

Mama, Mama. My hand is gone!

Images of Women in War News Reporting

IRMA KAARINA HALONEN

All over the plaza, scattered torn limbs, bits of brain matter and shattered glass lying in pools of blood. ... Passers-by, monglers, taxi-drivers and reporters helped the wounded into automobiles and drove them off to hospital, horns honking and signals blinking all the while.

“Mama, Mama, my hand is gone!” a small child wails. She is huddled in her mother’s arms, wrapped in a bloody blanket, in the back seat of a reporter’s car, turned ambulance.

“Where is my husband? I have lost my husband!” the woman cries out. She, herself has lost one eye in the explosion.

Old women creep forth, blood-spattered, gasping for breath. The contents of their shopping bags lie spread out over the plaza, among the blood and lifeless bodies.

Hardly anyone can read the above without being shaken. The text, taken from Finland’s leading newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat* 28th August 1995, describes a scene in Sarajevo with brutal clarity. Although the effect is text-based, the shock is amplified by a photo of a wounded, perhaps dead, man’s body sagging over a wrought iron fence.

The text contains the three dominant images of women in war reporting: the mother, the daughter and the crone.

Word and image are closely intertwined.

When I use the phrase “images of women” in the title above, I mean both text and visual images. My examples are, for the sake of brevity as well as clarity, mainly photographs.

Scholars interested in journalism and journalism history have always stressed the effect of the illus-

trated narrative. But there is no consensus concerning the consequences of depictions of violence in news reporting. Ethical norms regarding such depictions are also somewhat unclear. The most recent Finnish research on the subject is Pentti Raittila’s *Uutinen Estonia* [News of the M/S Estonia], which discusses the problematics of photographing corpses and the ethical questions which confront reporters of catastrophic events.

Surviving loved ones and family members will be more sensitive to photos of victims, will find them more offensive than, say, journalists who arrive on the scene from a distant corner of the planet. Thus, cultural distance influences how images of catastrophic events are interpreted.

Contemporary research stresses that it is difficult to discuss the effects or impacts of texts and images inasmuch as interpretations vary virtually from day to day, among both journalists and readers and among media and their varied contents.

Can one say that one kind of war image is more appropriate or fitting than another? Journalists have to make such judgments every day. War journalism puts the journalistic role of journalists and editors to the test: should they maintain a cool detachment or take part in the events with the full range of their personal emotions? (cf. Luostarinen 1994:38, i.a.).

In many cases judgments have to be made very quickly and on the terms imposed by the international flow of images and texts. Increasingly often, reporters find themselves face to face with scenes that have been staged, manipulated (as in Rumania, where revolutionaries in December of 1989 displayed numerous corpses as ‘proof’ of atrocities; the bodies were subsequently found to have been exhumed from a cemetery adjoining a nearby hospital).

The culture of journalism influences the choice of images to be published, but the traditional au-

tonomy journalists have enjoyed is currently under threat. In the Gulf War, for example, the U.S. Army was more involved than ever before in the production of war images. As Heikki Luostarinen (1994) found, mass media became dependent on the material the Army deigned to make available. This material contained remarkably little human suffering and material damage. Above all, the Army made available material that demonstrated the exquisite sophistication of military materiel. Only after the cessation of hostilities did we learn of the true costs and consequences of the war in terms of suffering and devastation (Gerbner 1994).

The principle of "social responsibility" has meant that editors have sought to shield readers, viewers and listeners from excessive gore. As one Finnish textbook in journalism from 1986 puts it: "There is no justification for using rhetoric like: 'Maimed and bloody bodies and the nauseating stench of rotting flesh...'" (Bruun, Koskimies & Tervonen 1986:200).

As the example above demonstrates, times have changed; and these earlier norms are weakening. The actual consequences of warfare and the suffering of civilians are given considerably more space in both print media and television. Realistic, not to say naturalistic, journalistic depictions of war are much more common. Visual illustrations are also more common and would seem to have become increasingly explicit.

Where the propaganda machines of the warring parties have not been all too rigorous, as for example in the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia and Rwanda in

the 1990s, journalists have had greater freedom to depict the suffering of the civilian population. Journalists in such situations also live dangerously, indeed, they risk their lives.

Women in News of Catastrophe and War

I have studied the conditions under which women are "allowed into" the news for many years. My most dramatic finding is that women are virtually invisible in highly regarded spheres of news reporting. And when women are included, be it as players or as illustrations, their role is nearly always totally subject to patriarchic definition, that is to say, women are depicted on terms dictated by the masculine power discourse (Halonen 1991, 1995). In her research on radio news, Tarja Savolainen, too, has found that women are seldom ever included in the "mainstream" areas of news coverage such as the economy, business and finance, war, and politics (Savolainen 1995).

When I began collecting material for my analysis in 1986, I was struck by a photo published shortly after the assassination of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme. The photo (Plate 1), published in *Aamulehti* (16th March 1986), showed grief-stricken young Swedish women under the headline: "Parting with Olof Palme". The picture deviated sharply from the usual hard news photo-journalism in Finland at that time. It depicted women, and it depicted emotions.



Plate 1. *Aamulehti* 16.3.1986.

The photo was entirely pertinent to the subject at hand, but as an item of photo-journalism on hard news pages it was uncommonly dramatic. As my collection of material grew, I ran across more pictures of grieving women and women in distress, surrounded by the ruins of buildings or some other form of devastation. These pictures were few in relation to the images of men, and when women were depicted there role was primarily decorative. The photographer had chosen pretty faces in the background, supporters of a powerful male, or the images were anonymous, poor and grief-stricken women. I thought it must be some kind of journalistic Achilles' heel, a chink in the wall of objectivity. The presence of a woman in the illustration marked an emotional slant on the news event.

The events in Eastern Europe at the start of the 1990s and the war in Bosnia produced photo-journalism which consistently depicts the emotions of aged, destitute and suffering women.

One typical photo shows a woman standing alongside an open coffin. The body is a loved one, a husband or a son. I analyzed the theoretical composition of the picture. Myths often figure in connection with the analysis of visual images, and they are applicable to images from war zones, as well. As Kirsti Simonsuuri (1994:233-234) observes:

The women of myths are products of religious, sexual, economic and political factors ... they afford timeless documentation, unbound by historical circumstance and relationships. Contemporary mythological narratives may also be interpreted in this light, inasmuch as the structural premises remain the same.

Myths may be taken as points of departure in analyses of contemporary cultural products. What mythological references are present in the images of women in war news photography?

I have categorized the immanent mythologies in war news photography as follows:

- 1) The crying woman – Lemminkäinen's mother
This image refers to the women who remain home and worry about or grieve for their men who have gone to war. Since men in war are not allowed to cry openly (a proposition to which I shall return), women cry for them. There is a tradition of female mourners even in the North, albeit it is not fully as expressive as the ritualized mourning in, for example, Greece or the Mezzogiorno. Thus, women's tears can absolve the soldier of his sins, allowing him to return home as "his mother's son", without guilt.

- 2) The woman amidst rubble – Earth Mother
The ruins of a home and a grief-stricken mother, who symbolizes fertility and a new start. The home is resurrected through the maternal figure.
- 3) Women crying together – Sisterhood
There is usually an implicit male – either "away at the front" or dead.
- 4) Mother and child, victims of the war – Madonna and Child
- 5) Men who rescue women – Heroes

The categories are based on the material I collected out of leading Finnish newspapers in the period, 1986-1995.¹ Some of the material was gathered systematically, some more sporadically. The journalistic genres and their distinguishing characteristics are quite apparent even in material gathered over such a long period

Death and Photo-Journalism

News photos depict death either as a mundane, everyday occurrence, as a ritualized event, or in accordance with the ideology of pleasure. Stuart Hall points out that the degree of ideology immanent in the depiction determines how the image is presented to the viewer or reader (Hall 1984; see also Vanhanen 1991:45). The choice of symbolism surrounding death also varies over time in response to changing historical and societal contexts. Do editors choose to show dying and deceased human beings and grieving and suffering family members, or do they instead use symbolism? It would be a fascinating study to examine how death is dealt with in various eras and in conjunction with different historical events. It would also be interesting to trace developments in the role of illustration in news reporting. Might not the material say quite a lot about how our cultures relate to death as a phenomenon?

It seems as though catastrophic accidents and death today are symbolized by grief-stricken women. The point of the images of women does not seem to be to show corpses or people dying, but rather to impart the grief and suffering that the accidents and acts of violence result in. The suffering is not depicted graphically and explicitly but is imparted to readers and viewers through a kind of mythic filter. The theme of the grieving woman in our time relates to the Kalevala-mythology in Gallen-Kallela's painting, *Lemminkäinen's Mother*, which approaches the matriarchal myth which revolves around the relationship between mother and son.

Irma Korte describes Woman in the matriarchal myth as “an expression of the archetypical Mother-figure, Mother Nature”, which ascribes a magical dimension to women. Part of the male role is being “the son of a great mother”. According to Korte, matriarchies are characterized by a focus on material phenomena, on the satisfaction of immediate needs and the generation of utilities. This takes concrete form in giving birth and the replenishment of humankind it represents. In the Kalevala myth Lemminkäinen’s mother symbolizes the creation of new life and even, literally, revival. Her journey to Manala, the realm of the dead, is a metaphor for the matriarchal focus on the womb and “the Earth’s inwards”.

If the matriarchal paradigm stresses the subconscious, immediate sensual experience, nurturing the young, and giving birth, Korte sees the patriarchal paradigm as being characterized by instrumental action, cognition and analytical thought processes, and hierarchical power relationships (Korte 1988: 132-141).

Kortes’ interpretation may be criticized for being too clinical, too dualistic. Modern discourses are more fluid, and boundaries in the public sphere are more diffuse. Pure forms are hard to find. The discourses on gender also take new paths. The dichotomy between the private sphere – the feminine – and the public sphere – the masculine – is perhaps best preserved in the structure of news reporting. Consequently, Kortes’ interpretations seem fitting in this context.

Within news journalism qualitative criteria appear still to presume adherence to the patriarchal paradigm. News production is hierarchically organized, and news reporting is expected to keep to the realm of “objective cognition”. The subject relationship between reader and text is steered by patriarchal dogma and relations. Kate Linker perceives most forms of presentation to be geared to building up the male subject and suppressing or denying women’s subject status.

So constructed, Woman has no rights. She represents no one but herself, she is on display. Cast in a passive rather than an active role, she is more an object than a subject. She is forever subject to male decision-making in a society in which images and representation have the power to build identity (Linker 1983).

When news reporting concerns areas near the subconscious (as in the case of catastrophe and war reporting), the mythic paradigms are confronted with

a conflict. The dominant patriarchal paradigm of news cannot filter news content that treats accidents, catastrophes, war and hunger and all that these entail. When the studio news reader has reported the murder of 16 children in a Scottish kindergarten, he or she must continue in the same, modulated tone of voice on to the highlights of a summit on the Middle East.

One of the central linkages in the patriarchal paradigm, according to Korte, is the “father-spirit-consciousness-technology” chain, which amounts to a kind of logic of war:

Different people’s and groups of people’s and national groups’ ... separateness instead of community. One exaggerates the differences between social classes, castes, races, nations, etc.; the groups are perceived as rivals, as threats, in the struggle for power (Korte 1988:141).

The technology of war, both intellectual and material, may be seen as the utmost expression of the patriarchal paradigm. In peacetime it is virtually impossible to enact the patriarchal paradigm to its full extent in news production since readers and audiences are made up of different social categories and sexes. The emotional aspects of war and devastation encroach on the territory of the patriarchal paradigm and create an obvious conflict. Hard news and emotions are not particularly compatible – matters of significance are cognitive, technological, relating to fathers; nonetheless, it should be possible to resolve the conflicts suffering gives rise to.

News journalism portrays suffering on terms dictated by the ideal of objectivity. Excessively emotional material is neutralized by creating distance, presenting masses (rather than individuals) and resorting to anonymity. The suffering in refugee camps shrinks in direct proportion to the size of the crowds involved. News photos show tens of thousands of heads, each not much bigger than the head of a pin, and readers or viewers can rest assured that the matter is of no direct concern to them. Since the subjects constructed in most news reporting are masculine (studies of news audiences confirm this), the images of women in the reporting of wars and catastrophes are made of stereotypes created by men.

Television news cannot dwell on suffering: after the cruel realities of war the programme must move on to other topics, finally reaching a polished, mellow “wind-up”. But it is not always possible, let alone easy, to gloss over some dramatic themes or motifs. Photographers and editors are only human;

2. The principle of fusion (less familiar is fused together with more familiar material)
3. The limits of interpretation (depending on time and receiver)
4. The puzzle principle (structure can vary)
5. The principle of incarnation (the myth becomes real via history or art) (Simonsuuri 1994:260f).

The mythic material that is most commonly used in connection with the depiction of women is also common in news reporting of calamities, man-made and otherwise. In the material I have collected the main structural principles of myth-building are quite apparent. Myth-confirming practices are already part of the discourse of journalism.

Journalism creates cultural identity. Any culture's journalistic products have characteristics that can be appreciated only within the culture in question. Journalism strives to integrate the unfamiliar, surprising and deviant into some part of the culture. Journalism serves up current issues and demands that the receiver take a position on them. Themes vary from day to day within different discourses and in different media. Journalism also has the power to create new myths or to revive old ones. For example, wartime journalism revives the maternal role of the nation's women (Yli-Ketola 1988).

According to Simonsuuri, myths generally develop in the “margins of consciousness”. The assumption is that the narrative on which the myth is based has a beginning, a middle and some kind of

1. The principle of invention (compatibility between language, identity and mythos)



ending. Warfare and catastrophes are fertile ground for narrative, for story-telling. One may generally assume that a war has a beginning and an end; catastrophes, too, can be assigned an end-process (albeit the process may take some time).

The masculine aspect of war narratives always involves the opposite poles, departure and return, the beginning and end of the war, as in the case of the novels of Väinö Linna. Among men, the “middle”, the interval between departure and return, is



Serbijoukot tulittivat Sarajevoa ja Dubrovnikia

YK:n arvioitiin päättävän Belgradin vastaisista p...

Dubrovnik/Sarajevo/Nea
AP=AFP=DPA=

Serbia äänestettiin tu perjantaina ja perjantaina yönä Bosnia-Hertseg pääkaupunkia Sarajevoa. mie kuin kertakasan aik...

Myös kroatilainen satan punki Dubrovnik joutui p okun kohteeksi perjantaina la tulitus oli pohinta puolee teen, silminnäkijät kertoiv...

New Yorkissa YK:n tu suusanavustio jatkoi perja Jugoslavian vastaisen pal den käsitteistä. Turvallisu voston lähellä olevista lä arveltiin, että pakoitteet sa hyväksytyiksi aikaisintaan t lauantaina.

Perjantaina aikan kuluu s emä Venäjän, Kiinan, lat Zimbabwe taivaltia viel kotteiden kannalle.

Euroopan yhteisö EY on zut omista pakonesteistä oh penkkyynti lopettamisesta. Sian ja sen liittolaisen Mont son kanssa, EY vastii YK:ta tamaan laajennet pakoitte hin liittyvästi kaikki jäsen...

Turvallisuusneuvoston kasteihin perjantaina Yhd tein luonnoksen pohjalta. kien pakonesteiden, nsa, olj kauppaneuvon, saatamises maan yhteiskäsiteli.

Milosevic vähätteli

Serbian presidentti Slob Milosevic vastasi hankkemi teuralla torstai-illassa, ette biällä ole mitään syytä i llaisten pakoneste. Ulk ten painostus menee pian hän usko.

Milosevicin mukaan Ser ole syytä pelkoon, koska s llaiset eivät ole tekemässä n mikä vahingoittaisi muiden...

Milosevic sanoi myös, Serbia nio luopua sijetisistä vollen, ottamatta...

Sarajevolaisten nainen piti sylissään vastasyntynyttä lapsenläämään tykistöuhutuksen aiheuttaman rakennuksen portainkone perustana.

Plate 3. Helsingin Sanomat 30.5.1992.

filled with the events of the war, whereas for the women it is a state of limbo, a period of waiting. They follow their sons and husbands from afar and anxiously await their return. In war news women are depicted in their role as mother, as producers of war materiel, as life-givers, as custodians of domestic life on the home front, as care-providers and agents of mercy for those afflicted by the war.

Photo-journalism makes vivid associations between these roles and archetypal, mythological themes. The most typical image of women in wartime in the press material I have collected is the grief-stricken figure reminiscent of Lemminkäinen's mother (Plate 2, *Aamulehti* 3rd March 1992: Armenian women in Mardakert mourn a man killed in battle with Azerbaijanians in Nagorno-Karabakh). Men cannot cry openly about a war. Women's

mourn in their stead and, by the same token, make it possible for the men to return home.

Men are ever "present" in the images of the grieving women; they are the objects of women's grief – either as corpses or as absent loved ones.

In most cases the grief-stricken women remain anonymous. They embody an idealized matriarch, "she who stayed home", the emotional heart and soul of the family. Tearful women also call to mind the semi-professional mourners of some cultures – women who play out the full range of emotions at funerals, wakes and weddings, concretizations of the myths surrounding motherhood. Mothers refrain, lose, make sacrifices.

Another common theme of news photos in war reporting is "Woman in ruins" (Plate 3, *Helsingin Sanomat* 30th May 1992: A woman in Sarajevo



Plate 4. *Turun Sanomat* 12.9.1991.

with her newborn grandchild in her arms, standing in a stairwell demolished by artillery fire). The photo shows an old woman in the midst of the rubble of war. Typically, the photo-journalist is careful to note the time of the photo, "Friday". The woman's identity is apparently not so important. "Woman in ruins" is a reference to Earth Mother, to female fertility, to woman's ability to produce new life despite the devastation.

The grandchild and the old woman's confident smile emphasize budding life and optimism. Man's home is destroyed in the war, but woman can rebuild it, make it whole. The women may even quite literally build new homes, but symbolically they stand for healing and forgiveness. "Motherless is homeless."

Another common theme is women crying together. These pictures emphasize sisterhood among

Israel pommitti Etelä- Libanonia kiivaasti viidettä päivää

Riina

Israel jatkoi torstaina Etelä-Libanonin pommittamista ja ainakin 27 ihmistä sai surmansa. Viidettä päivää jatkuneessa moukaroimisessa oli torstaina kuollut yhteensä ainakin 111 ihmistä. Muun muassa Yhdysvallat ja Britannia tuomitsivat siviilejä pakosalle ajaneet iskut.

Israel ilmoitti jatkavansa Etelä-Libanonia järjestelmällistä tuhoamista ja pakolaistulvan synnyttämistä niin kauan, kunnes operaatio "Vastuulle" asetetut tavoitteet on saavutettu, ja pääministeri Jitzhak Rabin komosi arvelut pikaisesta tulitauosta.

Israel haluaa samantien aloittamallaan operaatio "Vastuulla" tuhlata Etelä-Libanonin asuinkelvottomaksi ja saada pakolaistulvan avulla libanonilaiset nauttimaan Israelia tulittaneet iranilaismielisen Hizbollah-järjestön sissit aseista.

Presidentti Mauno Koiviston mukaan lähi-idän rauhanprosessi olisi kiireesti saatava liikkeelle. "Todelliseen rauhanprosessiin on nyt erinomaiset edellytykset olemassa", hän sanoi.

Sivut B 1 ja A 7



Khedeh Chalkoubia ja hänen vauvansa työssänsä hoitamassa torstaina Työskentelinsä sairaalassa Beirutin kaupungissa Libanonissa.

Plate 5. *Helsingin Sanomat* 3.7.1993.

women (Plate 4, *Turun Sanomat* 12th September 1991. The war between Croatians and Serbs over who should rule Croatia is increasingly bloody. Relatives mourn 22 Croatians who lost their lives in a massacre in the village of Podravska Slatina).

The women on the home front have only one another to rely on. In a tutorial project in 1988, Liisa Yli-Ketola studied photographs of women in the Finnish magazines, *Suomen Kuvalehti* and *Kotilesi* in the period 1935-1949. She found that wartime photos "emphasized the importance of cooperation and group solidarity among women". A typical photo in *Kotilesi* was "a group photo of women doing neighbourhood chores together" (Yli-Ketola 1988). Women's "gathering" around the Absent One, usually a man, is reinforced, in grief as in everyday life. The women's activities are defined through the absent male; but their relations with one another also take on new dimensions. The grieving young women in connection with the funeral of Olof Palme (Plate 1) reflect the same theme. Tearful women who support one another are frequently younger than the women who grieve for their sons or husbands; they represent sisterhood rather than motherhood. Despite the women's grief the images impart strength and the potential of rebirth that can spring out of the spirit of sisterhood.

Women and children are the most vulnerable categories in a war. Caring for their children keeps mothers at home and also hinders them from fleeing to safety. The most dramatic images of photo-journalism from war zones show wounded, fleeing and dead women with their children. The mythic association is clearly a reference to the theme of Madonna and Child. Plate 5 hardly requires any explanation (*Helsingin Sanomat* 3rd July 1993; Khedjeh Chalhoubi and her one-year-old daughter after treatment at a hospital in Tyre for the wounds they received in Israeli artillery attacks in southern Lebanon).

Kirsti Simonsuuri observes that "The Virgin Mary is a variation on the Aphrodite figure; she represents Aphrodite's positive aspects: love and harmony, and the fertility so vital to society..." (Simonsuuri 1994:223).

The mythology surrounding the Virgin Mary (Madonna) is quite the opposite of war and catastrophes, which are the incarnation of hate, strife and destruction of life.

The image of Madonna and Child imparts a sense of serenity, but it can also be interpreted to contain an accusation: How can these things be allowed to happen? In this exceptional photo (Plate 5), mother and child are also identified. Their suffering is transformed into a pious, nearly holy, sym-



Plate 6. *Aamulehti* 30.4.1995.

in the case of the sinking of the Baltic ferry, M/S Estonia, men were depicted in heroic rescue operations. The male role of “Protector of woman” also features prominently in fictional romanticizations of war, works like *Gone With the Wind* and Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*.

In contemporary war news reporting, however, men are increasingly frequently depicted as rapist-war criminals, as the culprits responsible for women’s suffering. “Rape is part of military strategy,” Kalle Koponen commented in *Helsingin Sanomat* (13th September 1994) in connection with an academic study on the subject by Ruth Seifert. Seifert argues that rape as an act of war has a symbolic purpose; it is a symbolic humiliation of the enemy nation.

The mythologized content of war photo-journalism would appear to confirm Seifert’s thesis. The women are not depicted as concrete, feeling, suffering women, but as mythic symbols of Motherhood, Earth Mother or Hearth-and-Home, i.e., the collective domestic sphere.

War photography has come to deal with generalized mythic symbols and is not as poignant and disturbing as verbal descriptions of the kind cited in the beginning of this article. A photo without a caption seldom speaks to the beholder other than through mythic references. Visual images confirm the myths, words puncture them. We can gaze at the picture of a pretty, young girl without reacting particularly strongly. Only when we learn from the caption that she is Bosnian, that her name is Admina, and that she is suffering from leukemia and is in urgent need of medical care are we perhaps aroused and motivated to try to help her. Not even a thousand pictures can inspire readers and viewers to take action, to organize a movement, to demonstrate, unless words are there to steer our thoughts and neutralize the mythic motif.

Kirsti Simonsuuri observes that “the word ... increasingly often relates to visual images, which amplifies its communicative, cognitive functions. The processes are hastened, even if the word – in the sense of *logos* or *mythos* – will surely be around as long as there is human culture. The word will expire only when human culture ceases to exist, which means a return to a pictorial era – and progress toward the word will start all over again...” (Simonsuuri 1994:260). Words play an important role in photo-journalism about warfare and catastrophic events in that they link the function of the visual image to “logos”, anchoring the mythic material and directing and focusing our thoughts.

“You need child-related symbols to get people’s attention,” Kalle Löövi of the Finnish Red Cross is

quoted as saying in *Ilta-Sanomat* (17th August 1995). Publicity around a little Irma, Admina or Aladin can help other victims of the war by appealing to readers’ and viewers’ emotions and arousing a willingness to lend a helping hand. (Some 16,000 children died in Bosnia alone, and wounded children are believed to be about ten times that number, according to U. B. Lindström, Secretary-General for Unicef in Finland.)

De-mythologizing images from the war and providing realistic depictions of everyday life in the war zone are effective antidotes to war propaganda. It would also be useful to depict soldiers’ suffering on both the winning and losing sides – to the extent one may speak of “winners” in a war.

Good War Photos?

In the foregoing I have concentrated on how women are mythologized in reporting of wars and catastrophes. One of the central roles of illustrations is to validate, to reinforce myths. Photos offer unidimensional frames of reference by which complex and difficult issues may be interpreted.

Might different illustrations provide a better, more accurate image of war and of women’s roles? What kind of illustrations might do that?

My intent is not to say what should or should not be done, but rather to establish what is in a more or less systematic fashion. Researchers do not have a mandate to engage in such normative exercises. Mythic dimensions are so deeply embedded in our cultures that they are virtually beyond influence. In our part of the world, the interpretation of women’s role in terms of the archetypical Mother figure or the myth of the Virgin imbues all forms of cultural expression, not least pictorial forms. One dimension that I have not discussed in my analysis so far is the opposite of the archetypical Mother figure, namely, the Whore. “Enemy women” tend to be characterized in terms of this archetype rather than that of a maternal ideal or of a divinity. Such characterizations are not to be found in the Finnish press, but they have been used in war propaganda in ex-Yugoslavia. Such symbolism may in part explain the frequency of rape in the conflict – not that the pictures themselves should lead to direct action, but rather that the imagery fosters and legitimizes a contempt of the enemy’s women.

Most of the women portrayed in photo-journalism relating to wars and catastrophes are anonymous. When women are identified, they attain subject status, they become recognizable individuals. When confronted with individual cases, the reader

or viewer is presented with an opportunity to identify with the victim and to empathize with her suffering. Consequently, it is important that reporting

supply the identities and personal backgrounds of the victims shown.

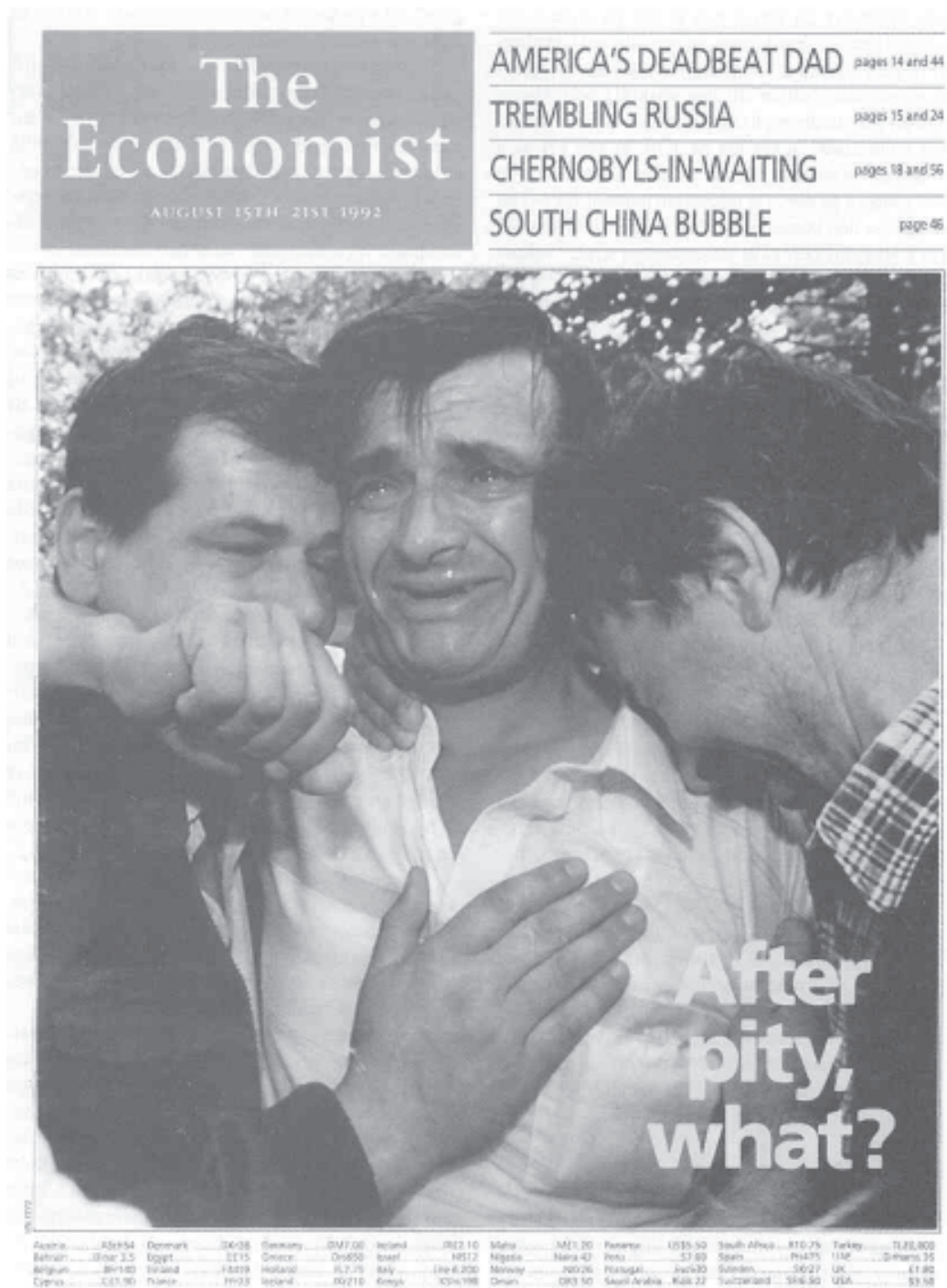


Plate 8. *The Economist*, August 1992.

In the material presented here, only one woman (Plate 5) was identified by name. Khedjeh Chalhoubi and her daughter look into the camera and engage the beholder compellingly. We do not consider her a victim; her gaze rather suggests determination and courage. The picture suggests a positive interpretation of the myth: We see not a suffering Madonna, but a strong one – a courageous example for all women.

If women's tears have symbolic/mythic meaning, does the same apply to men's tears? The primary mythic characteristic of men's tears, as I see it, is their absence. By absence I mean the fact that they are replaced by any number of surrogate images, ranging from women's tears to exertions of naked power and acts of aggression. Expressions of emotion on the part of men are rare in journalism, and even more so in news reporting. Men's tears have to pass through multiple filters and control stations: in sports journalism, for example, tearfulness is restricted to victory celebrations or extreme pain, in news journalism it is confined to anonymous women who cry in men's stead.

Tears are not appropriate in war; they are seen to encourage the enemy. During the conflict (as for example during the Gulf War or the war in Bosnia) propaganda machines efficiently suppress men's

suffering. Men can be shown to suffer at the start of a war or after the final ceasefire, but not in between.

The cover of *The Economist* carried a highly unusual photo of grieving men in August 1992 (Plate 8). The photo shows three anonymous men. The man in the middle is crying openly, and the other two are leaning against him in apparent grief. The photo is followed up in the inside pages with an article on conditions in Serbian prison camps under the heading, "Not Quite Belsen". The face of the man in the centre of the trio on the cover, identified as a Muslim, is used as a vignette throughout the article. The headline on the cover reads: "After pity, what?"

The primary interpretation of the three men's tearful mourning in this picture is that they are among the losers, they are captive prisoners. When pictures from Serbian concentration camps were published, they aroused a cry of indignation, but they were soon forgotten. A nation whose men shed tears is a lost nation. A nation whose women cry will survive since women's grieving lays the ground for reconstruction and rebirth. Women's tears open the way for men's return from the war; they represent the forgiveness which is necessary after all the cruelty of war. Women's tears are a purifying rain; men's sink into a bottomless well. Might we not break the logic of war if we revealed the universal grieving of even the most exemplary warriors?

Note

1. The newspapers in question are *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Aamulehti*, *Turun Sanomat*, *Ilta-Sanomat* and *Ilta-lehti*.

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