Global Divides in Transnational Media
*Managing the Visibility of Suffering**

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Abstract

By empirically exploring variations in satellite news on human suffering, inlcuding the 2004 tsunami footage and the 2007 Burma demonstrations, this chapter argues that the symbolic power of trans-national broadcasting consists primarily in its capacity to manage the visibility of suffering so as to reproduce the moral deficiencies of global inequality. At the same time, however, it shows that there are certain conditions of possibility, technological as well as symbolic, whereby satellite news stories may be able to produce a sense of moral agency that transcends the West, thereby constituting cosmopolitan communities of emotion and action.

Keywords: symbolic power, satellite boradcasting, human suffering, mediation

Introduction

This chapter explores systematic patterns in the visibility of suffering in satellite news, from the 2001 September 11th footage to citizen-generated content in the 2007 Burma demonstrations, so as to illustrate the role of trans-national media as agents of symbolic power[1]. Symbolic power refers to the capacity of the media to selectively combine resources of language and image, in order to present distant suffering as a cause of emotion, reflection and action for Western media audiences.

The ways in which the media portray and narrate the suffering of far away others has always been controversial. In the past, it has raised critical questions about the power relations between the West and the 'rest', about stereotypes of the 'poor South' and about compassion fatigue among Western audiences (Moeller 1999). In the global media age, the symbolic power of the media to represent suffering reformulates these issues into a crucial ethical and political challenge: the extent to which satellite media enable the expansion of moral imagination beyond existing communities of belonging, national or regional.

By studying examples of ordinary (news bulletins) and extraordinary (rolling footage) satellite reporting, in national and in international contexts, this article argues that the management of the visibility of distant suffering most often amounts to the reproduction of a communitarian imagination. At the same time, it tentatively points to the potential of citizen-generated content to provide a different management of the visibility of suffering, thus potentially challenging, though not necessarily transcending, the Western imagination of community.

The Global Visibility of Suffering

The Moral Claim of Trans-national Television

There are two responses to the question as to whether satellite broadcasting may be expanding our scope of responsibility beyond the West: whereas the optimistic response claims that the global visibility of suffering inevitably brings with it the potential to care for distant others, the sceptical one challenges the idea that visual immediacy may lead to anything more than care for those who are like 'us' (Curran 2005: 5-6).

The optimistic argument takes its point of departure on the global scope and instantaneous reach of satellite broadcasting as key dimensions of symbolic power that may give rise to new communities of belonging: the 'global village' or 'global civil society' (Thompson 1995; Tomlinson 1999; Beck & Sznaider 2006). Three distinct but interconnected arguments point to this direction. First, a consequence of the CNN effect, there is an increase in the broadcasting of distant disasters and in audience awareness about suffering others (Livingston & Bennett 2003; Livingston & van Belle 2005); second, there is a heightened visibility of war atrocities and new rituals of death and torture, such as the Iraq war, internet beheadings and Abu Ghraib pictures, placing the spectacle of suffering at the centre of a contemporary media ethics agenda (Mirzoeff 2006; Silverstone 2006); finally, there is an increase in citizen-generated footage, such as the Burma monk demonstrations in 2007, which bypasses traditional gate-keeping mechanisms and enables the world to watch spectacles of violence otherwise inaccessible to the media (Gillmor 2005; Beckett 2008). Thanks to satellite networks, the argument has it, we are now closer to distant suffering than ever before, thereby bearing the moral responsibility of witnessing and, with it, the burden of complicity: in the age of mediated abundance, *we cannot*, any longer, *say we did not know* (Ellis 2000:1). The optimistic argument on the ethical force of satellite reporting is essentially an argument about the symbolic power of trans-national media to generate a new moral imaginary, that of cosmopolitan citizenship – a disposition to act on distant others without the obligation of reciprocity or the certainty for the outcome of our action (Keenan 1993: 135; Peters 1999: 51-62; Barnett 2003: 9-21). This civic disposition draws on two historical modes of engagement, which mediate our relationship to the spectacle of suffering and shape our moral agency towards vulnerable others: indignant denunciation against the injustice inflicted upon the sufferers by their persecutors or tender-hearted empathy with the misfortune and pain of the sufferers (Boltanski 1999).

In contrast to the optimistic position, the sceptical argument challenges the function of trans-national media as agents of global connectivity and insists that satellite broadcasting, far from facilitating the globalisation of civic dispositions, clusters transnational populations around their already existing communities of belonging. Satellite television, in other words, *brings together multi-country markets linked by geography, language and culture* (Straubhaar 1997: 285). There are two overlapping perspectives to the sceptical argument: fragmentation and marketization.

Satellite media, the fragmentation perspective has it, may be global in technological scope but designed to be regional in cultural reach, serving the interests and desires of specific media publics, such as the Arab community in the case of Al Jazeera (Sakr 2005) or the Anlgo-American world in the case of CNN or BBC World (Curran & Park 2000). As such, they are less about globalising moral sensibilities and more about reproducing

'satellite realms', that is insulated publics that transcend the national but never quite become global (Sakr 2001).

The marketization perspective addresses the impact of financial oligopolies on satellite content. Insofar as news on suffering and violence sells, it remains a priority in international reporting but only on the condition that it is subject to the demands of infotainment (Thussu 2008). There are three aspects to the infotainment perspective on distant suffering: sensationalism, whereby suffering is presented in terms of its dramatic details in order to grasp audiences' attention (Seaton 2005: 49-80): sanitisation, where suffering is 'cleansed off' its graphic dimensions in order to protect the audiences' emotions (Campbell 2004) and, finally, de-contextualisation, where suffering is rarely explained as a complex event so as not to appear demanding on the cognitive capacities of media audiences (Moisy 1997).

Satellite broadcasting, in summary, maximises the presence of distant suffering on television screens, yet it does so in an ambivalent manner. Whereas optimists claim that it enables greater proximity with vulnerable others, internationalising the moral consciousness of the West, sceptics argue that news on suffering is not represented in accordance to its political or humanitarian magnitude but on the basis of its relevance to and infotainment capacity for Western publics.

Whereas both sides of the argument draw upon theoretical discourse and empirical evidence to support their claims, neither of the two engages in a systematic examination of the symbolic properties of satellite broadcasting. As a consequence, it is difficult to identify the cultural resources, in the form of aesthetic registers and ethical discourses, through which satellite news stories contribute to the formation of collective dispositions (Corner 1995: 43). Importantly, these arguments tend to oversee the capacity for change inherent in the making of news stories themselves. Indeed, although journalistic change is largely about ownership patterns and institutional structure, it would be misleading to ignore the fact that the potential for change also lies in the relative malleability of the representational practices of news embedded, as they are, in broader trajectories of technology and power[2].

Following a case-based methodology, I focus on the study of the symbolic properties of selected news stories on distant suffering in satellite broadcasting. My aim is dual: i) to trace down the representational practices through which each case manages the visibility of distant suffering, and, in so doing, ii) to show how each case simultaneously evokes a normative claim as to who it is important to care for. The study of the symbolic power of satellite broadcasting to act as an ethical force emerges out of this dual analytical attention in the particular properties of each news story and simultaneously in the universal claim each story makes about which sufferings are worthy of emotion and action for Western media publics.

I next explore the symbolic process of the imagination of community in satellite broadcasting by focusing on six case studies of news on suffering. Whereas the first four cases cluster around a Eurocentric imagination of community, constituting what we may call communitarian publics, the final two cases suggest that alternative ways of managing the visibility of suffering may lead to an expansion of the Eurocentric imagination – a possibility, however, inevitably grounded on the premises and practices of Western publics.

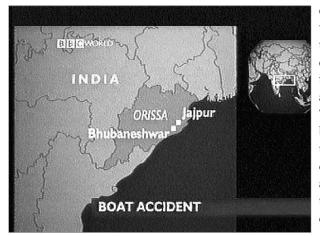## Trans-national Publics: Communitarian and Cosmopolitan Imaginations

I focus on two categories of satellite news, *'ordinary'* and *'extraordinary'* news, and I examine each one of these in two different contexts of broadcasting, the *national* and the *international*[3]. The category of *'ordinary' news* is reflected in the genre of the news bulletin, which I examine in the *national context* of the Greek National Television (Floods in Bangladesh, 2004), and in the *international context* of BBC World (Boat accident in India, 2002). The category of *'extraordinary' news* is reflected in the genre of rolling footage, which I examine in the *national context* of the Danish National Television (September 11th, 2001) and in the *international context* of BBC World (Iraq war footage, 2003)[4]. My emphasis in the study of these four cases falls primarily on the *aesthetic quality* of each piece of news, that is on the visual and verbal properties of their spectacle of suffering, and on *the moral agency* of the news, that is the options for action on suffering each piece proposes to us as relevant and effective.

Communitarian Publics

I first discuss the category of 'ordinary' news in the two contexts of broadcasting, trans-national and national, before turning to the category of 'extraordinary' news.

The Management of Visibility in 'Ordinary' Satellite News

The *first* piece of news is about a *boat accident in India* (BBC World, 2002). This is a brief story with a descriptive narrative: a river-boat capsized in river Baytarani, in the Indian province of Orissa, as it was making its way towards Jaipur town – forty people feared drowned most of them office workers and school children. Despite the fact that this is a major trans-national news service with an extensive network of technological and human resources as well as a long tradition of reporting in the region, the management of visibility in this case is minimal. It does not involve on location reports, but rather the use of maps: one of the Indian province of Orissa situated among its neighbouring provinces and another one of India situated in the northern hemisphere. The aesthetic register here is cartography, a decontextualised representation of geographical space that abstracts the event of suffering from its experiential circumstances. This management of visibility involves no people, no action, no emotion. Such absences correspond to choices over where, when, and with whom the suffering is shown to occur, which, in turn give rise to a particular type of moral agency: do nothing, care not. The geographical distance between Western Europe and the river Baytarani is coupled onto another kind of distance, an emotional and moral distance between us and the Indian sufferers.

The *second* example is a piece of news on *floods in Bangladesh*, (National Greek Television, 2004). It combines the visualization of the scene of suffering, as it reached national television via satellite, with a brief voiceover added for the Greek public[5]. Two symbolic features constitute the aesthetics of this piece of news: the panoramic point of view and the lack of action. The panoramic point of view provides us with an overview

of the flooded landscape from afar and above; at the same time, it universalizes the scene of suffering: this could have been elsewhere, at any other time, involving another population. In so doing, the panoramic landscape creates an aesthetic distance from lived reality: the scene is all about water, trees and human figures in a static composition. This is not the footage of a catastrophe, which covered 60% of the nation but a 'tableau vivant', inviting distantiated contemplation of the flooded land rather than engagement with the urgency of suffering. In terms of agency, there is no purposeful action, no voice: these people lack appelative power, the power to communicate the condition of their misfortune. In Boltanski's words, these Bangladeshi sufferers are portrayed as *radically without will* and their de-humanization, echoed in the voiceover's dramatic but brief text about the 'biblical catastrophe', further participates in the aestheticisation of this news story, effectively producing a spectacle of difference between cultures that lie beyond the possibility of contact.

Despite their diverse contexts, the national and the international, these two examples of 'ordinary' news share three key features: the minimal narration of suffering, the refusal to humanize the sufferers and the interruption of emotion, denunciation or empathy, vis-à-vis the events of suffering. Such symbolic features constitute the majority of our regular diet of daily news reports, on the grounds of the pragmatic argument of selectivity: the media do not always have access to sites of distant suffering nor can they report on every event in the same order of importance[6]. Yet, what these pieces of news throw into relief is that the interruption of emotion involved in this professional logistics is not only a necessity but simultaneously a moral claim in its own right. They remind us of the fact that emotion is a scarce resource and that part of the capacity of news to present the world is its capacity to reserve the potential for emotion for some sufferers; to locate others outside our own community of belonging and to place their suffering beyond the remit of our action.

The Management of Visibility in 'Extraordinary' Satellite News

There are, however, news stories with a different management of visibility, though these are admittedly not the majority. These exceptional stories include aesthetically complex representations that invite our exclusive and sustained engagement with suffering. The key feature of extraordinary news is the shift from the news bulletin to the rolling footage, which involves the suspension of an ordinary sense of temporality and

the introduction of, what Badiou (in Barker 2002: 75) calls, *truly historic* time: *moments when a minute lasts a lifetime, or when a week seems to fly by in next to no time* – the shock and disbelief at the moment of the second plane crash on the World Trade Centre. Let me briefly discuss the September 11th footage in the national context of the Danish National Television, before I move to the global media spectacle of the Iraq war, in the trans-national context of the BBC World.

I concentrate on three distinct *sequences from the September 11th footage on* Danish television: the eye-witness account, the update of events and the panorama of the Manhattan cityscape. The *eye-witness account* is a right here-right now exposition of events. We are together with the expert panel at the Copenhagen studio and, at the same time, connected via telephone link with the Danish Consul in New York. Satellite images show ambulances and people walking away from the scene of catastrophe, whereas the Consul gives a first-person account of chaos and mayhem in Manhattan. The aesthetics of this sequence is that of raw documentary. Camera and human voice combine in a complex act of witnessing that invites Danish spectators to experience the events as-if they were there on location and to share the intensity of emotion as-if they were themselves present in the scene of disaster. As a consequence of this intense proximity, moral agency is cast in the topic of empathy, inviting us to engage in real-time with the tragic fate of American people and to feel for their unexpected vulnerability.

The update of the 'morning of September 11th' events was inserted into the flow of the footage at regular intervals during the rolling footage. The management of visibility takes us everywhere where action took place: New York with the WTC attacks; Washington DC with Pentagon burning; Georgia with Bush' first appeal to the American people. The manner in which these sequences are linked, particularly using Bush's speech to

conclude the update, already situates the attacks, terrorism and the promise of retaliation in one meaningful narrative. In terms of aesthetic quality, this sequence differs from the previous one in that it is not about events as-breaking-news but rather about already authoring September 11th-as-history. The moral agency emerging from this management of visibility is cast in the trope of denunciation: it focuses on the tragic loss of human lives, separates perpetrators and victims and evokes the collective demand for justice as the only possible response to this instance of suffering (*we're going to hunt down those folks who committed that act*).

The Manhattan panorama is an extended sequence, which provides us with a long shot of the cityscape in grey smoke, turning the scene of suffering into a phantasma-goric spectacle. The confrontation with the awe-provoking dimension of the imagery of suffering removes the urgency of the here-and-now and opens up a space of analytical temporality, where the events can be debated and reflected on (Boltanski 1999: 121). Indeed, the moral agency of this sublime aesthetic is devoid of empathy or indignation and turns to tentative deliberations on the attacks: the voiceover consists of the expert panel explaining the causes and discussing the political implications of the event.

In sum, the September 11th satellite footage, characterised by a hectic alternation of aesthetic registers, complicates the moral agency of a specific national public, inviting the Danes to engage with this spectacle of suffering in multiple ways: to empathize, to denounce and to reflect on it as a human tragedy and as a political act. Importantly, the sufferers of September 11th are presented as thoroughly humanized and historical beings; as people who feel, reflect and act on their fate. They are, in short, people like 'us' who happen to live far away. We are united with them in denouncing the evil-doers (recall Le Monde's headlines, *We are all Americans*, 12.09.01) or in supporting them in alleviating their misfortune (the political legitimacy of the 'war on terror' was also, partly, due to extraordinary quality of world reporting on the September 11th attacks; Reynolds & Barnett 2003: 85-101).

The bombardements of Bagdad (BBCWorld, March-April 2003), one of the most visually arresting spectacles of warfare, were broadcast live on BBC World at approximately 19.00 CET and they were, subsequently, inserted as regular 'updates' in the channel's 24-7 live footage flow – the examples described here focusing on the updates' common patterns throughout their three-week broadcasting span (Chouliaraki 2006b).

The point of view is from afar and above with a steady camera capturing Baghdad in its visual plenitude. Filmed at night, the sequences turn the screen into a dark surface animated by yellow explosions and green flashes at the sound of bombing fire. The visual effect is that of a digital game, endowing the spectacle of war with a fictional rather than a realist quality- a similar quality to the Gulf War visuals that made Baudrillard (1994) famously conclude that the war never happened. The voiceover functions indexically to the visual, following action closely, and uses the first person perspective of the eye witness to draw attention to its detail. The extracts contain no visualisation of human beings on the ground: no sufferers in their homes, in the streets or in hospitals. At the same time, the linguistic choices that verbalise the sufferer and the bomber deprive both these figures of any sense of humanness: the sufferer is mostly a collective entity ('city') or a non-living being ('compound') and the bomber is either diffused in the activity of airwar ('planes', 'missiles') or erased from the narrative. By cancelling the presence of the bomber and the sufferer, the footage presents the bombardment of Baghdad as a site of intense military action without agency.

This particular management of the visibility of suffering evokes a sublime aesthetic, which, as we saw, constitutes distant suffering less through emotions towards the sufferer and primarily through a distantiated appreciation derived from the awe of the spectacle of warfare itself. Together with the embedded journalists' reports, the sublime register of the bombardments of Baghdad re-worked and perfected visual testimony as the dominant genre of war footage. The moral agency emerging from this first-person genre engages with the war in the mode of impartial contemplation, as a spectacle to watch rather than as a political act to take sides on. Despite the claim to objectivity that this process of sublimation conveniently issues, the BBC footage of the bombardments remained Western in its perspective, insofar as it consistently de-humanised the Iraqi population under attack in Bagdad and, in so doing, potentially blocked the moral agency of empathy towards the victims or of denunciation against the bombing of civilians or, indeed, against the whole project of the war in Iraq.

The Imagination of Communitarian Publics

I have discussed a number of satellite news cases, 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' in a national and an international context. These differ substantially from one another. 'Ordinary' news is about stories that we hardly ever remember; 'extraordinary' news is about stories that are hard to forget. Despite radical differences in their management of the visibility of suffering, however, these stories share a key feature: they address their audiences, both national and international, as an already constituted community. This is a community that is united in blocking out emotions for 'irrelevant' sufferings or united in fully empathizing with sufferers who are like 'us'. As a consequence, neither type of news can invite their audiences to engage in public action towards suffering that occurs beyond the West. Those who celebrate the creation of global communities through television viewing, find justification in the empirical reality of 'extraordinary' news in a national context, such as September 11th footage where the far away appears too close to us to ignore. Those concerned with indifference and compassion fatigue find partial justification in the empirical reality of 'ordinary' news, such as the Indian accident or the Bangladesh floods, where suffering never becomes humane enough to move us to a response. Neither of these classes of news provides us with a quality of connectivity that brings with it a responsibility towards suffering outside Western communities of belonging.

These positions represent a key aspect of the Eurocentric bias at the intersection between trans-national and national satellite flows – a bias that comes to confirm the fragmentation claim I discussed earlier. Far from a 'globalisation of content', those patterns of visibility suggest that what occurs in satellite broadcasting is a 'regionalisation' of global content, whereby trans-national media may be broadcasting globally but still 'remain within their own particular worlds' (Hafez 2006: 71). They demonstrate, in particular, that, despite the increased visibility of spectacles of terror, all content is inevitably subject to a process of hierarchical particularization that defines whose suffering matters most for Western spectators[7]**:** sufferers in North America are closer to us than those in Eastern Asia.

The bias further confirms the marketization thesis that links satellite news content to trans-national commercial interests. An illustrative example of this is the case of Iraq war reporting, which combined previous formats with new visual genres, evoking Western testimony and sensational spectacle as the primary definers of satellite war footage. Such features point to a mutation of war reporting from 'hard' to 'soft news' (Baum 2005) – a mutation that serves both commercial interest and political agendas. Aestheticised warfare, as we saw, erase the humanity of Iraqi civilians whilst upholding journalistic objectivity, whereas embedded journalists appear to produce authentic reports from the battlefield but ultimately operate under the tight control of their military hosts.

Satellite news then produces communitarian publics. It does so through national satellite broadcasting, where it follows a localised trans-national agenda that places distant suffering in a hierarchy of domestic relevance, but also through trans-national broadcasting, where news follows a regionalised trans-national agenda that may report on distant suffering but remains unable to cultivate a culture of solidarity beyond the West.

Cosmopolitan Publics

There are cases of satellite news, however, that can push civic sensibilities beyond the community of the West. The main feature of these cases of news is that they raise the demand for action on distant suffering here and now – hence their 'emergency' quality[8]. By incorporating the element of urgent action in its representation of suffering, emergency news re-configures, though not necessarily transcends, national and trans-national contexts of satellite broadcasting. At the same time, in accommodating different degrees of urgency on suffering, emergency news keeps the 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' news distinction in place. Let me discuss two examples of emergency news: news broadcasts on the Burma demonstrations 2007, as a case of 'ordinary' news and the rolling live footage of the tsunami emergency 2004-2005, as a case of 'extraordinary' news.

The Management of Visibility in 'Ordinary' Emergency News

The Burma monk demonstrations, September 2007, which involved the violent crackdown of peaceful marches of people, mostly monks, against the tyrannical regime of Myanmar, became an emergency story both in trans-national and national television contexts. Two symbolic elements contributed to the construction of this story as an emergency: i) the citizen-generated imagery of the peaceful demonstrators vis a vis the brutal violence of state army, which invoked both empathy for the suffering yet defiant monks and denunciation against the perpetrators of their suffering and ii) the intertextual chains of this imagery across types of media, from mobile phones to broadcasting and to internet blogs and websites, which not only expanded the public visibility of the events but further contextualized them in powerful discourses of resistance against the Burmese junta.

Drawing on the aesthetics of raw documentary, the footage gained significant news value in recording the long lines of saffron-robe dressed monks marching quietly through army-populated city streets and in capturing on camera the killing of a Japanese journalist by riot police on September 27th, in a demonstration where nine more people were also shot dead. Illegal in its country of origin, this amateur and erratic footage acted as a trans-national counter-narrative of power against official accounts of events – for example, when Danish National Television juxtaposed Burmese satellite footage from MRTV3 to scenes from the streets of Rangoon, throwing into global visibility what would have otherwise remained a local and obscure crisis.

The documentary aesthetics of 'clandestine testimony' that characterizes this piece, the *grainy* and *shaky* images or *crackly* telephone calls with their *chilling soundtrack*, is part of the strong appeal to authenticity that citizen-generated footage makes (Cooper 2007:6). Submitted to media networks by participant-observers in risky circumstances (Beckett 2008), such footage renews the journalistic authority of first-person testimony- an authority, let us recall, highly disputed in Iraq war footage. It does so, by displacing the journalist, potentially corrupt by state or private interest, with the citizen as the source of authentic information. Insofar as the latter owns the basic technology to record, reporting on human suffering at the peril of oneself is no more the heroic privilege of the professional but ordinary practice for everyone who happens to be in the scene of action[9].

The aesthetics of clandestine testimony simultaneously enacts and invites a particular type of moral agency that we have not encountered so far: the dual agency of 'seeing and saying' (Peters 2001: 717-23). This form of agency recognizes, in the passive act of witnessing, the active obligation to speak out in the name of those whose capacity to respond to injustice is limited and ineffective – to speak, in other words, in the mode of denunciation. *Now with the internet and the whole world watching, it is a very different story,* says a Burmese activist in his comparison of the 1988 with the 2007 revolts, emphasizing the radically different conditions of visibility and moral agency that frame two similar events (BBC24, September 26, 2007). The act of seeing is indeed able to shift to the act of saying only because of the intense media activism of civil society organizations, which appropriated and re-contextualised the images of monk demonstrations in a discourse of human rights and international solidarity – in Boltanski's words, they managed *to address the spectator's ability to consider himself as a speaker* (1999: 40). By capitalizing on the United Nation's democratization initiative in Burma, these civil society organizations managed to mobilize civic sensibilities across the world and to place Burma at the heart of a global and intense, even if short-lived, wave of activism.

The Management of Visibility in 'Extraordinary' Emergency News

*The tsunami catastrophe***,** 2004, invokes a different quality of urgency, one that resembles the 'truly historical' temporality of the September 11th news. Given the magnitude and multi-dimensionality of the disaster, the rolling footage of this event involved a continuous alternation of locations, types of information and genres of reporting, making the tsunami one of the most complex journalistic ventures ever (Downman 2005). The result was an unprecedented amount of aid donations for the tsunami survivors – what Koffi Annan, then Secretary General of the United Nations, celebrated as a *unique manifestation of global unity* (BBCWorld, Jan. 9th 2005).

Another unique dimension of the footage, however, was the number of tourist video recordings that reached the websites of major news networks, making the tsunami a crucial turning point in the use of citizen-generated content by news networks (Gillmor 2004). The first-person perspective of such visual material lent to the event an intense right-here-right-now quality and offered a powerful resource of identification for Western spectators. Whereas the Burma demonstrations footage capitalised on a 'clandestine' quality of witnessing unfamiliar to the Western world, the tsunami material capitalised on the 'all too familiar' quality of witness accounts by people like 'us'. The close-to-

home aura of most such videos, suddenly snapping, as recordings culminate in fear at the powerful wave blow, throws into relief the immense identification capacity of citizen footage on distant suffering. This aesthetic combination of the banal with the sublime created, in a way different to September 11th, another sense of collective identification for Western spectators**.**

Whereas satellite television played a major role in disseminating citizen footage, networks like the BBC integrated such visual material into their websites, providing multimedia and Web-video and -log facilities. Such a rich multi-media environment not only managed to contribute to public action that made a difference in the lives of distant sufferers, through donations, but also to participate in the therapeutic process of 'working through' the trauma of witnessing, through personal accounts and tributes to victims (Ellis 2000).

The Imagination of Cosmopolitan Publics

It is not that the cases of emergency news do not evoke the West as the imagined community where we belong to. They certainly do. It is rather that emergency news presents us with some demand for engagement that does not exclusively follow from the pre-commitment to implicit obligations; from the communitarian bond. We are neither the apathetic spectators of 'ordinary' news of distant suffering nor the over-engaged spectators of 'extraordinary' news on the suffering of the West. We are simply confronted with the question of suffering as a problem to be solved. We are invited to consider our commitment to it as a matter of our own judgment. Are the Burma demonstrations a cause worthy of our action? What can we do to help the orphans of Banda Aceh? In posing these questions for our own reflection**,** emergency news also opens up a space that pushes us, even momentarily, beyond the concerns of our communities of belonging; beyond the obligations of the communitarian bond (Chouliaraki 2006a: 188-89). But there is a difference between the two.

The 'extraordinary' emergency of the tsunami involves an intense management of visibility in trans-national, multi-media environments, which became possible largely because of Western tourists' use of technology and their subsequent involvement in the dissemination of images and narratives; in Kofi Annan's words, it has to do with the fact that the *whole world witnessed the tragedy*. Importantly, however, the extraordinary quality of this suffering is also due to the fact that, among the hundred thousands who lost their lives, nine thousand were citizens of Western Europe on Christmas holidays:

the tsunami emergency is proximal suffering at a distant location (Olsson & Riegert 2005). There is a Eurocentric bias in this construction of moral agency, which ultimately throws into relief the very conditions of possibility for 'global unity': the care for the suffering of distant others expands beyond the West only insofar as the West is part of this suffering, both experiencing and witnessing it. The Reuters' agency observation *that the tsunami attracted more media attention in the first six weeks after it struck than the world's top 10 "forgotten" emergencies did over a whole year* (quoted in *The Guardian Media*, March 11, 2005), only comes to confirm the fact that the sensibilities it mobilized constitute a global 'risk community' (Beck 2006) rather than a cosmopolitan public of empathy and solidarity.

The 'ordinary' emergency of the Burma demonstrations comes closer than any other example to what we might call cosmopolitan agency – a proposal to public action on distant suffering without reciprocity or guarantees. This is partly the consequence of a particular management of visibility, clandestine testimony, which used new media technologies to shed public light on a military regime suppressing popular protest. Crucially, however, cosmopolitan agency is also the consequence of the voices of trans-national governance and civil rights groups that strategically employed these new media to campaign and co-ordinate protests across the world[10].

Civil rights organisations, in this sense, enact the moral imperative of cosmopolitan citizenship in a dual sense: as a moral sentiment and as a political project (Kaldor 2000). It is precisely the capacity of this news, embedded as it was in a complex ecology of mediated communication, to appeal to a civil ethics of witnessing, in the scenes of violence and death, and to make the claim to justice, in the calls for action to 'free Burma', that brought forth the moral agency of international solidarity. The management of visibility in this particular piece seems to suggest that the cosmopolitan alternative may be a rare exception (Hafez 2006: 111-117), but it is certainly a possibility in the trans-national milieu of satellite and interactive media.

The Symbolic Power of Trans-national Visibility

There is ample evidence in the study of the symbolic power of satellite broadcasting to confirm the sceptical argument, which challenges the capacity of trans-national media to expand the moral imagination of Western publics. On the one hand, we saw that the national and international reporting of 'ordinary' news tends towards regional fragmentation, by way of suppressing emotional engagement and minimising moral agency towards distant suffering. At the same time, 'extraordinary' news provides resources for identification and action that selectively reproduce cross-border publics with exclusively Western affiliations; they do so, either by fully humanising the distant sufferers of the West, as if they were 'us', or by de-humanising non-Westerners, as if their pain or death were not relevant to our moral consciousness.

On the other hand, we saw that both 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' satellite news across contexts tend towards particular generic formats, the first-person documentary and the sublime spectacle, in order to render distant suffering a dramatic but emotionally acceptable media story[11]. Both formats are important for the management of the visibility of suffering, because their aesthetic properties work to accommodate the spectators' emotions in the face of the spectacle of suffering: a spectacle that confronts us

with the immediacy of human pain without offering options for action. These formats, however, become integral aspects of the marketization of satellite news, insofar as they ultimately come to participate in the narrative economy of infotainment: the first-person documentary, as we saw, tends to sensationalise the stories of suffering at the expense of complexity and explanation (eye witness accounts in the tsunami videos or the embeds reports), whereas the sublime introduces a contemplative distance that sanitises the spectacle of suffering, maximising its drama but keeping the spectators' emotional engagement with it at a minimum (Baghdad bombardment, Bangladesh floods).

If these features of satellite news throw into relief a description of the transnational media milieu as a 'sphere of global infotainment' (Thussu 2008: 7-8), then the question is whether distant suffering on satellite television can be more than just a fleeting spectacle; whether, in line with the optimistic argument, it may also act as a substantial message about the frailty of the human condition – the only feature of the human condition that can make a claim to universality (Arendt 1958). It is the category of emergency news that seems to bear the potential to expand existing imaginations of community in Western media. Whereas it is both 'extraordinary' and 'ordinary' emergencies that articulate the necessity for action, it is in particular the category of 'ordinary' emergency news that puts forward the normative claim of cosmopolitanism, namely caring for the vulnerable other without expectations for reciprocity or gratification.

Specifically, the symbolic features of 'ordinary' emergency news point to two key dimensions of the construction of a cosmopolitan disposition: i) the renewal of the claim to mediated authenticity, grounded on an ethics of the citizen witness and ii) the embeddedness of this claim in discourses of international solidarity.

Even though the aesthetics of first-hand documentary is as present here as it were in previous examples, its symbolic environment and, therefore, its normative discourse is different. The immediacy and sensationalism of violence is now framed by a claim to clandestine testimony, by an awareness of the conditions of terror under which the recordings reached a global audience – here, *the whole world is watching* quote is not simply a statement of technological capacity but a moral claim inherent in the aesthetics of citizen journalism itself. At the same time, the call for action does not reside in the satellite spectacle on suffering, and its inherent impasse of inaction, but comes through mediated voices of civil society in their blogs and websites, which provide concrete options for local action: signing a petition, participating in a protest. Without resorting to an uncritical celebration of the role of such media in enabling action (see endnotes xi and xii), it is nevertheless important to acknowledge the multiply-mediated dimension of practices of solidarity, online and offline, that ultimately manages the shift from watching to acting, from spectatorship to protest.

The civic disposition in 'ordinary' emergency news, then, should be seen as emerging in a broader multi-media environment of satellite and interactive technologies. Such environment shifts the spectacle of suffering away from sensationalism and sublimation and uses it to articulate an urgent and authenticated claim to justice and a form of moral agency that transcends the West as its exclusive terrain of responsibility and action – enabling what Gilroy calls a *wordly, cosmopolitan activism* (2006: 90). The value of this piece of news, even if it is only a fleeting occasion, lies precisely in its capacity to provide the symbolic resources for an imagination of the world that goes beyond the spectacles of global infotainment and presents the West with spectacles of human

vulnerability, of the world *as a small, fragile and finite place* (Gilroy 2004: 90) – and thereby issue forth a form of moral agency that can make a difference in the lives of those who need it.

Conlusion

This chapter empirically explores variations in satellite content on human suffering, taking its point of departure in the assumption that satellite broadcasting is not only a matter of territorial power, entitlements over access of space and technology, but also of symbolic power, entitlements over claims and representations that mobilise the imagination of community in the global media age. It concludes that the symbolic power of trans-national broadcasting consists primarily in its capacity to manage the visibility of suffering so as to reproduce the moral deficiencies of global inequality. However, under certain conditions of possibility, technological as well as symbolic, satellite news stories may be able to produce a sense of moral agency that transcends the West, thereby constituting cosmopolitan communities of emotion and action.

Notes

1. Conceptually, the focus on visibility is motivated by an Arendtian definition of the public sphere as a 'space of appearance' (1958), where image and aesthetic performance (rather than language and deliberation) are also seen as constitutive of civic dispositions; for similar conceptions, see Peters distinction of mediated public space as a space of 'world disclosure' rather than 'information exchange' (1999: 33-62); Butler for the formation of regimes of emotion and action in the mediated space of visibility (2004) ; Silverstone for the ethical dispositions towards distant others shaped in the *mediapolis* (2006); for historical accounts see Boltanski (1999: 1-19); Chartier (1999: 20-37). Methodologically, the focus on visibility offers a coherent field of empirical study comprising of the global flows of news images as they appear in trans-national and national media networks (Curran 2005: 9; Machin 2004: 316-66).
2. The embeddeddness of media texts in the power relations of technology and society is a common assumption in a number of critical hermeneutic approaches, which ask the question of how media texts participate in the formation of media publics (Alexander & Jakobs 1998: 28-32; Corner 1999: 6-8; Dayan 2001: 743-65; Seaton 2005: 102-32; Silverstone 2006: 43-55).
3. The case studies were selected on the basis of the 'maximum variation' principle (Flyvbjerg 2001: 79-81) from an extended body of empirical material consisting of news stories collected between 2001 to 2007 from three different European countries, UK, Greece and Denmark. Each case illustrates a particular position in the spectrum of variations in satellite broadcasting: from the absence of visibility at one BBC World news story (a case chosen deliberately to illustrate the ethical implications of this option), to 'ordinary' imageries of the scene of suffering in the news to, finally, the global media spectacles of September 11th, the Iraq war and the tsunami catastrophe.
4. For different versions of analysis on 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' satellite news, see Chouliaraki (2006a, 2006b).
5. Due to the low image quality of the original television footage, this picture comes from Google Image on the 2004 Bangladesh floods; the iconography is identical to the National Greek Television footage.
6. For news selection principles see Tuchman (1972: 660-79); Merrill (1984: 104-30); Cohen (2001: 173-177).
7. For a similar argument see Braman and Sreberny (1996); Sreberny et al (1997); Chalaby (2005); Hafez (2006).
8. For the term emergency, see Calhoun (2003: 531-53).
9. For sceptical arguments regarding the unreliability of citizen-journalist see Beckett (2008); Cooper (2007); for the problematic relationship between professional and citizen journalism see Gillmor (2005), Gow-

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ing (2007); for the elitism inherent in the use of technology as a means of activism see Hafez (2006); for more general sceptical arguments towards a new media determinism, which tends to celebrate new technology as a catalyst for social change see Curran (2005) and Mansell (2002).

10. For discussion on the use of new media and the development of civil society activism see Tambini (1999: 305-29); Dahlgren P. (2001: 64-88); Fenton (2008: 37-57).

11. Hafez (2006: 71) for the globalisation of format vs localisation of content argument; Moran (1998) for the negotiations of cultural identity produced through the globalisation of generic formats.

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