

This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article published in the *Journal of International Communication* following peer review. The version of record is available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2009.9674751>

To cite: Kogen, Lauren (2009). Why the message should matter: Genocide and the ethics of global journalism in the ‘mediapolis’. *Journal of International Communication*, 15(2), 62-78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2009.9674751>

Why the message should matter:
Genocide and the ethics of global journalism
in the *mediapolis*

Laure Kogen

The author would like to thank Nick Couldry for his helpful comments and support throughout this project.

Title: Why the message should matter: Genocide and the ethics of global journalism in the *mediapolis*

Abstract:

There is currently a need to re-analyze the notion of ethical obligation in an increasingly globalized world. This paper addresses the issue of moral obligation toward a distant stranger in distress in the context of international crises, and the role of both journalists and media consumers in fulfilling that obligation. Despite an inherent assumption that one should always do ‘good,’ it is quite difficult to define what this means in the face of millions of distant sufferers during a humanitarian crisis, for whom distance, time, and resources pose significant barriers to aid. In order to highlight the tensions found in the arguments surrounding global ethical obligations, and the real-world obstacles to both reporting such events and performing moral acts, this paper addresses the extreme case of genocide and mass killings in international conflict zones.

The paper explores this question in three parts. First, the key philosophical arguments regarding ethics and our relationship with a distant other are outlined. Roger Silverstone’s (2007) concept of the *mediapolis* is used to incorporate the role of both the media and the media audience in recognizing and acknowledging the distant other. These ideas are then expanded to the case of global humanitarian crises and distant others in distress. The second section narrows the topic, addressing obligation on an individual level, as a member of the media audience, and explores why we do not always perform in an ethical manner. This question is analyzed by incorporating behavior prediction models from the fields of economics and psychology into a discussion of ethical behavior. Finally, returning to the production side of media, the paper

begins to outline a framework for print journalists covering international crises to present information in such a way that recognizes how the media audience reads and internalizes information, and thus promotes moral action from the public by altering the weighting of preferential action that would be predicted by rational choice theory and the theory of planned behavior.

Profile: Lauren Kogen is a Doctoral student at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. Her recent publications include *The Spanish Film Industry: New Technologies, New Opportunities*, *The Confusion Over Culture: Film Trade Politics and Economic Rhetoric*, and *Media Regulation in Thailand: Expanding Hallin & Mancini's European Model* (forthcoming). Her current work focuses on telecommunication policy in the United States, and the use of media in conflict and post-conflict zones.

Much debate within modern ethics centers on the question of how we can live ethically in a world where we are no longer limited to face-to-face interactions, but confront instead a global citizenry. In examining this question, we cannot but recognize the importance of today's media in defining our relationship to the global 'other.' While traditional ethics addressed how one ought to interact with an 'other' who was present, who we interacted with directly, the modern world has created a conundrum in which, through media technologies, we 'encounter' thousands, even millions, of what Onora O'Neill (2000) refers to as 'distant strangers.' What is the moral obligation of the media audience to these strangers, if indeed there is one?

More specifically, this paper addresses how we act when we encounter a distant stranger, through the media, in distress. Despite an inherent assumption that one should always do 'good,' it is quite difficult to define what this means in the face of millions of distant 'others' who call to us during a humanitarian crisis, and for whom distance, time, and resources pose significant barriers to aid. In order to highlight the tensions found in the arguments surrounding global ethical obligations, and the real-world obstacles to performing moral acts, this paper uses the extreme case of genocide and mass murder in international conflict zones.

Through this lens, the paper explores this question in three parts. First, the key philosophical arguments regarding ethics and our relationship with a distant other are outlined. Roger Silverstone's (2007) concept of the *mediapolis* is then used to incorporate the role of both the media and the media audience in recognizing and acknowledging the distant other. These ideas are then expanded to the case of global humanitarian crises and distant others in distress. The second section narrows the question, exploring what the extent of obligation is on an individual level, as a member of the media audience, and why we do not always perform in an ethical manner. Modern views of ethics fail to sufficiently blend moral imperative with economic

realism, and so behavior prediction models from the fields of economics and psychology are incorporated into a discussion of ethics. Rational choice theory and the theory of planned behavior are used in order to explore why we make the choices we do when faced with ethical dilemmas on a grand scale, in order to create a general framework for a global ethics which addresses the 'distant sufferer.' Finally, returning to the production side of media, a framework is offered for a global journalism ethics. I take Alisdair MacIntyre's (1981) view that journalism falls within a field of 'practice' that places a moral obligation on professionals working within that practice, and additionally argue that the tradition of journalism, in its historical claims regarding the spread of knowledge and the promotion of democracy, must, to that end, take into account the politics of recognition and representation of distant others caught in crisis. I then offer a framework for print journalists working within these parameters to present information to the public in such a way that recognizes how the media audience reads and internalizes that information, and thus promotes moral action from the public by altering the weighting of preferential action that would be predicted by rational choice theory and the theory of planned behavior. Such a model recognizes the traditional role and deontological duty of journalists to promote and nourish the public sphere, but in such a way that acknowledges and addresses distant suffering in an appropriate way, and at the same time acknowledges that journalists and audiences have distinct responsibilities regarding ethical behavior with respect to the distant sufferer.

PHILOSOPHIES OF ETHICS IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

Emmanuel Levinas (1983) perhaps goes furthest in grounding a philosophy of ethics in one's relation to the 'other.' His position is extreme in its placement of the 'other' above the self,

and in his claim of responsibility toward the other as pre-ontological, “[dating] from before my freedom in an immemorial past...” (p. 84). Amit Pinchevski (2005), in his analysis of Levinas, notes that while other philosophers derive what ‘ought’ from what already ‘is,’ Levinas takes a critical leap in claiming that our relationship to the ‘other,’ and thus our ethics, is a first-order position. Philosophies of what we ought to do, according to Levinas, erroneously start with the ‘I,’ the ego, and this is a false presumption. As Pinchevski (2005) states, “Levinas says that the question ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ has meaning only if one has already supposed that the ego is concerned only with itself” (p. 74). Pinchevski goes on to argue that Levinas not only equates the ego and the ‘other,’ but in fact places the ‘other’ *above* the self, and thus exceeds social norms:

Levinas... criticizes the reciprocity and equality of the I-Thou. For Levinas, the Other comes from up high – the Other is teacher before partner. There is no symmetry in being responsible, that is, in being answerable and addressable... I am always already answerable to the Other’s call, always already approachable, open, predisposed toward the Other” (p. 75).

Levinas’ thoughts on our obligation to the ‘other’ thus seem to go too far in our modern world. While I will argue that his ideas are crucial for developing a framework for a global ethics in that they are firmly grounded in the acknowledgement that we are pre-ontologically connected to the ‘other,’ and by extension to all global beings, evidence from the world around us seems to suggest that ultimately we place the self above the other, not the reverse, and in some cases the distance between the two is quite extreme, to the point of disregard.

Hans Jonas (1984) also advocates for the increased responsibility towards the ‘other,’ but does so within the context of a globalized, technologically advanced world. Jonas’ cosmopolitan

stance argues for a radical rethinking of ethics to incorporate new global imperatives, and the new powers that technologies afford us. Older theories of philosophy such as those of Levinas rely upon an ‘other’ who shares a physical present, creating a scenario by which “they have a claim on my conduct as it affects them by deed or omission” (p. 5). Thus, according to Jonas, new technologies bring two new dimensions of responsibility: time and distance. First, the *vulnerability of nature* requires us to act ethically not only toward those we encounter, but to those of the future, who we will never encounter, but who will live with the consequences of the damage we do to our environment. Secondly, in terms of distance, the ability to know about distant others creates a *new role of knowledge* in morality – because “no previous ethics had to consider the global condition of human life” (Jonas, 1984, p. 8).

O’Neill (2000) similarly argues that the very acknowledgement of human life, even if distant from us, creates a moral obligation on a global scale because the assumption of a being’s ability to communicate accords them the right to a moral standing. She uses the example of a corner shop, in which the act of shopping includes the assumption of the shopkeeper’s abilities to act and to respond. Such assumptions, according to O’Neill, automatically place the shopkeeper as an agent and subject, and thus “if I were to deny her the moral standing that I routinely accord others whom I view as agents or subjects, I would need to offer weighty reasons” (p. 192). Applying the same argument to distant strangers, O’Neill concludes that media broadcasters enter this same tacit agreement with distant audiences, and are thus obligated to afford those distant strangers a moral standing.

Degree of obligation

While these arguments do not tell us exactly what our responsibility regarding the ‘other’ ultimately is, they offer a firm philosophical argument for some kind of obligation toward him. An individual obligation can obviously take a variety of forms, and involve different levels of commitment. In the case of the distant sufferer in a conflict zone in the modern world, these forms might range from minimal actions, such as speaking out against atrocities, or writing a letter to a representative demanding government action, to extreme sacrifice, including bringing oneself to the scene of violence and working on the ground to promote change. Chouliaraki (2006) argues that the media spectator can be encouraged to take public action in two key ways – “protesting” (in the form of denunciation or staged protests) or “paying”, through charitable donations (p. 201).

In evaluating what is reasonable engagement for the moral spectator however, we must also recognize that not all global citizens are obligated to make the same sacrifices and commitments. Some are more willing, able, or motivated to take farther-reaching steps. We *can* however explore the ways that people make these sorts of choices. To begin, it seems evident that in a world of distant sufferers presented to us through the media, Levinas’ notion of obligation goes too far. It is difficult (and, I would suggest, unrealistic) to argue that the ‘other’ should always receive priority over the self in this case. However, in a world saturated by media we must at least begin to evaluate the obligations that *do* exist between global citizens. As Nick Couldry (2008) argues, it has become unacceptable to continue to exclude from ethics “the consequences that media messages have for a world audience,” and “the irreducible presence of media institutions in the construction of the social world.”

In his *Media and Morality* (2007), Silverstone comes closer to a working definition of the modern citizen’s obligation toward the ‘other’ in a mediated world in his notion of the

mediapolis. His ideas incorporate those of Levinas while recognizing the limits of the Levinasian approach, and the misplaced assumption regarding the primacy of the ‘other’ in our day-to-day functioning. Whereas Levinas argues that we are supremely responsible for the ‘other,’ Silverstone recognizes that “in practice we are complicit, we collude, we think without thought” (2007, p. 134). His *mediapolis* places citizen actors within a global media sphere as equals, as interactive, combining the idea of the Greek *polis*, a public space of face-to-face communication, and a contemporary media space which “involves the coming together of speech and action and, albeit in the symbolic realm of mediated representation..., the discursive and judgmental space of the *polis*” (2007, p. 30).

This notion is useful as we attempt to tease out the differences between the moral obligations of citizens, media-consuming citizens, and the media institutions themselves. If we assume, following the arguments of Couldry, Silverstone, and O’Neill, among others, that the media today define our moral space, and our moral order, and more so when we discuss global humanitarian crises (see Moeller, 2008; Van Belle, 2008), we can begin to ask questions about how the media and media audiences ought to act in a globalized world, toward the global ‘others’ which the media represent and reproduce.

AN ECONOMICS OF ETHICS

I start from the assumption that we cannot begin to define moral obligation until we understand how individuals make decisions regarding moral action. To attempt to construct rules of morality without taking into account human nature denies the very essence of morality itself, as something intrinsic to us as human beings. If we view philosophies of ethics as attempts to

deny human nature, to counter ego-centrism, we shall find ourselves hard pressed to convince a global citizenry to forcefully will themselves to ethical action.

In the world around us, we often fail to see manifestations of any kind of moral philosophy. More often than not, we see those willing to ignore the plights of others, look the other way, and avoid internalizing others' problems as their own. If a problem is acknowledged, ways are often found to defend inaction, including simply avoiding knowledge of the problem. This happens at the individual, state, and international levels, and particularly regarding foreign conflict. With respect to genocide and wars in distant lands, it is all too easy to ignore what is happening – often simply by shutting off the television or turning the page in a newspaper.

When we see a child in distress in a war zone we certainly feel sympathy toward that child, but there is something that keeps us distant, that stops us from reaching out and offering help. Is it the fact that the message is mediated? Would we be more moved to help if the child were in front of us? Perhaps Levinas would say yes, but there is ample evidence that even proximity does not always result in public action. What can we add to theories of ethics when we take into account these natural tendencies of humanity? The answers to these questions lie partly in our internal processes regarding options for action (or in this case, inaction) based on perceptions of utility regarding those choices.

Rational Choice Theory

Lilie Chouliaraki (2006) argues that in order to understand why we ignore the suffering of others, we must begin to think of 'the public' and 'public agency' as structurally 'elsewhere,' without physical presence, and contends that we cannot discuss a 'universal morality' as an *individual* call to act from a distant sufferer (p. 204). But economics offers us a way to think

about moral action at the individual level through rational choice theory (RCT), which argues that we maximize personal utility when evaluating options, sometimes at the expense of the utility of others.

Unlike philosophies of ethics, RCT acknowledges that humans often act selfishly. However, while the model has become quite fashionable, it makes no mention of morality or moral obligations, as noted most eloquently by the economist and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen. As Sen (1987, 2002) points out, the theory fails to recognize first, that we do not always behave rationally, and that we are sometimes moved at least to some extent by emotion or ‘gut feelings.’ Secondly, the model does not incorporate any sort of ethics. Sen (1987) questions RCT’s assumption that it is “uniquely rational to pursue one’s own self-interest to the exclusion of everything else” (p. 15). Such notions are loosely built into the model either by rationalizing that charitable action increases personal utility by increasing the actor’s social capital, or by arguing that one will act generously if it brings him utility in the form of pleasure. However Becker (1996), one of the pioneers of RCT, argued later on in his career that sympathy can also be a motivation for action, as is the case with beggars. According to Becker the more sympathy/ guilt the beggar is able to elicit, the higher the *reduction* in the person’s own utility, and the more money he must give to make him more comfortable and raise his own utility level back to normal (1996, p. 232). He thus argues that rather than making people happy, acts of generosity can make people feel *less* unhappy. Yet Becker seemingly rejects labeling this aversion to utility-lowering as any kind of moral impulse or obligation.

Sen (1987) states that typically, when presented with several possible courses of action, an individual will evaluate his choices, along with potential tradeoffs, and rank the possible courses of action accordingly. But at times, a complete and fixed ordering is impossible, and an

individual might find two courses of action to both be superior for different reasons (p. 65). This is precisely the conflict between economic well-being and ethics; It is when we must choose between doing something that will help ourselves but potentially harm someone else that we face the most difficult questions in terms of our own actions. Sen (1987) makes an analogy to strike-breakers, torn between the ethics of helping their co-workers and getting work themselves (p. 70). In the case of global violence such as genocide, we witness the problem on a larger scale. Decisions regarding whether or not to take action against such atrocities must be weighed against our own personal priorities.

A study conducted by Slovic et al (2007) compared how much money donors would give to an African NGO when the organization centered its ads on one child versus two children. Advertisements were designed to resemble those of the well known NGO “Save the Children,” and were created for two real children: Rokia and Moussa. Not only did they find that the amount allotted for each child decreased when the ad featured two children but the *total* contribution decreased significantly when the ad stated that the donation would go to help both Rokia and Moussa, as compared to when the ad was for one child only (from \$25 for one child to \$20 for both children). Such a change makes little rational sense, but shows that the desire to help is counter-intuitively lessened when we see that more help is needed.

Similar studies (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; Susskind et al, 1999) show comparable results, according to Slovic, in which individuals provoke greater impressions than groups. Slovic (2007) attributes such studies to the phenomenon of “psychic numbing”, arguing that our “capacity to feel is limited” (p. 90), and that eventually our empathy shuts off as numbers get larger (and this starts with number two).

This argument echoes those of desensitization put forth by Sontag (1977). While there is a rich and intriguing literature on the issue of imagery in the news media, and its effects on desensitization, this line of argument is outside the scope of this paper. Rather, I pose whether we can put forward an alternate explanation for these logically inconsistent reactions.

Philosophical theories of ethics often eschew the rational for the emotional since it is quite difficult to rationalize ethical behavior. In the words of Nietzsche, our judgment of what is ‘right’ has a prehistory in our drives, inclinations, aversions and experiences (1882/2001, p. 187). But what if our actions *are* more rational than emotional, but we simply factor an innate tendency toward some level of morality into our ‘colder’ calculations? Is it not possible that we simply acknowledge our own ineffectiveness in the sight of mass murder? While it is quite easy for us to, say, send ten dollars a month to help *one* child in Africa eat and go to school, when presented with famine or murder on a mass scale, we are quite right in concluding that our donation of ten dollars, even if minimally useful, is not going to help *much*. Is it not possible that we simply analyze the possible courses of action in terms of personal and social welfare, and determine that the effort or money we would expend to help would far exceed the actual benefit our efforts would produce?

Namely, even if we *do* have some innate instinct to help the ‘other,’ which the theories of ethics we have outlined, as well as casual observation, suggest we do, we may evaluate how and when we act morally by placing that option within a more rational economic model, and in so doing evaluate:

- 1) the extent to which our actions really make a difference;
- 2) the perceived benefit (to the other) from acting;

3) the potential harm to oneself (harm broadly defined as a decrease in our own utility through spending time or money, or by putting ourselves in physical harm.)

I expand on each of these factors in the following section.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985) goes farther than RCT in accounting for some of these less obvious features of rationalization. TPB comes from the field of psychology rather than economics, and so uses a unique set of predictors in evaluating behavior. It is useful here because it incorporates internal, emotional factors into a theory regarding why people make certain choices. The model is a more fully developed version of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) which sought to explain why people could have favorable attitudes toward certain behaviors, such as eating right or exercising, but fail to act in correspondence with those behaviors. TRA solved this problem by dividing reasoning into two categories: cognitive and social. Cognitive factors are attitudes toward the behavior, and social normative factors are the perceived pressures a subject feels to engage in that behavior. According to TRA, behavior is thus a function of *attitudes* and *subjective norms*, subjective norms in turn being a function of *normative belief* (for example, “people think that acting against an atrocity is the ethical thing to do,”) and *motivation to comply* (“I want people to regard me as an ethical being.”) TRA thus adds another dimension to RCT in that it recognizes that certain actions are performed even if they decrease our personal utility, because they reference established social norms with which we wish to conform.

TPB builds upon TRA by adding a third factor unaccounted for in the original model, *perceived behavior control*, which can be described as a self-efficacy judgment regarding “how

well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (Hale, Householder & Green, 2002, p. 277). In other words, in our decision-making we calculate what power we have to actually perform the task we are evaluating. This roughly correlates with our third hindrance to moral behavior listed above, regarding the evaluation of whether we can do enough to help the distant sufferer. This can also become a factor if the resources are not in place for us to help, such as if we are unsure if our donation of \$10 to organization X will *really* go to help the sufferers, or if it will be wasted.

I would argue however that neither of these models goes far enough in incorporating moral *obligation*. TPB has been criticized by some for inadequately addressing this issue (Hale, Householder & Green, 2002). Ajzen (1991) acknowledges that issues of sympathy might be included in a future version of the model, though he argues that it is already somewhat embodied in the notion of normative beliefs. I would contend that normative beliefs however are still based upon calculations of what is deemed socially *appropriate*, rather than what is seen as moral or ethical. While normative beliefs do well to explain behaviors that are not necessarily logical or sympathetic, but conform to social etiquette and established norms, such as voting, social norms are *not* equivalent to performing an action according to an innate sense of sympathy, empathy, and connectedness with an encountered ‘other.’

Thus, in regard to predicting ethical behavior, and taking into account the insights garnered from the theories outlined above, I suggest a combination of RCT and TPB which acknowledges the evaluations described in the previous section, such that:

$$MB = A + MO + SN + PE + u$$

where moral behavior (MB) is a function of the attitude (A) regarding the perceived benefit to the other from performing the act (how “good” the act is), a sense of moral obligation (MO)

regarding the act, the social norms (SN) surrounding such a behavior, the perceived efficacy (PE) concerning whether one has the ability to truly have an effect, and personal utility (u), where utility represents the *decrease* in personal utility by performing the act, through harm to oneself (by spending time or money, or risking physical harm.)

Let us assume that u will always be negative, since in a ‘selfless’ act, by definition, we ourselves are gaining nothing and sacrificing something (ignoring afore-mentioned claims of increased social capital and the received joy of helping others.) Then, from a mathematical standpoint, we can assume that if the absolute value of u is greater than $(A+MO+SN+PE)$, the resulting sum of our five variables will be negative, and the person will choose not to act. Thus, in order to *change* such decisions, one would either need to raise the value attached to attitude, moral obligation, social norms, or perceived efficacy, or reduce the decrease in utility that comes about from completing a moral act.

A MODEL FOR CHANGE

If we accept from the philosophies of ethics described above that helping others is an ethical obligation, and that human beings nonetheless attempt to prioritize courses of action according to tradeoffs relating to the optimization of both personal utility and social welfare, where do we go from there? How can we increase the frequency of public action? And who is we? Is it international governments, the media industry, the audience, or the journalists? Here I suggest that while all of these elements are obviously vital for a holistic vision of global justice and equality, a modest starting point for altering the system is through journalists, and the “practice” of journalism in the neo-Aristotelian sense as defined by MacIntyre (1981).

Chouliaraki (2006) states that the ‘emergency news media’ already “seek to constitute their relationship to distant suffering in terms of a demand for public action” (p. 200). She assumes that the news media *do* seek public action, but fail to achieve that end. Whether or not she is accurate in that assumption is open for debate, but she does bring to the fore the question of the purpose of news, and of journalists. MacIntyre (1981) argues for a neo-Aristotelian view of ethics which recognizes the moral imperatives for distinct fields. He defines as a ‘practice’ “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized...” (p. 175). He links such practices to an Aristotelian notion of virtues, defining virtue as “an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods” (p. 178).

By the very nature of its elevated position in politics and in the social world, journalism has been assumed throughout its history to perform a role in the advancement of humankind. Journalism is in many ways beyond the reproach of rules that come into other parts of civic life, and is uniquely kept out of the eye of government to a large degree. In many Western countries freedom of speech is granted constitutional protection, thus affording special privilege to the media industry because of the perceived importance of that field, and its ability (and presumed mandate) to create a ‘public sphere’ in the sense that the information provided and circulated by the media is seen as necessary to promote democracy.

Journalism, accordingly, can be seen as having a specific set of factors which make what is ‘good’ in journalistic practice different from what is ‘good’ in other fields. I thus argue that part of what is considered ‘good’ in journalistic practices must stem from journalists’ advantages regarding calls to public action. Specifically, the placement of journalism within our social world

gives it the ability to raise the valuations attached to attitude, moral obligation, social norms, and perceived efficacy in our above formula, which we have pinpointed as loci for change in promoting a global increase in public action.

According to MacIntyre, ancient and medieval codes of law sought to make all citizens virtuous according to one accepted set of values (p.182). While more modern political philosophies recognize that different sets of values can co-exist between and within cultures, it can still be argued that to be virtuous within a practice requires acting in such a way, if it is possible, that ‘improves’ society overall, broadly defined. As such MacIntyre argues that this approach to virtue must recognize that the aim of participating in a practice must be, in part, to extend human powers, and thus improve society, by consistently striving to achieve standards of excellence “appropriate to... that activity” (p. 175). Similarly, with reference to media ethics, Couldry (2006) notes that the benefit of taking a neo-Aristotelian approach is to help answer the simple questions of ‘how should I live?’, ‘how should we live together’, and ‘how should each of us conduct our life so that it is of value?’ (p.110). A historical assumption that one of the roles of journalists is to enable us to live better together by creating a democratic and cooperative public sphere thus suggests that to be virtuous within the practice of journalism requires extending that public sphere to include representing and acknowledging the other in an appropriate and fair manner.

Framing global journalistic ethics as having a moral obligation because of its nature as a practice also allows us to incorporate the theory of planned behavior into MacIntyre’s neo-Aristotelian view of ethics. Where a ‘practice’ approach to professional ethics compels those within each field to recognize their own field-specific virtues, TPB takes this argument further by recognizing that individual ability to perform a virtue depends upon that individual’s

assessment of the resources available to them and their personal ability to complete the task. Given that journalists have more of the resources and abilities necessary to change global reactions to the distant sufferer, journalism thus finds itself in the position of being ethically responsible for *instilling* ethical responsibility upon their audiences, due to their positional advantage to do so.

FRAMEWORK FOR A NEW GLOBAL JOURNALISM ETHICS

Ward (2005) takes this obligation and analyzes global journalism ethics within a contractualist approach of ethics, looking at what global journalists ‘owe’ their media audiences, building on the writing of John Rawls and Thomas Scanlon. Using claims of truthfulness, he calls on global journalists to perform their ethical ‘contract’ with a universal audience by supplying them with the information they need to be well informed in a globalized world.

However, I would contend that we need to go beyond the need to simply inform. As Couldry (2006) states, media institutions need to become more aware of the wider consequences of their actions, “of how they represent our shared world, not only for their own ethical performance, but also for the general living conditions in those territories and, indeed, the world as a whole” (p. 131). Being aware of consequences means understanding how the information they feed to their global audiences will be received, interpreted, and reacted to by those audiences. What Ward (2005) calls the “cosmopolitan imperative” is the acknowledgement that global journalists’ responsibility is not solely to their national audience but to a borderless, global audience, and that that responsibility includes efforts to place at the forefront of journalism our common humanity. To begin to unpack this mandate, we need to turn momentarily to the notion of justice.

Modern cosmopolitanism, derived from Immanuel Kant's (1785/1998, 1796/2006) work, places a high value on justice. Kant's 'universal imperative,' while perhaps extreme, rightly calls on us to universalize our interactions with the global 'other.' MacIntyre (1981) argues that justice today requires that "we treat others in respect of merit or desert according to uniform and impersonal standards" (p. 179). In journalism, this must go beyond an imperative to simply acknowledge the other and his suffering, and must respect the 'other' by acknowledging as well that the consequences of journalistic reports directly and indirectly affect his condition. While it is more common to discuss the principle of "do no harm" within journalistic and other practices, the definition of 'harm' needs to be extended to encompass the act of telling a story in such a way that the distant sufferer is ultimately ignored by the media audience. Today's global journalists must recognize that their actions serve up a potential justice to a global, marginalized other, and that to deny that justice is to act unethically within the field of journalism.

If 'moral behavior' as we have defined it can run the gamut in terms of personal sacrifice, from speaking out against atrocities, to writing a letter to the government, to donating money, to staging a protest, to traveling to the area in crisis, journalists are uniquely qualified to seek such calls for public action in the way they frame their news stories. Following the models of morality and economics discussed above, we can put forth three areas within journalism in which journalists have the possibility of altering the way that the public analyzes tradeoffs between personal utility and social welfare, and which at this point often leads it to choose inaction.

1. The distant sufferer as Other. Using Levinas' claim that the face of the 'other' calls to us due to our intrinsic bond, news stories should emphasize personal connection, and thus the innate connection between audience and 'other.' In this way the media can encourage the viewer to see the distant sufferer as worthy of succor.

This proposal is not entirely new. Silverstone's (2007) notion of *proper distance*, and Ward's (2005) contractualist approach to journalism ethics both call upon the media to stress the connectedness of global citizens and the notion of a common humanity. In an attempt to define how we ought to extend morality to a distant other, Silverstone introduces the idea of proper distance as a way for the media to present the other that draws upon "a moral agenda that is appropriate to the conditions of the mediation of the world" (p. 173). According to Silverstone this requires more of a recognition not only of our commonalities with distant others, but of the differences between our world and theirs which demand moral acknowledgement. The media, according to Silverstone, wholly fail in this obligation, painting the stranger as either beyond knowing, or as blindly indistinguishable to the Western audience which observes them. Ward likewise calls on the media to "[focus] on what is fundamental – a common aspiration to life, liberty, justice, and goodness" (Ward, 2005, p. 15).

And here we must come back to Levinas' focus on the *face* as the "original site of the sensible." For Levinas it is the very proximity of the 'other' which is essential. The face, in its expression, "summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question" (1983, p. 83). Similarly, Chouliaraki argues that identification provides the means toward the possibility of media cosmopolitanism. This in part explains why programs such as "Save the Children" are so effective. Like Levinas' beggar whom we encounter face-to-face, and in so doing feel obligated to help, the letters and pictures provided by Save the Children connect *one* child with *one* donor, thereby succeeding in a very material way at closing the gap that physical distance creates between the self and the other.

2. *Elicit a shift in perceived power.* As outlined in the TPB, we are less likely to engage in a meaningful way with the other if we feel we do not hold the power to actually help him.

While journalists cannot be expected to take on an activist role, convincing their readers that that public action makes a difference, they can change the *way* that stories are presented, and move away from journalistic conventions that place the weight of responsibility on international bodies or the corrupt governments of the countries in conflict. Chouliaraki, for example, addresses the practice of airing live footage of massive anti-war demonstrations around the world before the war against Iraq in 2003, and how such images place a high value on the efficacy of impersonal action. While such images may not have changed the ultimate course of action that was taken by the U.S. and U.K. governments, they arguably were effective in bringing the debate to the global public in a meaningful way, and “[testify] to a rare moment where public agency becomes embodied and visible to many and, more than this..., [stages] how action on distant suffering is possible” (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 205), by making such moral public action visible and audible to a global audience.

It should be emphasized that these first two areas lie somewhat in opposition to one another. While framing the distant sufferer as an ‘other’ may be done by evoking sympathy and empathy, going too far in showing their despair and misfortune can backfire by decreasing appeals to the efficacy of the audience. Emphasizing terror and hopelessness can work to evoke sympathy, but does little in the way of making the public think that progress can realistically be made. Chouliaraki likewise highlights the danger of ‘overpsychologizing’ suffering, stating that such practices can render the news sensationalist and thereby reduce the demand for action.

3. Elicit a shift in social norms. I would argue that this is where journalists, and the media in general, have the greatest potential for impact on public action. As discussed above, the elements of the practice of journalism give journalists the tools to change social mores. By reporting in such a way that recognizes the public as having an obligation to help, or showing

ways in which ordinary citizens are already helping, moral attitudes can begin to shift. As Chouliaraki (2006) states with respect to airing public protests, these images “constitute a space of mediation where some of the world common to all of us appears in front of the spectators’ eyes *precisely as common*” [italics added] (p. 203).

CONCLUSION

Humans prioritize. Embedded within an instinct to help the distant sufferer is a rational analysis of what risk we pose to our own levels of personal utility when performing a moral act. In coupling ideas from a philosophy of ethics with a practical analysis of an economics of ethics, we can begin to articulate a framework for understanding the place of ethics in a newly globalized, technologically advanced world, and for promoting a new global ethics of journalism. Among the variables we use to weigh the pros and cons of ethical action, adapted from rational choice theory and the theory of planned behavior, are an instinctive moral obligation to the other, social norms, perceived efficacy, and the decrease in personal utility caused by acting. If we are able to alter the values used toward weighting these variables, we can begin to change the way moral acts are evaluated by the public in the mediapolis.

According to Macintyre, practices never have fixed goals, “but the goals themselves are transmuted by the history of the activity” (1981, p. 180-1). Journalists today must reconcile the historical imperative of the news to promote a democratic public sphere with the modern day fact that new media technologies have changed the scope of the field, and have brought us into a new world where we are brought face-to-mediated-face with the distant ‘other.’

There are of course other potential routes via which to change social norms. I have looked here only at the media, and within that field primarily at the print media, and have not articulated explicitly what changes ought to be made. This is only an initial framework, with

general guidelines toward restructuring the practice. Further analyses should explore other avenues for changing norms, such as social networks, government interventions, and grassroots interventions. Likewise, I do not give detailed attention to the specific issues raised by the imagery of television, and have focused more on news as a journalistic medium. Visual media are arguably even more effective than the print media in both changing social attitudes and reaching disparate audiences, and thus deserve deeper attention in future research. I suggest and hope that beginning from the level of the individual journalists will provide a starting point from which to begin to discuss the television sector, the infrastructure of media institutions more generally, media audiences, and the role of international organizations.

It should also be noted here that in today's highly mediated world, news-reporting is no longer confined to traditionally trained 'journalists'. As ordinary citizens become, in a sense, journalists through blogs, video websites, and mobile phones, their ethical obligations must be viewed in a different light, emphasizing this dual role of media consumer and media producer. It will require further analysis to determine under which conditions these types of media production fall under the category of 'protest' or 'denunciation' as defined by Chouliaraki, under which conditions they fall victim to the same motives as editorial and corporate boards, and under which conditions these sorts of productions offer the potential to follow the above framework in a way that 'traditional' journalists cannot.

It should be recognized that while journalists find themselves within a certain practice that necessitates certain skills, and thereby compels specific moral obligations, journalists are still subject to the same laws that a universalist ethics puts forth. I have claimed here that they have certain obligations which go beyond that of the average citizen because of the position they find themselves in, but at the same time they are equally obligated to perform moral actions. In

other words journalists, as human beings themselves, fall under general codes of ethics, and not simply those of a unique “ethics of journalism.” Couldry (2006) argues that the media “should be ethically responsible for what they do as should actors in any other area of life” (p. 123). While this may seem obvious, it is worth recalling that due to the structure of the field, blame for the consequences of published reports can be pushed off to editors, producers, and corporate boards. Loyalty toward the company, and perhaps the country, and an *economic* imperative to get the job done as quickly, as cheaply, and as effectively as possible in order to garner a (paying) audience, are practical impediments to acting ethically on an individual level that are not easily overcome. In order to find the middle ground between these two mandates we must balance what journalists ought to do *as journalists*, and what they ought to do as ethical beings in a globalized world. Without the virtues of justice, courage, and truthfulness, states Macintyre, practices become vulnerable to corruption by the material-seeking institutions that sustain them.

These ideas may seem quite far reaching, and perhaps naïve. The proposed framework outlined here seeks to change attitudes toward ethics on a global scale. This is no small task. However, I contend that the model outlined here is really not so farfetched. While Silverstone advocates a shift in audience attitudes without any sort of catalyst, and Silverstone and O’Neill both advocate changing the laws surrounding global superpowers and multinational corporate conglomerates, the changes outlined here require no modifications in legislation or unrealistic notions of the ethical beliefs of the average citizen. While journalists are obviously still beholden to the requirements and requests of their editors and corporate boards, and may not be able to cover atrocities at will when other media events take precedence, such ideas as outlined form a framework for how to address these stories when they are covered.

Is this manipulative? Perhaps. I am advocating a way of writing that elicits sympathy, and ultimately, a change in attitude. However, I do not think this framework necessitates manipulation or bias. It is simply an acknowledgement, put forth through the news media, of the inherent connectedness of today's global citizens. A cosmopolitan journalism, and a global journalism ethics must recognize the value in all global beings, the fundamental principles of a universal ethics, and the prima facie claim to humanity of all global citizens.

References

- Ajzen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behavior. In J. Kuhl, & J. Beckmann (Eds.), *Action control: From cognition to behavior* (pp. 11-39). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211.
- Bagdikian, B. (1983). *The media monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Becker, G. S. (1996). *Accounting for tastes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Boltanski, L. (1999). *Distant suffering: Morality, media and politics* (G. Burchell Trans.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Calhoun, C. (2003). Belonging in the cosmopolitan imaginary. *Ethnicities*, 3(4), 531-533.
- Chouliaraki, L. (2006). *The spectatorship of suffering*. London: Sage.
- Couldry, N. (2006). *Listening beyond the echoes: Media, ethics, and agency in an uncertain world*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Couldry, N. (2008). *Communicative virtue and the construction of a global media ethics*. Paper presented at symposium: "The ethics of media: Philosophical foundations and practical imperatives", Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Cambridge, 4-5 April 2008.
- Davies, N. (2008). *Flat earth news*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1975). *Beliefs, attitude, intention, and behavior: An introduction to theory and research*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

- Hale, J. L., Householder, B. J., & Greene, K. L. (2002). The theory of reasoned action. In J. P. Dillard, & M. Pfau (Eds.), *The persuasion handbook: Developments in theory and practice* (pp. 259-286). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hamilton, D. L., & Sherman, S. J. (1996). Perceiving persons and groups. *Psychological Review*, *103*(2), 336-355.
- Jonas, H. (1984). *The imperative of responsibility: In search of an ethics for the technological age*(H. Jonas, D. Herr Trans.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kant, I. (1998). *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Original work published in 1785.
- Kant, I. (2006). Toward perpetual peace. In P. Kleingeld (Ed.), *Toward perpetual peace and other writings on politics, peace, and history*(D. L. Colclasure Trans.). (pp. 67-109). New Haven: Yale University Press. Original work published in 1796.
- Levinas, E. (1983). Ethics as first philosophy. In S. Hand (Ed.), *The levinas reader* (pp. 75-87). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- MacIntyre, A. C. (1981). *After virtue: A study in moral theory*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- McChesney, R. (2004). *The problem of the media: U.S. communication politics in the 21st century*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Moeller, S. D. (2008). Considering the media's framing and agenda-setting roles in states' responsiveness to natural crises and disasters. *The Role of the News Media in the Governance Agenda: Watchdog, Agenda-Setter and Gate-Keeper*, Harvard University.
- Nietzsche, F. (2001). In Williams B. (Ed.), *The gay science*(J. Nauckhoff, A. d. Caro Trans.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- O'Neill, O. (2000). *Bounds of justice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Neill, O. (2002). *A question of trust*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Pinchevski, A. (2005). *By way of interruption: Levinas and the ethics of communication*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Sen, A. (1987). *On ethics and economics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Sen, A. (2002). *Rationality and freedom*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Silverstone, R. (2007). *Media and morality: On the rise of the mediapolis*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Slovic, P. (2007). "If I look at the mass I will never act": Psychic numbing and genocide. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 2(2), 79-95.
- Sontag, S. (1977). *On photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Susskind, J., Maurer, K., Thakkar, V., Hamilton, D. L., & Sherman, J. W. (1999). Perceiving individuals and groups: Expectancies, dispositional inferences, and causal attributions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76(2), 181-191.
- Van Belle, Douglas A. (2008). Agenda-setting and donor responsiveness to humanitarian crisis and development aid. *The Role of the News Media in the Governance Agenda: Watchdog, Agenda-Setter and Gate-Keeper*, Harvard University.
- Ward, S. J. A. (2005). Philosophical foundations for global journalism ethics. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 20(1), 3-21.