So a story like the tsunami marks the kind of moment when transnational news channels like CNN come into their own.⁴ Also embedded in this notion of being a 'force for good' in the world is the idea that by bringing world events 'home' to viewers, they can become engaged and have the opportunity to do something about such events (Küng-Shankleman 2003).

This is accomplished partly through audience address, which is more personal at CNN than at the Swedish national channel TV4, which instead is more formal and factual and speaks *about* people rather than directly *to* them as viewers. At CNN, more effort appears to go into establishing a relationship with the viewers – the anchor establishes herself as the viewers' confidante. For example, the CNN anchors give the impression of asking questions on behalf of viewers, and when they move from one place to another by explicit references clarified by maps shown on the screen, they appear to want to 'take the viewers with them'. The live phone-ins from reporters on site take the shape of friendly and often personal conversations between the anchor and correspondent. During the tsunami, the correspondents functioned as professionals, as eyewitnesses, and as survivors, thus anchors sometimes took the opportunity to ask them about their own safety or ability to cope with the horrific scenes of devastation. In this sense, the viewer was invited to take part in the CNN community and to move back and forth, with the newsroom, from the affected region back to the safe home studio.

When comparing CNN to TV4 regarding technological and organizational factors as well as journalistic culture, work practices and the channel's self-image, it is clear that CNN has been constructed for global crisis reporting to a much higher degree. However, when discussing the media's role in global crises and disasters, there are aspects involving the actual news output and its reception that must be taken into consideration. We need to explore the news culture in conjunction with the content and reception of the coverage in order to assess how CNN used its organizational advantage in comparison with a national news channel during a global crisis.

Comparing Dilemmas of Global Crisis Reporting

With an increasing number of transnational channels on the global media market using their capacity to be first on the scene of a crisis, their role in framing crises might have a growing impact on how both viewers and other national channels come to perceive major world events. In order to better understand what kind of media actor the transnational channel represents during a crisis, we want to look more closely at how CNN covers suffering, for instance, and how, when favouring speed, it deals with the problem of accuracy. In line with this reasoning, we focus on three aspects that are key to crisis reporting: immediacy and accuracy of information, distant suffering and the role of crisis manager.

First, crises are characterized by an immediate demand for accurate information from the public, crisis managers and policy makers alike. A transnational channel such as CNN has a reputation for being quickly on the scene and can start broadcasting almost immediately. However, in a crisis situation, it may be difficult to achieve both immediacy and accuracy. In the case of CNN,

with its live presence, the emphasis on immediacy means that inaccurate information can constantly be updated (MacGregor 1997; Riegert forthcoming). At any rate, this is an important difference between CNN as a rolling news channel and Swedish television news, both generally and in the tsunami case in particular. According to a Swedish media study of the tsunami, for example, the public service broadcaster made a conscious choice not to start broadcasting until they had the right people to do it even if this meant a delay (Andersson Odén, Gherseti & Wallin 2005; Riegert & Olsson 2007).

How news organizations deal with the speed vs. accuracy dilemma is a central aspect of crisis coverage. A news channel prioritizing speed would argue that incoming information should be broadcast to viewers as soon as possible, leaving it up to viewers to interpret, make sense of and decide what credibility they attribute to the information and the images. The opposite strategy entails that the news channel prioritizes evaluation of the accuracy and credibility of the information before sharing it with viewers. As this involves journalistic judgements that take time, such a strategy slows down the information flow considerably (Nohrstedt 2000: 204). The whole evaluation process could be undermined in a competitive media market where other media outlets emphasize speed. However, inaccurate information spreading quickly in and between media systems could create panic and chaos, hampering rescue and relief efforts as well as causing citizens unnecessary suffering and anxiety.

The second aspect deals with the concept of 'distant suffering' and refers to whether there were conscious efforts made on the part of the newsrooms to depict the scenes of suffering as close to or far away from the audiences and whether those who were suffering were depicted as 'others' to pity or 'people like us' with whom 'we' feel compassion. Here, TV4 had to concern itself with representing disaster to an audience in which almost everyone was somehow affected, whereas CNN with its global audience could not know exactly which sections of its audience were directly affected. Their challenge instead consisted of bringing people geographically distant from the event to (or almost to) the site as events unfolded.

Thirdly, and finally, there is the question of what role the channel takes upon itself during a global crisis. In our study of the mediated events of the tsunami, we have seen that both TV4 and CNN saw themselves as crisis managers, but owing to their different host cultures, they did this differently. From a media organizational perspective, routines such as staying live (although no new information is forthcoming), retaining the same faces on screen, representing the bereaved, participating in the mourning, 'working through' the crisis, promoting an understanding of 'why' are all part of the cultivation of local and national communities (Riegert & Olsson 2007; Robertson 2007; Hellman 2006). It is not surprising that local and national journalists take on these roles, and provide these mediated spaces for collective grieving and reflection, or give voice to survivors of a catastrophe. But can such media 'rituals' bridge

the distance in the global crisis between the victims and survivors on the scene and the relatives and general public at 'home'? We posit that CNN tries to use liveness as a cultivator of transnational community. But the question is whether and how a transnational channel can stage the rituals so common to local and national journalists, such as participating in mourning, representing the bereaved, demanding accountability from those in power, and finally whether such a channel can connect with audiences in the same way national broadcasters do.

Immediacy and Accuracy in CNN and TV4 Tsunami Coverage

The present article is based on a larger project investigating the links and contrasts between transnational and national communicative spaces. Specifically we are interested in whether the tsunami catastrophe gave rise to what could be called a transnational mediated space and if so, how this space differed from the discourse in the national media. How can we locate transnational mediated spaces? The various studies included in the project have attempted to answer this question by looking in several places: Hellman's content analysis looked at the way in which key actors and events were portrayed on CNN and TV4 during the first week of the crisis. Riegert interviewed CNN foreign correspondents and selected among other nationally based production studies of the tsunami in an effort to understand the point of view of the (mostly) television journalists who reported the disaster. Finally, news consumers of various nationalities were interviewed in focus group studies about how they made sense of the disaster on the basis of transnational and national news. Including these perspectives in the study enables us to compare our analyses of the news content with an analysis of how journalists themselves see their role in covering the catastrophe and how the coverage is perceived by viewers. This enabled us to identify differences and similarities between news content, journalists' own experiences and viewers' experiences concerning what journalistic mechanisms promote viewers' engagement and identification with distant sufferers, as well their attributions of responsibility regarding who should help victims in a catastrophe such as this.

Although immediacy is of key concern for any news organization, our analyses point to CNN and TV4 as two channels with different approaches to the relationship between immediacy and accuracy. As we noted previously, CNN ran pictures live hours before TV4 had even begun broadcasting, and in much of this first coverage there was little concrete information to be had, as rescue efforts were still underway.⁵ Regular CNN viewers in our focus groups remarked that when CNN reports live in this way, before information has really started coming in, journalists are sometimes unable to see the forest for the trees, meaning that they focus on something insignificant that happens to

be in front of the camera, unintentionally directing the viewers' attention away from the centre of the crisis.⁶

/.../ They are the first ones there, but the first ones there are often the ones without a lot of information you know.... But if you are going to be on the air from the minute it happens.... you're going to have to sort of come up with stuff, off the cuff for these things. (respondent in focus group)

In his study of CNN coverage of an attempted terrorist attack on the British Cabinet and the home of the Prime Minister during the Gulf War of 1991, MacGregor points to this problem as a conflict between the task of newsgathering and 'rolling news'. He says: "This shift in function to satisfy the relentless demands of rolling news means that reporting live and instantly places limits on the very newsgathering activity meant to be taking place" (MacGregor 1997: 88). Such problems of accuracy were also referred to by members of the Swedish government when they were accused of responding too late to the crisis. They blamed the transnational channels for not having accurately reported on the consequences of the tsunami in Thailand, where most Swedes were vacationing, but said the focus had instead been on India and Sri Lanka (Daléus 2005).

Generally speaking, CNN's main format is "breaking news journalism", i.e. immediate output of incoming information in the form of continuous updates, where new and sometimes different information replaces the previous messages and new clips of footage are added to those already being broadcast. Although the anchors during the tsunami occasionally told the audience of the uncertainty of the information owing to the ongoing crisis, information that proved to be wrong was not corrected, but merely replaced with a correct update. In this sense, the news format presupposes the kind of viewer who tunes in to CNN continuously to keep up-to-date, fully aware that what passes as news at one point in time might have changed the next. In the tsunami coverage, we noticed that information and new pictures appeared to be put on the air as they came into the newsroom, and if the anchor commented on the pictures, she or he would do so live, as if seeing them for the first time along with the viewers. This is in line with CNN's own projection, offering as they say 'primary source' not delayed, secondary, edited information. The sense-making is thus done live, and the role of the anchor is to mediate between the different locations of reports and reporters, the incoming images and the spectators, not to interpret and analyse the event and its consequences – at least not in the initial stages of an erupting crisis.

In much of CNN's initial coverage of the tsunami catastrophe, there was little comment accompanying the pictures. They appeared to live a life of their own and quite often contradicted phone-in live reports from the correspondents on site. For example, much of the initial footage lacked depictions of urgency, chaos and the fear of new waves – recurrent themes in the corre-

spondents' reports during the first 12 hours of coverage. Despite the fact that there was little live coverage with pictures and reports in which speech and pictures were combined, both anchors and correspondents strongly emphasized the ongoing, what was happening here and now. The news reporters were introduced with the phrase: 'NN joins us on a line from XX' followed by the question: 'NN what is the latest?' The news reporters' frequent use of the present tense indicated a sense of immediacy, as if something were happening 'as we speak' and 'at this very moment'. The uncertainty of the situation also served to emphasize the theme of *nowness*, for example, the fear of another series of waves added emphasis to the sense that the crisis was ongoing, and hence how important it was that viewers remain tuned to the channel. This sense that new information was coming in all the time was certainly how the interviewed journalists recalled the first day of reporting, although our content analysis instead revealed repetition of very little information (Riegert et al. forthcoming).

The focus group respondents were if anything disappointed in the repetition and the news footage, which they said did not give a sense of the uniqueness of this catastrophe compared to the kind of 'flooding that happens every year in Bangladesh'. It was evident from these discussions that the images mattered more than the speech in terms of how the respondents perceived a sense of urgency and immediacy in relation to the crisis. Instead they interpreted the clips as demonstrating the aftermath of the catastrophe and largely disregarded the excited reporters' accounts (Riegert et al. forthcoming).

In comparison, the format of TV4 news stories did much less to emphasize immediacy, but focused rather on the ever-broadening scope of the catastrophe. Surviving tourists spoke of how they were coping at this moment in time and what they hoped for in the immediate future, but the journalists did not impose a favoured frame of newness on the stories. The past tense is used more often both in reports and by the news anchor. Aside from the use of telephone reports, few stories were broadcast live and the occasional two-way live report did little to create a strong sense of immediacy. This indicates that immediacy was not as crucial to the national broadcaster and that TV4's coverage, as opposed to CNN's, was not based on immediate output of information, but more on 'processed', edited news.

There were also pieces in the TV4 coverage that described an atmosphere and the situation on the ground, rather than a specific event, and here the time frame was made redundant/irrelevant. Reports about the generosity of the Swedish public formed such a timeless frame, as did some eyewitness reports describing the situation on the ground in Thailand. Because of the existence of thousands of Swedes vacationing in the affected region and the difficulty the official information agencies had in providing correct information about these people, it is likely that the demand for accuracy in the national news coverage was much more strongly felt by TV4 journalists. There was no need to emphasize TV4's immediacy when eyewitnesses and others could be relied upon.

Distant Suffering in CNN and TV4 during the Tsunami

Immediacy through live broadcast is seen as the means whereby distances are to be bridged, global audiences to be reached and viewers distant from the scene of the crisis brought into the midst of the events and made to feel that they are there – as it happens. In a crisis situation and especially a disaster like the tsunami, it is heavily centred on depictions of suffering. Our study shows that CNN's journalistic efforts during the tsunami were primarily focused on bringing meaning to the events by reporting on the magnitude of the waves, the surprise with which they struck and the unfathomable consequences they had in terms of numbers of dead and missing in a number of different countries, as well as the immense material devastation they caused (Hellman forthcoming). Although there were horrific images, these served primarily to emphasize the magnitude of the disaster – the size of the area of Aceh that was wiped out, and how bodies were being buried by the hundreds using bulldozers so as to avoid epidemics.

The depictions of suffering by CNN's correspondents on site during the first week thus positioned the sufferers as distant 'others' to pity, not as people like 'us' for whom spectators were invited to feel compassion. In this sense, the suffering came to appear 'distant' in the CNN coverage – especially when compared to TV4. Despite a news channel such as CNN with access to modern and mobile equipment and plenty of reporters on the ground, a disaster area brings difficulties to journalistic work of both a practical kind and an ethical kind. One of the most complicating factors of the Indian Ocean tsunami was that it took everyone, even the seismological experts, by surprise. Although CNN had its own New Delhi office chief on vacation in Sri Lanka at the time of the tsunami, there were no live images of the actual waves. Thus, during the first 12 hours of coverage on CNN International, there was a lack of newsworthy and informative pictures to complement the dramatic reporter phone-ins to the studio, and although CNN was one of the first news teams to land in Aceh province, it did not get there until two full days after the earthquake. Pictures of the waves that eventually were broadcast were amateur videos that were also broadcast on national news channels all over the world. This lack of pictures may thus be seen to have contributed to the distant journalistic perspective and the impression of suffering as being distant from the spectators.

Another factor contributing to the distanced perspective was that the anchor address tended to create a layer between the viewers and the people on the scene of the event. As the anchor addressed the audience and spoke to the reporters on site, s/he made explicit the moves from the studio in Atlanta (the 'safe home' where there was order) to various places in the affected region where there was chaos, anxiety and uncertainty, thus accentuating the distinctions between the dangerous 'there' and the safe 'here'. The anchor became a mediator of sorts between what Chouliaraki called zones of danger and zones of safety and in so doing may have made viewers very much aware of the

distances and differences between those who suffered and themselves, the spectators (Chouliaraki 2004 and 2006).

According to a number of CNN journalists who covered the crisis, by the end of the first week of reporting on the catastrophe, CNN changed its reporting style from objective or 'fact journalism' to more emotional coverage focusing on the human angle and individual fates (Riebert et al., forthcoming). Focusing on people's stories, said CNN journalist Matthew Chance, was the only right way to cover this indescribable disaster area, which was worse than any war zone. "In the end what all journalism is about is people. It's not about politics, economics, war or strategy; we have to focus on the human condition, which everyone in the world relates to" (Bindra 2005: 152). In an edited story from Khao Lak, Thailand (entitled "The Face of Death"), Chance focuses on the 'human condition' as a means of expressing the seemingly brutal measures required to deal with the large numbers of dead bodies in the aftermath of the tsunami and how entire families had disappeared leaving single family members alone. He interviews an aid worker standing on the beach with a bulldozer working behind him who describes his first sight of the beach area as: "there were bodies all over the place". The camera then cuts to the grounds of a Buddhist temple where dead bodies in bags are lined up in what looks like the hundreds, and people are walking along the rows of bodies looking for someone they know. Chance comments: "And for days makeshift morgues, like this one on the grounds of a Buddhist temple, have filled with the remains of Thais and tourists alike." Standing in front of the bodies, he says that they might have to be cremated en masse within days. No distinction is made between the treatment of Thai and Western victims. They are all bodies of people who died in the tsunami, who owing to their large numbers had to be lined up in the open air. Forensic teams are helping out with identification, we are told. He further adds that the conditions are 'appalling' and that the stench is overwhelming (CNN Newsnight, Dec. 29, 2004).

The camera cuts to a Thai woman overwhelmed by grief. She cries to the reporter that she does not know where to find the strength to go on. The reporter adds that it is no comfort to her that her loneliness is shared by so many others. He concludes the story by standing next to billboards with photos of western looking faces, saying that despite the fact that this country is far from being the worst affected, there are many people who are missing loved ones and have listed their photos and names on boards in the hope of reunification. It is worth noting that, in contrast to many other reports, Chance refrains from making sense of the magnitude of the tsunami by referring to the huge numbers of dead and missing in the affected region and instead talks about the catastrophe as global. His ending comment is that it is in Thailand the greatest number of foreigners have been affected and "so in that way it has touched the hearts of many people in the international community..." (ibid.)

Despite the occasional story such as this one, in line with how CNN reporters themselves recall their work, our study indicates that CNN primarily de-

voted the acute and highly formative phase of their crisis coverage of the tsunami, when audience figures peak, to reports about the material devastation and accounts of what it looked like on the ground – not on the compassionate or emotional depictions of the suffering of locals and tourists. In coverage broadcast a few days into the first week, the footage reflected more suffering and emotional reactions to the catastrophe, but the distanced perspective and the focus on facts and figures were not abandoned.

In contrast, we have the national channel TV4 broadcasting to an audience in which many were directly or indirectly affected by the tsunami. The scenes of suffering here were much more from ‘home’ in Sweden than from South-east Asia, and there were clear efforts in news items to interconnect the two, i.e. they could move almost seamlessly between the two geographic locations (cf. Odén, Ghersetti & Wallin 2005: 66-67). To use Chouliaraki’s terms, CNN depicted suffering as taking place ‘over there’ in the danger zone and brought their images of suffering to those located in safety (Chouliaraki 2006: 86). This distinction between zones of suffering may be one reason why the depictions of human suffering were more outspoken and gruesome on CNN than on TV4. On CNN, dead bodies were filmed in more exposed ways, grieving, desperate men and women were filmed in close-ups and there were pictures of masses of dead Western bodies lined up in the open air – an image Western viewers might be used to seeing in reports about catastrophes, famines or other human tragedies in the developing world, but not in news about people like themselves. This is in line with John Taylor’s observations:

Reports of horrors overseas concentrate on the essential strangeness of victims, whether they invoke revulsion or invite compassion. Even in those stories that spark moral debate, the press uses stereotypes of alien life: they include refugees, corpses and even skeletons on the streets. These pictures contrast with idealised British systems of value, care and order. They imply that outside Britain chaos is the norm and life is cheap. /.../The dead in foreign stories confirm that famine, epidemics of disease, war or natural disasters such as typhoons and earthquakes are un-British.” (Taylor 1998: 129, cf. Andén-Papadopoulos 2000)

In Sweden, the tsunami disaster became a national trauma and TV4 news represented this by reporting on the compassion shown the Swedish victims by fellow nationals and by depicting suffering that was not bound to geography – it was taking place in Thailand as well as in Sweden. Through the emotive and personal accounts of people who survived the wave or who lost someone, close-up camera angles and amateur pictures, the coverage came to invite viewers to re-experience what these Swedes had gone through and to share their experience with them. The suffering of the local population was less prominent in the coverage and was differently narrated than that of the Swedes. With a few exceptions, this coverage consisted of edited agency ma-

terial with a speaker voice from Stockholm, not reports filed by reporters on site, producing their own footage accompanied by original sound. The main focus of stories about the local population was on the material devastation and how groups of people, not individuals, experienced the tsunami. It was typical that quotes were brief and that the reporter was the narrator of the story rather than the suffering people. All in all, the depictions of the suffering of the local population were more distanced and less emotional than the individualized and explicit depictions of suffering Swedes. Thus, the former tended to give expression to a kind of pity of 'others', while the latter is better characterized as expressions of compassion for people like 'us'.

In comparison with CNN, due to its heavy emphasis on Swedes and Swedish victims, TV4 represented the suffering as less distant, taking the experiences all the way 'home' and inviting their viewers – located in 'safety' – to share in this. To some degree, this also meant that the suffering of the local populations also came home to Swedes, although as noted above they cannot be said to have been treated equally (though their loss was greater).⁷ This was also the impression that our focus groups had. Although a third of the respondent group were not ethnically Swedish, the vast majority of the respondents found the TV4 story about the effects on the local population (not involving Swedes) more touching and engaging than a similar CNN story taken from the same time period directly after the outbreak of the catastrophe (Riegert op. cit.).

Several respondents remarked that the informality and familiarity of the CNN address made them feel more distant rather than intimate with the reporters and anchors on screen: they were "speaking more to each other than to me", and this made them feel they "were on the outside looking in" on the scenes of suffering halfway around the world (ibid.). Views such as these were mainly voiced by the Swedish respondents, the Americans, for example, felt more at home with this kind of address. Some female respondents attributed this to a language barrier, i.e. although they understood everything the reporters said in the CNN news stories, the fact that they all spoke English made them feel as if the coverage did not quite have to do with them. Many of the female respondents said that TV4 spoke to them as Swedes and not to them as 'viewers' who could be sitting anywhere – in England or in the US watching TV (cf. Höijer 2004). The role of one's mother tongue in creating a sense of security in a crisis has also been discussed by Kivikuru in her study on Finnish media consumption during the tsunami in 2004 (Kivikuru 2006: 512). Yet it is noteworthy that the approach CNN journalists said they adopted towards their viewers in this case – to provide them not only with information, but also a sense of proximity to the scenes of the disaster, a sense of being part of global humanity in which spectators connect with those that suffer – was not particularly noticeable in the channel's first week of coverage. In the examples offered to our focus groups, there was very little that could be connected to this CNN approach and therefore, despite a variety of readings from those variously familiar with the channel, this sense of proximity remained absent.

Instead the national sense of belonging seems to have played a greater role for the respondents – something that was not necessarily seen by them as a good thing for a global catastrophe, i.e. the excessive media focus on their own nationals was judged to be unfortunate and ineffective.

Aside from language, it was TV4's greater proportion of interviews with people who had been affected that gave respondents the sense of proximity and engagement that CNN lacked. One woman said about one of the CNN news stories: "It just grinds on, and they talk and talk: I hear what he [a CNN expert commentator and eyewitness who happened to be vacationing in the area] is saying and it feels like it doesn't concern me and then the pictures come back again and they pass by" (Riegert op. cit. p. 131). The CNN footage did not give rise to the feeling that 'this could have been me', instead the participants said that they could not identify with the tourists who were shown in the CNN clip helping the wounded on the Thai beach. Thus, the majority of respondents thought the CNN coverage gave them the impression "that what was happening was far away, to people that are used to things like this happening, and it was mostly 'others' that suffered from them" (ibid.: 134).

So given these depictions of suffering: Were spectators invited to feel compassion? TV4, although carrying more human suffering in their coverage, treated tourist aspects as separate from local population aspects of the tsunami. There was more cautious talk and fewer gruesome pictures of scenes of suffering from Thailand, where the loss of Swedes was in focus. The more emotional and horrific depictions of suffering in stories featuring the consequences of the tsunami for the local population could be seen, for example, in South India. On TV4, suffering took on a human face in stories from Sweden with people whose family members were missing or home-coming tourists telling of their dreadful experiences. The sufferers shown on TV4 were, with a few exceptions, Swedes, and the reporting journalists invited viewers to identify with them, to re-live their experiences as if they had also been there, thus creating a sense of 'this could have been me' (Hellman op. cit.).

Journalists as Crisis Managers

The role of the media as 'crisis managers' in the tsunami catastrophe raises questions about how a transnational and a national channel could appear as actors in the news coverage and what role they assign themselves in relation to the news. Quite cynically a commercial channel might perceive of such a situation as an opportunity to market itself as 'do-gooder' and to promote the weight of the channel in 'making a difference in the world'. But there is also the journalistic ethic of siding with the victim, with those exposed, and of making the voices of the powerless heard in the world. This raises questions about journalistic values and could indicate that crisis journalism is 'committed' rather than 'impartial'.

Based on our analysis, we can conclude that there was a marked difference between CNN and TV4 in their journalistic values on this point. Although both channels manifested themselves as crisis managers in various capacities, by advising their audiences where to donate money as well as by posting photos and personal information on their web pages, the question of responsibility for crisis management and the scrutiny of state actors dominated the TV4 coverage, whereas this aspect received little attention on CNN. Clearly, this difference should be seen in light of the fact that TV4 broadcast for an audience more heavily affected by the disaster than CNN did. Yet, as several studies has shown, there is reason to believe that in comparison with other national media, the Swedish media were unusually focused on their own nationals and on finding guilty parties (Robertson 2007; Odén, Ghersetti & Wallin 2005). CNN, for its part, seems to be at the other end of the continuum, lacking any critical perspective on governments' relief efforts. While our analysis only covers the first week, the difference between CNN and TV4 is striking (Hellman, *op. cit.*)

The CNN coverage did not evince critical appraisal of national governments' responsibility for rapid response and coordination of relief efforts, neither was there much information on their efficiency. What was highlighted instead was the surprise and unprecedented force with which the tsunami had struck the coasts of South-East Asia and the scramble for relief efforts. During the first day of coverage, the correspondents on site reported on immediate state responses to the disaster almost to the point of praising the leadership in the region for their efforts. The Prime Minister of Thailand was said to have brought a much needed 'image of control' to the region when he arrived in Phuket on the evening of December 26. His presence and reassurances on site were talked about as "a much needed boost towards getting some sense of stability and urgency to the efforts that are ongoing here" (Raman, CNN Report, Dec. 26, 2004). The Sri Lankan Prime Minister was reported to be on her way home from London, and it was repeatedly mentioned that the Indian government was sending naval ships to Sri Lanka despite the fact that the southern provinces of India were equally hard hit (Hellman, *op. cit.*; Bindra, *op. cit.*)

In this way, CNN spread a sense of understanding for the difficulties that people and state authorities alike in the region were facing. The numerous expert statements and explanations further added to a framing of the crisis as a natural disaster, evading the question of responsible state authorities and the efficiency of the rescue operations.

One might argue that it is only natural that CNN would not criticize governments' relief efforts during the first week given that the disaster was so broad and unpredictable. On the other hand, CNN itself sees scrutinizing authorities as one of its roles. Indeed CNN anchorperson Shihab Britansi said that it is one of CNN's main roles to,

/.../take our role as 'the fourth estate' seriously as well. We are in a position to ensure that those in power are held to account; that all promises and pledges are being kept; that relief and recovery operations are occurring in as efficient and transparent a way as possible; and that no-one is being left behind.

He was not so sure that CNN's long-term coverage had succeeded on this account:

I'm not convinced that there has been sufficient follow-up. Have the promises of governments and international agencies been kept? Are those most in need being helped? Are unscrupulous parties using the massive displacement of people to make land-grabs? Many of the reports I've seen suggest there is still much to be done in the affected areas; and that many of those left vulnerable by this disaster are at risk. But I get the sense that they have just become generic, developing country 'poor people' again now that the waters have receded. (Britansi 2007 in Riegert op. cit., p. 113).

One reason for this might be that, faced with the enormity of the disaster and the immense suffering, critical approaches to rescue operations or to government authorities were put on the back burner. Another reason might be that journalists in the field came to stay with suffering survivors of the tsunami for an extended period of time and focused their attention on people's emotional experiences of the tsunami and individual human tragedies. A third possible reason is that because CNN is a transnational channel whose host culture was relatively unaffected, it did not feel the need to hold certain national governments to account. A final reason that comes to mind is that, due to the increasing competition in the international media market, the questioning of government authorities (both in the region and in the West) might prove costly or cause future difficulties in accessing government sources. Clearly, we do not have enough evidence to do more than speculate. Suffice it to say that, for transnational broadcasters, the journalistic role of the 'fourth estate', originally nationally oriented, is not self-evidently transferable to all nations or authorities in the world equally.

In comparison, TV4, like many other Swedish media, reported the immense suffering – of Swedes primarily and locals secondarily – in relation to the inaction of the Swedish Government. This prompted journalists to take an unprecedented critical role in a time of crisis (Strömbäck & Nord 2006). A pattern emerged in the TV4 coverage whereby 'good' Swedes and supportive Swedish society (including the media and TV4 itself) were set against the 'bad' government and incompetent state officials. Reports about aid activities in which Swedes everywhere were reported to have taken part came to stand in stark contrast to coverage of the government and the state authorities. While the Swedish people (along with the news channel itself one might add) were

reported to understand the needs and suffering in Thailand, the government had to send Foreign Minister Freivalds to the region to come to the same conclusion. For example, in the TV4 story broadcast on December 28 about Foreign Minister Leila Freivalds' visit to the 'beaches of death', the entire item revolves around the Foreign Minister's realization that the catastrophe was an unbelievable disaster of a magnitude that had only previously been reported by travel agency representatives and tourists. TV 4 said, "And for every hour that passes the criticism of the extremely limited Swedish rescue and relief efforts grows stronger" (TV4 Nyheterna, Dec. 28, 2004). In defence of her government, the Foreign Minister said:

We did as much as we could. After all it was a holiday when we found out about it. It is a long way to come here. It is almost on the other side of the globe, but of course we wish that we could have done more right away.

TV4 Reporter Nieminen: But isn't it strange that there are more Swedish journalists here than aid workers?

Laila Freivalds, Foreign Minister: Well yes, perhaps you have another way of going about your job (ibid.).

It is worth noting that the journalist compares the role of the Swedish media in the affected region to that of the aid workers assigned by the Swedish government, making the point that the media are doing more for the victims than the government – a view the Foreign Minister is forced to agree with. The government countered that two special Medivac planes were on their way to Phuket, and the Foreign Minister had received promises from the Thai government that Swedish bodies would be transported to Sweden. The story cut to one of the hospital wards where the Foreign Minister is moved to tears as she tries to console a grieving mother, to which the reporter commented that no one was left unmoved by the tragedies. The story ended with the Foreign Minister saying in a broken voice: "Yes, it is a terrible tragedy to lose a baby. Yes, it is awful" (ibid.).

This story was typical in that it spun around a theme critical of government, but somewhat exceptional in that it showed the Foreign Minister as compassionate and sensitive. When it came to the government's responsibility for rescue and relief efforts, her position was unmoved: It is unfair to accuse the government of doing too little too late, because the tsunami occurred during the holidays and thousands of miles away from Sweden – the government was doing everything possible. Thus, despite Freivalds' 'human face', the dominant impression was that she was a thick-skinned politician, realizing only during her personal visit to the 'beaches of death' that more active government involvement was unavoidable.

In this way, the state actors were treated as unreliable sources. While they made clumsy statements, contradicted themselves when they were directly

quoted and were depicted as poorly organized, with tedious and inefficient working methods, private, business and media actors were presented as much more professional, efficient and reliable. Lottie Knutson, the Information Director of Fritidsresor, the travel agency with the largest number of guests in the affected region in Thailand, appeared in the news coverage to be the best informed and most knowledgeable person of all (see Falkheimer's chapter). Her statements were concretely formulated and gave the impression of sincerity. Ms Knutson was most often filmed in close-ups and spoke anxiously yet without hesitation about the serious and difficult situation in Phuket for the surviving Swedes. She was depicted as a doer, who acted to alleviate the situation as best she could. Lottie Knutson had heroine status in the coverage, and along with the surviving tourists and their families, she was the person to be most highly trusted for accurate information.

While CNN coverage demonstrated an understanding of the difficulties the affected governments had with crisis management, CNN crews found themselves at the centre of what CNN bureau chief Satinder Bindra called 'competitive compassion' between different state governments. This competition stretched from the size of various countries' aid contributions, to the rescue and relief efforts of different national and transnational organizations. In some cases, they became the objects of PR campaigns, particularly the power rivalry between the US and India, when CNN crews found themselves invited to conduct interviews and broadcast live from both countries' ships, helicopters and other places of operation (Bindra 2005: 186-187).

According to a number of seasoned CNN journalists, the tsunami story was like nothing they had ever seen before. Entire communities were wiped out, whole families were lost, older people, women and children died disproportionately. Unlike wars and conflicts, they said, this was an indiscriminate natural catastrophe. There was "no enemy" – this could happen to anyone at any time. Journalists of different media – national and transnational – met numerous people in the affected region who, desperate for food, shelter and information about their loved ones, approached journalists, asking for help. For the CNN journalists, who lived for weeks reporting twenty hours a day, it was hard to maintain their traditional impartial and 'objective' position. CNN's Suhasini Haidar reporting from India said "I think neutrality does get blurred in these situations because their pain quickly becomes your pain and there's no question whose side you are on" (ibid. p. 284). That the journalists' primary assistance consisted of making these people's desperation known via broadcasting provided little consolation. While CNN correspondents at the time despaired at not being able to help in more concrete ways, many of them later saw their channel's coverage as playing a pivotal role in the large donations made to the tsunami victims (Riegert op. cit.).

Indeed, during what journalists have dated to the second week of news coverage, the tsunami sparked a departure from the *modus operandi* of CNN, to a 'new style' of journalism, a more emotional and committed kind of jour-

nalism. According to Tony Maddox in senior management, “/.../there is nothing wrong with showing the human side, and responding. People clearly get deeply moved. If our reporters show how they are moved and do it properly, that can be quite moving for the audience” (Bindra 2005: 284).

In contrast to the stories from a dozen or so CNN journalists, as reported by Bindra, who discuss the inadequacy of factuality and impartiality in the situation in which CNN journalists found themselves, there is no similar discussion by Swedish journalists about their departure from objectivity. With so many Swedes affected, and with over 1500 citizens unaccounted for, the national channel became a space for collective grieving, and the Swedish media took on a therapeutic role in helping surviving tourists by providing a forum for them to look for loved ones and share their experiences with fellow survivors and loved ones at home (Odén, Ghersetti & Wallin 2005). One news theme was, for example, what kind of New Year's celebration ceremonies were proper and suitable considering the tsunami tragedy.

The therapeutic role of the CNN journalists differed markedly from that of the Swedish journalists. For the transnational channel, it was often through the breaking news format, the live repetitive updates and reports, that the anchor established a kind of ritual that serves not merely to pass on information, but to reassure us that ‘our’ world has not come to an end, that as long as we keep watching we know that the worst has not happened (not to ‘us’ anyway, in ‘our’ neck of the woods). This echoes Riegert and Olsson's analysis of live coverage as a focal point for community and reassurance in a time of crisis. According to them:

/.../media rituals can be said to function as a way for media organisations, television in this case, to establish authority by playing a key part in society's healing process/.../ being in the media means being at the centre of the ‘reality’ of a crisis event. Being outside the media, finding out about it days after the event, is to have missed something ‘important’ or so says the ritual act of watching. (Riegert & Olsson 2007: 147).

This notion of a continuous presence on the scene in combination with reminders that ‘we’ – the community of anonymous CNN spectators – are ‘there’ in the affected region along with the CNN staff and that for every time we are brought there ‘we’ are also brought back to safety was confirmed by our analysis. (See above section on distant suffering.) The continuing repetition of images from the same geographic sites turned into a symbolic set of images for viewers watching for an extended period of time. South India was represented by a calm harbour, a close up of a door with water pouring out underneath, a huge crack in the dry ground, a couple of flooded houses filmed from above and wild waves thundering noisily ashore. The waves at the end of the film loop contrasted sharply with the other pictures, which depicted an almost frightening calm and silence. Thailand was depicted with scenes from

the beach, where Western men with bare upper bodies are carrying a stretcher towards a waiting chopper. One of the men is walking away from the camera, and his back is covered with deep scrape wounds. As we have noted previously, according to our focus group respondents, there is reason to question whether the live format and the audience address really cultivated a community in the way the function of media rituals suggests they do. Judging by our (admittedly limited) content analysis and focus group study we find little support for this, despite the clear ambitions and beliefs of the CNN journalists. Clearly, however, further research in this area is called for.

To summarize the roles the two news channels took upon themselves during the tsunami disaster: CNN used its live and continuous (ritualized) presence to reassure audiences that they would be in contact with all the latest in the disaster area. CNN correspondents did their best to 'tell their story to the world' so as to bring in adequate funds for the relief efforts. TV4 performed a therapeutic role for both individuals and a traumatized society at large, but it also applied heavy pressure on the Swedish Government to take greater responsibility for its citizens. It did this by giving a voice to those affected by the disaster, often in emotional stories set in familiar domestic environments.

The CNN and TV4 News Culture and its Role in Disaster Coverage

This chapter has focused on the performance of a transnational news channel – CNN – as compared to a national news channel – TV4 – with stakes in the crisis as a result of a national audience directly affected by the tsunami catastrophe. The comparison concerns three aspects seen to be of key importance to global crisis reporting. Based on the results of our study on the tsunami coverage, this final section will discuss in what ways the news culture of a transnational channel is suited (or not suited) to global crisis reporting as compared to a national broadcaster.

In comparison to a national broadcaster such as TV4, CNN is faster, has more updated technology, and more resources including more reporters in the field. Additionally, they have a greater audience reach, at least theoretically, if not in reality. CNN has almost unlimited airtime without having to take extraordinary measures. One reason for CNN's speed is that there are fewer demands on the pictures, specifically there appears to be less concern about how these pictures are perceived and whether they are matched with the text. Especially at the beginning of a crisis, a transnational channel such as CNN will broadcast all it has and leave much of the interpretation to viewers. The question of accuracy, as we noted above, is not as important. We found that there were more gruesome pictures of dead bodies on CNN than on the national channel, which most likely had to do with the fact that TV4 was addressing an implied audience directly affected by the catastrophe. Or perhaps

this was due to media competition, where CNN has profiled itself as a channel that shows the world 'as it is'.

Whereas TV4 reported on ceremonies and rituals of national mourning during the tsunami, CNN tried to pull the audience together as a community through its news format, and its audience address, i.e. the familiarity of the news anchor and the interaction between the reporters and anchors (talking to viewers as though they belonged to the same community and presenting CNN as a provider of good services of information and images). Yet the respondents in our focus groups claimed that these aspects of CNN's coverage did not engage them, but instead passed them by. This appeared to be partly due to the language barrier, and to the lack of congruence between the pictures and text, but it could also be a result of non-American viewers feeling excluded from the informal CNN banter.

CNN failed to create a sense of proximity between sufferers and audiences, through its distinction between sufferers over 'there' and the audience 'here', safely tucked away in the CNN sphere. During the first week of coverage, the depictions of suffering were, with a few exceptions, distant and factual rather than emotive and personal. There were few occasions when the narrative indicated identification, implicitly suggesting that 'this could have been you'. Instead the suffering belonged to 'others', whom we felt for but could not identify with. The sufferers were anonymous. This, according to CNN journalists themselves, appears to have changed after the first week of coverage, when a shift in reporting policy appears to have taken place.

The question of whether this more personal and emotional style of coverage has continued in other crises is left for another research project. In the tsunami catastrophe, it is clear that the journalists saw themselves as 'a force for good', taking on the role of crisis managers at least in terms of offering information on their website to victims and their families. CNN crisis reporting was characterized by a consensual tone, with an emphasis on what relief efforts were underway and how to contribute to the relief and rescue efforts. Few of these journalists took on the role of scrutinizing those in power.

This was, as we demonstrated, a major issue in the TV4 coverage of the tsunami. It is well known from other cases that the role of the media during a crisis is strengthened when state authorities or other key crisis managers fail. In line with Odén, Ghersetti and Wallin's (2005) study, we found that TV4 devoted a large part of their coverage to criticism of the Swedish Government, the Foreign Office, and other state agencies and officials in reference to the rescue and relief efforts. Thus, while the government and other state actors shunned their responsibility and aggravated the situation, TV4 came to promote itself as an important actor, together with private groups (or businesses) and individuals as main actors, in assisting survivors and victims' families. CNN instead focused on the need for collective efforts and on an understanding of the difficult circumstances that state officials in the affected region had to struggle with as a result of the suddenness and great scope of the disaster.

With the increasing global mobility of people and developments in communications technology, changing media consumption habits and the emergence of transnational broadcasting processes, we are likely to see more globally mediated crises in the future. This, in turn, speaks in favour of transnational news channels. However, as we have shown here, in the case of the tsunami catastrophe – a global crisis indeed – the advantages of technology and organization were not matched by a superior capacity to fill the therapeutic role played by many national television channels. Furthermore, according to our study, there appears to be a discrepancy between the way in which the transnational channel CNN sees itself ‘as a force for good in the world’, contributing to engagement in global issues, and how Swedish viewers perceive CNN’s coverage in an actual crisis – at least at the very beginning of the crisis. Clearly, more research is needed in these areas, not only more comparisons between transnational and national news channels to investigate systematically how these differ, but also in relation to other crises, to see whether the discrepancy found here between CNN’s self-perception and that of its viewers is true for other cases and other channels.

Notes

1. Here it should be noted that while we say CNN, we are actually referring to CNN International, i.e. the news organization’s international branch and the news seen outside the U.S.; CNN also has a domestic news desk. This project, sponsored by the Swedish Emergency Management Agency, undertaken by Riegert and Hellman, explores the connections between national and transnational mediated spaces based on news coverage in a national and transnational news channel, focus group interviews and interviews with CNN journalists. See Riegert et al. Forthcoming. *Transnational and National Media in a Global Crisis: the Indian Ocean Tsunami*. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press.
2. These are described as “new laptop computers that were a one-stop shop to edit pictures, transmit stories via satellite phones and also do *live* hits. The new technology was lightweight, easy to use and, compared to the earlier transmission method of using satellites, was also much cheaper, giving us greater lasting power on a long-running story.” Bindra 2005: 281-2.
3. Such negotiations took place during September 11, for example. See Olsson, Forthcoming.
4. It is arguably the case that if the modus operandi is to go ‘live’ to the scene whenever there is a breaking story, then more and more events will be defined as ‘crises’ by these kinds of transnational news channels, in order to get and retain viewers.
5. The period covered in the content analysis was 26-31 December 2004. For CNNI, the period consists of the first 12 hours after the tsunami struck, after which the recorded material was taken from news stories produced by CNNI correspondents broadcast on CNN *Newsnight*, complemented by transcripts by these correspondents until 30 December. For TV4, the material consisted of the evening bulletins of *Nyheterna*, 7 pm and 10 pm until 31 December.
6. The focus groups consisted of 32 people in total divided into 8 different groups – people who were both foreigners and Swedes living in Sweden, men and women, young and old, people living in the city and in a small provincial town, and people in Sweden and abroad at the time of the tsunami. Each individual was asked to fill out a questionnaire about their media consumption during the tsunami as they recalled it and what they remembered from that coverage. After this followed an hour-long group discussion centred around four different pieces of news, two from CNN and two from TV4. The participants were asked to

compare the news pieces especially in terms audience address, what actors were important, who is responsible for helping the victims and their emotional engagement. The focus group discussions were conducted in 2006.

7. One of the conclusions of a Swedish study was that Sri Lanka and India, even Indonesia, were vastly underreported because of the excessive focus on Swedes and Thailand, not to mention the lack of coverage of other European countries that suffered losses. The estimated dead thus far for Indonesia was over 167,000, Sri Lanka over 36,000, India over 18,000, aside from the other 7 countries affected in the region. These were vastly smaller for the European countries, but many countries lost citizens, aside from the over 500 dead in Sweden and Germany, Finland, Switzerland and the UK lost over 100 citizens, France, Norway and Austria had close to 100 dead. See Odén, Ghersetti & Wallin (2005) and "Countries affected by the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake" [www.wikipedia.org. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Countries_affected_by_the_2004_Indian_Ocean_earthquake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Countries_affected_by_the_2004_Indian_Ocean_earthquake).

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Popular Magazine and Responsive News Journalism

Is there Space for Both?

*When the News Started to Weep
When the Discussion Went to the Web*

Ullamaija Kivikuru

Most expert comments about popular magazines include an understatement: The statements refer to scandals, gossip, irrelevant features presented by a slow and outdated medium, in the middle of a process of dying out in the hard struggle for receivers' attention. The reality tells a different story. In fact, popular magazines do quite well in Finland: At least they are popular; they sell well; they collect advertising; and they create more and more specialized issues at Christmas, Easter, about weddings, cars, computers, food, travel and sofas. Thus, they give practical advice on a wide range of relevant occasions in human life. And quite often they also tell a "different" story about major processes or events. They focus on the individual level and describe how people feel about being unemployed, or the targets, victims or heroes of social processes.

The contradiction has existed for a long time. Marshall McLuhan (e.g. 1964: 201-202) claimed that a popular magazine is an entertainment service created by the advertising industry, which is seeking consumers. But McLuhan also had opponents. Leo Lowenthal (e.g. 1984: 227) stated that a popular magazine is one of the main pillars of human life. An ordinary reader is not satisfied with a mere collection of facts, but wants to know how these facts are inter-related. Magazine stories about other people's lives link the facts together and promote an understanding of the issue as a whole.

Thus far, there has been ample space for magazine reporting in the mediascape, and the magazine has filled that open space with partly irrelevant but partly highly relevant material, making the mediascape more polysemic. The space for magazine perspectives has even grown, because news transmission has become increasingly standardized. The vivid discussion on hybrid media

genres and their use, plus such phenomena as infotainment, emotainment and edutainment (e.g., Hill 2007: 30-83; van Zoonen 2005: 143-151; Aslama 2008: 276-285), has not as such touched upon “old-fashioned” news journalism, although such concepts as infotainment and tabloidization (e.g., Sparks & Tulloch 2000) in particular definitely come close to news journalism, suggesting that news reporting has become thinner and more superficial. Within this frame, the news genre has adopted a wider range of expressional tools. Narration is today an integral part of news reporting, and affections are regularly used in “ordinary” news reporting (see Pantti in this volume). Visual expression is also given far more attention now than in the recent past, although the 21st century interest of cultural studies researchers in emotions, affections and experiences (e.g., Berlant 1997; Skeggs 2004; Koivunen 2008) has not yet really reached media research.

The above-described development is usually linked with the commercialization of journalism, which promotes the search for mass audiences. However, there is also another lively discourse that crosses the borders between industrialized and developing regions. Its goal is to decrease the industrialization of news production, advocating for more locality and for people-based values. Traditionally, news journalism has been the media mode most strongly tied to rules concerning both sources and style. However, the recent “crusade for responsive journalism” (Hardt 2000: 210), bringing about such concepts as public journalism, civic journalism, popular media, as well as alternative media, has markedly changed, not only the basic ideology of journalism but also the professional practice. In this discourse, the link to the public is highly valued. In fact, Hanno Hardt takes some distance to responsiveness, though it is seen as one of the dominant features of contemporary journalism. The definition of responsiveness is left loose, and perhaps on good grounds. One easily finds a whole array of recent journalistic approaches, all aiming at strengthening the contact with receivers and making it reciprocal.

Both of these crusades have had their effect on magazine journalism. So far, it could be claimed that, although the popular magazine is often technically strongly formatted, it carries qualities that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) have called “rhizomatic”, which stands for a heterogeneous, non-hierarchical and ever-changing information-distribution network (see also Bailey et al. 2008: 27-33). The popular magazine’s often “anarchistic” value judgments, combining reflection, affection, practical advice and indirect marketing, could be claimed to carry such elements.

Today, the tradition of news reporting is changing, on the one hand, and, on the other, the web offers numerous fresh modes for responsive journalism as such, even debates between the media and their receivers. Is there any longer space for magazine journalism? Are the threats that have been spelled out since the 1960s finally coming true? In the following, I try to elaborate on the shrinking role of popular magazines on more general terms, using as an

example the Finnish magazine reporting on the tsunami catastrophe. To do this, I must also review Finnish news journalism on the tsunami.

A History of Diversity Production

Finland has often been described as the heaven of popular magazines. There are almost 5,000 magazine titles published in the country, and if only general magazines, customer journals and opinion journals are included, there are still nearly 400 titles. An average Finn is estimated to spend some 25 minutes a day reading magazines. However, magazine reading tends to be accumulating – those who read one magazine tend to read several, but it still can be said that magazine reading is a weekly activity for the majority of Finns (Statistics Finland, www.stat.fi; Kansallinen Mediatutkimus 2006). However, it is worth remembering that, although the general image of the popular magazine is linked, on the one hand, to gossip and celebrities and, on the other hand, to specialized journals, Finland also has several general information magazines. Furthermore, the women's magazines in the country are also quite factual, with extensive relevant stories on social welfare, politics and the arts. A celebrity on the cover page might sell a magazine at the newsstand, but heavier material is also given considerable space inside the magazine.

During the Finnish campaign for EU membership (September–November 1994), the content of as many as 342 magazine titles – general magazines, professional magazines, customer magazines and membership magazines – was studied (Kivikuru 1996: 167–215). Although the substance dimensions of these magazines joined that of the mainstream media towards the end of the studied period¹, it still had a specific role in two different dimensions. First, the EU material, provided by popular magazines, offered specified information about professional as well as hobby-based needs. Second, the magazine sphere offered reactions and experiences, mainly those of professionals or so-called ordinary people. The daily press, radio and television were far more expert-oriented and alert in relation to national politics, while the magazines focused on either specified or regional items, making a deliberate effort to focus on so-called ordinary people and their interests. The magazine press, especially the customer and membership magazines, thus operated as a rhizomatic medium and had a specific role in the publicity around EU membership. It had linkages across borders, bringing the EU closer to people's lifeworlds and routines.

Another process ran parallel to the EU campaign, namely the dramatic economic crisis that hit Finland in the early 1990s. Again, the magazine press told “another story”, focusing on individual catastrophes and regional items, departing clearly from the strong expert talk that filled the mainstream media after the first shock. This time, the main role was played by the popular weekly press, namely women's magazines and general magazines. They offered identification poles for so-called ordinary readers, while the mainstream media,

especially at the last stage, were dominated by experts. Personal interviews and reportages about people losing their jobs came to the daily media first after the worst phase of the mass unemployment was over. Popular magazines started much earlier with this kind of material (Kivikuru 2003).

In its avoidance of expert talk, the magazine press resisted the “economization of journalism” that took place in mainstream journalism in the mid-1990s (Kantola 2006). In this mode of reporting, the rationale was found – and still is, the trend continues in mainstream journalism – in the realm of economy, profitability and loosely defined globalization. Welfare values were put aside. In magazine journalism such issues lived longer than in mainstream news reporting.

The News Machine Turns Responsive

The December 2004 tsunami and its consequences totally dominated the Finnish media for roughly a five-week period. As many as 15,000 news dispatches and reports were filed in the 55 daily papers, four television channels, five national radio channels and the nearly 60 local radio stations, during the period December 26 - January 5, and some 5,000 more during the rest of January 2005². The reporting declined rapidly in mid-January 2005. Another far lower peak was detected in the reporting in March 2005, when an Accident Investigation Commission team visited Thailand. Still two peaks were to come: one in June 2005, when the Investigation Commission’s report was filed and in December 2005, when the anniversary of the catastrophe approached and the Swedish Commission filed its report. All three “aftermath” peaks were small compared with the first one.

Nine out of ten stories covering the tsunami took a news form. During the first two days, the media reports mainly described the phenomenon itself and the destruction it had caused. The main sources were international news agencies. On December 27, a commercial television evening news bulletin turned the agenda. The company had sent its reporter to Thailand, and he filed an emotional report on Finns in hospitals, in evacuation centres and airports, telling their stories and searching for their family members. After that, the Finnish media changed the focus almost entirely to what had happened to Finns in the region. Afterwards, both researchers and journalists questioned whether this kind of national self-centredness was justified (Rahkonen & Ahva 2005). Toward the end of the first week, criticism against Finnish authorities and of the slowness of the evacuation process emerged on the media agenda, but eyewitness stories still dominated the reporting. Not more than 7-10 percent of the stories carried consistently critical aspects.

The main themes in the tsunami reporting were three, interestingly contradictory as such. The economic aspect received surprisingly much attention, describing partly the financial losses, and partly the huge assistance operations at home and globally:

- what happened to Finns in the target area and at home (an overriding number one)
- what in general happened in the catastrophe and what kind of consequences it had
- what kind of economic dimensions the tsunami had (disaster costs, assistance)

The reports on tsunami anniversaries also included these three themes – how the people at home and in South East Asia had recovered and how much the process had cost. However, the main trait of reporting focused on detailed, mostly sad stories of ordinary Finns.

Compared with routine reporting, “ordinary citizens” – Finnish tourists in Asia and their concerned relatives and friends at home – were given far more space in the media than usual, now comprising 25-35 percent of the volume, when under normal circumstances, the proportion of man-on-the-street reporting hardly reaches 15 percent. News agency material comprised less than one-third of the items published. Especially in the middle of the first week after the tsunami, both Finnish television and print journalism approached the mode of melodrama, a discursive practice that makes truth and justice intelligible by demarcating a clear boundary between right and wrong (Anker 2005). It fit surprisingly well with the news format. The ordinary citizens going through the ordeal, and the medical and airline staff working for their best were described as heroes, while the organized society was mostly given the role of the guilty party, thus receiving diffuse criticism. Sometimes nature took the role of the guilty party. It had betrayed innocent Finns seeking the sun.

The reception was both expected and unexpected. The interest in the theme grew considerably, as it usually does in similar cases. People started with the radio, then shifted over to television – and then dived into the Net for a while. That was the new element. People wanted to discuss the event, and when they did not find the conventional media material particularly informative, they found their way to the Net discussion sites (see Hakala & Seeck in this book). What is interesting is that, although the visitors to the most popular sites reached hundreds of thousands daily, only some hundreds actually participated in the discussions with their own contributions. It seemed to be enough that the Net offered the possibility to discuss the matter. This was more than what the conventional media had to offer. However, the public itself behaved much in the same way as with the conventional media. They visited the websites only to check that there were others in the same indefinite, uninformed position as they themselves were.

In sum, the tsunami did not become an evergreen topic on the Finnish media agenda. The huge news machine provided an interesting contradiction: the tsunami remained as a news item, but in tsunami news journalism, far more tears, affection and despair were used than was typically the case.

In the early 1990s, the news media reported on EU membership and the economic crisis in a very reserved manner: staying on a nation level, being expert-oriented and factual and not leaving too much space for the man/woman on the street to express his or her views. The ordinary person had to find another channel to satisfy his or her need for specific information. Popular and membership magazines were available, and they provided such a channel.

Tsunami Reporting Opened a Gate

The “blood, sweat and tears” approach taken by the news media in the tsunami reporting was obviously not unique. The news media used a similar profile in the reporting on a school shooting in November 2007.³ Research on the topic has hardly started, but the public discussion and some more official reactions indicate that the news media again did the same thing – they adopted the role of not only a reserved observer, but also a participant and co-weeper, attempting to establish the audience’s sense of care and responsibility. Another and highly interesting issue was the fact that, also in the case of the school shooting, the role of the Web was important. This time, the public did not actually dive into the Web to discuss the issue to the same extent as in the case of the tsunami, but used it mainly as a news medium, parallel to the conventional media. Thus, the mediascape in fact created a dual function: the conventional media reported in detail about the victims and the shooter, while the more banal details were placed in the online versions of the same media. The public was even invited to send in their own video-clips and pictures from the shooting arena.

What is interesting in the case of the school shooting was the fact that no experts other than psychologists and web experts⁴ were involved in the first wave of reporting. A few weeks later, the shooting itself was dead as a news event, but comments, columns and in some cases also editorials started a discussion on school budgets, social security, and other issues linked to the welfare state. In short, only when the event had died as a piece of news did a rational discussion start. The same pattern had already been seen in the tsunami case, although some “emergency care” editorials had been published when the case still was a hot news item. The more in-depth discussion started later.

In relation to the tsunami, the phases were not as distinct as in the school shooting case, however the elements were similar. On the one hand, the news coverage was huge, but also included elements not usually found in news reporting. Nevertheless, the potential for discussion was not there, and at least those Finns who had been directly affected by the catastrophe dived into the discussion websites for a while. Further, it could also be claimed that the tone of news reporting was determined by television. First, the commercial company offered strongly emotional news reporting. After a while – although not to the same extent – the public service company also softened its style. Newspapers joined the bandwagon.

In the case of the school shooting, the media occupied the web as well, but in another manner. The online news of the news media, in 2007, was already part of the media routines, particularly of younger Finns⁵; this was perhaps not the case to the same extent in 2005. The public was thus offered a space for discussion, but above all, a source of information: fast and detailed. This time, the online news of the conventional media supplied their receivers with “another” type of material: more detailed and faster, above all with amateur photos and video clips, far more dramatic than professional journalism, many pieces also bypassing the ethical rules of proper journalistic conduct. It appears as if the primary need for discussion would have been fulfilled already, but the conventional media still competed with each other over details – details provided by amateurs.

All this can no doubt partly be explained by an advanced phase of new technology applied by the conventional media, but the most interesting part is that amateurs (that is, members of the public) were used as partners in the competition for receivers. The public was already well aware of the potential inherent in web discussions. The fascination with large-scale discussion was over. Instead, the media tried to win receivers by offering fast reporting and an abundance of details. This two-edged agenda, offered by conventional media and their web versions, supplied “stories” in a true Lowenthalian style.

Major crises are always unique cases in journalism. However, the use of narratives and emotional reporting has become increasingly common, in “normal” news journalism as well, especially when covering crises. As readers encounter individual and collective narratives immediately following the crisis, they are subjected to the personal accounts of those who were there. Later, readers can communicate with others who are reading the same narratives and develop a sense of connectedness. Readers may be anxious to read about how individuals and collective groups dealt with such tragedy and displayed courage. Subsequently, readers want to know who is to blame. This need is met, very often, in the following “batch” of narratives. Once the immediacy of the crisis has passed, it is likely that readers will want to know where we go from here. This need is met by the imagined futures narratives (Caldiero 1997).

Thus it can be said that news reporting, especially when covering dramatic events, has adopted reporting techniques that have largely traditionally belonged to the sphere of features. The tsunami reporting was not identical to the examples Hardt refers to, but the same elements were there. The result was not very successful in the sense that ordinary Finns were not happy with the news reporting – people deserted the media and also assessed them as belonging to the “official” sphere of society (Kivikuru 2006), which they felt had abandoned them. Interestingly, the media and public institutions, such as the ministries and the police, were put in the same basket.

In a sense, the news journalism on the tsunami activated its receivers, but with elements that were lacking in the content of the reporting. In this case, the quest for responsiveness required horizontal, not vertical networks. They

were not found in the sphere of conventional journalism at all. One could argue that such citizen-led journalistic forms as “public journalism” (Rosen 2000) could perhaps have been effective just after the tsunami. They aim at problem-solving. However, they still include a strong informational perspective. What was needed here was a community in sorrow. The news media provided the public with detailed and personified information, that is, individual sorrow. In fact, the community aspect only emerged in the coverage of the huge assistance operations. The needs of the senders and the receivers did not really match.

The excursion to the Web did not last long. The audience returned to the conventional media. However, it can be claimed that the emotional news reporting about the tsunami may have “killed” the tsunami as a political event in Finland. The tsunami did not cause any other dramatic social changes in Finland than a profound rearrangement of public information delivery in the ministries and other public institutions. The tsunami was a huge news item for a short while, but it disappeared soon from the public arena, making occasional melancholic or optimistic re-entries to the media arena around anniversaries, at Christmas time. It could be claimed that the conventional media unintentionally personified the sorrow and the resistance, although there was a potential for community-building found in the media texts as well. However, the overdose of emotions perhaps muffled the encouragement of social action. The few reports of heavy criticism and the huge coverage of individual sorrow were not connected.

Concerning the far more limited case of magazine modes, the claim here is whether, by adding a strong dose of emotions to news reporting, this in fact limited the operational space earlier reserved for magazine journalism. Magazines automatically lag behind the news machinery, due to their production procedures. They thus “inherit” a theme that has already been defined by the news media and that is to a certain extent, at least partly, already worn out. So far, the strength of magazine reporting has been that it has added emotions, personalities and different perspectives to the theme. But was that option available in the case of the tsunami?

Three Waves of Magazine Reporting

The tsunami did not raise the sales of magazines in Finland, although this media mode also offered an extensive supply of stories on the catastrophe, even some special issues. In this enormous flow of journalism, the magazines were hopelessly outdated in the game of breaking news. It also happened when the newsrooms on the magazine side were at their weakest: it was the Christmas break, and most magazines had sent out double issues for the holidays.

Besides the coverage of the news vehicle⁶, the Accident Investigation Commission followed 32 popular and membership magazines, a total of 53 issues

covering a six-week period in December 2004 – February 2005. The same magazines were followed over a one-week period in March 2005, when a team from the Investigation Commission visited Thailand. Then there was an additional follow-up in December 2005, a year after the catastrophe. In the news media, there was also reporting in June 2005 when the Investigation Commission's report was published. However, the magazines were not interested in the report. They only published one article.

All large-circulation popular magazines belonged to the sample. It is reasonable to assume that the sample gives an overall picture of the magazine sphere during the tsunami process. The magazine sphere followed the focus established by the news media, and their coverage of the tsunami dropped faster than in newspapers or radio and television.

In fact, the coverage was quantitatively extensive, although because of the complicated layout style of most magazines, it was difficult to give out exact figures. In December 2004-February 2005, some 270 stories were filed on the tsunami, and the sample magazines referred to the tsunami 30 more times, in stories focusing on something else. In addition, a celebrity and rumour magazine (*7 Päivää*, "7 days") had as many as eight spreads filled with pictures, with 1-5 line captions, from Thailand's tsunami. In March 2005, the number of stories dropped to 40, with a mention of the theme in 15 additional stories and 22 letters to the editor. In December 2005, only nine – but extensive – stories on the tsunami were published, and it was mentioned nine times, mainly in editorials dealing with a totally different theme.

During the first wave of articles, the tsunami made it as a cover story in almost half of the cases. The articles during the second (March 2005) and the third (December 2005) waves were few, but they were extensive, often based on a visit to the catastrophe region. However, the theme appeared only four times as a cover story. The number of letters to the editor was limited, but they played a role, especially in March 2005.

The first wave of reporting on the tsunami started in magazines later than in the news media, and it ended earlier. The Aceh peace process overrode it. The peace process received considerable attention in Finland due to the role the former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari was playing in it. In addition, it was better suited to the magazine style: magazines – especially the most serious ones – were able to provide reflection and new perspectives on the peace process. Finally, Aceh also brought Indonesia into the Finnish magazine sphere. Until then, magazine reporting had not paid much attention to the country worst hit by the tsunami.

Themes Filtered through the Magazines' Own Profiles

The magazine reporting focused almost entirely on Finns and Finnish emotions, reactions and experiences related to the tsunami. Towards the end of the first wave, some attention was also given to fundraising efforts at home

and abroad. Descriptions of the phenomenon itself were rare, but scientific journals published some stories about how tsunamis are generated.

The first wave clearly indicated a need to participate in the coverage of such a major issue. This was obviously a matter of the overall credibility of popular magazines. At least mentioning the tsunami belonged to the “musts” in Finnish journalism in January 2005, even in highly specialized journals, from baby-care magazines to computer manuals. It became equally clear that magazines are in a difficult situation in a journalistic culture that respects the rapidity of transmission. As said by the editor of a travel magazine (*Matkaopas*, “Travel Guide”):

We finished preparing this magazine already before Christmas, and we were so happy with the upcoming Christmas season. The only page we could pull out from the printers was the editorial page. Up to this point, the new issue had been a delight for me. Now I don’t know what to think. (Pirkko Puoskari: “Maailma vuonna yksi”, *Matkaopas* 1/2005)⁷

In some cases, the connection with the rest of the content was quite artificial, but these clumsy references were no doubt genuine expressions of consolation and sympathy, and the “ordinary person’s perspective” was emphasized, offering identification poles for those in need of them. Here, it can be claimed that a genuine feature perspective was found. A popular women’s magazine (*Me Naiset*, “We women”) discussed weight watching in its editorial, with the following epilogue:

In 2004, the Christmas was short. Many of us were sitting and relaxing after the hustle and bustle, grabbing for the last Christmas chocolates while pushing the buttons on the TV remote control, when everything changed. After that, the only possible channel was the one sending news from the Far East.

First you thought luckily none of my relatives or friends are there. Then you began to think that there were many whose friends and relatives were there – the catastrophe came closer to us all. While writing this, the flow of news is continuous, and we have not yet received a single piece of good news. (“Oma pieni osa”, *Me Naiset* 2/2005)⁸

The perspective was markedly that of the woman on the street, an ordinary person, and the tsunami part of the editorial concludes with an appeal to readers that all Finns should show their solidarity with the victims of the catastrophe. Thanks to the magazine’s fast printing schedule, *Me Naiset* was the first one to react on the magazine front. The themes were genuinely “magazine style”, and similar themes were repeated in several women’s magazines, though 1-2 weeks later. A handicraft magazine advised readers to “help by knitting”, a journal for the elderly stressed that music gives comfort, and a magazine specialized in health issues stated that one is in a better position to

help if one's own body is in good shape; hence one should go on outings, rest and eat lightly. All these articles carried very practical-level advice on how to cope with the problem. Thus the magazines filtered the tsunami message through their own profiles and genres, but wanted to participate in the national experience of sorrow.

Experience, Comfort and Therapy

The first wave of tsunami reporting in weeklies covered the whole magazine sphere, from membership journals to popular magazines. These stories included somewhat more individual experiences, and they were more elaborated than the reporting in dailies, on the radio and on television, but the differences were small. The tsunami received most attention in general interest magazines, which usually follow up the news themes of the dailies. The ingredients were roughly the same as in the dailies, but the textual and visual composition was more polished – but also delayed. The tsunami no doubt offered popular magazines in Finland a possibility to indicate their topicality, their capacity to approach the news sphere, but the very same item also showed that magazine journalism is slow. The definition of the phenomenon was formulated by other media; the magazine sphere could only repeat the same themes, adding some details. A genre of its own was represented by gossip magazines, which sent their reporters to Thailand and filled a full issue with pictures of distracted and shocked Finnish tourists waiting for a lift home.

During the first and most extensive wave of reporting on the tsunami in the Finnish popular magazines, the distinct magazine themes were individual experience, therapy and comfort, and the informants and interviewees used as sources were well-known psychologists, priests and authors, more national celebrities than experts in a professional sense. The majority of the articles focused on individual experiences. But interestingly, expert talk may have been somewhat more prevalent in magazines than in the news media, which wallowed in personal experience in January 2005. Expressions of criticism were rare in the magazine coverage. Altogether, six out of some 300 journalistic texts were completely critical of the rescue operations and of the slowness of public information, a dozen others included some critical aspects. Also, some letters to the editor criticized the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or the government as a whole, for the slowness of the rescue operations. On the news media side, the proportion of critical texts was as low as 7–10 percent (Mörä 2005). Magazine reporting was even less critically oriented.

The most “serious” general interest magazines behaved in a classic magazine style, but they were in the minority⁹. One (*Seura*, “Companion”) filled an entire issue with more than 100 features on how Finns confronted the news about the tsunami. This effort entailed exactly the same qualities as those found in the news media, but in a more consistent way, adding such elements as humour and irony, which the news mode rarely dares to use. Another (*Apu*,

“Help”) followed a Finnish medical doctor’s work in the catastrophe area with extensive reflections on emergence help and assistance, and the third (*Suomen Kuvalehti*, “Finnish Pictorial Journal”) let readers themselves assess the magazine’s tsunami articles. One monthly’s (*HS Kuukausilehti*, “Helsingin Sanomat Monthly”) editor-in-chief happened to be vacationing in Thailand during the tsunami, and she published her diary containing her own emotions and reflections after the tsunami; the interesting aspect was the combination of journalistic professionalism and individual insecurity expressed in this personal account. One publishers’ membership journal (*Suomen Lehdistö*, “Finnish Press”) monitored and analysed the editorial coverage of the daily media, focusing mainly on the stands taken in relation to the state apparatus.

The focus in all magazine reporting was strongly domestic, although many stories covered tourist areas in Thailand and Sri Lanka – during the first phase, not a single magazine focused on the country hit worst by the tsunami, namely Indonesia – a country rarely visited by Finnish tourists. There was also relatively little comparison to the other Nordic countries. The common who-does-it-best competition with Sweden was not observed. There were fewer references to the Swedish situation in the magazines than in the news media. However, the “rise” of the Swedish king to a “father of the state”, during the first weeks after the tsunami, was reported in several magazines. This is not exceptional as such, because these magazines follow keenly the Swedish royal family.

The texts were predominantly prepared in the individual newsrooms. Interestingly, the popular magazines reporting on the tsunami selected as their interviewees or the targets of their stories the same celebrities – politicians, musicians, actors – and largely the same ordinary people as found in the news media. Magazines often tend to avoid source persons who had already been “worn out” by the news media. This time, the selection of the same targets and sources was obviously a kind of credibility test, confirming the messages already offered by the faster forms of reporting. The tsunami killed 178 Finns, and as many as 100,000 Finns, according to rough estimates, experienced the catastrophe directly in one form or another as relatives, friends or colleagues of those who died or were injured. Accordingly, the selection could have been different than in the news media, but the magazines played it safe, associating the national grief with the same icons, established or “instant”, as those found in the news mode.

Although the magazine stories were generally more elaborate, better polished and included pictures of better quality, the strong similarities in themes and targets intensified the fact that magazine reporting on the tsunami was redundant and “outdated” at the moment of publication. On the other hand, the magazines could not totally filter the material through their own profiles – a story on a catastrophe can be more detailed in a magazine than in a newspaper, but the basic elements must remain the same. This became most obvious in the case of the most specialized magazines – unlike in the case

of EU membership, an ‘alternative route’ to the tsunami was not possible for any other specialized magazine than perhaps travel or science magazines, and even these did not use such a route.

The dimensions of sorrow, therapy and hope were strong in the post-tsunami magazine journalism, perhaps stronger than in the news media, and the stories were predominantly linked to individual expertise or experience. One could assume that such a combination really does have rehabilitation effects on receivers (e.g., Pennebaker 1997). The texts did not distance themselves from the target, but walked together with him/her, perhaps more so than in news texts, which always include the coverage of a variety of events.

However, the target persons were not depicted as “agents” in magazine texts, nor were others on the scene shown to be acting in relation to their misfortune. As in news stories, the agency aspect (Chouliaraki 2006: 85) was missing in magazine reporting during the first wave in January-February 2005. Chouliaraki argues that the focus on agency in reports on accidents and catastrophes conveys the message that something can be done; distances can be overcome through a purely personal effort. The agency component potentially invites spectators to feel and act for the distant sufferers. In instances when sufferers are depicted as lacking in agency, their misfortunes may either not be shared or shared in only a limited way. However, one may claim that, in this particular respect, no media agency was needed either. The bond with the sufferers was confirmed by extra-media factors such as kinship or friendship, but the lack of agency might have had a partial effect on the fact that the tsunami reporting in Finland on the whole came to be so short-lived. One interpretation of the phenomenon is that the tsunami “dropped out” of the public agenda after the killed and injured were brought home – the focus was on the Finns who experienced the tsunami, not on the tsunami itself.

On the other hand, Annette Hill (2007) refers to a totally different aspect. According to her, the news modes do not need anything “extra”, because receivers recognize news as being all around them, available at fixed marker points throughout the day.

When they [viewers] reflect on themselves watching the news, they mainly refer to its constant presence in their lives, a presence which can be reassuring and also anxiety inducing. When a major news event occurs, such as the London bombings, many viewers described the obsessive manner in which they immersed themselves in news. News genre work highlights the deeply immersive modes of engagement for this genre, and also shows awareness of our need for news, even if we are critical of it (Hill 2007: 97).

What Hill in fact suggests is that the news mode is so obsessive that no agency as such is needed, especially regarding major news events.

Construction and Deconstruction of Heroes

The second wave of tsunami reporting in magazines in March 2005 did not add much to the substance diversity either, but it could be said that the magazine sphere now started to find its identity while dealing with the tsunami case. The focus was still predominantly on Finns and their actions, but some reporting was also devoted to the targets of fundraising efforts in the catastrophe area; in this wave, Indonesia also emerged on the arena, although the main focus was still on Thailand. Both the size of the damage and the size of the assistance operations received coverage. However, the profile of magazine features was slightly more distinct in this phase; the magazine articles included more facts and details than did the news reporting. The stories were relatively few, and only the general interest magazines paid attention to the theme now. Women's magazines and special magazines had dropped the item from their agenda.

In March, the victims, their relatives and friends no longer received much attention. The main focus was on Finns who had been active during the rescue process: Finnish policemen, priests and above all the Phuket-based Finnish divers who organized immediate local activity and turned their website into a discussion arena. A few local everyday heroes from Thailand and India were also included in the magazine supply. It can be claimed that the agency aspect emerged here, in a delayed manner, and without any direct connection to the suffering, which had partly faded away.

In the second wave, popular magazines published more opinion pieces and letters to the editor, most of them not showing any solidarity with tsunami victims, but in fact quite the opposite. The majority of their authors represented dissident voices, claiming that tsunami victims and their families at home had been groundlessly promoted to saints. Is it more valuable to die or get injured abroad than at home, after voluntarily travelling to the other side of the world, asked "Maijastina" in *Seura*. Several letters to the editor also criticized the military, the formal and Lutheran character of the reception ceremonies occurring when the bodies were brought home. The costs of the rescue operations were of interest to some writers. Others suspected that it is unnecessary to send money to a region that is totally demolished. It is interesting that these critical voices were, without exception, those of so-called ordinary people; professional journalists did not participate in this dissident discourse.

In fact, there were two distinct parallel discourses in the second wave of reporting: on the one hand, melancholic, occasionally naïve reports about heroes in Thailand, Sri Lanka and India, some also at home in Finland – on the other, politically incorrect reactions by non-journalists who had received an overdose of journalism through individual experiences, sorrow and heroism related to the tsunami. They entered into an exercise that could be called hero deconstruction.

Memorizing

The Accident Investigation Commission's report was discussed in the news media, not in magazines. But in December 2005, a year after the tsunami catastrophe, some magazines also started memorizing – this time both general magazines and women's magazines. The basic line of these stories, usually quite large reports with pictures, was "How has family XX recovered from the horrors of the tsunami". So the same names as in January-February 2005 re-emerged on the magazine arena, while in the news media, the memorizing was predominantly done within a more general, partly political framework, searching for causes and effects. The news media were especially interested in the successes and failures of the crisis assistance. Magazines – with a few exceptions – left this theme aside and focused on individual tragedies and people who had survived. A very popular format to present was a diary – the interviewees' experiences from Boxing Day 2004.

During the third wave of reporting, the news media and popular magazines diverged. The magazines added to their reporting considerable amounts of affection and melancholy, while news journalism now remained detached and sought political reasoning. Both had an early start for the anniversary: the memorizing phase began already at the beginning of December 2005; by the end of the month, the theme was no longer given too much attention.

Newzak?

In the publicity after the tsunami, Finland emerged as old-fashioned, hierarchical and more backward-looking than future oriented. Despite fine policies and delicately designed websites, public institutions adopted a top-down form of information distribution, and the media predominantly used a news format that could hardly be considered democratic and responsive. Thus, tsunami reporting hardly belongs to the country's journalistic triumphs, neither in the news media nor in the magazines. The bloated news mode included a great deal of affection and emotions, individualism and petty details, but it was still sender-biased. It was almost vulgar the way in which the information apparatus, on the one hand, dwelled on human suffering and sorrow and, on the other, focused on money, fund-raising and the cost of the catastrophe. The theme only marginally matured into reflection or serious criticism. It was a huge news drama, which quickly disappeared from the arena.

Magazines did not stress the financial aspects as much as the news media did, but this element was also included in their content. In general, the magazine discourse can hardly be called polysemic or diversified. The content convergence with the news sphere was strong, but the potential of the many-sidedness of the magazine scope was not realized.

One could claim that the Finnish magazine vehicle joined the *newzak* created around "big" news items, adding more and more details to the theme.

Through these details, a tragedy gradually develops into infotainment or entertainment (Franklin 1997: 251). In any case, “genuine” magazine journalism was not given enough space to create a profile of its own. Although magazine stories were better prepared and more therapeutic, they came late and they seemed to deliberately avoid political reasoning. The majority worked with one source only, and some even ended up distributing rumours. The dimension of power was non-existent in the magazine narratives, and they bypassed the Investigation Commission Report, which they, in principle, could have elaborated on parallel to the news media. But the Report did not bring up anything dramatically new, and thus obviously lost its newsworthiness in the eyes of magazine writers. In its obvious search for news credibility, the magazine mode adopted work practices from news reporting – and thus lost the proximity inherent in feature journalism.

Further, the magazine sphere did not change the geographic imbalance: The reporting focused on Thailand and Sri Lanka to the same extent as that in the news sphere. In the magazine reporting, as well as in the news reporting, the tsunami remained a Finnish catastrophe. The victims in far-away Indonesia were outside the magazine focus. In a way, the politically incorrect letters-to-the-editor writers emerged as bolder individuals than the professional journalists.

It would be exaggerating to claim that magazine journalism is turning into *newzak*, but there obviously is a danger that magazines, when confronting big, dramatic events in general, will mainly offer an echo of news journalism, emphasizing the same elements as the news media instead of offering a new perspective, whether it be relevant or irrelevant. In this way, magazine journalism may easily become a tool for reconfirming an already set agenda. This is a game in which the magazine is not going to win, because it is too slow and clumsy to engage in a news type of reporting.

In the case of tsunami reporting, the whole sphere of Finnish magazine journalism, despite its volume, was quite an insignificant factor. The main reason was no doubt the fact that the emotional dimensions had already been “too” well covered by news reporting. The drama was simplified into a story about “good” Finns and the “bad” – or at least poorly functioning – actions of public institutions. The basic set-up was of a little person fighting the system. The magazines were not brave enough or motivated enough to pick up on a true dissident stand, challenging not only public institutions, but also questioning citizens and their responsibilities: Why was it that all Thailand tourists did not have travel insurance; why did ordinary Finns fail to show solidarity with their countrymen, especially children, during the rescue?¹⁰ Magazines chose the conventional route and echoed the news media. Here one could claim that McLuhan’s reasoning on the commercial basis of magazine production receives support: Magazine journalism, cornered by commercial demands for maximizing the audience, did not dare to challenge the “safe” route offered by news reporting and its first definition of the phenomenon.

Similar tendencies could be found in other major and dramatic events, such as the November 2007 school shooting, which, in fact, revealed that even the Web has partially eaten up the sphere magazines used to command. The Web bites first, then come the conventional news media, and first after them the magazine mode. The basic problem is perhaps that, in the case of dramatic news events, the division into “good” and “bad” elements, persons and processes is too distinct. A magazine is able to carve out a new perspective, if the situation is complex and ambiguous. If not, its destiny may be to remain an echo of news reporting. It would seem that, contrary to previous assumptions, highly dramatic and affectionate events leave magazine reporting less operational space. However, “normal”, more complex processes and events create the potential for fresh theme and source choices, which challenge the first definition or the basic framework of the phenomenon established by news reporting. Ambiguity offers magazine journalism a chance. Responsiveness cannot be based on redundancy alone. The public should also be offered some new elements in the journalistic content.

Alternative?

It has been predicted that the popular magazine will die due to its slowness and limitations. However, its dominant characteristics, which Lowenthal talked about, have become extremely fashionable today. The qualities that Lowenthal found and McLuhan denied in relation to popular magazines were togetherness and community construction. The same elements are central to the arguments made in a large body of recent literature on the alternative media (e.g., Atton 1998; Bailey et al. 2008; Bennett 1999; Downing 2001; Rodriguez 2001). The concepts of alternative media, community media, or people’s media – the phenomenon has many names and forms – in these texts are partly contradictory, but all of them emphasize togetherness, alertness and participation. Some presuppose that the final goal is empowerment, although the definition of empowerment often remains diffuse. The basic assumption is that, unlike the conventional media, which focus on “audiencing” receivers, alternative media liberate them and allow them to take a stand and to act.

No doubt the Finnish tsunami case as a whole shows that the audience was left too far outside the media practice. The Internet has opened some new routes for the public to discuss and debate – more so today than in 2004-05, when the tsunami caused numerous reactions. However, there are tendencies in the mediascape to shovel the audience onto the Net to discuss, debate and reinforce their stereotypes, while the conventional media institutions are allowed to continue their professional practice in much the same way as before. The widely marketed potential for two-way communication in web-based or web-assisted journalism has not proven to be problem free.

As Kevin Barnhurst and John Nerone (2001: 5-13) point out, readers may make meaning, but not under conditions of their own choosing. In the case of newspapers or magazines, the news form constrains meaning-making. Once readers enter the newspaper text, they continue to make choices, but the form imposes rules that facilitate certain reading practices and obstruct others. As long as we are talking about conventional media, newspapers and magazines, this is definitely true, but it may also apply to new forms of mediated communication, because people are used to certain sets of choices and routines. A good example is the case of Finnish net discussions about the tsunami: Most visitors to the discussions sites remained voyeurs, not participants. The relationship was in fact no different from that of an afternoon paper and its audience, or of a magazine and its readership.

In the case of tsunami reporting, the framework offered by journalism in Finland could be described as simplistic and self-evident. Despite the fact that the tsunami made the ground tremble in South East Asia, the battlefield was at home. The “good” citizens met the “bad” state machinery. And as presented by a huge volume of research on news reporting, the “community” was the Finns, who, directly or indirectly, had to meet an extreme and undeserved accident (Rahkonen & Ahva 2005; Kivikuru 2006). It was interesting that one of the basic old human narratives – man against nature – was not utilized here. The nature aspect was pushed aside, receiving only minor attention in magazine journalism during the third wave of reporting (the memorizing phase in December 2005).

Here, obviously, the novelty of this type of catastrophe also had a role to play. The tsunami was a new phenomenon for Finns, and people were astonished that they could meet with such mortal danger in a summer paradise. The first definition of the event was a naïve simplification, as often happens when journalism encounters new distant and ambiguous phenomena. Not even the slow magazine reporting felt a need to redefine the event. The recognition of “us” was strong, and “we” referred to the whole nation, although journalism as such was filled with stories about individuals. They were presented as representatives of the nation, and this was why the public was encouraged to feel sympathy and the welfare state was required to offer its services. Only some letter-to-the-editor writers dared to claim that not all Finns were partners in the exercise. There was a difference between those who had faced the catastrophe directly, those who remained as members of any news event and those who remained somewhere in between, operating as mediators. However, all media reporting chose to represent the event as a national experience, and it was obviously thought to be politically incorrect to challenge it.

Alternative media and alternative reporting have often been interpreted as politically radical and resisting established social rules, operating underground or at least in opposition (e.g., Downing 2001). The oppositional and radical shades are still found in texts theorizing alternative communication, but the picture today is more nuanced. The present definitions often depend on La-

clau's and Mouffe's (e.g. 1985: 111-125) considerations. Citizens must enact their citizenship on a day-to-day basis, through their participation in everyday practices. Mouffe states that citizenship should not be viewed "as a legal status but as a form of identification, something to be constructed" (Mouffe 1992: 231). This everyday construction work requires diversity in mediated communication and a crossroads position in civil society; it requires elusiveness and readiness to cut across borders and to build bridges.

According to this view, one could claim that, in addition to the comfort and therapy offered by mainstream journalism, Finns would have benefited from the potential for participation in the media. The discussion websites were open for comfort, but did not go beyond the information delivery offered by the conventional media. The conventional media offered information, but no space for discussion, although the journalistic form that dominated the coverage of the tsunami could have been interpreted as inviting participation:

I have claimed that the style of popular culture typified by personalization and dramatization may offer a way into politics for people otherwise excluded or bored. I have also claimed that popular fictions of politics enable people to perform as citizens. (van Zoonen 2005: 150)

Liesbet van Zoonen's argumentation can be presented as defending the feature form in journalism. She stresses that the conventional forms of political communication tend to exclude, above all, women and ethnic minorities. With personalization and drama, the excluded can find their way into the public arena. It is no doubt true that in conventional mass communication, the form of news is placed high on the credibility hierarchy, although the news is not by any means an innocent or neutral mode of information distribution; it is sender-heavy, biased towards sender interests. News media do political work, even when they ignore politics itself. In the case of tsunami reporting in Finland, the news media – above all television, which Barnhurst and Nerone describe as a medium without "a necessary relationship to self-government" (Barnhurst & Nerone 2006: 25) – took over and framed the event, and did it fast. Respect for the news form muffled the popular magazine in a moment of national sorrow. The non-news medium positioned itself in the choir.

Alternativeness in mediated communication thus has several barriers to overcome. It has to change deeply rooted production and reception routines. Dan Gillmor (2006) makes these changes sound easy, but there is everyday evidence of the fact that "...the collision of journalists, newsmakers and the audience..." (Gillmor 2006: 237) is not an easy one. Gillmor has a vision that, in the long run, the grassroots as a whole will turn proactive. Based on the Finnish tsunami experience, one could claim that both media professionals and members of the public sought safe and conservative solutions – as did Finns who escaped to the websites. They wanted a community, but a commu-

nity of audience members. That can hardly be called a responsive standpoint, not to mention a rhizomatic one.

All in all, an overwhelming event seemed to standardize the modes and genres of mediated communication in the coverage of the tsunami in Finland. The news took over. However, this can hardly be interpreted as a death announcement for the popular magazine. It has its chance to influence the construction of citizenship in everyday life, where the positions of the “good” and the “bad” are less obvious than in the context of a great drama.

Notes

1. This “normalization” happened especially after the EU referendum on 24 October, 1994. After it, the magazine sphere appeared to have lost its specific task in the publicity game. The reporting on the EU theme decreased rapidly, and it became more and more expert oriented, mainly offering reactions to the referendum. Before the referendum, membership journals in particular had distinctly different profiles compared with the other media. They focused, on the one hand, on very specific problems, such as bra sizes or problems in horse breeding, or on the other, on people’s views of history and the future, starting from World War II and ending in their own or their children’s possibilities to study and work abroad. So the time span of magazine reporting appeared to be quite different from that of the daily media, which mainly reported on what had happened yesterday or the day before.
2. The estimate of the total mediascape is based on a study of 12 newspapers, 3 TV channels, 5 radio channels and 21 popular magazines, during the period Dec. 26-Jan. 5, and 3 newspapers up to the end of January (Mörä 2005; Kivikuru 2006).
3. On November 7, a high school student shot seven people and himself in a school in Tuusula, close to Helsinki. This is the first time this kind of event ever happened in Finland, and it created an enormous news flow for some 3–4 weeks (again, not longer, the news machine seems to be working fast). In the reporting, especially the reactions of the schoolmates and teachers received attention. A week later, the school students collected names and delivered an address to the Prime Minister, claiming that reporters had overdone their role, rushed to a crisis centre and interviewed and photographed people in shock. One research report (Pentti Raittila et al. 2008) analyses the shooting incident in detail.
4. The shooter had in fact announced his plans to shoot at this school a few days in advance on YouTube, and it came out soon that the isolated and reserved young man in fact had a very intensive online life in a variety of websites. This very fact caused an immediate request to control the Web better, both in the media and among the general public. This debate disappeared soon, when more rational aspects were brought into the discussion.
5. Parallel to the school shooting, an opinion poll on people’s media habits was carried out. It was found that one-third of Finns under 35 years named the Web as their primary source of information. Among older groups, television was put in first place.
6. As many as 16 news media were monitored in detail over a one-month period.
7. *Teimme tämän lehden valmiiksi jo joulukuun alkuun, niin kovin auvoisissa tunnelmissa tämänhetkiseen verrattuna. Vain tämän pääkirjoituksivun saimme vedettyä pois painokoneesta. Aina ennen uuden lehden ilmestyminen on ollut minulle suuri ilo. Nyt en tiedä, mitä ajatella.*
8. *Vuoden 2004 joulun loppu lyhyen. Moni meistä oli viettämässä tapanpäivää toipuen joulubässästä, kauboien toisella kädellä loppuja suklaakonvehteja ja näpräten toisella kädellä tv:n kaukosäädintä, kun kaikki yhtäkkiä muuttui. Kanava juuttui uutisiin ja kaukoidän katastrofaalisiin taphtumiin. Ensin tulee mieleen: onneksi kukaan läbeisistä ei ole siellä. Sitten: mutta niin monen muun läbeiset – turma koskettaa jollakin toisella tasolla meitä kaikkia. Tätä kirjoittaessa uutisten*

- vyöry on katkeamaton, eikä hyviä uutisia ole vielä ensimmäistäkään.* (MN 2: *Oma pieni osa*)
9. However, the weeklies *Apu* and *Seura* both have a circulation approaching 200,000, and *HS Kuvakauslehti* is distributed once a month with *Helsingin Sanomat*, the daily with the largest circulation in the Nordic countries (circulation 450,000 on weekdays, 500,000 on weekends). The circulation of *Suomen Kuvalehti*, the most serious of them all, remains around 100,000.
 10. There were several occasions in which adults struggled for aeroplane seats and pushed away teenagers in particular; younger children were taken care of. There were also cases in which citizens demanded coverage for their lost property, although they had not taken an insurance policy for their trip.

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Crisis and Web-enabled Agency in Practice

The Cases of Sukellus.fi and Thairy.net

Salli Hakala & Hannele Seeck

After saving himself from the sea to Khao Lak at around 6 pm on Boxing Day 2004, Janne Miikkulainen, managing director of a diving company, managed to contact his acquaintance, reporter Petri Ahoniemi, in Finland at around 9 pm Finnish time. Ahoniemi immediately sent an emergency message to *Alex Nieminen*. This marked the beginning of the divers' website Sukellus.fi, which offered concerned citizens precious information about their family members or ways to contact them in the crisis area. From the viewpoint of affected citizens, during the first week of the crisis the action taken by active citizens replaced authority communication (Huhtala et al. 2005).

We argue that the tsunami communication crisis brought about a turning point in the Finnish public administration's mode of communication: Due to the communication crisis, public administration was forced to make a shift from information to strategic communication. Crisis communication has also become more political, because citizens and the media are more alert with regard to authority communication and they have become more active themselves. Crisis communication is understood as an increasingly important part of crisis management and leadership. The new technology has brought new forms of organization within the reach of citizens. These forms challenge the authorities to act more quickly and more openly in crisis situations, because in cases where authorities fail to deliver the information, it can be gathered through other sources (Huhtala & Hakala 2007: 22).

Crisis communications has turned from a pragmatic operational task into a strategic task (Huhtala & Hakala 2007). According to John Dewey (1927/2006) and Hannah Arendt (1958/1989), citizens' active public behaviour is strategic action and lies at the core of democracy. Based on this premise, crises call forth agents and leaders to act. However, this has not been the case in the history of crisis management in Finland (Huhtala & Hakala 2007: 41-92.)

In the present chapter, we discuss how active citizens' human agency materialized through the use of SMS and the Internet. In a crisis, human agency is of key importance. A crisis situation calls for action and a leader. Here, we

look at human agency from a theoretical perspective through three different levels, or layers, of human agency: *the individual subject, the collective agency, and the cultural artifact*, in this case an Internet website.

In spite of the eyewitness accounts and citizen contacts, it took two days for mainstream media in Finland to realize the full extent of the crisis from the Finnish point of view (Mörä 2005). For a long time, the media relied on the official account of the disaster that reported a single Finnish casualty in Sri Lanka. Active citizens rose to help each other through SMS and web-based communication. Particularly in Thailand, important sources of information and help were the Phuket-based Finnish diving company 'Raya Divers' and its managing director Janne Miikkulainen, whereas in Finland the *Sukellus.fi* (*Diving.fi*) website by Alex Nieminen was a crucial source of information.

In the most acute phase of the crisis, citizens received contact information and were able to contact their family members in the catastrophe area via the Sukellus.fi website. Within one week, the site had served over one million visitors seeking information. It took ten days for the authorities to establish their own website on the Asian tsunami. The state administration tsunami site was opened on 7 January 2005 on the website of the Prime Minister's Office. The last Finnish nationals had been evacuated to Finland from the catastrophe area on 2 January 2005. The earlier official statements had been addressed mainly to the media, rather than to citizens in need. A study on the information flow and communication during the disaster (Huhtala et al. 2005) explored why citizens were denied contact to authorities at a time of need. The information and communication crisis caused by the tsunami is a good example of the mistakes to be avoided in a similar situations in the future (Huhtala & Hakala 2007). At the same time, the sukellus.fi pages are a good example of the use of ordinary citizens' agency.

According to Finnish law, travel agencies hold the primary responsibility for their clients' safety and evacuation when needed (Accident Investigation Report 2005; Huhtala et al. 2005). For the travel agencies, the flow of information was obstructed because their own guides were victims just as their clients were. Their offices had been destroyed and with them the client data. The data had to be acquired from Finland. Connections to the outside world were obstructed primarily because of the collapsed telecommunications network in Khao Lak and the overload of the telephone network in Thailand. Moreover, the travel agencies had to continue selling trips to other destinations, also within Thailand. Naturally, this caused conflicting emotions, as Finns were also trying to make contact with their travelling family members through the travel agencies. Legal constraints regarding the disclosure of personal details also limited the travel agents' communication with the public. A private person, *Alex Nieminen*, constantly updated his own Sukellus.fi web pages with new data on names, locations, and hospitals in connection with found persons and lists of hospital links, through which people managed to get into contact with their missing relatives.

Our theoretical starting point rests on the concept of agency. Further, we describe the authority context of the tsunami disaster in Finland and analyse citizen agency in a crisis through the website *Sukellus.fi*. In conclusion, we sum up how active citizens displayed their agency and consider the demand for active citizenship from the viewpoint of authorities.

Theoretical Premises: The Concept of Agency

The problem of human agency has persisted in organizational analysis (Reed 1988). It has held the promise of serving as a core concept that would help to identify the mediating process between social constraint and individual choice. Researchers, however, have yet to reach a consensus regarding the definition of agency.

In her doctoral thesis, Tuija Pulkkinen (1996) examined a particular conceptualization of agency. The German-influenced Finnish theoretical debate often uses the concept of “subject” or sometimes even of a Germanic “subjective” to refer to a concept combining individuality and agency. This, however, is different from the use of the term “subject” in the English language. Like Pulkkinen, we too are interested in political agency – as a substitute for the word “subject”, we employ the English term “agency”. In this kind of constructionist thinking, agency attaches itself to any kind of cultural artefact, such as a photograph, a text or a thing (Latour 2005). According to Latour, “objects too have agency”. In crisis communication, facial shots often become the images and symbols of the disaster, in this way becoming agents that direct communication and mental images. In the case of the tsunami, pictures of children and adults, reported as missing but who in fact had already been found, were published first on the Web and then in the traditional media. Moreover, pictures of clearly recognizable bodies were spread, which was considered degrading to human dignity. Pictures and mental images of the disaster proliferated in an unforeseen way, mainly due to video and digital cameras, as well as mobile phones carried by Western tourists. No previous disaster has produced a comparable mass of picture material so quickly and easily accessible on the Web. Latour (2005) calls this kind of visual broadcast the “sociology of associations”. This approach has become known as the Actor-Network-Theory.

According to Anthony Giddens (1991: 74-75), the idea that “each person has a unique character and special potentialities that may or may not be fulfilled” was alien in pre-modern times. In Medieval Europe, attributes relevant to identity, such as lineage and social status, were all relatively fixed. Naturally, transitions also occurred, but they were mainly governed by institutionalized processes, in which the role of the individual was relatively passive (Giddens 1991).

The modern conception of the individual is essentially linked to freedom and responsibility. Knights and Willmott (1999: 84) suggest that “the modern-

ist view of the individual presumes a close association with the concepts of freedom and responsibility because, for our self-consciousness, the source of creative self and social development is attributed to [reflexive] freedom". The understanding of human beings as free and autonomous agents has some profound implications, which can be explained through the notion of responsibility. According to Knights and Willmott, responsibility carries a twofold meaning: on the one hand, we bear responsibility for our own identity and behaviour, on the other, we are responsible for others (Seeck 2008; see also Seeck & Parzefall 2008).

Webb (2004: 722) compares the reflexive self (Giddens 1991) and the corroded self (Sennett 1998), finding that "both recognize that current socio-economic relations place emphasis on an individualized sense of responsibility for personal achievements, which in turn encourages a risk-taking and calculative orientation to life". However, the two authors, Giddens and Sennett, offer rather contrasting perspectives on selfhood: Giddens sees the contemporary organizations as providing a greater degree of choice about self-identity and as enhancing agency and reflexivity, while Sennett views the new economy as corrosive of character and social relations (Webb 2004: 722). Mike O'Donnell (2003) analyses some assumptions about subject agency in Giddens' liberalism and Foucault's post-structuralism and argues that these two approaches are more complementary than is often understood.

For the purposes of the present chapter, human agency is broadly defined as the capacity of an agent to act in the world. Agency is the capacity of human beings to make choices and to impose these choices on the world. Although agency is often discussed in collective terms as a means to impose collectively made choices concerning the world, here we focus on individual agency in an organizational context. Specifically, we draw on Sewell's (1992) conception of agency as a constituent of structure, as opposed to a structure in itself.

According to Sewell (1992: 20), "to be an agent means to be capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree". Sewell considers as agents those who are empowered by structures to act with and against others; according to him, agency arises "from the actor's knowledge of the schemas, which means the ability to apply them to new contexts" (ibid.: 20). He argues that humans are born with a highly generalized capacity for agency, which he understands as the capacity for desire, to act creatively, and to form intentions. However, although the capacity for agency is inherent in everyone, the specific forms it takes vary extensively and are historically and culturally determined. In other words, *how* people exercise agency is subject to great variation (Sewell 1992: 20). This highlights the significance of education and training when preparing to meet different kinds of crises. Agency in a crisis does not materialize from nothing, even though some people have a natural ability to become agents.

Context: Lack of Agency on the Part of the Government

In Finland, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs dealt with the Asian tsunami crisis on 26 December. Starting from 27 December, the responsibility was transferred to the Coordination Board of Government Chiefs Preparedness from all ministries. The Chiefs of Preparedness worked under a mandate from the Prime Minister. This was the first time crisis management had been organized in this way. In previous civilian crises, the operations had been led by the appropriate ministry and a group of experts selected from the ministry or the government, which had normally convened at the first occasion after the crisis had broken out. The government convened four days after the disaster on Thursday, 30 December, for a regular meeting and discussed, among other things, the cost of the Asian tsunami (Huhtala et al. 2005: 53). As the crisis touched on the areas of responsibility of about half of the ministries, a government-led operation model would also have been justified (Huhtala & Hakala 2007: 78).

Many of the problems in the tsunami disaster communication were caused by the fact that the responsibility for crisis management was delegated to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which was not sufficiently prepared to lead a rescue operation. The study *Information flow and communication in the Asian tsunami disaster* suggests that the preparedness organization of the Ministry was inadequate. At the beginning of the crisis, it was unclear who was in charge of the organization: in fact, it took almost four days to clarify this (Huhtala et al. 2005: 37-58). In practice, rescue work and the evacuation of Finnish nationals from the disaster area were delegated to the Finnish Red Cross. The airline Finnair together with the travel agencies had already begun evacuating Finns on Boxing Day.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs sent more of their staff over to the disaster area first on Wednesday, 29 December, four days after the catastrophe. No public information officers were sent over, even though problems with information flow had been acknowledged. Information was gathered only in the Consulate Department, where it was understood from the beginning that the disaster also had affected Finnish nationals. However, the information remained within the Department. The information flow to other authorities, such as Government Security Control at the Prime Minister's Office and Department for Rescue Services of the Ministry of the Interior, was slow (Huhtala et al. 2005: 47-48). For the citizens affected, the main problem was the difficulty in contacting authorities. Of the 67,000 telephone calls made to the Foreign Ministry's crisis centre, only 6000 got through (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28 Jan 2005: 12). An operational telephone service would have been essential, because citizens had good reason to assume that the authorities held more information on the situation of Finnish nationals in the disaster area and had better contacts with authorities in other nations than what individual citizens had (Huhtala et al. 2005: 133-184).

The need for information among people affected by the crisis was not taken into account by the government: No information leaflets were handed out to citizens in the disaster area, and the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not offer instructions or a channel that would have enabled safe transmission of information about missing loved ones. The information given on the missing over the telephone had been gathered in different ways, and it was, in part, inadequately registered. Because there was no unified information gathering system, much of the information had to be registered several times. This was frustrating for the citizens, many of whom felt that the authorities were misplacing the information citizens had provided. Moreover, the victims' family members in Finland gave information without receiving any (Huhtala et al. 2005: 148-149, 160). The first press conference by the authorities was organized as late as 29 hours after the opening of the crisis centre, even though the immense need for information by the citizens was known. Not a single minister or leader of the crisis organization was present to answer questions or inform citizens of what had happened and what the current measures were that had been taken by authorities. When it was clear that the information channels via state officials were not working satisfactorily, ministers took over the responsibility for the crisis communications starting 28 December (Huhtala et al. 2005: 45).

The citizens began to act themselves when their needs were not met by the authorities. According to one study (Huhtala et al. 2005: 133-184), the cognitive needs of citizens and persons affected by the disaster were very simple and concrete, and many of their wishes could have been met with a single sheet of paper printed out from the Web and distributed in the disaster area. "The most important need among the citizens affected by the crisis was contact with family members. This was followed by cognitive needs and needs associated with the organization of the operation, such as information on the health of family members, transportation to one's home country and the necessary documents, and contact information on authorities that could provide and receive further information" (Huhtala et al. 2005:253). In a crisis necessitating concrete rescue work such as the tsunami, it is necessary to have quickly mountable crisis service points in the catastrophe area, so that information and help can both be sought and received from one place. The information should be available on a single sheet of paper, such as a copy of an information bulletin published on the Internet. Sending a public information officer to the disaster area would have solved a number of concrete problems for both the media and the citizens in the tsunami and at the same time reduced the amount of and need for contacts. In this way, all of the agents would have shared the same information.

Especially the Raya Divers diving devotees and the maintenance of the *Su-kellus.fi* website received abundant praise and thanks from citizens for their fast and professional action. The website supported by the Friends of Thailand Registered Association, the *Thairy.net*, also received many notes of apprecia-

tion from citizens for helping them establish contact with their loved ones (Huhtala et al. 2005: 181, 221-222).

Web-enabled Agency in Practice: Sukellus.fi

In a crisis, much depends on the meeting of different agents, particularly of authorities and the citizens in crisis care. If the parties fail to meet, both will begin to act at their own pace and in their respective directions. How do they organize their actions and establish contacts? In a crisis, authorities and citizens need each other. What kind of agency did the tsunami crisis produce? One study of crisis organization during the tsunami disaster (Huhtala et al. 2005) pointed out how a bureaucratic way of operating, based on the modern concept of society, easily leads to a deepening of the crisis on various levels of the organization: Problems accumulate in attempts to gain a full picture of the situation, in internal communications, in dissemination of information, and in managing the operations of communication units. The operation mode of a crisis organization in Finland has been analysed using the 15 bureaucratic organizational features identified by Max Weber (Huhtala 2006; Huhtala & Hakala 2007: 93-131). The Web emerged as a structural solution in citizen agency. The debate on modernization has highlighted the socio-cultural breakthrough brought about by the Web: "The web is simultaneously both the target and the producer of the transition" (Sassi 2000: 28). The lightweight organization of the reporters of the *Sukellus.fi* pages revealed the effectiveness with which reciprocal action of citizens, with the help of the Net, can replace the traditional, print and electronic media that emerged as the product of modernity as well as the culture of bureaucratic action, in a crisis situation. The Asian tsunami disaster affected very different societies. Many Asian societies could be classified as pre-modern, both in terms of their societal structure and their means of production. In Western countries, state administration is still largely governed by the elements of modern society. The structure of late modern society is represented by active citizenship that is carried out independently and even globally, often independent of the structures of society. The Web enables public agency on a broader front than before.

Research on communications and information flow during the Asian tsunami disaster (Huhtala et al. 2005) has shown that the tsunami disaster caused a communication crisis in the state administration and the media in Finland. For this reason, the active citizen could step in to rescue the flow of information and deliver it to affected citizens. The websites *Sukellus.fi* and *Thairy.net* functioned primarily as means to disseminate information and establish contacts during the Finnish tsunami disaster. The above-mentioned study by Huhtala et al. (2005) based its conclusions on data concerning how the telephone, SMS, and the Web could be harnessed to improve and serve state administrative

communication in crisis situations. The study reveals what kind of information citizens needed during the first 24 hours of the crisis.

The data analysed in the present chapter consist of private correspondences between citizens facing the crisis. Particular attention has been paid to the requirements made by the confidential nature of the material, so that mutual trust between citizens can be maintained. Here, only the names of publishers and co-publishers of the *Sukellus.fi* website are mentioned: persons who have already received public recognition and won prizes for their action. The individual e-mails by citizens remain anonymous. Alex Nieminen has submitted the data for research purposes, hoping that the study will enable development of the state administration's crisis communication.

In line with our previous work, we construct agency here as three-dimensional: agency by an individual, by a collective and finally agencies produced by socio-cultural actions or artefacts (Webb 2004; Sewell 1992; Giddens 1991; Sennett 1998; Latour 2005).

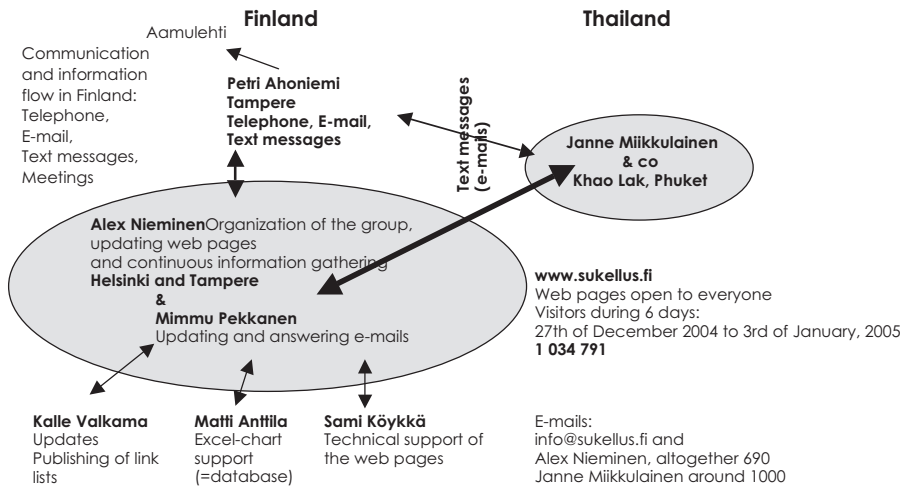
The beginning of the *Sukellus.fi* activity constitutes a typical example of individual and collective action. The operation of the web pages was based on a network built by *Alex Nieminen* and two or three persons who were familiar with journalistic work and the network environment. The actions of the diving centre *Raya Divers* in Thailand and its contacts with Finland formed the core of the information sharing already on Boxing Day 2004. Before Christmas, Nieminen had been in touch with the *Raya Divers* managing director *Janne Miikkulainen*, and the next group of diver enthusiasts were expected to arrive in Thailand directly after Christmas. Nieminen and reporter *Petri Ahoniemi* from the newspaper *Aamulehti* had received information of the earthquake and the tsunami near Indonesia through the Internet and traditional media. "When I saw the first reports of the earthquake and the following tidal wave catastrophe while watching TV news at home in Tampere, I grew anxious over my friends and acquaintances in the area, even though there had not yet been any information on Finnish victims, and started sending them SMSs", explains Nieminen, the publisher of the *Sukellus.fi* website (Huhtala et al. 2005). Alex Nieminen knew that *Miikkulainen* had spent Christmas in *Khao Lak*. On 26 December at 11.23 a.m., directly after the morning TV news, Nieminen received an SMS from his friend *Ahoniemi* "I need names, numbers of Finns in Phuket, if you know of them. Send them to this number [...], *Petri Ahoniemi*, *Aamulehti*. I already have *Janne's* and *Jari's* (phone numbers)" (Huhtala et al. 2005: 165). The agency of *Petri Ahoniemi* sprung from the general information gathering ability and curiosity of a reporter looking for contact information to the disaster area.

After some hours, according to Nieminen, TV news reported that there were no Finnish victims in the area. "I did not believe it anymore", stated Nieminen. Thus, he clearly states the reason for his individual agency: mistrust towards the media. He begins to look for a connection to the disaster area himself. On the morning of 26 December, he also received a number of concerned

telephone calls. No one seemed to be able to reach Miikkulainen. In the evening of Boxing Day at around 9.20 p.m., Ahoniemi made a telephone call to Nieminen saying that he had managed to reach Miikkulainen in Khao Lak and had been told by him that the situation in Khao Lak is “serious, deceased everywhere”. Ahoniemi asked Nieminen how a list, consisting mainly of divers and sent by Miikkulainen via SMS, could be delivered to family members as quickly as possible. Nieminen suggested that the information could be distributed via the *Sukellus.fi* website supported by him. The pages were known mainly by diver enthusiasts, but provided a channel for immediate distribution of the information. According to Miikkulainen’s text message, all divers who had left Khao Lak for the Similan Islands had been rescued and were staying in a school in Khao Lak.

Janne Miikkulainen became known among Finns for his rescue efforts in the disaster area. Generally, in crises and catastrophes, some people simply start to act, perhaps often without giving further thought to their own motives. Miikkulainen’s agency emerges as individual agency of this kind. He kept sending information about the Finns to Finland as soon as he had located the persons concerned. In the evening of Boxing Day, text messages were arriving at a rate of almost one per minute from Miikkulainen to Ahoniemi, who then forwarded them to Nieminen. In the evening of Boxing Day, information was passed on from Khao Lak that altogether 89 people had been found. Most were staying at the “Thum Ma Plao school about 10 km from Thaplamu, near Khao Lak, safe with me in a school building”, as Miikkulainen wrote in his text message. These people were missing more than 30 loved ones. From the messages sent in the evening of Boxing Day, it became clear that the disaster had also affected Finland in a significant way.

Alex Nieminen was in contact with two of his friends in Finland, Sami Köykkä and Kalle Valkama, on Boxing Day. Together, they decided to publish the first name lists received from Miikkulainen on his web pages. They then began a week’s worth of around-the-clock work aimed at locating Finns in Thailand and forwarding any information to their family members and friends. The individual agent began to act via the Net. On the first day, the name lists arrived to Ahoniemi via Miikkulainen and then directly to Nieminen. He formed a group in Finland to support the *Sukellus.fi* service and coordinated its operations. He also published information on his website to facilitate the information seeking activities of family members and friends. As Sewell (1992) describes, individual agency is associated with *initiative*, *mistrust* and *creativity*. Nieminen himself looked up the connections to the disaster area, used his ready-made web pages in a creative way, and spread information about the site.

Graph 1. The Information Flow and Organization of Communication of Sukellus.fi

Source: Huhtala et al. 2005: 168.

The first media to publish information on the situation in Khao Lak in Finland was the newspaper Aamulehti in Tampere: Ahoniemi's report was published on 27 December 2004. On the same day, Alex Nieminen was in contact with four journalists known to him in the Finnish media and told them that some information was available via the *Sukellus.fi* website. Nieminen's individual agency was based on both his natural ability to start acting to serve others and on his expertise in web communications. Nieminen had previously hosted web-related programmes for television, and reporters knew and trusted his knowledge and ability. On the evening of Monday, 27 December, the *Sukellus.fi* website was mentioned both on the nationwide television channels MTV3 and YLE TV news, causing over 76,000 people to download the website. In this way, information on the *Sukellus.fi* website also instantly reached Thailand, where some of the people affected were able to send information directly to the address info@sukellus.fi from hotel Internet service points. The e-mail address was established on Monday, 27 December, making distribution of the names of the missing and found much easier than via SMS. Already on 27 December, Khao Lak began to dominate the contents of the e-mails: At 2.03 p.m., the Thai Army allowed Miikkulainen, guides from the travel agency Sun Tours, and other helpers in to the catastrophe area in Khao Lak. Kalle Valkama sent Nieminen an e-mail on 27 December at 11.16 a.m. with the subject line: "List of Phuket hospitals." Nieminen put the list on his website. In this way, the *Sukellus.fi* group started a direct information service for citizens, with the aim

of helping family members contact the hospitals themselves and follow their lists of patients. In this way, a private website grew into a public concept and started to act as an object in itself, as formulated by Latour (2005). The website grew into a Latourian artefact, into a functioning object, which got citizens to act, to produce more information for the pages and to circulate information *collectively* via the media (Peters 1999; Huhtala & Hakala 2007).

During the first two days, most information concerning missing persons was reported from Khao Lak, some from Phuket. One of the hotel names that kept reoccurring in the reports was the Hotel Blue Village Pakarang in Khao Lak. Of the residents of that hotel, 106 Finnish nationals died. Nieminen kept receiving names of persons who could not be reached in Khao Lak. The same names comprised the final list of missing persons published by the Central Criminal Police (Huhtala et al. 2005: 171). In all, 178 Finns lost their lives in the tsunami. Five of them remain missing to date.

The information sent to *Sukellus.fi* via telephone, SMS and e-mail mainly consisted of names, telephone numbers and lists of links to provide further information. The agents of *Sukellus.fi* perceived their role as a temporary substitute for the authorities (Huhtala et al. 2005: 172). Within six days, the website had one million visitors: more than in any other Finnish website on the disaster. This indicates the general sentiment that help and reliable information could be attained through the pages. The media were quick to distribute information about the existence of the pages, and the visitor count on the *www.sukellus.fi* website and e-mails to the *info@sukellus.fi* address increased every day until 30 December 2004, when the Central Criminal Police published the first list of missing persons.

In contrast to this citizen agency, the authorities' failure to operate appears in an even more negative light. The full extent of the disaster in Khao Lak was clear only on 28 December at 5 pm at the meeting of the Government's crisis organization leaders, when more accurate figures on the missing or clients missing from the travel agencies, with whom no contact had been made, were achieved (Huhtala et al. 2005: 198). This proved that the catastrophe in Khao Lak was revealed to the state administration, in keeping with bureaucratic methods of operation and using traditional information channels, almost two days later than to the active citizen. At that point, more than 200,000 visitors had already found their way to the *Sukellus.fi* website (Huhtala et al. 2005: 180). Later, the government presented the *Sukellus.fi* website with an obviously well-deserved 'dissemination of public information' award, which appeared to mirror typical authority agency: The help of active citizens was redundant during the actual crisis, but was brought into the public eye three months later with a ceremonial tribute.

The *www.sukellus.fi* website received the 'dissemination of public information' prizes on Wednesday, 30 March 2005. The prizes were received for fast and professional network information in a crisis via the *www.sukellus.fi* website by *Alex Nieminen*, managing director; *Petri Aboniemi*, reporter; *Janne Mi-*

ikkulainen, diving entrepreneur; *Matti Anttila*, system engineer; *Sami Köykkä*, IT specialist; *Mimmi Pekkanen*, producer; and *Kalle Valkama*, data communication engineer student. The following reasons were given for the prize:

In the Finnish communication of the South-East Asian tsunami disaster, the www.sukellus.fi website revealed the effectiveness of skilful and fast Internet-based information. Owing to strong professional expert knowledge of network communication, [sukellus.fi](http://www.sukellus.fi) was able to gather information fast and to update it under the constantly shifting circumstances. The professional nature of the activity was also evident in the ability to take into account questions of data protection as demanded by the circumstances. Moreover, in a way characteristic of web-based information, users found the website, which had previously been unknown to most, with astonishing speed.

Ministry of Education, Press release, http://www.minedu.fi/opm/uutiset/archive/2005/03/30_1.html

There was a major difference in the way the authorities and citizens acted to learn about the situation at the outset of the disaster. When citizens Aho-niemi and Nieminen could not make contact with Khao Lak, they continued to try until the first SMS reached Thailand, and Miikkulainen managed to make telephone contact directly from the disaster area to Finland. In contrast, the Finnish Ambassador to Thailand in Bangkok gave a seemingly reassuring statement on Monday, 27 December: "There has not been any information from Khao Lak" (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 28 January 2005). This reflects the difference between the methods used by the active citizen and authorities, who used traditional bureaucratic means of information gathering.

The agents of *Sukellus.fi* were familiar with the code of ethics for journalists and the requirements of data protection. They also posted information about their operating principles on the website. They published only the names of survivors and links to Thai hospitals and other websites offering further information. They had their own registers for those reported missing and for those seeking their loved ones. Some of the linked sites contained ethically problematic pictures of the victims, and of the deceased. The agents of *Sukellus.fi* included warning labels in connection with links to such material. The feedback given to the *Sukellus.fi* pages was exclusively praise: "You have beaten all of the nationwide media. You have been the only clear, rational, and up-to-date information channel." (*Sukellus.fi* 28 December at 5.36 p.m., e-mail 145; Huhtala et al. 2005: 175). The Central Criminal Police published the first list of persons missing on 30 December at 6 pm, after which the Central Criminal Police's pages crashed due to a substantial number of visitors. On 30 December 2004, *Sukellus.fi* announced that they were terminating their on-call operation as the authorities were taking over the responsibility. Yet, even after this, the pages continued to be updated due to the massive need for information among citizens. At this point, the nature of the operations of *Sukellus.fi*

switched to collective agency managed by the authorities. From the viewpoint of the affected citizen, this private forum was more helpful during the acute phase of the disaster than was the authorities' collective agency.

In the Finnish tsunami disaster, the *Thairy.net* website discussion forum, supported by the Thai registered association, also became an important forum for Finnish citizens. Moreover, *Thairy.net* and *Sukellus.fi* co-operated in information exchange and distributed information over each other to the main media. When gathering data for this study, we examined all of the significant web forums for Finns. *Thairy.net* emerged as a second important discussion forum in relation to the tsunami disaster from the Finnish point of view, alongside *Sukellus.fi*. During the Asian tidal wave disaster, the discussion on the forum of the Thai registered association mainly consisted of news and guidance service. Most of the messages were copied news bulletins from the news agencies and the media. The *Thairy.net* discussion forum emerged as a different type of field for collective agency than the *Sukellus.fi* website. This proves that the traditional media were not able to satisfy the need for information and contacts among citizens, who then sought and found it in the Internet (Huhtala et al. 2005: 204-231). Maintenance of both the *Sukellus.fi* and *Thairy.net* websites was performed on home computers.

In the disaster area in Thailand, Janne Miikkulainen was looking for Finns from the whole area of the disaster and in practice led the Finnish rescue services during the first days in Khao Lak, together with two guides from the travel agency Sun Tours, after he himself had gained shelter at a school with the help of the Thai Army (Huhtala et al. 2005: 167). The responsibility for leading the Finnish rescue services in Thailand was turned over to the Red Cross only in the evening of 28 December 2004. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs managed to set up a crisis centre on 3 January, 2005 at the hotel Orchid, used by the travel agency Finn Tours (TUI), only after all Finns had already been evacuated. On the same day, the barrier of one million visitors was broken on the *Sukellus.fi* website. In this way, the individual and collective agents proved their ability to act in a crisis.

Conclusion: The Active Citizen Replaced the Authorities in the Acute Phase

Crisis communication has turned into strategic communication. In the global world of the 21st century, learning about gradually escalating crises through the transmission model of communication has become antiquated now that active citizens have found each other over the Internet and now that mobile technologies have speeded up the rate of information dissemination. Today, an increasing amount of information is within everyone's reach. Based on this information, groups of citizens can form a picture of a given situation and mobilize themselves quickly. Citizens demand fast action and communication

also from the authorities and politicians. Authorities must act quickly to ensure that their action is active rather than reactive and that they appear as reliable and trustworthy, both in normal life and in crisis situations (Huhtala & Hakala 2007: 92).

The tsunami crisis indicates a turning point in crisis communication in Finland. The tsunami crisis moved the public administration's crisis communication into a new era. In Finland, the aftermath of the tsunami included mainly criticism and self-criticism of both media and authority communication practices. There was also harsh criticism of politicians in Sweden. This criticism helped the public administration to substantially develop its crisis communication system. Now, communication in a civilian crisis is no longer about information dissemination as much as it is about strategic communication and action.

In the tsunami disaster, active citizens organized themselves with the help of the new technologies to provide information and psychosocial support when they found that such needs were not being met by the media or the authorities. The Internet became an important channel of communication also because telephone communication did not function smoothly. A previous study on the tsunami (Huhtala et al. 2005) showed that the authorities did not know how to apply information technology in order to grasp the situation, neither with regard to information gathering, leading the operation nor with regard to serving citizens. Instead, the citizens organized themselves over the Internet and became active informers. The tsunami affected people from more than 50 countries and from various cultures. Web communication was able to break down traditional structures of communication at a time when citizens were in urgent need to make contact with family members on the other side of the world.

Production of net content is easy, cheap and quick, and it requires only limited human resources. Problems associated with the network environment include congestion caused by a sudden rise in the number of users, the target public's access to the Net and the Net's possible reputation of being an unreliable and questionable means of communication.

Agents are the key to all human action. A person who has the courage to become an agent in a crisis leaves his or her private hiding place and steps out to be visible to anyone, in other words, he or she dares to step out into the light (Arendt 1958/2002: 188-190). In practice, this is achieved through action.

With the advent of the Net, the concepts of recipient or reception do not really apply. Sinikka Sassi, whose doctoral thesis focuses on network communications, distinguishes the Net from other mass media (Sassi 2000: 70-71). On the *Sukellus.fi* and *Thairy.net* websites, numerous agents were active in searching for and passing on information. Many were looking for links to Thai hospitals and for recent news materials. After finding this information, they would then distribute it to the open Internet network and to various discussion fora. Some were asking for and offering help with translation and with

sharing the information from authorities. This is what we, the present authors, call agency. Instead of an individual subject, it attaches itself to a socio-cultural activity, and thus establishes itself in the interaction between the agent, the means and the actions. This is in line with our previous definition of agency (see, e.g., Giddens 1991; Sennett 1998; Pulkkinen 1998, 2003). The media and network communication, in particular, have a central role to play in the creation of images and myths. Pictures of and messages about a disaster proliferate effectively via the Internet. In a network society (Castells 1996, 2001; McNeill & McNeill 2003), crisis communication – alongside the traditional transmission model of communication and the ritual view of communication – constitutes sharing and dissemination of a message. On the Net, the borders of object and subject vanish more easily than in the traditional media (Peters 1999; Huhtala & Hakala 2007).

The *Sukellus.fi* website's agency can be seen as a typically post-bureaucratic and, in this sense, also postmodern activity and as agency that does not ask for the authorization or foundation of others.¹ Michel Foucault's (1997) genealogy and concept of power offer a theoretical approach to precisely this kind of thinking, which dismantles the transcendental individual agent. Foucault was not interested in who holds the power or how individuals use it, but in how "power produces individuals" (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982; Pulkkinen 1998; 2003). By organizing a web service for over a million people for the duration of one week, Alex Nieminen together with his friends proved how agency and power are produced in practice. The "Sukellus.fi organization" comprised a few experts from various branches of society. They knew each other and each other's working methods. Reciprocal trust between the actors was essential. They did not ask or wait for authorization. Alex Nieminen published the information on the Internet, immediately on Boxing Day 2004 evening, as soon as the first name lists of survivors came via SMS from Janne Miikkulainen in Khao Lak. In an emergency, the most important thing is to make contact with family members. *Sukellus.fi* served this purpose on behalf of the authorities for hundreds of Finnish victims and their relatives. The information operations of the Finnish diving company was noted internationally. In the Finnish tsunami disaster, the *Sukellus.fi* site became an example of agency in a Foucauldian sense. At the same time, for the first time in a worldwide disaster, the Net became a community of images, where people not known to each other began to help each other by transmitting crucial information via the new technologies available.

Note

1. In a continuum of modernity, late-modern societies are characterized by reflectivity of a loose, structurally changing process and of a technical innovation: the worldwide digital network. The typical features of post-modernity are detachment, the fragmentation of structures and the never-endingly astir definitions of concepts (Beck, Giddens & Lash 1995; Pulkkinen 1998; Huhtala & Hakala 2007).

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Independence – Then Adaptation

How Swedish Journalists Covered the Tsunami Catastrophe

Tomas A. Odén, Marina Ghersetti & Ulf Wallin

The tsunami catastrophe received more coverage in Swedish media than did any other single event during the past twenty years. Between December 26, 2004 and January 1, 2005, 84 percent of all airtime on Rapport 7.30 p.m., Sweden's most popular TV news program, was devoted to the Indian Ocean tsunami and its consequences.¹ The sinking of the ferry Estonia ten years earlier received just a little less airtime, 74 percent. Although quite different, both these events claimed the lives of many Swedes under dramatic conditions. The third largest event is the Gulf War in 1991 (71 percent), and the fourth largest is the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001 (70 percent) – two events that took place far away but that were portrayed in the media and international debate as threats to the entire Western World, including Sweden. Compared to these events, the assassination of Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986 received less (64 percent) and the assassination of Minister for Foreign Affairs, Anna Lindh in 2003 received considerably less (40 percent) airtime.²

The enormous media coverage of the tsunami could be explained by the fact that it happened during the Christmas/New Year's period, which is a time that usually lacks newsworthy events and generally features yearly chronicles and the year in retrospect. No other major news issue competed for column space or airtime. But the most obvious and important explanation is that this unexpected and dramatic event directly and brutally affected the lives of many Swedes, and that a serious flaw in the preparedness and the emergency response capacity of the Swedish Government was revealed (See chapters by Falkheimer and Nord and Strömbäck in this volume). The event was important, extremely relevant, and would affect individuals, responsible politicians and authorities for a long time to come.

The present article is based on a study of how newsrooms at nine major Swedish news media organizations responded to the tsunami catastrophe.³ The objective is to analyze how newsrooms organized their coverage. The three main research questions are:

- How did newsrooms organize their work during the first few days after the tsunami?
- How did the individual journalists handle the situation?
- What impact did modern technology have on news media coverage of the catastrophe?

A total of 37 editors-in-chief, news editors, reporters, correspondents, web editors and photographers from two single copy sale papers, two subscription newspapers, two online newspapers, one radio station and two television channels were interviewed. Most interviews took place during March 2005, while a few additional interviews were held in April and May of the same year. This newsroom study is part of a broader examination that also includes a content analysis of the nine different media's coverage during the first month of the catastrophe (Andersson Odén, Gheretti & Wallin 2005). The studied media were:

Aftonbladet	The largest single copy sale newspaper, with main newsroom in Stockholm. Circulation: 439,000 copies a day, 2004.
aftonbladet.se	The largest online newspaper in Sweden. 3.1 million unique visitors a day during the last week of 2004.
Expressen	The second largest single copy sale newspaper, with main newsroom in Stockholm. Circulation: 359,000 copies a day, 2004.
Dagens Nyheter	The largest subscription newspaper, with main newsroom in Stockholm. Circulation: 367,000 copies a day, 2004.
dn.se	Online version of largest subscription newspaper. 1.0 million unique visitors a day during the last week of 2004.
Svenska Dagbladet	Then the third largest subscription newspaper, with main newsroom in Stockholm. Circulation: 188,000 copies a day, 2004.
Sveriges Radio (SR)	A commercial-free public service radio. Four channels with joint newsroom, 2004.
Sveriges Television (SVT)	A commercial-free public service television. Two terrestrial channels with joint newsroom, 2004.
TV4	The largest commercial, privately owned television channel. One terrestrial channel, 2004.

Crisis Journalism and New Media

When a disaster or catastrophe occurs, the media are among the most important actors when it comes to giving quick, correct and important information to citizens, official authorities and others. The media have three important roles. First, they supply the information that citizens need to understand what has happened, the extent of the incident, what risk reducing measures should be taken, and immediate consequences for both individuals and society as a whole in the first critical phase. Stig Arne Nohrstedt (2000) states that the media in cooperation with official authorities at this point could play a significant and important role in avoiding or adjusting disturbances to society. Second, after a few days, the media can supply important background information and explain the causes of dramatic events. And third, the media should move on to critically investigate the actions of responsible authorities and other actors involved (Real 2001; Englund 2002, 2008; Jarlbro 2004).

Research on media's reporting from disasters and catastrophes shows that the news generally adapts to basic media logic and news dramaturgy. The media focus on individuals and particular events rather than on social and economical structures. Reporting is characterized by dramatizing and conflict, ignoring possible long-term solutions (Hvitfelt 1986, Singer & Endreny 1993, Ghersetti 2000).

But there is also another side to the question of news from disasters and catastrophes that has to do with the individual reporter or photographer. Journalists are the only professionals on the scene of a catastrophe who do not have a duty to save lives. Thus, their job is in many ways both problematic and preposterous. As Liselott Englund argues, journalists have to struggle with dilemmas and inconsistent tasks: they must both report quickly and correctly, be considerate but also investigative, calm the general public but at the same time keep it alert, and finally scrutinize and criticize without promoting rumor and gossip (Englund 1999a, 1999b, also see Larsson & Nohrstedt 2000).

Furthermore, the professional role of the journalist is complicated by the fact that most reporters are unprepared for the stress and strain they will be exposed to at the scene of a disaster or catastrophe. Norwegian media researchers Arne Blix and Jo Bech-Karlsen claim that adequate reporting in a situation of crisis requires that the reporter, or photographer, be aware of his or her own emotional reactions. Quite often journalists are hit by the same stress factors – for instance chock, nausea, apathy, and confusion – as rescue workers and people from task forces. They may experience a conflict between acting like professionals, i.e. journalists, or like fellow human beings: Should they observe and report or act and participate?

Crisis journalism must be perceived within the perspective of the existing newsroom culture. The media's editorial work is generally based on gathering and handling large quantities of information and transforming this into units for publication in various formats, such as articles in the daily press, online

news reports, or features in radio and TV news broadcasts. The news media rely on proven routines and older concepts both when organizing their work, and when adapting and transforming news material (Tuchman 1978, Altheide & Snow 1979).

But there is also a readiness to improvise and change. Denis McQuail (2005) points out that alongside everyday routines, there is also room for improvising entrepreneurs. This preparedness includes efficient and delegated decision-making processes.

In her study of Swedish newsroom cultures, Monica Löfgren Nilsson found that “self-motivated” reporters are regarded positively, especially reporters with specific areas of responsibility. Sometimes they find their own assignments, and when they receive assignments from the editorial board, they decide themselves how to handle the job. Individual initiatives at the reporter level are totally acceptable as long as they produce material that can be published. Löfgren Nilsson describes this model as atomistic, and does not believe it is only confined to the newsrooms in her study. She claims that Swedish newsrooms are becoming increasingly atomistic (Löfgren Nilsson 1999).

Herbert Gans also observes how the ideal image of a reporter in news organizations is someone who works independently of news editors and colleagues (Gans 1980). However, although news reporters do work independently, there is a framework of expectations and standards for how they should carry out their work.

The studies mentioned above are based on participant observation of everyday work in newsrooms, with a focus on normal routines and their impact on the work of reporters and on the news content. How newsrooms act in acute major crises has received less attention in the research. There are a couple of Swedish reports, though. Rutger Lindahl (1986) describes how six newspapers worked after the assassination of Prime Minister Olof Palme. This description is part of a larger study, also including newsrooms in radio and television. Furthermore, Torsten Malmström and Lennart Weibull (1985) have studied the newsrooms’ work following a blizzard in Gothenburg. These studies were national and local, respectively. The geographic aspect of the tsunami catastrophe demanded much more extensive media efforts. Each of these cases, however, deals with sudden and unexpected incidents that required extraordinary action.

Analyzing contemporary media newsroom work is hardly possible without taking into account how new technology influences news production. In modern media analyses, “new technology” usually means digitalization in general, and the Internet in particular. The term refers to using the Internet for journalistic work processes, such as gathering information and publishing. This publishing is global, sometimes creating a global village, a term introduced already in the early 1960s by Marshall McLuhan (1962). These areas also merge when analyzing the media’s interactivity with the public. Interactivity and global accessibility have been described as the two most important

features of the new technology (Livingstone 1999). The news media have welcomed new technology. “There is an almost irresistible pressure sooner or later to adopt the latest innovations”, writes Dennis McQuail (2005).

But new technology does not only refer to the Internet. Other information technology is also significant: McQuail emphasizes the importance of cell phones. Combined with satellites and modern fiber technology, cell phones have revolutionized the transmission of news material from places where infrastructure has either been destroyed or is non-existent. When the tsunami struck, a new generation of cell phone cameras were widely used by both reporters and private individuals.

New technology also changes the relationship between the media and their audiences. In theory at least, anyone with access to a connected computer can become a journalist and publish on the Internet (Boczkowski 2004). But published material is not always read. The media audience still needs help to sift through the information. Rather than increase diversity, new technology may in fact strengthen the major media companies’ dominance as news sources. “Attention on the web is even more concentrated than in the print world”, claims Maxwell McCombs (2005). For example, he mentions how the five largest U.S. newspapers account for 21.5 percent of the circulation among the top 100 daily newspapers, but 41.4 percent of the total Internet links to the same 100 newspapers.

To conclude, media coverage of catastrophes and disasters is influenced by different interplaying factors such as considerable cross-pressure on professional journalistic role perceptions, existing newsroom cultures and news media adaptation to new technology in crises situations.

Tsunami News Media Work: Hour by Hour

On Christmas night 2004, most newsrooms in Sweden are deserted. Only the newsrooms of the single copy sale papers, *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen*, are in operation. The night has been quiet. It is almost 4 a.m. and all pages have been sent to the printers. *Expressen*’s journalists go home. The on-duty web editor will arrive in one hour.

The sleepy stillness at *Aftonbladet* is suddenly shattered. The shrill sound of telephones cuts through the night and text messages flood the newspaper’s e-mail. Something has happened. A major event soon unfolds for the slimmed-down night staff. From Kata Beach in Phuket, a man tells the single reporter on duty about a massive tidal wave that swept in, and that many people are dead or injured.

Telephones ring incessantly, the reporter cannot answer them all. Neither the national news agency TT, nor the BBC nor CNN have received any reports of a tidal wave. But one thing is certain, something huge has happened. The pace in the newsroom quickens.

Shortly after 4.45 a.m., the web editor is woken up by a telephone call. From his home he quickly publishes a text in the online newspaper. Tourists start sending photos from their cell phones. The editors ask for more pictures. More employees are called into the newsroom. Aftonbladet mobilizes.

Like thousands of other Swedes, a number of journalists are on vacation in Thailand. One of Aftonbladet's reporters calls, plus a stringer and some freelance journalists and photographers. They start to work immediately, and produce several reports for the newspaper on December 27.

At 5 a.m., Aftonbladet's printers change the paper rolls. The front page and three news pages are replaced. Half of the regular edition on Boxing Day brings news of the tsunami.⁴ Aftonbladet is the first newspaper in Europe to publish news about the tidal waves in Thailand.

Expressen's on-duty web editor comes in to work at 5 a.m. One short hour without staff in the newsroom and Expressen is now lagging behind Aftonbladet, its main competitor.

At 5:42 a.m., TT news agency sends out a breaking news telegram. News editors and the editors-in-chief of all major news media are woken up. The telegram announces:

Tourists missing in Thailand

Many tourists missing after enormous tidal wave sweeps over holiday resort Phuket in southern Thailand, reports public radio.

The foreign news editor at Sveriges Radio (SR) is on vacation, but is woken by the TT telegram. He immediately calls in employees to the foreign news desk. A producer and sub-editor are also called into the newsroom. Two telegram editors have been on duty during the night. SR broadcasts news every hour at nighttime. On the 6 a.m. news broadcast, the radio reports that a tidal wave has hit Thailand, and fifteen minutes later, the telegram editors publish a feature on their website.

Expressen's web editor also responds to the TT telegram at 5:42 a.m. He sees that staff are called into the newsroom. When the news editor reads words like "holiday resort", "tidal wave" and "many tourists missing", he decides to send employees to Phuket. Some freelance reporters in Southeast Asia are immediately requested to make their way to Thailand. Early morning website readers are encouraged to "Call Expressen!" This is how the newspaper locates a photographer on vacation in Phuket who witnessed the tidal wave.

The newsrooms of Stockholm's two largest subscription newspapers, Dagens Nyheter and Svenska Dagbladet, are empty when the TT telegram arrives. But Svenska Dagbladet subscribes to a TT service that automatically publishes the news agency's breaking news on the newspaper's online version.⁵ This explains why TT telegrams are already published there at 6 a.m.

Dagens Nyheter's web editor is not in Stockholm when he receives the news flash at 5:42 a.m. But he immediately goes on the Internet and publishes

the TT telegram on the online edition. The web newsroom should have been closed today, but employees are called into work.⁶ The newspaper's editor-in-chief and edition coordinator are also woken by the TT telegram.

Newsrooms are Staffed

At 6 a.m., the night staff at Aftonbladet does not even consider going home. The executive editor decides to run extra editions in Stockholm's inner city and suburbs. Print start is set for 10.30 a.m. and vehicles are ordered from the haulage contractor. All of this is routine, Aftonbladet often runs extra editions. The printers are still at work, and instructed to work overtime. The newsroom pulls six pages from the regular newspaper and fills them with news about the tsunami. The front page is completely dominated by news of the catastrophe.

The newsroom of Sweden's largest commercial television channel, TV4, is deserted when the TT telegram arrives. The news editor calls employees in to work from her country house. The web editor is first to arrive at 6.30 a.m. He skims through the first TT telegrams and publishes them on the web. Amidst the constant ringing of telephones, he tries to contact more colleagues.

At Sveriges Television (SVT), only a teletext editor is on duty in the newsroom.⁷ The 5:42 TT telegram is published on SVT's teletext at 5:49 a.m. Teletext news is automatically published on the news website, and more text, photos, videos and links are added later. The teletext editor calls colleagues and alerts the responsible editors. The managing editor for news programs immediately leaves for SVT's newsroom when he sees the TT telegram. A decision is made to send a special broadcast at 12 noon. An anchorman, producer, mixer, photographer, sound engineer, control room and make-up staff are organized in time for the broadcast.

Meanwhile, an SR reporter in Stockholm has located a Swedish tourist in Phuket. He describes his ordeal on a 7 a.m. broadcast. On this same broadcast, a leading travel agency claims that around 10,000-15,000 Swedish charter tourists are currently in Thailand.

The radio newsroom is struggling with staffing problems during the holiday period. The executive editor is recuperating after a recent operation; the current affairs producer and program coordinator are on vacation in India and Australia. Other employees are out of reach during the Christmas/New Year's break and SR has no staff in Bangkok at the moment. One correspondent has just finished and the next one has not yet started.

Employees are Sent to the Scene

The time is about 7-8 a.m. when the TV4 news editor decides to send two employees to Phuket. She orders their plane tickets. A decision is also made to send a special news broadcast at 11.49, eleven minutes before the rival public

service television channel. This means finding staff quickly. At the same time, a search for photos from the affected areas is underway. Reuters is a great help here.

SVT's foreign news editor is woken at 8 a.m., and quickly decides to send a team of reporters to Thailand. He knows that something has happened, but still thinks it is an earthquake. However, it does not take long before the newsroom receives amateur videos from Swedes in the tsunami-struck areas. Reporting starts even though many journalists are on holiday leave. Employees come in to work voluntarily.

A reporter and photographer are sent to Thailand from Stockholm. The tickets are for the next flight at 12.15 p.m. via Copenhagen. SVT's EU reporter is on vacation in India with her family. When she hears about the catastrophe, she travels immediately to the tsunami-struck areas in southern India. Another employee is in Sri Lanka. She has witnessed the tidal wave.

The time is 8 a.m., and the editorial board at Dagens Nyheter still does not know what has happened in Southeast, but they understand that the situation is serious. A decision is made to send employees to Phuket. At the same time, graphic artists, reporters and page designers are called into the newsroom. The newspaper's regular Asian correspondent is on vacation and out of reach. Another reporter and photographer travel to the catastrophe area instead. The photographer is a substitute and on duty this weekend. Despite a lack of seats, the 24-hour emergency travel service in London arranges two tickets on a plane from Arlanda to Bangkok at 2 p.m. A seemingly trivial but serious problem now arises: how to pay for the tickets on Boxing Day, when the newspaper's administrative staff is on vacation. The foreign news editor saves the day by paying with his private credit card.

The situation is still confusing when SR's foreign news editor decides to send employees to Phuket. At 8.45 a.m., he calls the Berlin correspondent and asks him to go. Regular staff have now reinforced the foreign news desk. The foreign news editor had planned a break over Christmas, but like everyone else, he works harder than ever. All broadcasts are filled with news of the catastrophe.

The subscription newspaper Svenska Dagbladet's editorial board waits before sending people. The newspaper already has one reporter in the area, a theatre critic who is on vacation in Phuket. The correspondent in Southeast Asia is on vacation, however, and cannot be reached. Employees stream into Svenska Dagbladet's newsroom during Boxing Day. Seven reporters cover the tsunami for Monday's edition. It is decided from the beginning that the domestic and foreign news departments will combine over the next few days. The web newsroom should have been closed, but that does not happen. One employee comes in around 10-11 a.m. and staff continue working through the evening.

In the single copy sale newspaper Expressen's newsroom, four reporters are working at 9 a.m. on Boxing Day. Reporting responsibilities for each of

the affected countries is divided between them. An extra edition is underway. The production manager warns that it may be difficult to find drivers to distribute the extra edition on a holiday, but a decision is made to try. At the same time, the organization mobilizes. Day editors, janitors and extra switchboard staff are called in. The printers are also notified, as today's paper is ready and people have gone home. The manager has to work hard to find printing staff for the extra edition.

Rival newspaper, Aftonbladet, organizes a back-up organization with extra page designers, the night editor, photo editor, illustrator and copy editor, all devoted to the tsunami catastrophe. Like everyone else on the night shift, the night reporter who answered the first call from desperate Swedes in Thailand is still at work at 11.30 a.m. when the extra edition is printed. She works through three deadlines before going home. Twelve reporters in the newsroom write about the tsunami in the newspaper next day.

"The job was really heavy. People called us while they were walking around looking for their families; they were crying and begging for help. We couldn't tell them it wasn't our job. And the situation in the newsroom was chaotic with all the calls from people asking us to publish photos of their missing relatives", says one reporter.

The newspaper still manages to produce 26 pages on the tsunami in its regular Monday edition. It also publishes an extra edition.

Resources are Distributed and Organized

During the morning and afternoon of Boxing Day, newsrooms delegate tasks. The scope of the catastrophe is still unknown during the morning. Sky, BBC and CNN show images from Phuket, but nothing is heard from Aceh or Khao Lak.

Telephone connections with Thailand are unreliable. The newsrooms also receive calls from worried relatives in Sweden, who are angry and desperate because the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not answer their calls. They wonder how much the newsrooms know. The Ministry has not published any information on its website, so people call the news media instead.

More and more reporters go to their offices during the day. Editorial managers comment on how easy it is to find employees. Reporters call and ask whether they can come in and work. Some have to be stopped.

Pressure is peaking in the newsrooms. Desperate people never stop calling. The situation is chaotic. Receptionists cannot handle all the calls, and newsrooms cannot plan their work properly. Calls continue for several days, and the journalists feel obligated to answer them.

All newsrooms, except for subscription newspaper Svenska Dagbladet, are in a hurry to send reporters and photographers to Southeast Asia. They send employees to Phuket even though Sri Lanka seems worst hit by the tsunami

at first. Only the newspaper Expressen redirects one reporter and one photographer to Sri Lanka. Newsroom directors explain their focus on Thailand:

"We saw to the interests of our readers. Foreign newsrooms wrote about Aceh and other countries based on telegrams and information from other sources", says Expressen's edition coordinator.

Sveriges Radio's foreign news editor says:

"Maybe we concentrated too much on Swedes and not enough on Thais. But Swedish makes better radio than foreign languages with interpreters. We decided that our listeners would be more interested in hearing about Swedes."

Sveriges Television has a broader coverage of the catastrophe from the very start because employees are already on location in India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

By Boxing Day afternoon, the following employees from the news media studied here are on their way to Southeast Asia:

- Sveriges Radio: Correspondent from Berlin via Frankfurt 2 p.m. to Phuket
- Dagens Nyheter: Reporter and photographer from Stockholm 2 p.m. to Phuket, reporter from Malmö 5 p.m. to Phuket.
- TV4: Reporter and photographer from Stockholm 2 p.m. to Phuket.
- Sveriges Television: Two reporters are delayed in Stockholm, miss the plane in Copenhagen at 2 p.m. and travel via Frankfurt later that day.
- Aftonbladet: Reporter and photographer from Copenhagen 2 p.m. to Phuket, reporter and photographer from Stockholm 2 p.m. to Phuket.
- Expressen: Reporter from Ho Chi Minh City at 8 a.m. (Swedish time), four employees from Malmö 5 p.m. to Phuket.

Rapid Turnouts

For many reporters, the Christmas/New Year's break comes to an abrupt end when they are sent to Phuket.

When the telephone rings, TV4's foreign news reporter, Stefan Nieminen, is at home in bed in Gällivare in the very north of Sweden. It is snowing. There are no flights from Gällivare that day. Nieminen's wife drives him 250 km to Luleå while he calls Scandinavian Airlines, SAS, and asks them to hold his plane. They are late because of the weather. He also knows that he will arrive late at the airport in Stockholm. He calls SAS and Thai Airlines and asks them to check him in before he arrives. This is not easy. Thai will not compromise, and says he must check in personally. In Stockholm photographer Paul Kuchar tries to persuade them.

"We reached the domestic terminal by 1.40 p.m. Thai was due to leave from the international terminal at 2 p.m. You can usually find transport between the domestic and international terminals when you're in a hurry, but not on

Boxing Day. I had to run along the corridors with all of my hand luggage”, Nieminen says.

The next problem was boarding the plane without a ticket. Photographer Paul Kuchar has both tickets, and he is standing on the plane with his foot between the doors so they cannot be closed. Security guards realize the seriousness of the situation, and offer a guarded escort to the gate – without a boarding card. When Nieminen and Kuchar arrive in Phuket, they contact the newsroom in Stockholm and then travel by taxi to Patong Beach where they find a satellite uplink. Complete devastation is just around the corner.

“The first feature was ready in half an hour and I went live on air in the morning news on December 27”.

Kristian Åström, SR’s Berlin correspondent, receives a call from his foreign news editor around 8:45 on Boxing Day morning that tells him to go to Thailand. The plane from Berlin is due to leave at 10.30 a.m. Åström’s wife books the tickets and drives him at full speed to the airport. Åström lands in Phuket at 4.15 the next morning. A German producer offers to share a taxi to Patong Beach, but Åström has to jump out and find a new taxi on the highway when the German is suddenly redirected. Åström leaves his luggage at the hotel and starts working. He goes live on air with his cell phone at 6, 7 and 8 a.m. He also finds a Swedish tourist for the 7 a.m. broadcast who describes his ordeal.

Expressen’s reporter Tommy Schönstedt is not working on Boxing Day, and is just about to leave Stockholm. He drives past the newsroom to collect a few things. But the news editor has decided to send more employees to Thailand and asks Schönstedt to go. The time is 12.35 p.m. The plane leaves Stockholm at 1 p.m.⁸ Schönstedt drives to the airport in all his winter clothes. He has no luggage except a computer bag, where he always keeps a toothbrush and clean underwear. And he always carries his passport. He arrives at Phuket Airport, 12-noon local time on Monday. Total chaos reigns. There are no rental cars or helicopters. He persuades a taxi to take him to the catastrophe area.

Technical Difficulties

Reporters on location have no problems gathering and processing material for articles and features in the tsunami-struck areas. On the contrary. Television images are downloaded from cameras with simple and seamless technology and edited on laptop computers. The problem is sending text and images home to newsrooms. In hard-hit areas like Khao Lak, both landline and cell phone networks are down. And there are no links for sending television features home. The closest one is on a rock face in Patong on Phuket. But the TV news team has to drive there to broadcast. The journey takes four hours there and back on a heavily eroded roadway.

When the TV news teams arrive in Patong, they have to arrange link time. EBU and AsianNet have teamed up, and taken over the only available link. It

is difficult to get time. A lot of TV news teams are on site, and some of them are heavily exceeding their time limit. The link in Patong is incredibly overcrowded. EBU's coordinator burns out, creating even worse traffic jams.⁹ SVT sends an employee to Patong to coordinate transmissions.

Broadcasting conditions also vary. The cell phone network spans a very small area; calling Sweden from some hotels is impossible and Internet access is limited. The reporter from SR feels restricted by the limited transmission possibilities:

"It could take up to an hour to transmit one minute of feature."

The photographer working for Expressen has the same problems:

"Our hotel had broadband, but it obviously was not very broad. It could take me three to four hours to transmit a photo to the newsroom at home".

Communication between Expressen reporters in Thailand is even more difficult. The news editor uses group-sms to keep them informed.

Transmission is excellent in some untouched hotels, however. The TV4 reporter uses a satellite phone to transmit from Khao Lak.

"We also edited some features on the floor of the hotel lobby in Phuket. We mixed images and voice over on the laptop and transmitted it directly to the newsroom at home. The equipment is simple and you can load images from the camera to the computer in a taxi, if you have to", he says.

Reporters and photographers who do not know how to handle the new technology under pressure cause some problems. The reporters from Dagens Nyheter and Expressen have great difficulties with telephone connections:

"I could not transmit my texts over the phone from the hotel. And I never managed to use the computer after being helped in an Internet café. They changed the computer's settings and after that it didn't work. I had to find a more modern hotel with access to mobile net and finally managed to get in contact with the newsroom. I read my texts over the phone", says the reporter from Dagens Nyheter.

Resource-demanding Coverage

Hour by hour, newsrooms are beginning to grasp the scope of the catastrophe. They mobilize and work harder than ever. Some are involved in long calls from people who desperately want to contact their missing relatives; others handle the mass of photos streaming in from the area. The newsrooms reinforce their resources.

Television stations change their schedules to make time for special broadcasts, and avoid sending inappropriate programs. TV and radio news airtime are almost doubled until the second weekend in January.¹⁰ Up until New Year's, SVT's two newsrooms broadcast three times longer than usual. During the following nine days, they broadcast 150 percent more than usual. SVT's two news broadcasts combined include more than twice as much material on

the tsunami as the news broadcast on TV4, which leaves out all commercial breaks from the news programs during the period December 26 to Januari 7.

SR's news broadcasts are also considerably longer, but mainly current affairs programs are extended, focusing exclusively on the tsunami. During the whole of the analyzed month, catastrophe coverage constitutes around 50 percent of all content in all broadcasting media. The reporting is most intense during the first week, between December 26 and January 3. Between half and one third of all analyzed material is published or broadcasted during this period.

Newspapers devote almost all their news coverage to the tsunami. They expand their format as far as printing resources permit.¹¹ Expressen prints 12 extra pages each day during the first few weeks, and reduces its coverage of politics, crime and other topics. The format of Aftonbladet is utilized to a maximum each day during the first few weeks. The Sport section decreases from 20–24 pages to 16, and several reports written prior to the usually uneventful Christmas period are not published. The two single copy sale newspapers publish a total of 937 pages on the tsunami catastrophe during the first month, an average of 30 pages per day. Coverage in these newspapers is almost double that of the two analyzed subscription newspapers, which average 16.5 pages per day¹². The formats of subscription newspapers Dagens Nyheter and Svenska Dagbladet are also utilized to a maximum, and there is more space for tsunami coverage because some advertisers withdraw their advertisements from the text pages.

aftonbladet.se publishes more material on the catastrophe during the first five days than does dn.se, and has more than three times as many unique visitors – over 3 million.¹³

Staff resources are fully utilized as well. About twice as many people work in the SR newsroom during the first few days, and nearly all newspaper and television staff work on tsunami coverage. At Svenska Dagbladet and Dagens Nyheter, employees from other departments also work on tsunami coverage, not only the foreign and domestic news departments.

Single copy sale newspapers make an enormous investment in tsunami coverage. Expressen in Stockholm calls in staff from local newsrooms in Gothenburg and Malmö. During the first three weeks, 18 employees are sent to Thailand and 2 to Sri Lanka. Aftonbladet sends 15 employees to Thailand, whom 10 arrive during the first few days. The newspaper also collaborates with the Norwegian paper Verdens Gang, whose reporters write articles for Aftonbladet.

Online News

The need for information is enormous and a news-hungry public devours breaking news in online newspapers and teletext. Most important is that peo-

ple in the affected areas can access information via online newspapers if they have cell phones or can visit Internet cafes in Phuket.

Web newsrooms also devote nearly all staff resources to tsunami reporting. Online news includes news and feature stories from journalists on location, video features from television news broadcasts, and amateur videos taken by tourists. One person is responsible for purchasing amateur videos and images at SVT's television news. This helps relieve the pressure (the telephones never stop ringing, and the email volume is massive), and helps assess the incoming material.

The greatest difficulty is knowing how to handle the impact of images. One manager says:

"On the one hand we respected the individual's needs for privacy and understood that people were in shock, but on the other, if readers were to understand the overwhelming implications of this catastrophe, we had to portray reality. Gradually there was a shift in view of what shots we could publish. After some days, both television and online news showed more shots of body bags and message boards. But we never showed photos of dead bodies that could be recognized. We maintained a constant dialogue on ethical standards, and were careful to point out that this was an exceptional case due to the situation at hand."

The same discussions take place at TV4, where the amount of photographic material from private people is difficult to handle. There are long discussions about the content of photos.

SR's reporters send their presentations and scripts to the web newsroom, where material for the Internet is edited. Nine people are working (one part-time), and during the first six days, online news focuses almost exclusively on the tsunami.

expressen.se is also filled with tsunami news. Some sport and entertainment news is published, but all other news and advertising are removed. Three to four employees work exclusively on the tsunami in the online version of the newspaper.

aftonbladet.se publishes news from agencies, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other sources. Reporters on location send material back to the web newsroom, where reports are edited. They also write features for the newspaper's Internet radio. The web newsroom works closely with the newspaper, and provides information. The web newsroom also receives most of the photos from tourists in the area. Three hours after the tidal wave hits the west coast of Thailand, 36 photos have arrived in Aftonbladet's newsroom. Most photos come from tourists, others from photography agencies.

Dagens Nyheter's web newsroom works as usual, but stays open significantly longer. Amateur videos stream in, and around ten are purchased.

Articles written by Svenska Dagbladet's foreign news reporters are published in both the newspaper and svd.se. The online version includes graphics, earlier articles and photo specials from the affected areas. The entire web

newsroom works many hours overtime during the first week. Like the staff at dn.se, they also work through the New Year's weekend, which they would not normally do.

Web newsrooms also provide designated sections for people searching for missing relatives. The names and photos of people are published on the Internet. The newsrooms also publish information about where people can receive and offer help in Thailand and Sweden, and make donations.

The Worst Experience

The journalists sent to the catastrophe areas are subjected to tremendous physical, but most of all, mental strain. After a couple of days some of them are in extremely poor condition. Many of the reporters are completely unprepared for what's coming. One Aftonbladet reporter says:

"Not even in our wildest imagination could we anticipate what met us in the Temple areas in Khao Lak, where all the dead bodies had been gathered."

"The sights of bodies along the roadsides and the stench of putrefaction were horrible. Several reporters and photographers vomited in their masks", one journalist from Expressen says.

Still, the worst is not the bodies or the stench. The most difficult to handle are the indescribably distressed fellow countrymen, some of whom are seriously wounded, desperately looking for relatives and friends among the junk. These people seek consolation, help and information from the journalists. Many of the correspondents testify how they abandon their professional roles to help suffering people in different ways. The reporters were rather approached as fellow human beings than as journalists at work.

"I found it very difficult to work among all the mourning and worried people who were desperately searching for relatives. Also friends and acquaintances of mine were amongst the missing. Some people mailed or called me and wanted me to help them find their relatives", says one radio correspondent.

A TV4 reporter agrees:

"This is the worst experience I have ever had. When I've been reporting from war zones, I've been prepared for dying persons, collapsing houses and desperate people. You know that. But this was something different; fellow countrymen, a tourist's paradise where mums, dads, children and friends go to enjoy the sun and the nice climate. I also saw the hotels where I've been on vacation with my son. They were completely demolished. At that point the calamity came very close. But you have to try to keep a distance. In the beginning, when I felt fit, it was all right, but then it just got more and more difficult."

All the Swedish media workers in Phuket say that what they experienced there is the worst thing they have ever been through. Still the situation in Phuket is in many ways less infernal than the one in the Province of Aceh,

where one reporter from SR, one from TV4, and two from SVT are sent a few days after the disastrous waves. In Phuket the area closest to the beach was completely destroyed, but the rest of the community remained quite undamaged. In Aceh and parts of Sri Lanka, however, entire communities are erased. Even the local media are reduced and many journalists in the Province of Aceh are dead. As a consequence, information is extremely difficult to find. The only major newspaper in the region is not issued the week after the catastrophe.

The correspondent from SR is not at all prepared for what is waiting when he arrives from Johannesburg in South Africa. In Aceh he finds no place to stay, nothing to eat and nothing to drink. The small supplies he brought with him soon run out. He is starving and dehydrated and struggles to stay alive.¹⁴ The TV4 correspondent also falls sick during his stay in Aceh.

"At home, we didn't know what conditions we were sending them to. The teams that went later were equipped with tents, food and water, and the reporters were all vaccinated and more prepared for what was waiting", deputy news editor on TV4 says.

One of the SVT correspondents reports:

"When we arrived at Banda Aceh one week after the tsunami, many corpses were still laying around. There was no food, no water and really no places to stay. At first, we were directed to an assembly room, where hundreds of journalists were staying together. They slept, had their meals and worked there. And we all shared one toilet, that had no water."

The reporter and a photographer from SVT manage to stay with a local journalist. They have to share the bed, but are still much more comfortable than their colleagues in the assembly room. And they have access to some water and possibilities to wash. The food shortage is severe, but the worst thing about staying in Aceh is the recurrent earthquakes.

"It was worse than seeing all the corpses laying around. Because this was about our own survival", the reporter says.

The employees sent to catastrophe areas are not the only ones exposed to great strain. All newsrooms mobilize and the staff work overtime. Many reporters are involved in long conversations with desperate people begging for help to find their next of kin. Others are trying to handle the vast number of images coming from the catastrophe areas, depicting the most horrible scenes.

Notifications of Missing Persons

The most time-consuming work for the four online newspapers is the notifications of missing persons.

"Many readers demand instantly that Aftonbladet publish notifications of missing relatives and friends. But at first they are too many", one news editor says.

On December 29, however, after requests and appeals from families, Aftonbladet starts to publish photographs and names of persons missing in Thailand. The relatives are given the opportunity to expose photographs on the newspaper's web pages, sending them by mail or sms to the newsroom. Only family members are allowed to do so. The newsroom always calls back to control and confirm the sender. It also follows up each case and removes the photograph from the site once the person is found.

It is a time-consuming and very trying job. This only occupies at times four reporters. For the despaired relatives, the conversations often have a therapeutic purpose.

"This time, we've had quite different functions compared to previous catastrophes. People came to us for help when they had no one else to turn to. We do have a lot of experience dealing with people who have been severely hit by losses or misfortunes", a reporter at Aftonbladet says.

On December 29, Expressen states:

"After much urging and crying for help from our readers, we now publish names and photographs of a large number of persons who are reported missing by their families."

One of Expressen's editors is responsible for the publishing while 3-4 reporters are on the phones with relatives, controlling that the notifications are correct. Several readers also get in touch directly with the newspaper's correspondents in Thailand and beg them for help to search for relatives.

Also at Dagens Nyheter the notifications require a lot of time and effort. A couple of staff members are exclusively occupied with publishing the missing-persons list and keeping it up to date. In addition, several reporters help in controlling that information is accurate. Many of the phone calls they have to make are very emotional.

"We very often have requests from readers, asking us to publish notifications of missing persons on our web edition. This is actually the first time we have done this", the web editor reveals.

At Svenska Dagbladet a link on the newspaper's web edition is open to the public for notifications. It remains open for about a week.

"Occasionally we called to check if the information was correct, but most of the time we trusted it to be right", the web editor tells.

Some, but not all, notifications are also published in the paper edition.

The TV4 newsroom also receives many requests for notifications to be published, but does not find the resources to do so.

"We really wanted to publish notifications on our web site, but didn't have the capacity to check on the accuracy of the information received, and update a list. So we didn't do it. But we did supply extensive information on the Internet on where to turn, both for those in need of help and for those who wanted to help", says the deputy news editor.

Neither Sveriges Radio nor Sveriges Television publish any notifications. The SVT online editor says it is due to lack of personnel resources caused by

employees being on sick leave, and lack of ethical and jurisdictional routines for how to handle these kinds of notifications. So instead, the online newsroom choose to put together an extensive list of web sites where the public can look for missing relatives and friends by themselves.

Debriefings

The editorial boards in Stockholm soon realize that the employees on duty in the catastrophe areas are suffering under great psychological strain. When possible, they send their most experienced reporters and photographers, those who have already reported from conflicts and wars, terror attacks, the Estonia catastrophe, the discotheque fire in Gothenburg, and other similar occasions. But all of them testify that the catastrophe in Southeast Asia is the worst incident that they have ever experienced. Several of them are not doing well at all. Some are replaced after a only few days.

The journalists and photographers from Expressen are constantly sharing their experiences with each other and with the home newsroom. When they return to Sweden the administrating editor meets them at the airport.

"That felt very good", one experienced reporter says.

It is the first time that he participates in debriefing interviews. The newspaper did offer something similar, however, after the big discotheque fire in Gothenburg in 1998, when 63 young people died and 200 were injured.

Also representatives from the Dagens Nyheter's editorial board, who want to reassure themselves that the homecoming employees are all right, meet the journalists at the airport. All are offered debriefing interviews.

Aftonbladet hires a professional company for similar interviews. Even reporters located in Thailand are urged to call them. All homecoming journalists are invited by the editorial board to get in contact with a psychologist, at least once. Some reporters in the home newsroom, who have spent a great deal of time on the phone with relatives of missing persons, are also in need of debriefing.

The editor of foreign news at SR has repeated conversations with the correspondents about how they are feeling. They are all offered debriefing interviews when they return home, but not everyone is interested. A certain macho attitude prevails among some reporters, but most find the interviews very helpful.

"I was debriefed when I got home and met a psychologist for a few hours. But I would rather not talk about it, it brings it all back", says the radio correspondent first on place in Thailand.

Unlike his colleagues from the newspapers and television, he works alone. As a radio reporter he has no photographer with whom to share the distressful experiences.

The psychological strain under the most intensive phase is also heavy on

the newsrooms' staff at home. Reporters are often used to interview people under pressure and in crises, but this is worse and more extensive than ever before. TV4 hires a psychologist to be present in the newsroom and at hand for the reporters during the first two weeks. The homecoming journalists are also invited to attend consultations. One correspondent tries to handle his experiences on location in Thailand:

"To me it was a relief to report what I was experiencing to the viewers. I also talked a lot with my photographer, we shared the same room."

Conditions for Rapid Response by Media

To a large degree, the media's rapid response relies on modern information technology and how it is distributed among the Swedish public. Between 65 and 70 percent of Swedish households had access to the Internet in 2003, and in the beginning of 2005, 71 percent of the population between 16-74 years of age said they used the Internet at home (Bergström 2004, SCB 2005). Another important condition is that most Swedes, 86 percent, watch television on an average day (Carlsson 2007). On a day like December 26, when subscription newspapers are not published, the number of television viewers is probably even higher.

Not insignificantly, single copy sale newspaper Aftonbladet often encourages readers to call them with news tips. The first telephone report from a beach in Phuket reached the newspaper at 4 a.m. And the general public actually sent information to newspapers with their cell phones before telegrams arrived from news agencies. Images traveled directly from the public to the news media. The quality of the images was generally poor, but they were graphic.

Advanced technology has also increased the speed of media reporting. Just a few hours after the first phone call, Aftonbladets's web editor, who worked via a broadband connection from home, published eyewitness accounts in aftonbladet.se. This meant that news was also available to Swedes who had access to the Internet in the catastrophe area.

Interactivity with people in the catastrophe area was further strengthened when media published photos and eyewitness accounts in their online editions.

This combination of speed and accessibility in the catastrophe areas meant that Swedish newspapers were asked by both tourists in Thailand and their relatives in Sweden to publish photos of missing persons. Several newspapers did so. The lists were usually published in online versions, but in some cases also in regular newspapers. The Government's inability to handle a missing persons register gave media publications extra significance. Criticism of these publications tended to disappear, while criticism of the Government was overwhelming (See Nord & Strömbäck's chapter in this volume).

Independence – then Adaptation

The tsunami catastrophe could not have happened at a worse time for Swedish news media. Most newsrooms were deserted. It was a major holiday, and the middle of the night. Many journalists and editors were on vacation. And the tsunami took place on the other side of the globe.

Except for *Aftonbladet*, which acted extremely fast, the TT telegram at 5.42 a.m. was the starting signal for all media. News and managing editors around the country were woken by their cell phones or beepers. The sparsely worded telegram spurred them to action. Staff were immediately called in to work, and the TT telegrams that began to stream in were directly published online. Reporters and photographers were sent to Thailand.

In urgent situations, the on-duty news editor, foreign news editor or editor-in-chief makes decisions about whether to send staff to a catastrophe area. This time, several editors made the decision before they really understood what had happened. Better to act in haste than not at all, decided *Expressen's* young web editor when he read the TT telegram, and immediately called and woke his editors on Boxing Day morning. Reporting, production and distribution staff were called in as quickly as possible. Decision-making processes are usually effective in newspaper newsrooms.

Several newsrooms were reorganized. Departments were temporarily combined and special groups were created to investigate the actions of government authorities, to handle and check the missing-persons register, and to produce extra editions. Air tickets that were usually arranged by administrative staff were purchased by managing editors on Boxing Day, or by the reporters and photographers who traveled to the catastrophe areas.

Emergencies reveal the important aspects of flexibility and capacity for rapid reorganization. McQuail (2005) speaks about improvising entrepreneurs, and these played an important role in most newsrooms during the first day of the catastrophe.

But there was not much scope for improvisation at *Sveriges Television* (SVT). Detailed instructions for how editors should act in emergencies were followed precisely, which meant that nothing could be broadcast until the right person was in the right place. SVT went on air with its first report on the tsunami eight hours after the catastrophe took place, which was unfortunate because SVT's news programs are considered the most important mediators of the news in Sweden. The commercial TV channel was only eleven minutes faster, but in this case the slowness was due to staff shortages rather than following a list of instructions.

Despite the public holiday, many employees came in to work as soon as they heard about the tsunami. When something important happens, journalists want to be involved (Lindahl 1986, Malmström and Weibull 1995). Editors had to stop people from coming in to work because replacement staff would soon be needed.

Experienced, resourceful and inventive reporters made their way to Phuket. TV4's reporter requested that Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) delay his plane in Luleå, and managed to board a Thai Air plane in Stockholm without a ticket or a boarding pass. SVT's correspondent took a huge risk and flew to Sri Lanka without a visa. Others tried to buy tickets on fully booked planes – and succeeded.

When they arrived, however, editorial boards at home guided their work. An overview of the situation and information gathering was coordinated from Stockholm. When several reporters cover the same event from different angles their work has to be coordinated, and any opportunities for acting independently quickly fade. Once the news teams were in place and after they had consigned their first reports, "independent" reporters were rarely seen in the tsunami coverage, and almost non-existent in the catastrophe areas.

After the first day, the need for clarity and coordination, plus a heavy workload and a gradually increasing strain on the news workers, progressed to more conventional and molded journalism. A content analysis showed that coverage during the first month was characterized by traditional journalistic dramaturgy and standardization (Andersson Odén, Ghersetti and Wallin 2005). Reports focused on Swedish interests, especially what was happening in Stockholm, while other affected countries within and outside Europe received little attention. Around ten prominent persons dominated the news, most of them men. Many of these were portrayed in stereotyped ways and assigned the characters of villains, heroes or victims. Accounts of the tsunami's devastation were adapted to the standard images of natural catastrophes usually presented by media.

Newsroom staff worked under intense pressure during the period. Reporters' long telephone calls with desperate and sometimes seriously injured people, long shifts and the rapid pace caused mental and physical strain. But the demand for information and news was huge, and the competition for readers, listeners and viewers loomed constantly in the background. Under these conditions, the most effective employee was someone who could work independently, but still within given frameworks and standards.

Resourcefulness and improvisation are the basic prerequisites for getting started. Independent actions are encouraged. But when the organization is up and running, adaptation to news production routines and standard templates is expected. The idealistic "independent" reporter is therefore rarely accommodated in everyday newsroom routines. But this study shows that he or she can have a major impact on how newsrooms respond to emergencies. The "independent" reporter is thus not only an ideal newsroom image, as Herbert Gans states (1980). In the initial phase of dramatic events, reporters are expected to act independently. This is actually crucial to the news organization responding adequately to the situation.

Successful Use of Debriefing Interviews

The independent, and often quite improvised, actions taken by staff members put some of them in situations they were not prepared for. Many traveled on short notice to the disaster areas, without realizing or understanding what was waiting.

Several journalists and photographers spoke after the catastrophe about a feeling of conflict between professional and civilian roles. Should they report or help? It is not the duty of a reporter to participate in emergency rescue efforts, but many felt the pressure of these kinds of expectations, and as a consequence also guilt and powerlessness. Similar reactions have been reported from journalists covering previous disasters and catastrophes (Englund 2002; 2008). In the home newsrooms, many reporters were involved in long conversations with desperate people in search of news about their family members and friends in Thailand. Journalists stepped in to give help and comfort when official authorities and professionals failed to do so. This was yet another task they were neither trained nor prepared for.

A person in a crisis situation does not react normally or rationally. In journalism, strain and stress may lead to increased risk of unprofessional behavior, such as unmotivated intrusion on victims and their relatives, insensibility and lack of empathy, weak criticism of sources, and violation of the standards of journalistic ethics. This, in turn, can easily lead to exaggerated, sensational and speculative news reporting.

Routines for dealing with emotional and psychological strain – so-called debriefing – have been practiced by fire brigades, police and the army for many years. Therapeutic interviews, however, were very rare, or almost unknown, in the Swedish media up until the late 1990s. The turning point came with the discothèque fire in Gothenburg in 1998, when many reporters and photographers ended up in, and reported from, the middle of the disaster.

During the tsunami catastrophe, however, there was from the very outset awareness of the need to deal with the distressful experiences of the media workers, both of those in the disaster areas and those working with relatives and lists of missing persons in the home newsroom. Therapeutic interviews were offered to correspondents while they were in the field and also directly upon their return home. Afterwards many journalists spoke of how they used each other, or at times even the reporting itself, as a kind of debriefing. When necessary, correspondents were replaced after only a few days.

Competent administration and organization at the home desk facilitated working conditions for journalists in the field. Correct and adequate decisions may be difficult to make at the scene of a catastrophe. Firm guidance and ethical responsibility, which were managed by the editorial board at home, made the work in the field less difficult, and indirectly ensured higher journalistic standards.

Effective Use of New Technology

The Swedish media market has evolved into an increasingly deregulated and competitive environment over the past decades (Hadenius and Weibull 2003). Commercialization of the market has increased, forcing several newspapers to close and radio stations and television channels to develop a stronger profile. Furthermore, new media are now established on the Internet.

Competition, combined with a prolonged economic recession in the 1990s, has favored news that is inexpensive to produce and that attracts a larger audience (McManus 1994, Allern 2001, Wadbring 2003). This has created openness to all kinds of changes – technological and organizational – that minimize costs. The great penetration of new technology in newsrooms is not primarily due to the fact that it is simpler and easier to use, but to the fact that it is cheaper to acquire. It also enables newsroom rationalizations. Fewer staff can produce larger quantities of news material. One example in Sweden is the “one-man news team”. Digital cameras and computers allow a solo reporter to interview, record, take photos and edit material on a laptop computer. This process used to require at least three people. Many of the reporters and photographers who traveled to Thailand expressed how smoothly they could process and complete their news items, sometimes on hotel floors or in taxis, before sending them home to newsrooms.

Competition has also favored dramatic and sensational news (Ghersetti 2000). Dramatic and sensational events are often considered more newsworthy than those that lack these qualities, and they receive more coverage. One factor that clearly affects the degree of drama and sensation is time. The more immediate an event, the greater its news value. Therefore, one of the greatest merits of digital technology is that it enables a significantly faster news service.

One important result of the present study is that it reveals how quickly the coverage of the tsunami catastrophe began. The first calls from Phuket reached *Aftonbladet* just minutes after the first tidal wave had washed over the beach. One and a half hours later, the news was published on the newspaper's website. New technology may have played a greater role in news coverage during and after the tsunami catastrophe than ever before. Through cell phones, text messages and email, newsrooms found out what happened long before news agencies delivered the information. *Aftonbladet* had already produced four pages on the tidal wave when the Swedish news agency, TT, sent its first telegram.

The study shows that, during the initial stages, online newspapers were the medium that reported fastest and widest. Television was the largest news medium as a whole (most people followed the tsunami catastrophe on television), but eight hours passed before SVT and TV4 sent their first special news bulletins.

The single most important contributing factor to this increase in dramatic and sensational news is probably access to photographic material. High speed

and seamless technology enables the immediate transfer of photographic material to newsrooms. This ultimately refers to live broadcasts, or real-time news.

The widespread use of digital cameras is of great importance to this change. Most cell phones today can take and send high-resolution images. The general public is responsible for many, if not most, of the sensational, dramatic and disclosing images published by media. The first day's coverage of the tsunami in the Swedish media confirms this fact. Before newspaper staff arrived on location, most coverage was based on the amateur photos and videos sent by survivors.

New Trends?

This study of Swedish newsrooms and how they were organized and worked during the tsunami catastrophe shows that modern technical resources combined with clear, flexible and effective organization are important prerequisites for producing fast and professional news coverage of major, dramatic events. The study also identifies some new phenomena in Swedish journalism.

First, the general public supplied newsrooms with information. This is not new, but for the first time this study presents a general description of how people in a crisis situation have turned to the media. Newspapers in Sweden have encouraged readers to contact them with news tips for decades. Single copy sale newspapers also have a long tradition of "involvement" or "representing the unrepresented". The tsunami catastrophe showed how this close relationship between newspapers and their readers gave newsrooms better information about the situation than the Swedish authorities acquired. It also revealed major defects in how the authorities handled the information received and, during the crucial initial phase of the catastrophe, failed to organize both information strategies and rescue efforts. This emphasized the media's duty to supply practical information about how both relatives to tourists in Thailand and the general public should react to the catastrophe.

But the most remarkable factor during the tsunami catastrophe was how so many people contacted the media with pleas for help or enquiries that should have been directed to government authorities. When authorities did not react or respond to the crisis, the general public turned to the media. Many reporters in Stockholm newsrooms sat and listened to distraught people who were enraged by the Government's lack of action. Besides their regular jobs, journalists took on a therapeutic role. Many reporters in Thailand stopped working as reporters and assisted desperate, choked and injured Swedes when no other help was available.

Second, the media published descriptions of missing people. Space was designated to photos and short texts sent by relatives. This is the first time that the Swedish media have ever devoted such large-scale coverage to missing people.

Third, online newspapers targeted Swedes in the catastrophe areas as well as domestic readers. Tourists and volunteers in Thailand could read about the catastrophe in Internet cafes or on their cell phones, see who was missing and find out where help was available. The Internet, and global distribution of on-line newspapers, was used to inform and communicate with a large group of Swedish citizens abroad, far beyond the normal distribution area of the media.

Altogether this created a form of “global village” in which the electronic editions of Swedish mass media companies extended the local town-square bulletin board with news and announcements about missing people to towns and tourist resorts on the west coast of Thailand.

Notes

1. Share of total airtime on Rapport 7.30 p.m., Sweden's most popular TV news program, has been measured for the following major events during the first week after the event: The assassination of Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986, the Gulf war in 1991, the sinking of the ferry Estonia in 1994, the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001, the assassination of Minister of Foreign Affairs Anna Lindh in 2003 and the tsunami disaster in 2004.
2. The assassination of Anna Lindh occurred three days before the Swedish referendum on the European Monetary Union (EMU), which clearly influenced the amount of airtime the assassination received.
3. The study was originally commissioned by the Swedish Emergency Management Agency.
4. According to editor-in-chief, Niklas Silow.
5. Several provincial newspapers also subscribe to the TT service.
6. The web newsroom is most active during working hours on weekdays, when there are also most readers. Activity is considerably lower during nights and weekends.
7. The Rapport newsroom has step-by-step instructions for how the newsroom should respond to major and unexpected events. These include an outline of who should alert who, in what order, and the telephone numbers of the people responsible. The instructions state: “We are particularly vulnerable on Saturday and Sunday nights when only teletext/website staff are on site. The earlier the warning, the easier it is to respond effectively.”
8. According to Tommy Schönstedt.
9. According to reporter Claes JB Löfgren, SVT.
10. Broadcasting media were analyzed between 26/12/04 and 25/1/05.
11. Content in the two single copy sale newspapers was analyzed between 26/12/04 and 25/1/05, and both subscription newspapers between 27/12/04 and 26/1/05. Aftonbladet.se and dn.se were analyzed during the first six days of the disaster, between 26/12/04 and 31/12/04.
12. All the analyzed papers were in tabloid format.
13. The two online newspapers were analyzed between 26/12/04 and 31/12/04.
14. According to SR's foreign news editor.

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The Authors

Tomas A. Odén, PhD (2001) is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Gothenburg. Besides research on Crisis Communication, he has conducted studies about media coverage of elections in Venezuela and participated in projects about Swedish media history.

John Barnshaw is Research Projects Coordinator at the Disaster Research Center and a Doctoral Student at the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, University of Delaware. His research interests include: stratification and inequality in a variety of social contexts ranging from disasters to educational tracking to infectious epidemiology.

Jesper Falkheimer, PhD (2004) is Associate Professor in Media and Communication Studies at the School of Arts and Communication (K3), Malmö University. His main research interests are public relations, crisis and communication management. He has published several books, e.g., the anthology *Geographies of Communication – The Spatial Turn in Media Studies* (with André Jansson) and articles in journals such as *Public Relations Review*, *Journal of Contingencies* and *Crisis Management and Event Management*.

Marina Ghersetti, PhD (2000) is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Gothenburg. During the last ten years she has conducted and participated in several research projects on news reporting of big events, such as the death of Lady Diana, the murder of Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh, the tsunami disaster and the avian flue.

Salli Hakala, MA, is a University Lecturer at the Department of Communication/Open University, University of Helsinki. She is finalizing her doctoral thesis on organizational communication. Her research interests include crisis communication, and she has worked in several projects related to this theme. She has written, together with Hannele Seeck, a book on crisis communication in Finland.

Maria Hellman, PhD (2006) is a Researcher at the Media Studies Unit of the Department of Security and Strategic Studies, SNDC. She defended her thesis *Televisual Representations of France and the United Kingdom under Globalization* at Stockholm University. She has been a guest scholar at the Media

Research Institute, then at Stirling University, Scotland, and has spent time in France researching French television. She is presently working on a project headed by Kristina Riegert about the state and the media in global crises.

Johanna Jääsaari, PhD (2007) is Associate Professor at the Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki. She is working for a project on citizenship, media and power, financed by the Academy of Finland. She recently prepared a survey on people's opinions about the media in Finland. She has worked at the Research Department of the Finnish Broadcasting Company. Besides political communication and audience research, her research interests include issues surrounding youth.

Ullamaija Kivikuru PhD (1990) is Professor of Journalism at the Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki. Her research interests include media and democracy as well as communication development, especially in eastern and southern Africa. She has published and edited a dozen books in Finnish, Swedish and English, and published articles in international journals.

Lynn Letukas is a Doctoral Student in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice and a research assistant at the Disaster Research Center, University of Delaware. Her areas of interest include: environmental sociology, environmental justice, stratification and inequality, social problems and social scientific aspects of disaster.

Lars Nord, PhD (2001) is Professor and Chair of Political Communication and Director of the Centre for Political Communication Research at Mid Sweden University. His research interests include strategic political communication, media and democracy, and crisis communication. He has published several books in these fields as well as numerous articles in international journals.

Anna Olofsson, PhD (2002) is Associate Professor in Sociology and Senior Lecturer at the Department of Social Sciences, Mid Sweden University. She has worked with risk research, particularly risk perception and risk communication in heterogeneous societies. Her most recent journal articles are: 'Young people making sense of risk' (*Young* 2008, with E. Wall), 'Crisis communication in multicultural societies' (*IJMED*, 2007) and 'Cosmopolitans and locals: An empirical investigation of cosmopolitanism' (*Current Sociology*, 2007, with S. Öhman).

Mervi Pantti, PhD (2001) is a Marie Curie Fellow at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR), University of Amsterdam. Her current research focuses on media construction and representations of emotion in the contexts of journalism and television entertainment. She has published several books in Finnish and articles in international journals. Her most re-

cent journal article is: 'Till Death Do Us Join: Media, Mourning Rituals and the Sacred Centre of the Society' (*Media, Culture & Society*, 1/2009, with J. Sumiala-Seppänen).

Kristina Riegert, PhD (1998) is Associate Professor in Media and Culture Studies at Södertörn University College. She is editor of *Politicocontainment: Television's Take on the Real* (Peter Lang 2007) and *News of the Other: Tracing Identity in Scandinavian Constructions of the Eastern Baltic Region* (Nordicom, 2004) and author of *The Image War: NATO's Battle for Kosovo in the British Media* (Örebro University Press 2003) and *'Nationalising' Foreign Conflict* (Stockholm University Series 1998). She has contributed to the *European Journal of Communication*, *Journalism Practice* and the *Journal of Information Warfare*.

Hannele Seeck, PhD (2004) is currently an Adjunct Professor at the University of Helsinki and a Senior Researcher at the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. Her current research focuses on adoption and dissemination of management thought. She has published several books as well as journal articles.

Jesper Strömbäck, PhD (2001) is Lubbe Nordström Professor and Chair in Journalism, and Professor in Media and Communication, at Mid Sweden University. He is also research director at the Centre for Political Communication Research at Mid Sweden University. He has published more than ten books, as well as numerous book chapters and journal articles. His most recent publications include *Handbook of Election News Coverage Around the World*, co-edited with Lynda Lee Kaid (Routledge, 2008) and *Communicating Politics. Political Communication in the Nordic Countries*, co-edited with Mark Ørsten and Toril Aalberg (Nordicom 2008).

Ulf Wallin, PhD (1994) is a former Senior Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Gothenburg. He has conducted studies of media coverage of the EU referendum in Sweden and the tsunami disaster.



Director and Administration

Director: Ulla Carlsson
Telephone: +46 31 786 12 19
Fax: +46 31 786 46 55
ulla.carlsson@nordicom.gu.se

Administration and Sales:
Anne Claesson
Telephone: +46 31 786 12 16
Fax: +46 31 786 46 55
anne.claesson@nordicom.gu.se

Technical Editing and Webmaster:
Per Nilsson
Telephone: +46 31 786 46 54
Fax: +46 31 786 46 55
per.nilsson@nordicom.gu.se

Field of Activities

Media and Communication Research

Publications

Editor: Ulla Carlsson
Telephone: +46 31 786 12 19
Fax: +46 31 786 46 55
ulla.carlsson@nordicom.gu.se

Research Documentation

Nordic Co-ordinator:
Claus Kragh Hansen
State and University Library
Universitetsparken
DK-8000 Aarhus C, Denmark

Telephone: +45 89 46 20 69
Fax: +45 89 46 20 50
ckh@statsbiblioteket.dk

Media Trends and Media Statistics

Nordic Media Trends

Nordic Co-ordinator: Eva Harrie
Telephone: +46 31 786 46 58
Fax: +46 31 786 46 55
eva.harrie@nordicom.gu.se

Nordic Media Policy

Editor: Terje Flisen
terjef@nordicmedia.info

Outlook Europe & International

Editor: Anna Celsing
anna.celsing@skynet.be

The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media

Scientific Co-ordinator:
Cecilia von Feilitzen
Telephone: +46 8 608 48 58
Fax: +46 8 608 41 00
cecilia.von.feilitzen@sh.se

Information Co-ordinator:
Catharina Bucht
Telephone: +46 31 786 49 53
Fax: +46 31 786 46 55
catharina.bucht@nordicom.gu.se

National Centres

Nordicom-Denmark

State and University Library
Universitetsparken
DK-8000 Aarhus C, Denmark

Media and Communication Research

Maria Hvid Stenalt
Telephone: +45 89 46 21 67
Fax: +45 89 46 20 50
mhs@statsbiblioteket.dk

Nordicom-Finland

University of Tampere
FI-33014 Tampere, Finland

Media and Communication Research

Eija Poteri
Telephone: +358 3 3551 70 45
Fax: +358 3 3551 62 48
eija.poteri@uta.fi

Nordicom-Norway

Department of Information
Science and Media Studies
University of Bergen
PO Box 7800
NO-5020 Bergen, Norway

Media and Communication Research

Ragnhild Mølster
Telephone: +47 55 58 91 40
Fax: +47 55 58 91 49
ragnhild.molster@infomedia.uib.no

Media Trends and Media Statistics

MediaNorway

Nina Bjørnstad
Telephone: +47 55 58 91 26
Fax: +47 55 58 91 49
nina.bjornstad@infomedia.uib.no

Nordicom-Sweden

University of Gothenburg
PO Box 713
SE-405 30 Göteborg, Sweden

Fax: +46 31 786 46 55

Media and Communication Research

Roger Palmqvist
Telephone: +46 31 786 12 20
roger.palmqvist@nordicom.gu.se

Karin Poulsen
Telephone: +46 31 786 44 19
karin.poulsen@nordicom.gu.se

Media Trends and Media Statistics in Sweden

Ulrika Facht
Telephone: +46 31 786 13 06
ulrika.facht@nordicom.gu.se

Karin Hellingwerf
Telephone: +46 31 786 19 92
karin.hellingwerf@nordicom.gu.se

Staffan Sundin
Telephone: +46 36 16 45 82
staffan.sundin@nordicom.gu.se

Director and Administration:

NORDICOM

University of Gothenburg
PO Box 713,
SE-405 30 Göteborg
Sweden
Telephone: +46 31 786 00 00
Fax: +46 31 786 46 55
info@nordicom.gu.se

Nordicom-Iceland

University of Iceland
Félagsvísindadeild
IS-101 Reykjavík, Iceland

Media and Communication Research

Guðbjörg Hildur Kolbeins
Telephone: +354 525 42 29
Fax: +354 552 68 06
kolbeins@hi.is

AFTER THE TSUNAMI

Crisis Communication in Finland and Sweden

EDITED BY ULLAMAIJA KIVIKURU & LARS NORD

The tsunami in Southeast Asia during Christmas 2004 resulted in the largest number of lost lives in Finland since the Second World War. In Sweden, the tsunami disaster caused about as many deaths as the sinking of the ferry Estonia in the Baltic Sea in 1994. In both countries, the tsunami disaster can be described as one of the worst catastrophes experienced during the post-war period.

This book examines how this dramatic and unexpected event affected public communication patterns and practices in countries like Finland and Sweden. The communicative relations between government actors, the media and citizens always significantly affect the development of crucial democratic values such as trust, accountability and legitimacy. However, it is also reasonable to believe that these values are more difficult to maintain when public communication is under hard pressure, as is most often the case during serious crisis situations.

The book covers different topics related to this issue, such as strategic political communication, media coverage, newsroom practices, public opinion and the use of new media in Finland and Sweden after the tsunami disaster.

NORDICOM

Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research

University of Gothenburg
Box 713, SE 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden
Telephone +46 31 786 00 00 (op.)
Fax +46 31 786 46 55
E-mail: info@nordicom.gu.se
www.nordicom.gu.se



UNIVERSITY OF
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