

# Putting a Face on It

## Individual Exposure and Subjectivity in Journalism

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Birgitte Kjos Fonn, Harald Hornmoen,  
Nathalie Hyde-Clarke and Yngve Benestad Hågvar (Eds.)



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CAppeleN DAMM AKADEMISK

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# Preface

A few years ago, a group of scholars at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA) in Norway began to take an interest in the fact that there had been a considerable increase in the tendency to put a face on journalism – individualising and personalising stories. Colleagues who had been teaching journalism for some years had virtually seen this change unfold before their own eyes.

This growing focus on the exposure of individuals in journalism has been spurred by a wide range of factors, from tabloidisation to the use of social media. Despite its omnipresence in the media, relatively little research has been conducted on the phenomenon. Our group, a research group at the Faculty of Social Sciences at HiOA, published our first edited collection, *Individet i journalistikken* (*The Individual in Journalism*, Hornmoen, Roksvold and Alnæs, Eds.) in 2015. It was based mainly on Norwegian data and its contents ranged from case studies of contemporary journalism to more historical accounts of the development of individual exposure, the blurring of the boundaries between public and private persons, and increasingly intimate modes of addressing the reader.

Since 2015, our research group (Individual Exposure in Journalism, “Index”) has broadened its scope to include researchers from the UK, South Africa and other Scandinavian countries. In this edited collection, we develop our project further through a set of studies in which we analyse some of the different forms that individual exposure and subjectivity take in today’s journalism. Most of the studies are based on data from Nordic media and societies, but we believe that that our analyses and findings are valuable in a broader context. Through this collection of case studies, we aim to show that individual exposure and subjectivity now permeate most journalistic genres and topics, both in “quality” and “tabloid” journalism. We also hope to contribute to a debate about present and possible future currents in journalism.

## PREFACE

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Oslo/Helsinki, October 2017

Birgitte Kjos Fonn, Harald Hornmoen, Nathalie Hyde-Clarke, Yngve Benestad  
Hågvær (Editors)

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## CHAPTER 1

# Putting a Face on Journalism: Introduction

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June 2017. The major British tabloid *The Sun* calls on its readers ahead of the general election not to chuck Britain into the “cor-bin” – accompanied by a large portrait of Labour leader James Corbyn with a bin lid on his head. A Danish journalist goes to Turkey to sleep with Turkish men, and writes a reportage about it in one of Denmark’s quality newspapers. Farther up on the North Sea, in an interview for a Norwegian tabloid’s online TV, a young woman recounts how she makes a living by twerking, while the major Norwegian quality paper devotes its entire front page to Tobias, one year old, whose life was saved by a new medicine, though this hinged on being in the right hospital.

Individual exposure, a focus on individuals, and subjectivity seem to be everywhere in the media, and these are the topics of this edited collection.

Despite an increasing tendency during the last few decades of personalising news stories or “putting a face on journalism”, there has been very little scholarly attention given to this development. Notable exceptions, and contributions that discussed the phenomenon at an early stage were Fairclough (1995 and 2001) and Sparks & Tulloch (2000). More recent contributions are Rosalind Coward’s *Speaking Personally* from 2013, and different works on emotion in journalism, e.g. Peters (2011) and Wahl-Jorgensen (2016). In 2015, a group of mainly Norwegian scholars published the book *Individet i journalistikken (The Individual in Journalism)* (Hornmoen, Roksvold & Alnæs), a first attempt to study the same phenomenon from a Scandinavian perspective. This volume is a continuation of that work.

When we discuss the focus on individuals in journalism, we include a wide array of things. It may involve the use of non-elite sources and/or a focus on the assumed interests of the audience – things that have characterised modern journalism for decades, but which digitalisation has brought to the forefront in most outlets and genres (e.g. Wahl-Jorgensen 2016). There is also the interest in the more personal aspects of all types of elite persons – politicians, artists, sports heroes, the rich and famous, and at the same time, there are the increasingly personal voices of many journalists in their stories and reports.

To the extent that this “individualisation” has been discussed, it has often been regarded as a problem for journalism. It has been seen as more or less synonymous with tabloidisation, and as an expression of the “dumbing-down’, ‘trivialisation’ and ‘sensationalism’ of the press” (Coward, 2013, p. 8). In many respects, it can be argued that this is a limited way of reading the phenomenon. It may also be seen as a way of democratising or humanising journalism, as an expression of a wish to include issues and topics in public debate that speak to the ordinary reader, listener or viewer, and not only to those higher up in society. The exposure of individuals and subjective views can be found in everything from undoubtedly trivial lifestyle journalism to including important voices from the audience during an outbreak of swine flu. One Norwegian study with a diachronic perspective on the coverage of homosexuals in Norwegian media found that the exposure of individuals had probably contributed to profoundly changing the perception of homosexuals over a period of 30 years (all examples from Hornmoen et al. 2015).

Apart from this introduction, this edited collection consists of 14 chapters that address different aspects of individual exposure and subjectivity in

the media. We aim to discuss how individual exposure and/or subjectivity now affect most journalistic topics and genres: from politics through sports journalism to science journalism; from health journalism to journalism about terrorism. It affects news and features, photos and front pages, and is of course the backbone of an increasing dialogue with the audience, in which case it also affects the role of the journalist.

One aim of this book is therefore to show some of this variation. Another is to contribute to a debate about the present state and also perhaps where journalism is heading. Where, and how, do we find individual focus and exposure? And why do different kinds of journalism – with a focus on individuals in common – trigger such different reactions?

## **The structure of the book**

This collection is divided into five parts, including chapters that discuss both the philosophy and the history of individual focus and exposure in journalistic media (parts I and V). Parts II through IV, consisting of altogether 12 chapters, each addresses a theme that resonates with the current political and social environment. Since individual focus today permeates all journalistic genres, with online and social media enhancing this tendency, and furthermore, as genres themselves are in rapid development, an edited collection like this cannot cover all aspects of the phenomenon. However we hope that our contributions will advance the understanding of some of the complexity of this increasing focus on individuals in journalism.

### **Part I. Subjectivity in journalism – a philosophy prism**

After this introduction, Steen Steensen discusses how different philosophical ideas at different times have dealt with the relationship between the individual and the collective, and how this can be related to developments in the public sphere and journalism (chapter 2). He argues that subjectivity is again on the rise in journalism, partly as a result of the influence from social media, partly as a result of the long-standing debate about what journalism is and should be.

His argument, and the argument of many writers in a more subjective tradition, is that the subjectivity of the reporters and their sources are more or less



two sides of the same coin – by being participants, journalists can create a “truer” journalism. Subsequently, subjectivity can be seen as a way of building a bridge between the particular and the universal.

## Part II. Representations of politicians and power

The second section of the book examines how the roles of politicians and people in other powerful positions are being exposed to increased personalisation, interest and scrutinising.

In chapter 3, Harald Hornmoen analyses and compares a set of ape-like caricatures that have been published in different outlets and under different circumstances, in Norway, France and South Africa. The caricature has been used to scorn and ridicule political leaders and powerful people for centuries. They can, however, be challenging to interpret. They demand some sort of common understanding between the artist and the audience. Historically, caricaturists have played the role of a “visual commentary writer” – with more freedom to personalise, but were still seldom detached from the publication as such. One conclusion is that the rise of social media has brought new challenges to the interpretation of caricatures. When they first appear in social media, the contract with the readers and the guidelines for interpreting – knowledge of genre, the sender, the general context – may present new challenges from the outset, and this also makes interpretation demanding when the caricatures later appear in legacy media.

This question of how prominent figures are represented and understood continues in chapter 4, where Birgitte Kjos Fonn and Anders Gjesvik present an analysis of profile interviews in Norway’s major business daily. When examining a number of interviews the authors find that when written for a broader audience, they reflect a set of values which differs from the neoliberal values that often guide the choice and framing of news in mid-week editions of the newspaper, and that this is expressed in a set of dominating discourses. What is more, these discourses also serve almost as a grid, where the individual’s personal stories and qualities are plotted in – probably to make the interviewees recognisable to a larger public, as well as to legitimate their position as people with power.

In chapter 5, Eva-Karin Olsson explores how recent Swedish prime ministers have been portrayed in the national press. Party affiliation and politics still

play a role, but the younger politicians in particular are also judged by how their personalities fit with broader societal trends. Olsson finds that younger politicians deem it very important to appear “like ordinary people”. On the other hand, it is also important to fit into current popular norms – to be good family people, to be youthful, sporty, etc. – a tendency that is also known from other countries, like Britain. There are for example obvious similarities between the remodeling of the Conservative parties in Britain and Sweden through the personalities of their party leaders David Cameron and Fredrik Reinfeldt (though some of the same strategies were also used by Tony Blair when British Labour was renewed in the 1990s).

Returning to the use of graphics and imagery to convey political messages, Hugh O'Donnell presents the front pages of the pro-Scottish independence, pro-EU and pro-social democrat newspaper *The National*. This is a publication which has in a short time gained popularity with the Scottish public. Chapter 6 is an analysis of how the paper uses graphics and imagery to reproduce Scottish, British and European subjectivities. It is clear that individual exposure on these front pages is intense, with entirely different graphic treatment of – in *The National's* view – the “good” and “bad” guys among British and Scottish politicians. *The National* is an example of a newspaper that takes a clear political stance, does not hesitate to do campaign journalism, and has perfected the using of and playing with images of individuals, mostly politicians, for this purpose.

### Part III. Evolving roles, changing narratives

Having examined how politicians and other public figures are represented, the collection now draws attention to the role of the media and the journalists themselves. This section is a collection of studies of changing narratives and functions. It includes challenges in reporting health journalism, to changing routines in news production, to the Questions & Answers services in online media – all of which demonstrate larger trends and forces at play.

In chapter 7, Yngve Benestad Hågvar examines genre development and role change in the Questions & Answers section of the online version of the Norwegian newspaper VG (vg.no). Since its launch in 2012, the VG Live Studio has become a permanent service with a steady staff and an ambition to answer all kinds of questions from readers. Strengthening the bond with

readers, but also being more open about the newspaper's work and priorities, were cited as important goals for the new format. But Hågvar's study of the service reveals that the questions and answers give little insight into the choices and priorities of the newspaper – this new genre rather seems to replicate the old journalist and reader roles.

Most of the contributions in this anthology concern Western journalism. Nathalie Hyde-Clarke's chapter (chapter 8) builds on this by providing an insight into the conflict between a Western approach and approaches from other cultural spheres. In a case study of the coverage of a so-called wildcat strike in South Africa which ended in a massacre, Hyde-Clarke discusses the connection between the outcome – a massacre – and how the strike was covered in the media. Arguably, in this instance, individual exposure might have facilitated a different outcome. In any case, the post-crisis reporting appears to benefit from its adoption.

Some elite persons have retained their status as heroes even after the onset of individual exposure in journalism. These are, for example, sports heroes – but when they fall from grace, the fall is dramatic. Ingvild Tennøe Haugen's chapter (chapter 9) is about the Norwegian cross-country skier Therese Johaug, who tested positive for a banned substance in October 2016. In a country where cross-country skiing is considered *the sport of all sports*, skiers are often among the national celebrities that a sports press with increasing exposure of individuals cherish. The downfall is accordingly full of emotion, agony, and hurt national pride, and Haugen analyses the major Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten's* coverage of the case, including both the news photos and an evolving genre – a so-called commentage – where the journalist mixes reportage and commentary.

In chapter 10, Tine Ustad Figenschou examines reflections on editorial practices and ethical dilemmas among twelve Norwegian health reporters and editors. In recent decades, health journalism has become an important feature of journalism, and the patient narrative a recognisable media genre. These are stories based on the personal experiences of individual patients, either in their own right, or as cases used to illustrate other health stories. But it is a challenging genre, in which individuals are exposed in the media when they are at their most vulnerable. Most stories spring from the traditional conflict between the little man and the authorities – or the doctors – but the watchdog function can conflict heavily with the need to protect people in a vulnerable position.

Journalists struggle with balancing professional distance and empathy with the sources, and also making the sources aware that media exposure can lead to far more – and different – attention than they anticipate.

The last contribution of this part is an essay that reflects on both individual exposure in journalism *and* journalism seen from the “inside”. In chapter 11, Silje Pileberg discusses the case of the Italian seismologist Giulio Selvaggi, who, together with six other academics, was indicted and at first convicted of manslaughter after an earthquake killed 29 people in L’Aquila in Italy in 2012. Pileberg takes as her point of departure the idea that science journalism is often educational, treats uncertain findings as simplified facts, and consequently also treats scientists as some kind of wizards, men and women with superpowers. The story about Selvaggi, one of Pileberg’s own pieces as a journalist, is however written in a far more narrative form, where the researcher is portrayed as an ordinary and vulnerable human being. Pileberg’s essay is also an example of a genre and methodology that is not very common, but could be used more in research in a practical-theoretical subject like journalism – a reflection on her own practice as a journalist. The methodological approach is “reflective practice” or “critical reflection”, and the aim is to develop new knowledge based on the author’s own experience.

## Part IV. The facets and faces of terrorism

What happens in and to journalism when terrorism strikes? Terrorism is a kind of crime that as a rule is regarded as an attack on the whole nation. This also has implications for media coverage – the victims will most often be regarded as representatives of “us”, and journalists themselves may feel strongly affected.

Nina Blom Andersen (chapter 12) investigates coverage of the mourning of the two victims in a 2015 terror shooting in Denmark, and raises the question whether the tendency of branding some people as “unworthy victims” is something journalism has left behind. Since the cartoon controversy in 2006, Danish public debate has been divided between those who advocate for freedom of speech and those who are eager not to demonise Muslims. This controversy paved the way directly into the mourning of the two victims, as one of them was interpreted as “less innocent” than the other victim after his death.

Are tolerance and freedom of speech perceived to be “binary opposites” in this context?

Although the ideal of objectivity and detachment in news reporting is constantly being questioned, there still seems to be a strong belief in it among journalists. The unexpected and unprecedented terror attack in Norway in 2011 also created unexpected challenges for journalists. Is it possible to remain untouched and continue doing one’s job in a situation where 77 people were killed, some of them only children, where there were dead people in the streets and along the shore, and even where some of the editorial offices were affected? This is the topic of chapter 13, written by Maria Konow Lund, Isabel Bech and Eva-Karin Olsson.

The next chapter discusses the conspicuously impersonal images of ID-like photos that often accompany news reporting on terror attacks. On the one hand, society probably needs to see the evil-doer in order to see that such catastrophes have a cause. On the other hand, the murderer is the ultimate “other”, the terrorist is the worst of them all, and we still do not want to see their “real” self. The Norwegian media, for example, refused to interview the lone-wolf terrorist, Anders Behring Breivik, after the terror attack in June 2011, and the public reacted strongly to the publishing of a photo from his personal Facebook profile. Anne Hege Simonsen (chapter 14) argues that the ID-like photos of Anis Amri that circulated in the media after the attack on the Christmas market in Berlin in 2016, did not represent Amri as a person, but served “to identify the physical traits of a criminal fugitive”.

## Part V. A historical approach: Tensions in individual focus and exposure

The book started with a chapter in which philosophy was used as a prism to understand varying views on subjectivity. The book’s coda, part V and chapter 15, is an outline of a few important historical developments in the press which regard subjectivity and individual focus and exposure. The chapter depicts six developments that we have reason to believe can tell us something about contemporary journalism. As Birgitte Kjos Fonn states, all these developments are rife with tensions, and may therefore help us to understand why reactions to current trends in individualisation are so varied.

## Concluding remarks

It is possible that critics are right to claim that many aspects of individual exposure and subjectivity in journalism *are* trivial, but as we demonstrate in this collection, the phenomenon is also far more diverse than that. In some cases, the lack of individual exposure probably weakens the quality of the information the public gets. In other cases, the exposure of individuals is part of an ongoing negotiation between the media and the source. Sometimes the exposure of a murder victim can be skewed, due to underlying political assumptions among journalists and debaters.

Today's individual exposure and subjectivity in journalism are the result of the combined forces of democratisation, commercialisation and also the professionalisation of the press. Sometimes they work together, sometimes they pull in different directions.

It is our hope that through this project we can inspire other scholars to do further studies in this significant, yet under-researched field.

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## Part I

# Subjectivity in Journalism - a Philosophy Prism





## CHAPTER 2

# Subjectivity as a Journalistic Ideal

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*This chapter discusses different notions of subjectivity as an ideal in journalism and relates them to epistemological philosophy from Descartes to Foucault. The chapter argues that subjectivity – once a dominant ideal in journalism – again is rising in significance, and that there therefore exists a need to better understand what subjectivity as an ideal is, and can be, to journalism. The chapter argues for a distinction between byline subjectivity (the journalist’s subjectivity) and source subjectivity and discusses four different notions of subjectivity in journalism: moral, political, existential and fragmented. The chapter concludes that subjectivity should not be considered as something that opposes and obstructs objectivity; rather it should be viewed as a prerequisite for objectivity.*

**Keywords:** Journalism, philosophy of journalism, subjectivity, objectivity, professionalism

## Introduction

For several years, I worked as a feature writer for Norwegian newspapers. I did so at a time when Norwegian journalism had long been professionalized and officially detached from any outsiders’ interests. Norwegian journalists, like journalists in most other democratic countries, have, since the decline of the partisan press, adhered primarily to ideals of objectivity and independence. They have practiced those ideals in very much the same way as the description by Tuchman (1972) of how American journalists in the early 1970s perceived themselves: A journalist reports the facts, nothing more.

Yet, in my feature writing I strived for something more. I wanted to write with a personal voice. I wanted to tell stories. I tried to use colorful language in order to portray people, places and events in creative ways. I looked for emotional responses from the people I interviewed so that their specific experiences and reactions would show them as humans, not merely as fact-providers and opinion makers. In other words: I strived for subjectivity.

Subjectivity has always been important to journalism, but is often portrayed as something unwanted, something that opposes the idea of the journalist as a neutral, detached reporter of facts. One of the few scholars who has written about subjectivity in journalism, van Zoonen (1998), simply defines subjectivity as the opposite of objectivity, the contested, yet most prominent ideal in modern journalism (Mindich, 2000; Schudson, 2001). Such a view implies that subjectivity means unfair and sloppy reporting instead of fair and accurate; it means taking sides instead of being unbiased; and it means being an interested and committed insider instead of being a detached outsider (van Zoonen, 1998, pp. 128–129). She argues further that subjectivity plays a crucial part in the shaping of a journalist's organizational identity, but that it is present in some domains of journalism (typically popular journalism) while hidden in others (typically political news). Journalism should therefore “become more open about its own constructedness, subjectively and structurally, to maintain its status as a core institution of democratic societies”, argues van Zoonen (1998, p. 140).

During the last few decades, many of the assumed dichotomies in journalism, like hard/soft, tabloid/broadsheet, entertainment/information and fact/opinion, have become blurred and journalism today is a complex field of practice in which subjectivity and objectivity, emotion and rationality co-exist in various ways (Peters, 2011). It may seem as if subjectivity today plays an even more prominent role in journalism, as social media push journalists to be more personal and to a lesser degree representors of the voice of the institutions they work for (Bruns, 2012; Hermida, 2012; Steensen, 2016).

It is therefore about time that we ask how an ideal of subjectivity in journalism can best be understood and defined. This chapter aims at doing exactly that. It asks what subjectivity means and traces the understanding of subjectivity and its relation to objectivity through the history of both journalism in Western democracies and epistemological philosophy.

It seems clear that the value of subjectivity in journalism rests on the premise that one person's subjective experiences, be it the journalist's or a source's, can have meaning for others. In other words, an ideal of subjectivity in journalism seems to imply a belief in some kind of universalism in which journalism can build a bridge between the particular (subjective experiences) and the universal and common. The existence of such a bridge and what it might look like has been heavily discussed in epistemological philosophy. I will argue that the best way to defend the existence of such a bridge, and thereby the best way to defend and practice an ideal of subjectivity in journalism, is to base the ideal on an understanding of subjectivity hinted at by Wahl-Jorgensen (2013), namely as an ideal that does not oppose objectivity. I will find support for such a position in the history of journalism in Western democracies and in Sayer's (2011) arguments for the interdependence of subjectivity and objectivity.

The chapter starts out by discussing what subjectivity is and how it is articulated in journalism through either *byline* subjectivity or *source* subjectivity. The chapter then discusses different notions of subjectivity found in journalism that can be related to epistemological philosophy: moral subjectivity, political subjectivity, existential subjectivity and fragmented subjectivity.

## What is subjectivity?

What exactly is subjectivity? The word is so commonplace in everyday speech that we all have a (subjective!) opinion on what it means. We associate it with the individual and identity. When something is "subjective" it is marked by the consciousness of an individual. Thus the word presupposes, in a way, that there is something that is *not* subjective, that there is a world beyond that which is shaped by the consciousness of individuals, in other words, an "objective" world. This is a conclusion that is not without problems.

However, subjectivity and individual identity are not one and the same. Hall (2004) argues that a person's identity is the sum of his or her traits, convictions and beliefs, constituting a stable personality and mode of social behavior; while subjectivity always involves a degree of thought and self-consciousness about one's identity. At the same time, subjectivity represents a myriad of limitations on one's ability to understand and grasp the nature of one's identity (Hall, 2004, p. 3). Thus, subjectivity is how we socially construct our identity and the extent to which we are conscious of our own identity. Our subjectivity

includes all the identities we possess (such as gender, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation) while also including our own (incomplete) consciousness of ourselves. In this way, subjectivity deals both with *epistemology* (how we know what we know) and *ontology* (the nature of reality). Self-reflection and self-consciousness, combined with the relationship between the self and the world beyond the self are, therefore, of central importance when examining subjectivity as a notion, according to Hall.

The notion of the subjective, not to mention *the power of the subjective*, arose during the Renaissance with its focus on the autonomous self and thus humanism, instead of viewing the human being as a product of God and fate. Thus, during the Renaissance, the free and subjective will of the individual emerges as an important factor in human success and failure. This became central to more recent thinking, too, especially in relation to what one can actually know about the nature of reality. Perhaps the most famous example of this is the credo of French philosopher René Descartes: “I think, therefore I am”. With these words, Descartes reduced all other knowledge of reality beyond the individual’s existence to insignificance. He asked himself the question: “If I doubt everything I know, what am I then left with?” The answer was himself, his own “I”. The only thing that he could not doubt was that he was thinking and that he, therefore, existed.

This sowed the seeds of what is often referred to as the epistemological shift in philosophy, in other words, a shift towards what knowledge actually is and how we can know what we know. The subject and its relationship to the world is central to Descartes’ epistemology and, because of this, we might well refer to him as the founder of *subjective philosophy*. As a consequence, the individual and subjectivity became vitally important to thinkers who came after Descartes.

However, there is an obvious problem with Descartes’ rational presentation of the importance of the “I”, which Kant and others were concerned about. Descartes’ “I think therefore I am” presupposes that the I can see itself, something which is a practical impossibility. Kant maintains that the self cannot be experienced because the self will always be a presupposition for all experience. As Garrett Thompson puts it: “The search for the ‘I’ is pointless, because any seeking must be done by the ‘I’, and so what is sought after is already presupposed” (cited in Hall, 2004, p. 27).

Instead, Kant and several of his contemporaries in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Age of Enlightenment were concerned with the interaction between the subjective and the objective, or the universal. Kant's *categorical imperative* is a famous example of such thinking, which, as we will see, plays a crucial role in how the notion of the importance of the subjective functions in journalism, even today. The categorical imperative is a universal principle of morality which Kant formulated as follows: "I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law" (Kant, 1998, 4:402).

In other words, Kant's categorical imperative is similar to the Biblical command – as well as to corresponding rules in other religions – which is often referred to as the "Golden Rule": that one should not treat others in ways one would not like to be treated oneself. While, in a religious context, this rule is seen as an order from God, for Kant it is a moral law that springs from the person alone, despite it being innate and universal. This means that in every single human being, according to Kant, there is a bridge between the subjectively recognizable and something common or universal, according to which a person acts.

A bridge of this kind between the subjectively experienced and the common or universal forms the premise for subjectivity as an ideal in journalism. By presenting the experiences of individual people, journalism seeks to create a sense of *identification* in the general public and thereby say something about the nature of reality. For many decades in many countries, identification by focusing on the individual has been an important news criterion in journalism (see for instance Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Gans, 1979; Handgaard, Simonsen & Steensen, 2013; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001; Schultz, 2007). This criterion assumes that people can recognize themselves in each other's actions, reactions and emotions, and that a large number of people can identify with a single human being. Moreover, as this serves as a criterion for journalism, it means that identification is regarded as *valuable*. The thinking behind this is that an issue will resonate with more people, more effectively, if it has the potential to create a sense of identification.

The notion of identification of this kind across subjects is based on generalizability, that one person's experiences can also have validity as experiences for other people, and that this reality is thus of equal value regardless of who experiences it. This ontological stance is prevalent in much of journalism.

## Byline subjectivity and source subjectivity

On the whole, the ideal of subjectivity is articulated in two ways in journalism. First, there is a long tradition in most journalistic cultures of cultivating the journalist's own subjectivity in opinion journalism, in other words genres such as commentary, review and gossip/causerie. However, subjectivity is also cultivated in areas other than opinion journalism, particularly in the genre of reportage where, ideally, the journalist describes her own experiences and impressions with a sufficiently high degree of sympathetic insight to be of value to the reader as well as, perhaps, reflecting on what she is experiencing (Carey, 1987; Hartsock, 2009; Steensen, 2011). For example, in her analysis of American Pulitzer prize-winning news stories, Wahl-Jørgensen (2013, p. 305) found that the stories were “pervaded with subjective language” in the sense that the journalists expressed affect, judgment and appreciation in their writings, and they did so without undermining claims of objectivity, according to Wahl-Jørgensen.

We can call this aspect of the ideal of subjectivity *byline subjectivity* as it is the journalist as author who imbues the story with her subjectivity. It is, however, important to note that the byline is historically speaking a modern concept (Reich, 2010), and that I here use the phrase “byline subjectivity” only as a way of signaling that this is subjectivity related to the journalist as author, independent of the existence and function of an actual byline.

Byline subjectivity can take several different forms, as demonstrated, for example, by Habers and Borersma (2014) in their comparison of the Middle East journalism of noted British journalist Robert Fisk and Dutch journalist Arnon Grunberg. In recent years, byline subjectivity has also played an important role in new forms of journalism, particularly American television journalism where “involvement by the journalist becomes actively embraced” (Peters, 2011, p. 301).

Second, the ideal of subjectivity is cultivated in a broader sense in journalism. The subjective experience of the individual is a central ingredient in much of today's journalism, especially in Western democracies where individualization has been key to the tabloidization and popularization of journalism. A story concerning cuts in psychiatric care can, for instance, be exemplified by describing an individual's subjective experience of mental health issues. A report on increasing petrol prices is incomplete without a motorist at a petrol pump complaining about the situation while refueling and watching his money disappear. Such subjective exemplifications of sources often referred to

as “consequence experts” (Allern, 2001; Hjarvard, 1999) have become an important part of the way in which many journalists in Western democracies think and work on stories. Stories need to be exemplified and personified. We can call this aspect of the ideal of subjectivity *source subjectivity*. This increased emphasis on the individual, and thereby source subjectivity, has often been regarded as lowering the quality of journalism, but as Meijer (2001) argues, it can also be viewed as attaining a different kind of quality, namely a public or civic quality, in which emotion, everyday life and a relative sense of self have become important ingredients in journalism.

Together, these two forms of subjectivity constitute a fairly dominant ideal in journalism in Western democracies today. But they have different origins. As I will discuss in the next section, byline subjectivity was a dominant ideal in journalism in Western democracies in the pre-objectivity era, while source subjectivity is a more modern invention. Furthermore, subjectivity as an ideal in journalism has adopted different meanings at different times. While byline subjectivity, and also to a degree source subjectivity, can be said originally to constitute an ideal of *moral subjectivity* based on the Kantian moral law and belief in universalism discussed above, the rise of positivism implied that objectivity – understood as the opposite of subjectivity – was the only way of achieving the same degree of universal validity.

However, moral subjectivity is not the only notion of subjectivity we find in journalism. Later on in this chapter I will argue that the partisan press employs a kind of subjectivity we may call *political subjectivity*, which has its philosophical counterpart in group subjectivity as expressed for instance by Hegel and Marx. Furthermore, I will argue that the “rebirth” of subjectivity as a journalistic ideal in the new journalism of the 1960s in the USA has clear ties to the epistemology of existentialism, and might therefore be labeled *existential subjectivity*. And, finally, the role of subjectivity related to modern social media practices might be seen as representing an ideal of *fragmented subjectivity*, which is partly paralleled in post-structuralist philosophy.

## Moral subjectivity and early journalism

Although the notion of the subjective first made an impact during the Renaissance, it largely exists – at least in the epistemological sense of the word – in what many regard as journalism’s archetype, namely the reportage genre.



Several reportage theorists cite Herodotus, born c. 490 BC, as the author of the first examples of reportage (Bech-Karlsen, 2002; Haller, 1987; Kapuscinski, 2006). The interesting thing about Herodotus is that he assumes in his travel reports the position of a narrator characterized by what Bech-Karlsen calls “open subjectivity” (2007, p. 47). Herodotus constantly questions what he sees and is told, and allows this uncertainty about what is actually true to be visible in his writings. He presents an “I” in his reportage precisely in order to convey this uncertainty and make it visible to the reader, thereby allowing his reports to be characterized by a Cartesian, epistemological discussion: He constantly questions his certainty about reality.

Bech-Karlsen shows how an ideal of “open” subjectivity of this kind has left its mark on aspects of reportage journalism right up until modern times. It undoubtedly enjoyed its heyday in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in Europe, but also in the USA. Schudson describes American journalism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as follows:

Far from cohering around a telegraphic center, the language of dashing correspondents from Cuba just before and during the Spanish-American War were personal, colorful, and romantic. The human interest reporting of reporters enchanted with urban life was sentimental. Coverage of politics was often self-consciously sarcastic and humorous. This was not prose stripped bare. (Schudson, 2001, p. 159)

Byline subjectivity of this kind was a dominant ideal of early journalism in Western democracies, especially in the reportage genre. This ideal meant that the individual journalist’s presentation of reality was permitted to appear as subjectively filtered, resulting in a blurring of lines between representations of subjective reality and fiction, and a mixture of facts and comment. But it also meant that journalism was considered a practice suited to shed light on and convince audiences of wrong-doings, and that the journalists had a moral obligation not only to embrace such a practice, but to do so with their subjectivity as a guiding moral compass.

The epistemological rationale for subjectivity in this early journalism was in tune with Kant’s moral philosophy and belief in universalism. The journalist needed to position himself as a subject with whom the audience could identify and relate to. This identification was not primarily inter-subjective; it was rooted in what was presumed to be a common understanding of morality. Reportage journalists of the time in Europe were heavily influenced by the

social realism movement in the arts, inspired by artists (who doubled as reportage journalists) like Emile Zola, Honore de Balzac and others, but also by early modernist writers with a greater emphasis on subjective representations of reality, such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Walt Whitman (in the USA), August Strindberg and Knut Hamsun, many of whom also wrote reportages in newspapers.

Furthermore, many reportage journalists of the time in Europe and the USA saw it as a moral obligation to reveal their subjectivity in the name of transparency. Hartsock points to the Pulitzer prize-winning journalist/author/essayist Hamlin Garland, who in a journalistic essay in 1894 argued that when facing facts, a writer should reveal his individual relation to those facts in order to be “true to yourself, true to your locality and true to your time” (cited in Hartsock, 1999, p. 441). To Garland, being subjective and transparent was “the essence of veritism” (ibid.). He linked subjectivity to objectivity in a way which later positivist thinkers and professional, objective journalism would greatly contest.

## Subjectivity meets social science discourse

According to Schudson (2001), World War I created a demand in the American press for an alternative form of journalism, a journalism that was based to a far greater extent on the verification of facts, rationality and common sense. The foremost exponent of this view and, thus, the rise of the ideal of objectivity, was probably the American writer Walter Lippmann. In his book *Public Opinion* published in 1922, Lippmann (2007) argued strongly in favour of subjectivity giving way to an objective method if journalism was to serve an important social role. In other words, journalism needed to be more akin to positivist-oriented social science.

Lippmann wrote *Public Opinion* at a time when social science was beginning to emerge as an academic discipline. Hence, thinking concerning the individual and subjectivity was given a sociological slant. Sociology, in the form established by Auguste Comte and later Émile Durkheim, originated within a positivist scientific discourse and took its template from the natural sciences. Durkheim believed that human behavior could be studied using the same principles adopted by natural science to study the world. This sociological shift meant that the subjective became devalued. A distinction was made between rationality and objectivity on the one hand, and emotion, evaluation

and subjectivity on the other. The thinking was that the former, not the latter, should characterize social science. Journalism, especially in the USA, soon adopted this social science discourse, – “at a moment when science was God”, as Schudson (2001, p. 162) put it – and thus the consolidation of the ideal of objectivity as part of journalistic professionalism must be seen in this light. Journalism gained legitimacy by adopting a social science approach to the world, and this form of legitimacy exists in journalism in Western democracies right up to the present day. That being said, the positivist paradigm and the ways in which it attempts to “deny and neutralize subjectivity” in journalism (Hartsock, 1999, p. 441), did not totally prevent other forms of subjective journalism from arising. One example is the subjectivity of the partisan press.

## **Political subjectivity: The partisan press and Marxism**

In many European countries, the partisan press survived until around 1980. Clearly, journalism in the partisan press era was not concerned with being objective. Neither was it influenced by the subjective views of the individual journalist. It was somewhere in between the two, as it was the newspaper’s political line that was important and determined the ways in which a news item was angled and presented.

We find a philosophical basis for such an intermediate position in Hegel, and later Marx, and their understanding of subjectivity and the individual. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* published in 1806 Hegel (2009) argued that individual self-consciousness does not exist in isolation – it only exists when it meets others. You can only see yourself through seeing others. For Hegel, this means that the individual cannot see other individuals in isolation; one only sees others as oneself in the other. Thus, a conflict arises between individuals in which the individual’s relationship to the other will always be based on dominance, according to Hegel. This was the starting point for Marx’s theory of class-consciousness and, hence, group subjectivity. Marx believed that, by gathering together and realizing they had a common desire for a greater degree of freedom, individuals could change their identity. Thus, identity and subjectivity were also mutable. With Hegel and Marx, thinking relating to the individual and subjectivity became heavily politicized.

Of course, the partisan press by no means came about as a Marxist idea. The point is merely that the idea of politicized group subjectivity, which Marx so strongly articulated, happened to establish a parallel to the epistemology of the partisan press. Political subjectivity in the partisan press implies a different kind of universalism and bridge between the particular and the general than that found in Kantian philosophy. It is implicitly understood in this kind of political subjectivity that there exists not one, but many bridges between the individual and the general, depending on which (political) group the individual belongs to. The universalism of subjectivity as an ideal in the partisan press is in other words a meso-universalism, compared to the macro-universalism of Kantian subjectivity – and what we might label a micro-universalism of existential and fragmented subjectivity, to be discussed later.

This meso-universalistic position is perhaps even more relevant today than during the partisan press area. The current media crisis in many Western democracies is, at least partly, linked to a metajournalistic discourse on the ability of journalism to convey a macro-universalistic view of events in the world. Especially in the USA, the term “mainstream media”, meaning traditional news institutions adhering to macro-universalistic ideals of objectivity and independence, has become discursively connected with liberal bias (Carlson, 2017, p. 163ff). Growing mistrust in mainstream media in many Western democracies is closely tied to mistrust in macro-universalism, and the growth in right-wing media outlets is closely tied to mistrust in and criticism of mainstream media. The best way for mainstream media to address this discourse of mistrust and criticism, is perhaps not to strive harder for macro-universalism, but to acknowledge that the best one can hope to achieve, is meso-universalism, in which group-subjectivity plays an important role. This does not mean that mainstream media should retreat to partisanism, but that they acknowledge and make transparent the fact that their journalism is based on certain values and ideals that are shared by many, but not by everyone.

## **New Journalism and existential subjectivity**

One day in 1962 American journalist and later author, Tom Wolfe, read his professional colleague Gay Talese’s portrait of boxer Joe Louis in *Esquire* magazine, and was struck by something he felt he had not seen before: journalism

containing intimate, scenic descriptions drawn from the boxer's private sphere. Wolfe was so inspired, he began to experiment with this way of writing himself. When he formulated his thoughts on this type of journalism, he christened it "new journalism" (Wolfe, 1975).

Wolfe emphasized in particular the subjective gaze of the personal viewpoint and what he called "saturation reporting", which meant that the journalist had to spend a great deal of time with the people he wrote about in order to really get inside their lives. The aim of the new journalists was to get involved, to be participants, in order to create a "truer" journalism. As a consequence, subjectivity was also a central ideal for the new journalists, both byline subjectivity in the sense that the journalism was strongly influenced by the subject who wrote it, and source subjectivity in the sense that many of the new journalists were concerned with the subjective perspective as well as the thoughts and feelings of their sources. The new journalists often reproduced their source's thoughts and feelings in given situations in the form of interior monologues, as if the journalist had access to what was going on inside people's heads.

In many respects, new journalism emerged as a protest against the ideal of objectivity and positivist epistemology that dominated American journalism at the time. But this did not mean that Wolfe and his peers believed that the journalism they produced could be inaccurate or less "truthful". On the contrary, Wolfe went so far as to argue that new journalism was both more accurate and more truthful than conventional journalism, precisely because it was based on painstaking research and personal involvement with the sources.

However, not all new journalists were equally concerned with making their subjectivity visible in the texts they wrote – at least not byline subjectivity. Eason (1990) makes a distinction between the realists and the modernists among the new journalists. The realists who, according to Eason, included journalists such as Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese and Truman Capote, were essentially quite conventional in terms of their epistemology and believed it was possible to "expose" an objective reality through the methods they developed and narrative story-telling techniques. The modernists among the new journalists, on the other hand, were those who truly challenged the epistemology of conventional journalism. New Journalists such as Joan Didion, Norman Mailer and Hunter S. Thompson did not believe that there was an objective reality out there that could be captured and described – rather they tried to describe "what it feels like to live in a world where there is no consensus about

a frame of reference to explain ‘what it all means’” (Eason, 1990, p. 192). Unlike the realists, these modernists did not actually believe in objectivity. They were, therefore, more in line with pre-new journalism thinking on subjectivity and epistemology that in the 1960s began to gain a foothold in the USA and became popular in Europe, namely existentialism.

In common with Descartes’ subjective philosophy, the basic premise of existentialism is that all thinking should be founded on individual experience. And, just as new journalism was a form of protest against systematized journalistic objectivity, so existentialism can be seen as a protest against the system orientation that Marx and Hegel, in particular, but also Kant, represented. Although Søren Kierkegaard is often referred to as the first existentialist philosopher, it was only after World War II and the works, first and foremost, of Jean-Paul Sartre that existentialism made a real breakthrough. Central for Sartre, as with the later modern new journalists, was the idea that it is impossible to grasp an objective reality outside of the subject. “Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism,” wrote Sartre (2002, p. 29).

This does not mean that existentialism promotes selfishness. Sartre and other existentialists placed great emphasis on understanding the consequences of our choices and their effect on other people, and their thinking was therefore characterized by a fundamentally humanistic attitude. However, Sartre did not believe in Kant’s categorical imperative as the basis for such humanism. There are far too many nuances in the world for us to be able to reduce them to a single moral principle that can be of equal validity everywhere, argued Sartre. As he wrote: “There is no other universe except the human universe, the universe of human subjectivity” (Sartre, 2002, p. 45).

This form of subjectivism also serves as a suitable description for the modern new journalists. Indeed, it may seem that there has never been a stronger correlation between journalistic practices and modern thinking in terms of the perception of subjectivity. The modern new journalists can simply be interpreted as the journalistic practitioners of existentialism.

Even though new journalism, especially the modern variant, might be considered a parenthesis in the modern history of journalism, it has clearly been influential in how feature journalism in general and literary/narrative journalism in particular have developed, and in how both journalism and society have become individualized (Coward, 2013). Emotions play a crucial role in

modern journalism (Peters, 2011; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013), and journalism in general has been featurized, in the sense that color, personal voice and narration have become important ingredients in a variety of different journalistic genres, and that the private sphere has become more publically accessible (Steensen, 2011, 2016). In this respect, journalism is, at least to a certain degree, becoming a universe of human subjectivity, in which the value of subjective experience needs no further legitimization.

However, most journalistic practices, at least in Western democracies, still relate to an epistemology that implies that the belief in an objective reality exists. Moreover the distance between journalism and thinking about subjectivity became even greater when post-structuralism joined in and started to problematize the extent to which the subjective also was “real”.

## **Post-structuralism and fragmented subjectivity**

If the distance between philosophy and journalism was short in the 1960s, when the modern new journalists in the USA and existentialist thinking in France were hand in glove, it was possibly at its greatest in West European democracies in the 1970s and 80s, when the partisan press had fallen, or was about to fall, and the American ideal of objectivity had gained, or was in the process of gaining, a strong, cross-national foothold. New journalism, with its rebellion against the ideal of objectivity, had gained little ground, and byline subjectivity had been cleared away from journalism except in opinion journalism. Neither was source subjectivity much in evidence. The tabloidization of journalism, with its focus on the personal and preoccupation with consequence experts and “cases”, had not yet made a real breakthrough in more than a handful of countries.

At the same time, Western philosophy, especially in Europe, was characterized by a great distance from objectivity and universalism. Key figures in the post-structuralist movement, such as Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes were concerned with the idea that the “self” as portrayed by earlier thinkers, was based on a fictional construct. Instead, they claimed that the self, and thus subjectivity, was a construction of different ways of understanding and the conflicts between them. Key identity markers, such as gender, race, sexual orientation and profession, are culturally and socially constructed, and are not qualities that “actually” exist in the subject, claimed

the post-structuralists. Indeed, it is the struggle between these various constructed identity markers that constitute a person's constantly changing subjectivity. For example, Foucault defined subjectivity as: "The way in which the subject experiences himself in a game of truth where he relates to himself" (cited in Skinner, 2013, p. 913). In other words, Foucault sees the subjective as a game in which the individual, through self-consciousness, creates an illusion of truth. In this game, various roles hold a central position (as "father", as "student", as "journalist", as "homosexual", etc.) – or how one perceives these roles, how one constructs them in one's own self-consciousness.

A consequence of post-structuralist thinking is that the distinction between fact and fiction appears to be fairly meaningless. A "fact" will always be a construction which cannot be separated from all the ways of thinking, knowledge and beliefs (or discourses) that are implicit in language. And as long as the post-structuralists believe that there is no reality beyond language, journalism will remain as fictitious as a novel. It is, therefore, impossible to reconcile journalism correspondence theory, i.e., that journalism always refers to a reality beyond journalism, with post-structural thinking – at least a journalism that does not take into account the fact that reality appears different from subject to subject.

However, what can be said to be an important contribution from post-structural thinking to a valid epistemological position for journalism's ideal of subjectivity, is the awareness of the fragmented subject – in other words, that subjectivity is always composed of the many different roles adopted by every individual. An individual, therefore, has not just one but many mutable subjectivities. We may today see an ideal of subjectivity inspired by social media practices arising in journalism that addresses this post-structuralist idea of subjectivity as fluid and fragmented.

Social media provide arenas where the distinction between public and private spheres, and the different roles one can adopt in the various spheres, is partly in a state of disintegration. In one and the same medium, such as Twitter, a journalist can send private messages and disseminate news to a public without changing the media-specific context. Journalists are constantly switching in this way between such private and professional use of social media (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013).

This almost constant movement between the private and the professional makes it difficult to separate the different roles from each other. Aspects of the



private slide over into the professional sphere and, perhaps, something slips back from the professional into the private. The result is the “profersional” journalist who uses the personal and, thus, the subjective, in his or her professional working life (Steensen, 2015).

There are two ways in particular in which the “profersional” journalist presents him or herself. First, journalists present their personal opinions to a greater extent in social media than in the newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations for which they work. Second, journalists share more aspects of their private lives in social media (Steensen, 2016). This is not necessarily anything new in journalism. In reportage and feature journalism, it is not unusual for journalists to mix in details from their own private lives. But with social media, this is also becoming commonplace among journalists who normally work within a paradigm in which traditional objective news reporting still rules. News journalists in traditional media are suddenly coming out as private individuals with subjective reflections in social media, and they do so, it seems, without losing credibility as news journalists (Boehmer, 2014).

One possible reason for this is that the “profersional” journalist appears to be more human when she demonstrates a broader spectrum of roles and identities. Sayer (2011) has argued that social scientists need to take the subjectivity of both themselves as scientists and the informants they study seriously in order for the science to be more truthful and objective. This argument can be valid for journalism as well, as I will discuss next.

## The subjective as part of the objective

In his book *Why Things Matter to People*, Sayer (2011) examines the ways in which social scientists relate to their sources. Instead of observing people from a distance, in an attempt to achieve some form of objective observation in which the subjectivity of the sources is eliminated, Sayer believes that social scientists should engage to a greater degree with who their sources are. The following quotation is equally valid if we replace “social scientists” with “journalists”:

The danger is that, because, as social scientists, we mostly want to observe and explain what people do rather than cooperate with them in some practice, we will project that spectator’s relationship onto them, and fail to appreciate the import of the practices

for them, so that they appear as unfeeling actors of parts, bearers of roles, occupants of subject positions, mere causal agents. (Sayer, 2011, p. 12)

Following this argument, journalists should, therefore, involve themselves in people's lives and not simply regard them as sources, if their aim is to understand and convey what is important to people. If journalists merely adopt the role of spectator, it becomes difficult for them to see the sources as anything other than isolated roles or positions. This is in obvious contrast with the one-dimensional ideal of subjectivity that case journalism often represents, where source subjectivity is reduced to only one (constructed) role for an individual. When sources appear as cases in news stories, they risk being reduced to one thing, which conflicts with their own sense of subjectivity. Eide (2012) has for example shown how disabled people who appear as sources in the news, feel alienated from the ways in which they are represented. If subjectivity as a journalistic ideal relating to sources should adhere to an understanding of subjectivity as fragmented and fluid, journalists need to see beyond the one role ("the disabled person", "the asylum seeker") the source is meant to have in the case. To avoid this, the journalist must be involved with and genuinely interested in the people she uses as raw material in her journalism. Otherwise, the distanced gaze many journalists adopt can take them wildly off course, precisely because it is the gaze of someone who is detached and non-participating.

Sayer believes it is inappropriate to make a distinction between the objective, distanced and rational on the one hand, and the subjective, emotional and value-oriented on the other. He believes that it is only by regarding the subjective as part of the objective, emotions and values as part of the rational, that we can understand people: "It seems that becoming a social scientist involves learning to adopt this distanced relation to social life, perhaps so as to be more objective, as if we could become more objective by ignoring part of the object." (Sayer, 2011, p. 211). Again, as journalism is so strongly influenced by social science discourse, we can easily replace the term "social scientist" with "journalist" in the above quote to produce a sentence with just as much meaning. The subjective is thus a part of each human "object" – the source as well as the journalist. Ignoring subjectivity by adopting an objective and, therefore, detached stance – untouched by emotion and values – means that you are missing important aspects of the reality you want to say something about. Ignoring the subjective simply makes it harder for the journalist to say something that is true.

Sayer's argument lends legitimacy both to source subjectivity and byline subjectivity as journalistic ideals. The subjective is a part of the journalist as object, just as much as it is a part of the source as object. Taking this into consideration involves acknowledging emotions, norms and values both in oneself as journalist and in the source. If we follow Sayer's argument, it is a misconception to believe that this makes the journalist less objective. On the contrary, it makes the journalist *more* objective, in the sense of seeking the truth.

## Conclusion

I have in this chapter discussed different notions of subjectivity throughout the history of ideas and journalistic practices in Western democracies, and shown how they at times collide and at other times harmonize. In table 2.1, I lay out the four different notions of subjectivity discussed, which can be linked to both different practices in journalism and different philosophical positions.

Of course, the borders between the different notions of subjectivity are not as clear cut as Table 2.1 suggests. For instance, realist reportage and case-driven journalism might be very political, and advocacy journalism can be deeply moralistic. There are, however, a few moments in history when notions of subjectivity in journalistic practice harmonized with trends in the history of ideas. First, from the 1920s onwards positivist thinking and the belief in objectivity dominated the rise of the social sciences, while journalism (at least in the USA) became professionalized and was influenced by the same idea. This phase

**Table 2.1.** Four notions of subjectivity that can be found in both journalistic practice and philosophical thinking

	<b>Moral subjectivity</b>	<b>Political subjectivity</b>	<b>Existential subjectivity</b>	<b>Fragmented subjectivity</b>
In philosophy	Kantian universalism	Marx and Hegel's notions of group subjectivity	Existentialism	Post-structuralism
In journalism	realist reportage; case-driven journalism; tabloid journalism	The partisan press; advocacy journalism	modernist reportage; new journalism	social media journalism, case-driven journalism

implied the separation of subjectivity from objectivity, and thus a devaluation of the former. Second, existentialism and new journalism – at least parts of new journalism – were dominated by the same epistemological position simultaneously, implying a re-evaluation of subjectivity.

For most journalism in Western European democracies today, the most common of the four notions of subjectivity in Table 2.1 is still moral subjectivity. The basis of such reporting is the belief in *personification* as a news criteria, which was described in the original work on news criteria by Galtung and Ruge as “cultural idealism according to which man is the master of his own destiny and events can be seen as the outcome of an act of free will” (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). The universalism of this kind of journalistic practice is therefore cultural, implying that not just any individual experience in any part of the world would be considered newsworthy. To become a subject for journalism, a person must bear some cultural resemblance to the audience. Furthermore, the person often has experienced or witnessed something that will be perceived as morally unjust by the audience, for instance witnessed a crime, a natural disaster, or experienced some wrongdoing by others. The identification with other subjects in such case-driven journalism and realist reportage keeps alive journalism’s function as a “custodian of conscience” (Glasser & Ettema, 1989) where the standards by which the public can make moral judgments are upheld. Subjects who bear witness in journalism (sources or journalists) do so as a moral practice, which is often linked to some kind of suffering or atrocity (Tait, 2011, p. 1221).

The cultural universalism in such journalism is taken for granted and rarely problematized as part of journalistic practice. It finds its philosophical legitimacy in the universalism of Kant, which was also culturally bound and centered on moral order. However, it might be a problem for contemporary journalism that it to such an extent relies on notions of subjectivity that imply a high degree of universalism, while contemporary philosophy – and media practices related to social media – tend to do the opposite.

The challenge for journalism in Western democracies today is to find ways to make its dominant practices more in tune with contemporary thinking on subjectivity. This would imply – in Hall’s words – to recognize that subjectivity “once considered potentially knowable and conceptually one-dimensional, has been rendered various, fractured, and indefinite in recent theorizations, largely because of a new recognition of the complexity of our social roles and the multiplicity of our interactions” (2004, p. 118).

Popular journalistic practices like case-driven journalism and realist reportage, in which subjectivity is present but hidden and not reflected upon, and the general and still very much alive notion of the detached and neutral reporter, embody very different ways of thinking about subjectivity and the relationship between representation and what is being represented in journalism. While multi-subjective representations of the world are gaining popularity with the public in social media, journalism has not yet embraced the same idea. I have in this chapter suggested ways to do so inspired by Sayer's (2011) arguments about subjectivity and how to embrace it in the social sciences. A first step in this direction would be to recognize that subjectivity is not the opposite of objectivity – it is part of objectivity. In other words: It is impossible to say something true about the world if subjectivity is ignored. This may imply that journalistic institutions should strive for meso-universalism in line with Hegel's and Marx's ideas on group subjectivity instead of the macro-universalism of the ideal of objectivity. It also implies that journalists must be aware of and even make visible their own subjectivity – as they increasingly do in social media – and they must be aware of and relate to their sources not only as occupiers of one role, but as subjects with multiple identities and roles.

Journalists, editors and journalistic institutions should perhaps be more conscious of how they themselves view the world and how that affects their reporting, as well as be more involved with their sources and audiences, in order to fully understand what is important to the audience and the sources. Journalists might benefit from being humbler and less certain about their representation of people and events in the world, and maybe they should recognize and take into account the different roles and identities people have, and how social and cultural contexts affect how people view the world and themselves. Perhaps that is what is needed for journalism to still matter to people, to paraphrase Sayer.

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**Part II**  
**Representations of Politics  
and Power**



## CHAPTER 3

# When Aping a Politician as an Ape: Making Sense of Political Caricatures on the Boundaries of Journalism

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*Political caricature is a subset of satire that visually exposes and ridicules the foolish behavior of persons engaged in power struggles in society. Political caricatures have a strong capacity to provoke and offend. They have provoked politicians to act, and they have caused public outrage, e.g. when playing with traditionally denigrating ways of representing politicians as animals. However, caricatures can be difficult to interpret for audiences, not least when first appearing in social media. Here, their contexts of production and reception are not as established or stable as in print newspapers, in which they conventionally accompany commentaries on editorial pages. Drawing on caricature theory, I argue that readers strengthen their interpretations if they acquire knowledge of genre characteristics, the type of media the caricatures appear in, the political and cultural context of the drawings, and the caricaturist. I apply such contexts in analyses of ape-like caricatures originally presented in different types of media and in different political-cultural contexts. The caricatures analyzed are: newspaper drawings by South African caricaturist Zapiro; a cover drawing from French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo by Stéphane Charbier (Charb); and drawings by the Norwegian satirical artist Thomas Knarvik that first appeared on his Facebook site. I find, in particular, that the genre-distinct features of sympathy, gap and differentiation are useful tools in assessing how the caricatures meet – or fail to meet – conditions for making sense of them.*

**Keywords:** political caricature, satire, social media, Zapiro, Charlie Hebdo

## Introduction

In May 2016, a heated debate unfolded in the Norwegian press about a caricature drawing. The artist and satirical illustrator Thomas Knarvik had drawn and posted caricatures on his Facebook site of a politician as an ape. The person caricatured was Ali Esbati, a Swedish-Iranian social commentator and parliamentarian for the left-wing party Vänsterpartiet in Sweden. He had reacted publically to a television news report made by the Norwegian national broadcaster NRK, in which Swedish police claimed that they were about to lose control of certain districts. The report was from Rinkeby, a suburb of Stockholm with a high unemployment rate and concentration of immigrants. Esbati claimed that the report showed an incorrect picture of the suburb, and that it was racist.

According to the caricaturist, his drawing entitled “The King of the Apes” – was a reaction to Esbati’s claim that NRK had promoted racism. Knarvik’s caricature represented Esbati as an ape hanging from a tree with his anus laid bare. The illustrator followed up with a drawing in which the depicted politician now licked the genitals of another Swedish social commentator, the prolific anti-racist and journalist Henrik Arnstad. These drawings led to Facebook temporarily shutting Knarvik out of the website.<sup>1</sup>

The debate that followed revolved around the question of whether it was acceptable to draw and publish caricatures that represent a politician as an ape. On one side, debaters defended the caricaturist’s right to publish the drawings under “freedom of expression”, whereas commentators on the other side condemned the caricatures as racist.

There were, however, various nuances within these two positions. Esteemed Norwegian newspaper cartoonists (Graff in Smedsrud 2016, Elvestuen, 2016) placed Knarvik in a continental European caricature tradition of depicting powerful persons as animals or in degrading sexual positions with their genitalia exposed, the purpose being to undermine the venerable, holy and pompous. The cultural commentator and sociologist Kjetil Rolness went even further in his defense and appraisal of Knarvik, seeing the ape

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1 The reason users had for reporting the drawings, and why the organization decided to shut Knarvik out, is not known (Horvei 2016).

caricatures as a civilized exposure of a politician who has repeatedly accused his critics of being racist, something Rolness viewed as a boorish master suppression technique (Rolness, 2016). Other newspaper commentators were less enthusiastic. Although defending the cartoonist's right to use political satire as he did, they could criticize his "naïve" toying with racist stereotypes. One of them claimed that the drawings embraced the dark European tradition of representing non-Europeans as wild animals, and Jews as stingy misers with curved noses (Egeland, 2016). Among the commentators most critical of the drawings was a politician who asked Knarvik to apologize to Esbati, claiming that the drawings contributed to dehumanizing opponents and the political debate, thus making the public "a more dangerous place to be for everyone with a minority background who wishes to express their views without being overwhelmed by persistent agitation and racism" (Valen, 2016, *my translation*).

Defending his caricatures, Knarvik expressed various intentions he claimed to have had, emphasizing a wish to contribute to an increased focus on the definitory power of – and a bullying culture among – politicians. He wanted to expose how a politician can stigmatize his opponents by "drawing the racist card". He stressed that a key objective of his deliberately provocative drawings was to ignite reactions and a constructive debate with "wide frames", and he claimed that his drawings succeeded in this respect (Knarvik, 2016b).

The provocations did in a sense contribute to creating "wide frames", by fostering several different interpretations of – and opinions on – the drawings, reflecting divergent views on the value of this type of caricature. Some would claim that the caricatures enriched public debate by provoking diverse reactions and that they realized a long held liberalist ideal of public discussion: to illuminate an issue from as many sides as possible and thus create a greater understanding of it.

This article's author values this potential capacity of caricatures, and I defend Knarvik's right to apply this type of political satire to express his opinions. One can wonder, however, to what extent the ape-caricature debate provided the larger public with an improved understanding of the caricatures and their message, or for that matter, what the debaters' grounds for understanding the caricatures were. The debate was – not only in social media but also in legacy media – largely

characterized by mudslinging among different fractions of the commentariat. They could level insults such as, “Esbati plays the nigger role without knowing it”, “islamist loving left-wing” (see Yusuf, 2016), and somewhat more humorously, “I do not wish to deprive anyone of a lack of ability to read art, but it is difficult not to apprehend this (the message of Esbati’s repeated racism stigmatization, *my comment*) in Knarvik’s drawings” (Mathiesen, 2016).

The coarse rhetoric reflected the strong effects applied in Knarvik’s own drawings, and I will argue that one key to decoding the caricatures is precisely the polarized debate among fractions of the chattering classes, whether taking place in social or legacy media. However, I also believe that public debate on visual satire could benefit from readers and discussants acquiring a grasp of grounds and codes for making sense of caricatures. What codes and contexts can readers draw upon to read political caricatures plausibly? I will attempt to exemplify how readers can apply certain codes and contexts in reading provocative, ape-like caricatures of politicians presented in different types of media, both print media and social media. Before examining specific examples, I will draw on theories of caricature to argue that interpretations of such drawings are strengthened if the interpreter acquires and applies knowledge of the following: genre characteristics, how a caricature’s meaning is determined by the type of media it is presented and received within, and the caricature’s political and cultural context. Some knowledge of the caricaturist will also be useful, and I will draw on that when necessary in reading the examples.

## Genre characteristics: The caricature

Caricature can be seen as a subset of satire (Streicher 1967, Bal et al., 2009). Satire demonstrates and exposes foolish, flawed and potentially harmful human behavior in order to scorn or ridicule persons or groups. Caricature can be perceived as the visualization of satire. Caricatures ludicrously exaggerate defects or peculiarities in persons through pictorial images and drawings along with their accompanying captions and words. “Cartoon” and “caricature” are often used interchangeably. Streicher (1967), however, points out that whereas “cartooning” may be said to refer to both “build-up” and “debunking” techniques of representing persons, caricature is definitely negative in its grotesque or ludicrous representation of the scorn and ridicule of human follies and vices.

As my focus is on political caricature, I find Streicher's distinction between political and social caricature helpful. He sees political caricature as dealing with the "ridicule, debunking or exposure of persons, groups and organizations engaged in power struggles in society" (Op.cit., p. 432). Social caricatures, on the other hand, deal with non-political affairs that do not possess the potential to affect the distribution of power in society. Duus (2001) draws attention to how political cartoons and caricatures can undermine the legitimacy of rulers and harm their public image, and Buell and Maus (1988) stress that politicians have feared for their public image as long as cartoonists have caricatured politicians.

Political caricature has provoked politicians to act, and even contributed to taking down corrupt politicians (Bal et al., 2009). Meyhoff Brink (in Edrup, 2016) points out, however, that satire can also be used as a weapon by rulers to oppress their people. This is typical of a form he designates as *campaign satire*, which is used to demonize your opponents to further a cause, without considering whether what one implies is true or not. For example, this was the case when the Nazis used satirical campaigns against Jews. Another form of satire according to Meyhoff Brink is *carnevalistic satire*, a form that turns things upside down, e.g. transforms a priest to an animal and vice versa. This type of satire is inclusive and rarely offends, whereas *confrontational satire* has a strong capacity to offend as it exposes everything from power abuse to hypocrisy, and in this manner confronts others with what they wish to conceal. The last is characteristic of much political caricature.

Political caricature employs analogy and ludicrous juxtaposition to sharpen the public's view of contemporary issues. Caricaturists seek to create a response from their audience, influence their way thinking, and predispose them towards a certain course of action. Although attempting to present often complex issues in a simplified and accessible form, cartoons and caricatures do not necessarily make sense to everyone who comes across them. Kleeman (2006) emphasizes that caricatures and cartoons are only meaningful to those who are familiar with the person portrayed or with the cartoonist's subject matter.

Building on works of Streicher (1967) and Coupe (1969) amongst others, Bal et. al. (2009) have developed a theory of political caricature I find particularly useful for analysis. They identify three necessary features of a person or thing to be believably or plausibly cartooned: Sympathy, gap and differentiation. *Sympathy* refers to how an audience must be able to relate to, or identify with, the



object of satire in order to understand the point of the satire. It is essential to have an affective bond – whether love, hate, derision, etc. – with the object. *Gap* refers to a disparity that exists between reality and image. A gap may be known to the audience, or it may refer to a disparity with an alternative reality created by the caricaturist, which is different from what the audience believes it to be. The caricaturist may also point out a gap between reality and the object of the satire. Finally, *differentiation* refers to a unique attribute possessed by the object of satire that distinguishes the object from other objects. The attributes may be physical, comprising material characteristics of the object such as size and shape, or they can be ideological characteristics such as ideals, values and beliefs.

Bal et al. point out that exaggeration is fundamental to caricature as it is used to magnify that which differentiates a person or thing. They hold that the potential for a cartoon to work depends on the degree of differentiation, and the degree of sympathy, that is, the extent to which the audience can relate to and identify with the object of the cartoon.

## Media contexts for political caricatures

Political caricature has been a hallmark of satirical magazines since the form was developed in England in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Rowson, 2015). A broader audience will be familiar with political caricatures from the editorial pages of (print) newspapers where they conventionally accompany commentaries. Larsen (1991) draws attention to how this placement formally equates the caricaturist with the commentary writer. The drawer also provides a commentary to ongoing public debate. As a visual commentator, however, she has more “artistic freedom” than the writer. Whereas the writer needs to argue, reflect and be analytical in order to convince, the drawer can personalize the issue with humor and irony, and transgress social manners and tact through distortions and exaggerations, thus creating an image that is contrary to prevailing factuality and common sense.

Many newspaper readers have acquired an understanding of such conventional functions of editorial caricatures, well established as they are. When appearing within legacy newspaper contexts, readers can also make sense of caricatures drawing on the message of the written commentary, as well as on their knowledge of the newspaper’s and the caricaturist’s typical political leanings and viewpoints.

But where there is a certain fixity to the meaning potential of caricatures in traditional print news media, their contexts of production and reception are not equally established or stable in digital media, particularly not in social media settings. Cartoonists have increasingly used the Internet to circumnavigate editorial controls and publish cartoons rejected by their newspapers (Danjoux 2004), and social media such as blogs and Facebook sites have facilitated the proliferation of new cartoonists. However, in media where everyone can publish their own caricatures, interpretation and assessment can be demanding. Readers often lack knowledge about the drawer and their political stance, and the motivation behind their drawings. Rather than accompanying analytical and reflective texts typical of newspaper commentaries, the caricatures in social media may appear in commentary contexts in which the unrestrained language of fierce opinion is prevalent. If drawings are censored, as was the case with Knarvik's ape caricatures, new challenges of assessment occur as the settings in which they were originally presented can no longer be accessed. Controversial cartoons may then reappear in newspaper contexts in which the drawings acquire new meaning as they may be subject to polarized debates of the kind we outlined above, as well as the caricaturist's reinterpretations and rationalizations of his own drawings in response to accusations of offensive representations. Note, however, that readers who get specific information such as political news and comments through one medium are likely to acquire topical information through other media as well. According to the complementarity framework proposed by Dutta-Bergman (2004), segments of users access various media formats due to their interest in particular issues. Thus, social media and more established media such as printed cartoons complement rather than compete with each other (Terblanche, 2011).

## Political and cultural context

In decoding the meaning of caricatures, the interpreter can fruitfully explore the wider political and cultural context of the caricatured political act or event that is placed on the news media agenda. Relevant knowledge can be gained from looking at the satirized politician's history and record, the political system or government of which the object of satire is a part, as well as the nature of the incident that triggered the caricature.

The meaning of political caricatures may also be determined by their allusions to – or playing with – traditionally denigrating ways of representing politicians as animals. Hervé (2016) draws attention to how satire through history has been misused in far-right and racist propaganda. In Europe, there has been a tradition of anti-semitic caricatures. Because of the propaganda effect of caricatures and satire in general, the form can easily be used to promote racism and xenophobia. In France, for example, the weekly far-right satirical newspaper *Minute*, is known for comparing the former French Guianese Justice Minister Christiane Taubira to a monkey.

There is, undoubtedly, a long and dishonorable tradition of comparing black people to monkeys in the US and Europe. In America in the 1800s, associating black people with monkeys and apes was a way to justify slavery. Black people were considered by some white people to be more simian than human, and therefore had no self-evident rights, such as freedom (The Authentic History Center, 2012). The depiction of black people as apes was expressed in mainstream popular culture towards the end of the 19th century in the so-called “coon caricature”: “coon” being a disparaging term for a black person. Such stereotypes were pervasive throughout the colonial world in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a well-known cartoon example being the comic book *Tintin in the Congo* with its depiction of Africans as inferior apelike creatures. The tradition is still upheld, e.g. anti-black monkey images resurfaced during the 2008 campaign of Barack Obama. Buttons and T-shirts depicting him as a banana-eating monkey were distributed, and the imagery continued to proliferate on the Internet after Obama’s election.

Caricatures comparing black people to monkeys, then, have consistently been used to denigrate black people as being less worthy of dignity than their white counterparts.

## Reading political caricatures

### Caricatures originating in print media

Let us first consider ape-like caricatures of politicians that were initially presented in different types of print media in a range of political and cultural contexts.

In the cartoon (fig. 3.1) from the print edition of *Mail & Guardian*, a weekly newspaper with a focus on political analysis and investigative reporting, the prominent South African caricaturist Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro) plays with what has



**Figure 3.1.** Evolution of Democracy © Zapiro. Originally published in *Mail and Guardian*, August 19, 2010. Reprinted with permission; no reuse without rightsholder permission.

become a canonical cultural icon, the depiction of the concept of evolution as a linear sequence of advancing forms. The sequence is conventionally represented as a march, moving from a stooped ape to an upright human. In this manner, the canonical image typically equates evolution with progress, and represents the human being as the apex of life's history. Zapiro has depicted, from the left, heads of state in South Africa during the apartheid era: Hendrik Verwoerd, B.J. Vorster, P.W. Botha and F.W. de Klerk. To the right of them are the country's post-apartheid presidents: Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma.

Printed on 19 August 2010, the political context for making sense of the drawing (hinted at in an accompanying text in the newspaper) is that this was when Zuma ordered police to crush a national workers' wage strike. This was also the period that the ANC (African National Congress, the governing party of which Zuma is currently president) proposed Protection of Information laws and the Media Appeals Tribunal. According to South African journalists (Shaw, 2010), the new laws would allow the government to classify a broad range of material that at the time was not secret. The tribunal would also be given powers to rule on media content and impose penalties on journalists.

The object of satire for Zapiro's drawing should be clear to readers familiar with the political context. Zapiro is playing with the cultural icon that represents evolution as progress. He does this by drawing a march moving from primitive hominids or human-ape hybrids to an apex with a full-fledged human being, the Nelson Mandela figure, who is marching behind primitive hominids who are currently in the position of leading the march. In contrast to the human-ape hybrids, Mandela carries a sheet of paper marked DEMOCRACY. In this manner, the cartoon satirizes, in particular, the politicians succeeding Mandela – and their politics. While the white, primitive hominid politicians from the apartheid period preceding Mandela appear undeniably as ludicrous figures, a certain progression is implied in the depiction of the movement towards the more upright walking figure of F.W. de Klerk. With the marked visual descent of the figures after Mandela, the ridicule becomes more apparent. What could be seen as a progression up to Mandela is, after him – in the context of current politics – clearly a regression. In the cartoon, the figure of Zuma marks a low point, visually, on the level with apartheid architect Verwoerd. The Zuma figure is, moreover, drawn with a showerhead affixed to his skull. This is a recurring trait in Zapiro's Zuma caricatures, which is directly related to Zuma's claim in a 2006 rape trial against him that in order to protect himself from contracting HIV he quickly took a shower after he had unprotected sex with his accuser, a young woman whom he knew had HIV (see Baldauf, 2011).

What is the *gap* between image and reality that this cartoon satirizes? It may be seen as the disparity between, on the one hand, what the cartoonist ironically depicts as the reality South Africa now faces through the politics of the country's current leadership (a devolution of democracy), and, on the other hand, what the object of the satire claims it to be. Zuma is fond of projecting an image of South Africa as a great democracy. In his State of the Nation address in the year this cartoon was published, he spoke of the country as "a shining example of freedom and democracy" (Zuma quoted in Nkosi, 2010).

As the cartoonist himself has suggested (Zapiro, 2016), readers most probably related to the object of satire here. In other words, the cartoon met a necessary condition for the satire to work: readers had the *sympathy* needed to grasp the cartoon. Many probably also recognized attributes that *differentiate* the object of satire. The characteristics of the uncivilized and undemocratic policies of the majority of these politicians are implied metaphorically by the human-ape

hybrid figures, and Zuma's primitiveness is furthermore ridiculed through the trait depicting his apparent belief that showering prevents HIV infection.

Interestingly, a more recent Zapiro cartoon (fig. 3.2), published in the daily South African newspaper *The Times* elicited a very different kind of public reaction. The cartoon depicts Zuma as an organ grinder, and the head of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), Shaun Abrahams, as a monkey dancing to the president's tune. The context was Abrahams's announcement (on May 23, 2016) that the NPA would appeal the court ruling that corruption charges must be reinstated against Zuma.

Unlike the previous cartoon, this one resulted in public outrage, and accusations of racism. In defending his cartoon, Zapiro explained that he intended the image of the organ grinder and his dancing monkey to be read metaphorically, referring to how the president was in control of Abrahams (Davis, 2016).<sup>2</sup> Zapiro (2016) also pointed out how he – without igniting accusations of racism – had depicted shamefully poor presidents and prime ministers, both black and white, as primitive hominids in an earlier cartoon (*The Evolution of Democracy*, discussed above).

Zapiro's defense did not mitigate the public criticism and condemnation of the cartoon. Why did so many have problems with relating to the satire of this cartoon and see it as offensively racist? A news event in South Africa early in 2016 could be part of the contextual explanation. A South African estate agent, Penny Sparrow, posted a comment on Facebook in which she blamed black revellers for littering a beach during New Year's Eve celebrations, describing them as monkeys (Wicks, 2016). The comment reignited an angry debate about the state of race relations in the country 22 years after the end of apartheid.

Zapiro's fellow cartoonists have said that they understand his use of metaphor in the cartoon and do not consider it racist, but they do see his timing of the cartoon as wrong, given the current context (Siwela & Ngubane, 2016, May 25). In terms of the broad public condemnation of the drawing, we may more generally ask if people's failure to *sympathize* with the cartoon was merely due to them not "getting it", as Zapiro (2016) himself has suggested. Rather than not being able to understand the metaphor of the cartoon, many readers may not have been willing to *accept* the depiction of Abrahams as a monkey in the

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2 According to Oxford Dictionaries the metaphorical meaning of "organ grinder" is conventionally "a person in control of another" ([https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/organ\\_grinder](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/organ_grinder)).



**Figure 3.2.** Another State Organ © Zapiro. Originally published in *The Times*, May 24, 2016. Reprinted with permission; no reuse without rightsholder permission.

current cultural context, or, more broadly, given the long tradition of denigrating black people by drawing them as monkeys.

## A Charlie Hebdo cartoon

Decoding the following drawing (fig. 3.3) may be somewhat more demanding. Specialized knowledge of media contexts as well the broader cultural context for the political caricature – and a competence in the French language – will strengthen the grounds for avoiding misinterpretation.<sup>3</sup> Many condemned it as evidence of racism that had “provoked” the murders of members of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. The drawing, published in an issue of the magazine prior to the terrorist massacre, depicted the black Justice Minister in France, Christiane Taubira, as a monkey.

3 The author of this chapter had to read contextualizing articles written by persons with such knowledge of French culture, politics, media and satirical publications.



**Figure 3.3.** Facsimile of drawing by Stéphane Charbier (Charb), on page 16 of Charlie Hebdo No. 1115, October 2013. Facsimile reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

A reader who is not familiar with the cartoonist's subject matter may quickly jump to the conclusion that this depiction of a black person as a monkey is racist. Even if readers are familiar with the person portrayed, a hasty framing of the object of the satire as the politician Christiane Taubira herself would imply that the caricature was mocking the justice minister in a degrading



manner. Frequent sharing of the image of Taubira on social media without the crucial elements accompanying the drawing (the text above the drawing and the logo at the bottom-left, see LorenzoA, 2016), could have contributed to the vocal misreading and condemnation of the caricature.

However, even with the accompanying elements in place, the reader would need relevant cultural knowledge to give a plausible answer to the key question: What is the object of the satire? For those familiar with French politics, the blue and red flame logo is a clear signal of whom the cartoon is mocking: this is the logo of Front National, the far right political party. The caricature phrase, “Rassemblement Blue Raciste” (Racist Blue Rally (or gathering/unity)), alludes to the slogan of Front National: “Rassemblement Bleu Marine” (Navy Blue Rally), a slogan that again is a word play on the name of the political party’s leader, Marine Le Pen. Provided they have knowledge of this context, the object of the satire should be clear to the reader: the cartoon is mocking the racism of Front National. This contextual knowledge, then, may be seen as a prerequisite for being able to relate to the object, the condition for caricature termed as *sympathy* above. For dedicated followers of Charlie Hebdo, a satirical journal with a staunch anti-racist stance (Leigh, 2015, LorenzaA, 2016), the emotion relating to the object of satire here would be negative, one of mistrust or even antipathy.

Culturally informed readers could make further sense of the object of the satire by expanding the context. The drawing may be seen as an allusion to a Front National politician, Anne-Sophie Leclere, who had shared a photoshop image of Taubira drawn as a monkey on Facebook and made racist remarks about her on French television (Knight, 2015; Le Monde, 2013). In a broader context, one could also include what has been considered a continuing attempt by Marine Le Pen to portray her party as more moderate than what her father Jean-Marie Le Pen did when he was its leader. In this perspective, the Hebdo caricature criticizes what the magazine essentially sees as a marketing move by Marine Le Pen, and draws attention to the fact that below the surface nothing has changed: Front National is still a racist party (see LorenzoA, 2016).

What, then, is the *gap* between image and reality created by this cartoon? A plausible reading could be to view the Front National’s self-promoting image as deceptive and the Hebdo caricature itself as representing what is the “true face” of the party through the caricaturist’s wordplay on their slogan and juxtapositioning of the logo and the racist imagery. As for *differentiation*, the

unique attribute that the object of the caricature possesses, the depiction of Taubira as a monkey together with the logo and the phrase all serve to illustrate the marked racist views that still surface in the party, and that distinguish it in French politics. This use of the monkey or ape image is different from that of Zapiro's, in that his caricatures (analyzed above) were evidence of the cartoonist's attitude to the politicians depicted, whereas here, the monkey is evidence of the political party's attitude to another politician.

Acquiring knowledge of the cartoonist could have countered the misinterpretation of the cartoon. It was drawn by Stéphane Charbier, one of the cartoonists who was murdered in the Hebdo terrorist massacre. Known as Charb, he was a controversial drawer not least due to his contemptuous ridiculing of religion. But he was also a marked anti-racist who participated in anti-racist activities and illustrated the poster for the non-governmental organization Movement Against Racism and for Friendship Between People (see Knight, 2015).

## Caricatures first presented in social media

The task of producing plausible readings of caricatures that have originated in a social media environment such as Facebook, may, as indicated, be even more challenging than for those initially presented in print media. One thing is deciphering the tribal language that tends to develop within the enclosed system of friends and followers of the caricaturists. Caricatures first published on Facebook may also acquire several new meanings if they are offensive enough to start traveling across different types of media, contextualized by different groups of actors and verbal codes.

### *Reading examples by satire artist Knarvik*

I now concentrate on a couple of Thomas Knarvik's caricatures. Many readers, including this author, became acquainted with his Facebook caricatures through legacy media in which they were subject to the heated debate described in the introduction. A crucial political context for making sense of his caricature of the Swedish politician, Ali Esbati portrayed as an ape (fig. 3.4), is not only the debate over the NRK report and the politician Esbati's reaction. This was a continuation of a long-running dispute between predominantly left-oriented participants on one side and participants with clearer liberalist leanings on the other side over issues of immigration and integration in Scandinavia.

A particular focus and target in Norwegian media has been on what the liberally inclined debate participants see as a consensus-oriented Swedish public sphere that inhibits a free exchange of opinion, and a tendency among some politicians immediately to stamp criticism of Islam as Islamophobia or cultural racism. Liberally inclined debaters argue that it is in this climate of “tolerance” or political correctness that minority ethnicity can be used by politicians such as Esbati to protect themselves against criticism – and to promote allegations and accusations of racism in a manner that those belonging to the ethnic majority cannot allow themselves to do.

Knarvik’s caricatures and his accompanying comments on Facebook target particularly what he sees as political correctness and articulations of antiracism that threaten free expression. He was not a well-known public figure when his ape caricatures appeared in legacy media in May 2016. But for those seeking clues to make sense of them at that time, he had articulated the objectives of his project in some of his foregoing media appearances. The academy educated artist had specifically expressed admiration of his earlier teacher Lars Vilks, a Swedish artist and activist known for his Muhammed drawings, which resulted in failed attempts by Islamic extremists to murder him. In a commentary on the 2015 Copenhagen terrorist attacks (Knarvik, 2015), Knarvik defends Vilks and other artists’ use of provocative tools in the name of freedom of expression. In 2015, Knarvik completed *In His Name*, an art project in the form of a collection of caricature drawings critical of religion, but the Norwegian publisher chose not to distribute the book. In Danish newspapers, Knarvik explained that he had drawn the caricatures in sympathy with the magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, and moreover that he attempts to do what Chaplin does in his film *The Dictator*: “to banalize absolute authority” (Knarvik quoted in Schollert, 2015). A short time before a new book with his caricatures was published (*In Your Face*, Knarvik, 2016c), the caricaturist changed his Facebook name from Thomas Knarvik to the moniker Thomas Hebdo.

For readers who have had the opportunity to follow Knarvik on his Facebook page by being accepted by him as a friend, the King of the Apes caricature could be accessed there from May 14, 2016. Underneath the ape caricature of Ali Esbati (fig. 3.4) hanging from a branch, the text apparently mimics the voice of the “ape politician”, written in Swedish: “You are racists, you, you, you are racists, you are racists every one of you are racists, y y you, you you are racists, you are all racists” (*my translation*).



**Figure 3.4.** A facsimile of Thomas Knarvik's first Esbati caricature, "King of the Apes", as it appeared below a text by the drawer on his Facebook page on May 14, 2016. Facsimile reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

This caricature is typical of the drawer in the sense that his object of satire normally is on the left side of the political spectrum. Here, Knarvik can target what he sees as “dogmatic” voices, whether belonging to politicians, authors or journalists. Less often does he attack conservative-liberal voices such as those of the most powerful politicians in the conservative coalition governing Norway at the time of writing. The Facebook caricature is also typical in the way he introduces it with a text that may be seen as an immediate context offered by the drawer for decoding the caricature. In my translation, the text above the caricature reads:

Ali Esbati, politician in the Swedish Parliament for the Left Party, wishes to point out to all of us that NRK is racist. Sylvi Listhaug<sup>4</sup> should be sacked, etc., and for the most part, the rest of us are also racists. Comical Ali should maybe consider taking a little break in his favorite tree. Had I not known better, I would think he was on the payroll of Gule<sup>5</sup> and the center against racism. “Hard-working” Esbati should understand that the great obstacle to the worker culture is the conservatism of instinct. Listen and learn from other things than your own fixed dogmas, and pick up a few instincts while you are up in your tree. Because you have got it in you, Esbati!

This text is a far cry from the analytical and deliberative texts characteristic of journalistic commentaries that accompany caricatures. Written in colloquial language it alternately addresses the reader and Esbati, and at the same time presupposes quite detailed contextual knowledge of debates in the news media in order to make sense of ironic statements such as “I would think he was on the payroll of Gule”.

The response to the text and drawing as presented on his Facebook page, however, testified to how his friends there could *sympathize* with the satire. In the thread following the caricature, most of the commentators related enthusiastically to it, and thus amplified the views of the caricaturist commentator.

What is the disparity between image and reality here? From the perspective of Knarvik and his approving followers/commentators, I interpret the *gap* as being between the object of satire (Esbati) and the reality of the NRK report that triggered Esbati’s reaction (and, as a consequence, the caricature).

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4 Listhaug is at the time of writing Norwegian Minister of Migration and Immigration, representing the conservative-liberal Progress party.

5 Lars Gule is a Norwegian social scientist and expert commentator who condemned Knarvik’s Esbati drawing as racist.

Knarvik implies that the report is a realistic documentation of a Swedish suburb with a major immigration problem, whereas the depicted politician has – once again – neglected reality by stigmatizing people who have expressed other views than his as racists.

However, the extent to which this is considered a gap with a satirical function will depend on how the reader-observer decodes the ape image. Esbati may be seen as an *aping* politician by the way he repeats what many perceive as a “politically correct”, albeit mistaken, accusation of racism. “Aping” is then understood as blatantly imitating something or someone. In this sense, the caricature can be seen as a mocking exposure of a politician who routinely repeats accusations of racism. Such an interpretation is supported by a follow-up caricature of Esbati, now drawn as naked and holding an ape-costume over his outstretched arm, beneath the utterance: “Here you can see! I am not an ape!” (*my translation*). This imagery playfully suggests how Esbati’s accusations can be seen metaphorically as an act of donning a costume when necessary for the strategic purpose of silencing opposing political views and promoting his own.

However, as noted above, quite a few interpreters – not least commentators in the legacy media – read the caricature differently. They saw it as an exposure of racism through its framing of an immigrant politician in a degrading manner. These negative readings were, however, in turn opposed by other writers who pointed to the fact that Esbati has an Iranian background and that there is no tradition for humiliating caricatures of Iranians as monkeys.

In interviews (e.g. Meisingset, 2016) and his own commentaries (e.g. Knarvik, 2016a), Knarvik confirms that he has knowledge of how the ape as a symbol is part of a racist tradition, but he also claims that he believed that his ape caricatures would be understood as “parodically racist” and signal that they were not meant as “sincerely racist” (2016a). A plausible interpretation of his politician-as-ape project is that he consciously plays with a racist stereotype to provoke reactions and debate. Contrary to his own expressed puzzlement with the condemnatory readings, it is reasonable to assume that a confrontational caricaturist like Knarvik eagerly sought to provoke the kind of reaction he got from several commentators. If a caricaturist who wishes to expose dogmas and follies of the “politically correct” could make left-leaning politicians and public debaters condemn an ambiguous drawing univocally as an expression of racism, that would be an ultimate triumph for the artist as

provocateur. By confirming how readily they also “draw the racist card” he expands his object of satire not only to include Esbati, but also what Knarvik sees as Esbati’s likeminded opinion leaders in public debate.

Some of Knarvik’s other caricatures that were initially presented on Facebook have been recontextualized in legacy media settings and subject to diverse opinionating there. This has in turn fostered reactions from the artist himself to commentators’ ‘misinterpretations’, followed by his lengthy explanations – whether expressed in press interviews or on his Facebook page – of what their true meaning is. These explanations, however, are not necessarily enlightening, and may rather testify to a forced attempt to redeem himself after publishing a drawing few people understood. A case in point is a controversial drawing entitled “The Holy Trinity”, which depicts the Norwegian Labour party politician Trond Giske with a little ape child in his arms and with an erect penis from which his partner Haddy N’jie, depicted as a semi-ape, hangs. N’jie, who at the time the drawing was published was expecting a child with Giske, is a well-known and respected Norwegian musician and journalist with a father from Gambia and a mother from Norway. According to Knarvik, the intention of the drawing was to defend N’jie against the persecution she had been subject to when being called “You rude, disgusting semi-ape” (*my translation*) on Facebook. The drawing is about “how unbelievably banal and silly it is to call N’jie a “semi-ape”, the artist commented (In Meisingset, 2016, *my translation*). The problem is that virtually no one saw that point. Rather, they saw a very repulsive drawing that clearly could be interpreted as racist. In other words, the audience could not accept the caricature, see its *gap*, or its elements of *differentiation*. The satire simply failed.

## Conclusions

By drawing on theories of caricature, I have attempted to elucidate how certain codes and contexts can be applied when reading provocative political caricatures. I have argued that readers strengthen their interpretations of such caricatures if they acquire knowledge of genre characteristics, the caricature drawer, the type of media the caricatures appear within, and the political and cultural context of the drawings. I exemplified the application of such contexts through analyses of caricatures originally presented in different types of media, both print and social media, and in the different political-cultural contexts of South Africa, France and Norway.

For the different caricatures discussed here, I have found that the genre-distinct features of *sympathy*, *gap* and *differentiation* are useful tools in assessing how they meet or create necessary conditions for making sense of and appreciating them, that is, for satire to occur. My discussion of the different cartoons illustrated, however, that the “success” of caricatures may largely depend on whether or not the reader applies appropriate contexts in decoding them. The Charlie Hebdo example testified to how cultural knowledge is vital for reading the caricature plausibly, as a mocking of Front National politics rather than misinterpreting it as racist. The widespread public disapproval of Zapiro’s organ grinder cartoon, on the other hand, may not so much be a question of many South Africans not being able to understand it. Rather, it may signal that they are not willing to *accept* it in the context of the preceding racist posting on Facebook and the angry debate it triggered on the state of racism in the nation. In the case of the Holy Trinity caricature by Knarvik, there is no appropriate context to draw on for satire to occur. The drawing does not meet any of the necessary conditions for making sense of it as satire. It appears only as an ugly drawing.

Interaction between print and social media has an impact on the meaning of the caricatures. For the three cartoons that originated in print media, we note how social media may have played a vital role in the framing and reception of them. The Hebdo caricature alluded to a photoshop montage on Facebook that presented Taubira as a monkey, and the mass reaction on Twitter (Wicks, 2016) to Sparrow’s racist posting on Facebook is a crucial context for understanding the public condemnation of Zapiro’s organ grinder cartoon. Moreover, both Hebdo’s Front National satire and the organ grinder drawing could be shared on social media without vital elements necessarily included (LorenzoA, 2016; Zapiro, 2016).

As for The King of the Apes, conditions for making sense of this controversial cartoon changed markedly when it was “taken out” of the echo chamber of the drawer’s Facebook page and recontextualized in legacy media. Notably, when members of the commentariat condemned the cartoon, Knarvik seized the opportunity to elaborate on what his intentions were and what the drawing signified. Disapproving responses from the commentariat were, moreover, productive for him in the sense that they triggered several new mocking caricatures of his critics, published on his Facebook page.



The extent to which the different caricaturists discussed in this article take part in a *journalistic* endeavor varies. Whereas Zapiro's work is an inherent part of the journalistic news media they appear in, Knarvik definitely operates on – or rather beyond – the boundaries of journalism. Like Zapiro, he does create caricatures that can be seen as examples of confrontational satire in the way they attempt to expose the potentially harmful behavior of individuals engaged in power struggles in society, with a capacity to offend. However, the drawings of Knarvik – who has made a habit of accusing mainstream journalism of being out of touch with reality – quite often appear as a form of confrontational *art* pieces that tend to be more ambiguous in their expression than journalistic caricature. The artist's Facebook page can be conceived of as not only a place to boost his morale from devotee feedback every time he publishes a new drawing, but also as a laboratory for testing the boundaries of what is permitted there. If Facebook shuts Knarvik out due to his being reported for an offensive caricature, he gets press in the legacy media from which he can build his brand as a brave provocateur. Ultimately, the most exposed individual in his satirical-artistic project is the artist himself, Thomas Knarvik.

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## CHAPTER 4

# Power Profiles

## Discourse as a Means to Make Profile Interviews Universal<sup>1</sup>

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*The aim of this chapter is to examine profile interviews portraying representatives of Norwegian elite institutions in the country's major business newspaper. Over the last few decades, the ideology and knowledge systems of the international business community have become increasingly important in society. This development is reflected in a general expansion of the business press. The newspaper in question, Dagens Næringsliv, is an example of a newspaper that has extended its readership well beyond the traditional business community, in particular with its end-of-the-week edition. The paper's Saturday profiles reflect this shift in both societal and journalistic power relations. We ask how individuals with power are presented in profile interviews when the purpose is to make the individual interesting to a broad and diverse public, and argue that this is achieved by positioning the profiled persons within certain popular and common discourses. The chapter is based on the study of 136 profile interviews with a time span of ten years, 2005–2006 and 2015–2016. Sixteen profiles are selected for closer scrutiny using critical discourse analysis. Our findings are that the unique individual is made universal through three dominant discourses: a discourse of gender, a discourse of*

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<sup>1</sup> Both authors of this chapters are former journalists in Dagens Næringsliv, Fonn during the beginning of the 1990s, Gjesvik for 14 years from 1994. Gjesvik worked with the features department.

*national identity and a discourse of personal power. Both the profiled person and the journalist use all three discourses frequently.*

**Keywords:** profile interviews, business news, power discourse, national (Norwegian) discourse, gender discourse

## Introduction

If an interest in individual stories is a sign of the times we live in, the profile interview fits well with this *Zeitgeist*. It is one of the most “individualised” journalistic genres available. The research in advance of the interview often entails consulting several kinds of sources, including people who know the interviewee well, to get an overview of the life and work of this person. When it comes to the final result, there is often only one single open source. The text is all about this individual: his or her history, his or her individuality or personality, his or her likes and dislikes.

But how unique are we, when the press grabs a hold of us? How unique are we when we are trying to communicate who we are in public, with possible reactions from an audience in mind? Our hypothesis is that the problem of making the unique “universal” in the profile interview is solved through the use of a set of recurring discourses. If this is so, it immediately raises another question: Are there dominant discourses, and what, if so, is the connection between the portrayed persons’ different roles and the different discourses?

As Miller (1984) has pointed out, a genre may in fact be defined as serving a social situation, and this goes for the profile interview as well, a popular genre in the press of most countries. The profile allows the media’s audience, often broad and diverse, to become acquainted with the more private sides of a stranger, someone they only know from the news – if at all. Most interviewees have some kind of power in society, but not all are very famous, and there is also not always a very fascinating personality beneath the role.

In the end, there will of course have to be a story. The stories in profiles are about changes – the protagonist has landed a new position, launched a novel, won an election etc., that makes him or her a relevant object for an interview. Still, the core of the genre is about this person and his or her characteristics, not about any breaking news as such. The profile interview offers the

interviewee a chance to transform their life into a positive public image. For the journalist it offers material that will make a fascinating story for the readers.

This article examines the questions above based on a study of profile interviews in one of Norway's leading quality newspapers. Our material consists of all profiles published weekly in *Dagens Næringsliv* during two periods, from January 2005 to March 2006 and from January 2015 to March 2016 – a total of 136 articles. We chose two periods separated by a span of ten years in order to check whether there has been a change over time. After examining the material to get an overview of the characteristics of those interviewed (gender and role), we chose 16 profiles for qualitative analysis. The two authors have analysed all interviews independently before having thorough discussions about any deviant findings.

## Claiming a role

“All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players,” William Shakespeare wrote in his play *As You Like It*. The line became a popular saying, and more than 300 years later, the sociologist Erving Goffmann (1959) picked it up when he likened social interaction in everyday life to a theatre, where everybody is an actor on a stage, playing different roles. At the same time, everybody is the audience, reacting to the play and to the roles, and the less familiar we are with our audience, the more concerned we are with playing our roles.

Goffmann called these roles “the face”. The essential question for anyone in a social setting is whether the audience will accept their role. The image of the self that is shown in such interaction with others is not just a presentation of individual qualities, but also a claim to a social position. If the role is not accepted, the person in question will “lose face”. Most social interactions are based on ongoing negotiations about which roles the actors accept for others.

Transferred to the profile interview, this means that the interview situation consists of an ongoing negotiation between the journalist and the interviewee about the role the latter should assume. We will argue that a significant number of the profiles are all negotiations about which position the interviewee should take, a pro or con position within a limited set of collective and broadly used discourses. When it comes to the final description of the

interviewee, considering the use of everything from quotes, setting, his or her background or behaviour, the journalist has a relative degree of freedom – he is responsible for the *coherence* of the profile. He can sew, cut and patch up the protagonist’s story with evaluations and clarifications – and even remove elements that do not fit the plot (Siivonen, 2007, pp. 85, 87).

Following this line of thought, we can see that the journalist plays an important role as playwright. Media audiences are not present in the interview situation, but they are in fact the addressee. The interviewer and the interviewee to a large extent communicate on the basis of the audience’s need for information and experiences, not their own (Svennevig, 2009, p. 122).

Press work however poses a particular problem, because neither the interviewer nor the interviewee know the persons they actually address, the audience. They have, however, some information about their readership’s demographics through surveys. Most large newspapers for example know the level of education, and the distribution of gender and age among their readers. This knowledge is also necessary to create strategies to reach new groups of readers. But statistical facts about gender and age have their limitations, and will not necessarily reveal the tastes and attitudes of the persons behind the figures. Whether a person likes a profile interview or not, will very much be a question of taste and attitudes. This genre appeals as much to emotions as to intellect.

A relatively small newspaper with limited circulation and a clearly defined target group may however also know a lot about their readers’ tastes and attitudes. But when a newspaper is read nationwide and appeals to different social and cultural strata, “reading” the mind of the public becomes more difficult. The Norwegian non-fiction prose scholar Johan Tønnesson has coined public text as a score (Tønnesson 2004), meaning that the potential reactions of the audience (as an imagined community of different so-called “model readers”) are already tentatively *discounted* in the text before publication. There must, in other words, be some kind of resonance with a larger public for the text to function.

## Method and background

The qualitative analysis is based on critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is an approach that combines methods for text analysis with methods for the analysis of social and political thoughts or ideologies. The approach is based on the tradition of Fairclough (1992/2010), and has since developed in different directions, partly dependent on whether the text analysis is linguistic or

primarily an analysis of meaning. One of many, partly overlapping, ways of using the word ‘discourse’ is that it can be said to be a way to construct the world, which again can be associated with a certain view of society – a political ideology, a belief in certain values etc. Examples can be a Marxist view or a neoliberal view of society, various feminist approaches to gender, or the belief that men and women are so different that they should have different roles in society. Different national or ethnic identities can furthermore give rise to corresponding discourses.

Fairclough operates with a three-dimensional model, where the innermost dimension, *the text*, is surrounded by two other dimensions. One is the *discursive practice*, which is primarily about the production, distribution and consumption of texts. The outermost dimension is the *social practice* – the overall social structures, power relations, ideologies etc. (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 73, 86 ff.). These dimensions, however, are not mutually exclusive. Power relations will, for instance, influence production, distribution and consumption heavily, the whole idea behind CDA being that the text is deeply dependent on both its social and discursive practice.

In this book, we take as a point of departure the fact that interest in individual stories is in itself an important part of the the social and discursive practice of the different kinds of public dialogue that we discuss. Social and discursive practice is also, however, often tied to more specific circumstances. Before we start analysing the profile interviews as texts, we will therefore describe what we believe are the social and discursive practices surrounding these texts.

## A pink newspaper

*Dagens Næringsliv* (*The Norwegian Business Daily*, DN) is the fifth largest newspaper in Norway in terms of circulation, and the fourth largest when it comes to readership (Medienorge 2015). It is not only Norway’s largest business newspaper, but also currently the one business paper in the world with the broadest national audience.

Established as a rather marginal newspaper for the shipping community at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it started to broaden its coverage in the 1980s: first by extending its scope to more general business and finance news, and later by reaching out to new audiences. As part of this process, the once rather solemn broadsheet also rid itself of its old mould, went tabloid, assumed a pink colour just like Britain’s *Financial Times* and Sweden’s *Dagens Industri*, and changed



its name from from *Norges Handels- og Sjøfartstidende* (*The Norwegian Journal of Commerce and Shipping*).

The relaunched old shipping paper experienced a tailwind from its very start. This was a result of the new deregulatory era of the 1980s and shortly after coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the decades to come, it quadrupled its circulation. This expansion was no isolated occurrence – during this period business outlets as such also expanded from being niche products to becoming general interest media in a number of countries, according to Kjær and Slaatta (2007).

DN professionalised its journalism and approached new target groups systematically, such as women (most readers were male at the time of the transformation) and civil servants. Slowly, the old shipping and business elites were accompanied by readers from entirely different social spheres. The reason for this success was partly the development of a Saturday edition filled to the brim with well-researched feature stories. These were often feature stories that went outside the realm of business and finance, or they were stories that made business and finance more intelligible and intriguing to the lay person.

At the core of this strategy were the newspaper's profile interviews. And not only for the newspaper, but for the sources as well: to be awarded column space in *Dagens Næringsliv's* Saturday profiles came to be regarded as a great honour. This was the showcase for the most important and most powerful people in the kingdom. And the profile policy also allocated power: a medium-size CEO or an invisible Director General of a ministry could suddenly gain considerable attention as a result of a DN profile, boosted by society's increasing interest in both power and money, and the individuals possessing them.

On the other hand, the expansion of the business press may have brought with it a pronounced set of values that in many respects differs from the values both of large groups of readers and even of society at large. Although the business press has contributed to increased transparency and increased investigation into economic life, it has also been associated with the neoliberal movements that have emerged in Western countries since the 1970s, and a neoliberal set of values (Kjær and Slaatta, 2007). One must assume that this gap in values between the newspaper itself and its extended audience had to be narrowed, otherwise the paper would not be able to attract so many new readers.

## Equality, nature, political consensus

Norway is rather young as an independent country, and probably shaped by that. Following four hundred years under Danish and Swedish kings, the country finally gained full independence in 1905. The national romanticism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century struck a particularly strong chord in a country whose background included being a Danish province, but which also has a long history of freeholding peasants, almost no feudalism – and a lot of spectacular scenery. At the same time, Norway was becoming a parliamentary democracy with a constitution strongly inspired by the French and American constitutions. The rural, often rough life became a symbol of freedom, and not least, what we can call “Norwegian-ness” – a common identity marker. These sentiments still play an important part in Norwegian political and public life. A recent attempt by the government to reduce the number of municipalities (around 400, many of them with no more than 5000 inhabitants) collided with the ideals of both the small community and relative autonomy, and has sparked heavy controversy and opposition as this is being written. The various aspects of this Norwegian “soul” have been discussed at length by the Polish-born, now Oslo-based, anthropologist Nina Witoszek. She argues that this entails a belief that “ordinary people are wonderful” (Witoszek, 2009, p. 9), and that the good life is in rural areas. Witoszek also argues that there is a strong consensus in Norway to avoid insulting anyone. This leads to a self-imposed self-censorship where debates “repeat all the benign mantras like dialogue, pluralism, reconciliation and equality” (ibid., p. 91).

On the other hand, there is also strong individualism. Witoszek (2009, p. 25) illustrates this by the fairytale about The Ash Lad, the youngest brother of three whom nobody believes in. He goes his own way, refuses to let others decide the rules, and wins in the end. An unusual combination of collective and individual values is probably an all-Scandinavian trait: The Swedish historian Lars Trägårdh (2007) has coined the notion “state individualism” to cover societies where collective arrangements, equality *and* individual freedom have been important.

After World War II Norway created a considerable welfare state with a high level of redistribution, but the state has also played an important role in facilitating business and an exceedingly free market, especially after the

fall of the Berlin Wall. The Labour Party has been the dominant party with approximately 50 of the last 70 years in power, but there has also been a relatively strong degree of consensus among the political factions, and the welfare state has strong popular support. One important difference today is that the conservative parties are more open to cutting taxes and privatising public services than the left, but they all claim they want to keep the welfare state.

Norway is also one of the most equal countries in the world when it comes to gender. Two out of three women work, they outnumber men in higher education, and chores at home are increasingly shared between the genders. The choice of profession, however, follows more traditional gender roles than in most Western countries. A clear majority of nurses are women and a clear majority of engineers are men. Norwegians prefer quality of life above their professional career: Half of the population in Europe agree that career is vital for a good life, while only 14 percent agree on this in Norway. There is a likely connection between egalitarian values and less competitiveness, and the large amount of women in the workforce may thus contribute to another set of values (Kjølsrød and Frønes, 2010, p. 144 ff.).

Political parties on both sides have played a role in promoting gender equality, but nevertheless the strongest commitment has been on the left. A number of important reforms have been implemented during recent decades, from extended maternity leave and large-scale development of kindergartens, to same sex marriage legislation. In 2016, the Norwegian parliament passed with an overwhelming majority a law that gives people the right to change their legal gender without changing it biologically.

In sum, we can see strong support for the welfare state, which indicates belief in an egalitarian society; strong support for a liberal economy, which indicates belief in individual freedom but not in unfettered markets; and strong support for gender equality. The political choices made over the last few decades have made a certain degree of both social equality *and* individual freedom possible, and Norway's oil wealth has clearly contributed to this result. On the other hand, the strong degree of gender equality and women's workforce participation during the last 40 years have probably meant as much for the country's economic prosperity as oil has (Koren 2012).

## The interviewees

Before we embark on a presentation of the kind of people featured in these interviews, we will say a few words about the difference between a role and a discourse, and then present our overall findings. We use discourse and role as two separate categories, but a role might as well be seen as a discourse. We expect a businessman to be daring and concerned with money-making while we expect a politician to be wise and concerned with public values. Both gender and professional roles can be seen as culturally given discourses as part of the identity of the person representing them. However, there are differences between the two categories role and discourse. A role can be defined as a conventional figure connected to a certain type of activity (Svennevig, 2009, p. 109). A minister will find it hard to be accepted if he or she claims to be a minister just to a certain degree. It is an either/or scenario. A role implies formalised rights and obligations, like certain types of power and certain rules for how this power might be exercised. This limits the interpretation of the role. The minister's gender is more open to claiming different positions. It is part of the discourse of gender, but in contemporary society gender is less connected to certain activities and is therefore open to many different interpretations. This gives the interviewee a much larger space to position herself or himself in. We realise that the distinctions between role and discourse are more complicated than our limited space allows us to discuss here.

The profile interviews we have examined mostly – and not surprisingly – feature the top leaders of various institutions in society. In a business paper one expects these institutions to be mainly business corporations, but an increasing number turn out to be part of the political sphere.

As table 4.1 shows, an interesting first finding is that the share representing the field of economic power has decreased markedly from 2005–2006 to 2015–2016. This development from the first to the second period is interesting considering the assumption that the economic field is increasingly depriving the political field of power (e.g. Østerud, Engelstad and Selle, 2003). On one hand it may simply be a result of the special status of the Saturday edition as a spearhead into new groups of readers. There might be an upper limit to how many grey businessmen wearing a suit and tie the average reader wants to spend her Saturday breakfast reading about. On the other hand it may be due

**Table 4.1.** Basis for professional power, 2005–2006 and 2015–2016, based on the studies presented in this article

Basis for professional power	Number 2005-2006* (female share)	Number 2015-2016* (female share)	Percentage 2005-2006*	Percentage 2015-2016*	Change in percentage points 2005-2006 to 2015/2016*
Economic	19 (6)	11 (2)	26	16	-10
Political	10 (5)	15 (10)	14	22	+8
Cultural	15 (1)	17 (6)	21	25	+4
Media	11 (4)	8 (2)	15	12	-3
Legal or public administration	7 (4)	7 (4)	10	10	0
Sports	3 (0)	3 (0)	4	4	0
Other	7 (1)	8 (2)	10	12	+2
Total	72 (21)	69 (26)	100 (29)	100 (38)	

to an increased recognition of the role that the Norwegian state plays in facilitating a viable market economy.

Another conspicuous change from 2005–2006 to 2015–2016 is however one of gender. Whereas women accounted for 29 percent of the interviewees in 2005 and 2006, ten years later this share had risen to 38 percent. This may reflect both an awareness of gender balance on the part of the editors, and an awareness of which professional roles should be given two full pages with a one-page portrait in one of the country's most read newspapers. After all, the fields of business and politics are also strongly gendered – there are quite simply more men than women in business, and more women than men in politics and the civil service. There is therefore an intimate relationship between the increase in the number of female interviewees and the increasing number of interviewees with a political power base.

## The dominant discourses

We chose eight profiles from each period for closer scrutiny in a qualitative analysis. We tried to acquire a balance between economic and political power,

and between male and female interviewees. When we set out to study these profiles, we discovered that almost all of them centered around three overarching topics. These are all topics rife with content and controversies about how the world should be seen. We can therefore say that the profiles centered around three prominent discourses. These were:

1. A discourse of national identity: How does the interviewee relate to what is normally considered good or bad values in Norway?
2. A discourse of personal power: What kind of abilities does the interviewee have to obtain and maintain power?
3. A discourse of gender: What male or female qualities does the interviewee have?

As we will see in the following presentation, the three discourses are interwoven, sometimes almost to the point of indistinguishability, and in some cases it is highly open to discussion as to which discourse should include which value. In order to decide that, we have had to assess the relative strength of the different utterances and characteristics, and their overall context. This does not, however, change the fact that these questions are what most of the texts revolve around. The leaders' manner of exercising power is a constant theme. The women are confronted with their femaleness or lack of such. And the degree of Norwegian-ness is seldom omitted, by the interviewer or the interviewee.

We have quantified the occurrences of the three discourses and find some minor developments from the first period to the second. The national identity discourse seems to be slightly more dominant in the first period. A slightly larger difference is also found regarding the need to claim an explicit distance to traditional gender roles in the first period. The difference between the two periods is too small to be considered important in our limited material, but could serve as a basis for further research.

In the following we will go through the three dominant discourses illustrated with typical examples from the texts, and finally also tie some comments to the connections between the three. (A more detailed overview of key elements in the discourses can be found in table 4.2).

**Table 4.2.** Assets of the discourses of gender, personal power and national identity, based on the studies presented in this article

Value	Discourse of gender, male	Discourse of gender, female	Discourse of personal power	Discourse of national identity
Success	Internally driven success	Externally driven success	Controlling the surroundings (internal)	Collective values
Failure	Externally driven failures	Internally driven failures	Legitimate power	Consensus
Career	Career important	Career not so important	Active career important	Career not important
Appearance	Natural	Vain	Winner	Natural
Social resource	Children not important	Children important		Nature
Competitiveness	Competitiveness important	Competitiveness not important	Competitiveness important	Equality (economic, gender and socially)
Control of others' actions	To a certain degree	Consensus	Yes	Consensus
Other important values				Rural, humble background

## The "Norwegian"

The discourse of national identity is clearly the most common of the three dominant discourses. In quantitative terms it appears twice as often as the discourse of power and four times more often than the discourse of gender. This dominance of the national identity discourse can be explained in several ways. One reason may be that this is the field where there is most chance of finding common ground for all parties – between the journalists, the interviewees and the audience.

Norway is a country where social mobility has been considerable since World War II, and most people either come from humble beginnings in a small place or they descend from somebody who does. The American dream is nowadays said to be far more within reach in Norway than in America – although differences due to inherited wealth are slighty on the increase in Norway as well (Aaberge 2016).

As stated above, Norwegian values may not necessarily – or always – distinguish themselves from values found in other Scandinavian countries, or in Northern Europe at all, but they seem to give a fairly good picture of Norwegian self-understanding. We claim that these are parameters of “Norwegian-ness” that are so deeply rooted in the Norwegian self-image that even when people do not identify with them, they need to relate to them. It could, although in a more subtle way, be said to hold somewhat the same position as the parameter “male-ness” as described by Simone de Beauvoir in her classic book from 1949, *Le Deuxième Sexe* – when you are not male, you have to be measured against the “male”.

In this small and egalitarian country, even the (rather small) upper and upper middle classes have been expected to act in a way that does not distance them too much from the man in the street, and even the popularity of the (powerless) royal family is based on their ability to be “of the people”. The paramount example is King Olav V, who died in 1991. During the oil crisis in 1973, his chauffeur-driven car had no access to petrol, so the king took a tram to go skiing and politely paid for his ticket. Norwegian society has changed profoundly since 1973, but this act earned King Olav a reputation as “the people’s king” which is still viable more than 25 years after his death. His grandson, the current crown prince of Norway, was recently widely criticised in public for sending his children to a private, international school.

As the above story suggests, a good Norwegian is also an outdoorsy Norwegian. If there are any signs of nobility in Norway, mountain hiking and cross-country skiing are among them. It must be said that a number of these norms also, at times, have a certain elitist ring to them. The lower ranks of society do not primarily build their ethos on mountain hiking, so to an extent one can say that the national and relatively class-blind “close to nature” ideology has some kinship with the old leisure class ideology better known from British or American culture. But there is generally a deep public affection for everything having to do with nature. One of the major bestselling books in recent years was literally about chopping firewood, and owning a small and remote log cabin with no electricity or running water is still highly treasured by a number of Norwegians. It is, however, important to note that a lot of identity-creating values may not always be expressions of what people really do – they are also viable *national myths* about what most people do. Norwegians are said to be born with skis on their feet, but only a third of the population ski and the number is decreasing (SSB 2016).



As national identity markers, however, national myths are very much alive (see also Haugen, this book). Almost half of the interviewees in our analysis explicitly state their love of nature. A Minister of Culture invited the International Olympic Committee to a cross-country skiing trip. They baked their own twist bread over a campfire and ate a special kind of chocolate, a local version of KitKat which due to a successful advertising campaign in the 1920s has ever since been associated with good old-fashioned Norwegian outdoor life. The way the story goes, it seems as if the twist bread episode was what made the IOC understand that not only snobbery, but also doping and match-fixing, are unacceptable in Norway: “[W]e sat around the campfire. [...] Made twist bread. They got the message,” as the minister put it. The clearly excited journalist later informs us that the Minister “of course” hiked to the top of the local mountain when she was young (20.02.2016). Furthermore, an interview with a prominent young MP with a Pakistani background is almost exclusively about being Norwegian. The MP is a Muslim, but his loyalty to Norwegian values is the core of the text, as both the quotations from the interviewee and the other choices of the journalist clearly show. The MP describes living in Norway as being “close to paradise on earth” (17.01.2015).

As far as nature is concerned, rougher seems to be better. The interviewees not only have experienced rough seas, they climb the highest peaks, swim the deepest depths, and spend nights outdoors with scouts (02.04.2005, 31.01.2015, 20.02.2016, 17.01.2015). One interviewee was proposed to by her husband on the top of Romsdalshorn, a mountain peak 1550 meters above sea level where one literally has to climb to reach the top (06.08.2005). Another interviewee claims to love nature though without convincing the journalist, and the latter writes rather sarcastically: “He loves the sea and he loves the mountains, he loves early in the morning and late at night” (19.03.2016).

Love for nature is a core value, and is proved through the urge to leave “civilisation” for the peace of nature. Even those who do not make it to the mountain tops make a point of their love for nature. Long walks in the woods to “flush the brain” are prescribed (02.04.2005). Some can hardly wait to leave politics or business to raise sheep or deer on a remote and tiny farm (19.11.2005, 06.08.2005). Only one of the interviewees, an oil industry official, admits openly that he regards economic gain – and consequently jobs – as more important than nature. This immediately makes the journalist from this

business magazine correct him, almost disbelievingly: “Don’t you believe in the carbon balance?” (11.04.2015).

Norwegian-ness is important also when it does not have to do with nature. The president and CEO of a major Norwegian international company makes a point of how he had to introduce a “Nordic management philosophy” when he was a regional leader in Asia. Whereas the Thai managers were brought to meetings in their chauffeur-driven Mercedes and private lifts, this interviewee promoted a culture where management was “on the ground, in touch with the employees” (23.05.2015).

## Personal power

The second most salient discourse in the interviews is about power. All profiles contain a story of success – the road to power or the road to new power. But talking about power in Norway is often difficult without referring to “Norwegian-ness” at the same time, as for example in the Olympic Games case, where the minister is also exercising power through being Norwegian. To get a better grasp of how power is presented, it is useful to take a look at the *roads to power*.

As a rule, the road to power is described as long and demanding. Social class and geography tend to coincide in Norway. Names like Vestertana, Dønna, Klæbu and Evje are scattered around in the texts. To Norwegians they are important signals: these are remote and humble places. Quite a few of the interviewees come from such places, and both the interviewees and the journalists love to make a point of it: the further away from the more densely populated and relatively urban south-east, the better.

The place where the interviewee grew up is presented in most of the profile interviews we have analysed. In more than half of them the birth-place is used to tell the story of a class journey – which is also mostly geographical.

This combined class and geographical journey probably serves two aims, one of identification and one of legitimising power. The mere use of these remote places in the journalistic texts may trigger a feeling of identification in the reader: “Imagine, it is possible to grow up in Vestertana and end up in a prominent position in the capital.” But in several cases a low, or even a lack of, education among the parents or grandparents is also emphasised, as if this is a

quality that adds credibility and thereby legitimacy among an assumed non-elitist public (23.05.2015, 29.04.2006).

Both the interviewee and the journalist engage in telling these stories. The interviewees make a point of their ties to their home regions and express how they always long to go back (and one day they will). The Minister of Fisheries is for example presented by the journalist as someone who grew up on a small farm in “a district in the districts” in sparsely populated Finnmark (19.11.2005). Finnmark is the northernmost county and the word “district” in Norwegian signifies a rural place. This is also the minister who “loves to work with sheep”. These elements serve both to affirm her love for her remote birthplace and as a way of legitimising her being deserving of a position in the political elite.

Obviously there is an unsurmountable gap between the values of the national identity discourse and the discourse of power. But this is the interesting aspect of the class journey story: it creates a bridge between the two discourses. This is apparently so important that some interviewees even stress it a little too heavily. One interviewee, the head of one of Norway’s leading grocery chains, inherited the position, but his father, the founder of the firm, was a self-made man. The interviewee grew up in a middle class area in Norway’s third largest city, Trondheim, not a particularly humble background. Today he is a successful man with taylor-made suits, a mansion in one of the capital Oslo’s most exclusive areas, children in an international school and a fluent management lingo – just the kind of man one would expect a business newspaper to cherish. But in his negotiations with the journalist, he apparently feels he has to defend the choice of school for his children, and the fact that he does not want to move back to Trondheim, a city further north, by stressing the fact that he grew up in a home with “plastic furniture in the living room” and black pudding every Tuesday (19.03.2016). The journalist then comments that the interviewee may have “lost his simple *Trønder* soul”, the word *Trønder* (from the mid-Norwegian county of *Trøndelag*) frequently being associated with moonshining and country-style rock music.

There is a lot of defending going on in the interviews, whether it is the interviewees’ social backgrounds or their current power positions that have to be defended. One of the few interviewees with an elite background, a lawyer and head of an important division in one of Norway’s most successful international firms, is also the daughter of a well-known TV personality. In the interview she distances herself from her privileged background by stating that it made her

“embarrassed” when she was a child (06.08.2005). A former government minister and now head of government relations for a major global firm – who is also a musical artist and the daughter of a prominent and long-standing Labour MP – describes her way into politics as a mere matter of coincidence. As a young trainee in the civil service she accidentally ran into a bunch of young Labour politicians with whom she had – just as accidentally, as the story in the profile goes – jammed with after a concert in her remote birthplace a few years earlier (02.04.2005). As readers, we are allowed to overlook the fact that most ordinary teenagers do not get a chance to jam with people who hold a concert in their birthplace, and that it is equally unlikely that the reunion in a government ministry some years later should be totally incidental.

All the interviewees are people with power, but the interesting thing is how the discourse of power changes from middle-of-the-week to Saturdays. On weekdays, the newspaper will regularly promote the strong leader and support “international” management styles where the distance between the top and bottom is considerable, and the paper also has a soft spot for union busting. In the Saturday profiles, however, the interviewees express a belief in close relations and community spirit. The CEO of the grocery chain claims that his employees “must be willing to invest [themselves] totally” in the firm. This quote does have a certain totalitarian ring to it. But at the same time he expresses belief in a corporate culture where “everybody is themselves”. Suits and ties have long since been excommunicated – implying also that these managers are down on the floor and on a par with the employees. The Norwegian chairman of a major car dealer furthermore makes his 3000 employees stand up and cheer when he gives a speech. This may sound like some kind of religious worship, but the journalist assures us that the chairman is no “Sun King”. The chairman confirms this by underlining the importance of trust – the employees’ trust in him gives his power legitimacy (30.04.2005). A government minister from a very remote place, who nevertheless made it to the corridors of power, is furthermore presented as living “together with several [minister colleagues] in an apartment complex”. In the text, this free apartment in Norway’s most expensive area almost sounds like a collective, which could be irony. The irony is however obvious when the reader learns that she goes to work in a black car with a driver, but as the colleagues share the car, it is implied that it is almost a kind of public transport (19.03.2005).

Furthermore, the asset of power does not come easy even after it has been achieved. People sleep on the office couch after long working hours (29.04.2005) and spend lonely nights in the ministry flat in the company of crispbread and stacks of documents (31.01.2015). For power to be legitimate, it also needs to have social responsibility outside Norway's borders. The chairman of one of Norway's largest state-owned companies with a considerable international reach, makes a point out of all the measures the company performs in poor countries (23.03.2016). The grocery CEO cannot admit that he is planning a luxury holiday in Africa without at the same time stating that he likes to help the Africans by "supporting their health service, supplying ethanol furnaces to a slum in Nairobi, and [choosing] fair trade roses from Kenya [for his grocery customers]".

## Gender

Gender is a challenging point for at least two reasons. Firstly, gender is both a role and a kind of discourse. Secondly, the discourse of gender is challenging because it is highly arguable as to whether different characteristics and parts of the text should be seen as a positive or a negative position within the discourse. It must be noted that the use of the words positive or negative here does not imply that some traits of gender are "better" than others, but that they are regarded in varying degrees as qualities of this or that gender. As in most Western countries, the Norwegian culture operates with double standards. If a woman drinks beer and swears loudly, is she liberated or is she masculine? The gendering of the interviewee is nonetheless a prominent feature, and the ambivalence of the values in the discourse is frequently raised. Is combining a power position with being a mother possible? Is being a Minister of Justice responsible for denying a number of refugees shelter more difficult when she is also a mother? (02.04.2005). Can a man say that he hates to work on his car, but loves romantic comedies (26.02.2005) without placing himself in a negative position within the discourse of gender? Sometimes the journalist situates the interviewee in an explicitly negative position in the discourse of gender. A male parliamentarian is described with "a striped, beige scarf that appears strangely feminine" and "the high-toned, light laugh that in a way drains his authority" (17.01.2015).

Terms like the "glass ceiling" and the "old boys' network" are frequently used (02.04.2005, 06.08.2005, 23.03.2016, 31.01.2015). In one case, the journalist

makes a point of the alleged rarity of a woman being so powerful, and follows up by pointing to this interviewee's feminine traits, but then contrasts these claims by describing her as fearless and tough (02.04.2005). Women's looks are frequently commented on in a gendered way, whether it be because of their long curly hair, an (assumed) all-over tan (02.04.2005) or more unexpected looks for a woman, such as a "boyish figure" (06.08.2005). We find this practice regardless of the gender of the journalist. In several of the interviews, the women interviewees have to make an effort to get the message through that they in fact are vigorous, playful, brave and tough. And when the journalists – or the interviewees themselves – present the females as tough, they mostly resort to signs we recognise from the discourse of national identity. As an example, one female interviewee insisted on proceeding alone to a mountain top in terrible weather despite her husband's warnings: "I was prepared to spend the night outside, but the worst thing was that he was likely to call the Red Cross" (23.03.2016).

These personal stories can of course be about power more than gender – they confirm the fact that these people have the competitiveness necessary for the job. But the way such stories are highlighted in the interviews with women also suggest that there is an unavoidable aspect of gender here. It is as if the references are used to assure the readers that the director is "tough enough" for the job. Or maybe "man enough"?

The Finnish scholar Jonita Siivonen (2007, p. 14) has argued that gender is a central dimension in how journalists present the protagonist in profile interviews. The female interviewee is expected to care about children and the home, while the male interviewee is expected to care more for his career. It turns out that these underlying assumptions can be found even in a business daily, where both men and women are invited to be profiled because they have a remarkable career in business or government. The men are rarely as openly gendered as the women, and if so it is in quite a different way – as with the "strangely feminine scarf" and "light laughter" above. And whereas husbands and children are often presented as an obstacle to the women's careers, or an obstacle they have successfully overcome, a wife will more typically be presented as someone who redecorated the house while the interviewee was doing important things out in the world (19.03.2016). It seems that the women interviewees need to be gendered in a double way – that they are both woman enough for their gender and man enough for their job.

This of course demands traditionally male qualities to be seen in women synonymously with gender equality, and this will often be the case. The irony is, however, that by emphasising so heavily such qualities in a woman, the journalist at the same time sends a message that these women deviate from the norm. In this way they contribute to maintaining existing gender roles even when the women are not gendered in the traditional way – an example of so-called normative contradiction.

## **The relationship between the three discourses**

As we have seen, there are similarities between different aspects of the various discourses, and sometimes they even overlap. An example of this is when the male Minister of Fisheries tells the journalist about his childhood at sea: “I was outdoors in all kinds of rough weather, mainly alone, and in situations that were much more severe than I realised at the time” (05.11.2005). With this statement he is claiming a positive position in all three discourses: he loves and at the same time challenges and masters nature (national and male gender discourse) and he is daring (important both in a power discourse and a male gender discourse). Another is the example of the Minister of Culture and the Olympics mentioned above, or the Norwegian CEO in Asia – the Norwegianness of his statement about management also presents one type of power. Other values can be seen as positive in one discourse and negative in another. The journalist states that the first name of a female ombudsman (“Sunniva”) means “sun gift”, but follows up by saying she is actually more like “darkness in the middle of the day” and “thunder” (06.06.2015). This could be associated with strength and determination in regard to power, as well as with something “unfeminine” in regard to gender. On the other hand, this woman is the national ombudsman for gender equality and it is just as likely that the dark description may be a positive description of a modern woman.

There are some differences between the various groups of interviewees, as far as both gender and position are concerned. Since mountain climbing, hunting and the rough outdoorsy life have traditionally been the males’ domain, one could believe that the claim of actively using nature would emphasise the masculinity of the male interviewees. But surprisingly, we find that this claim is uttered more frequently by the female interviewees than the male. The women may express their active use of nature to score in the national identity

discourse and at the same time as a break with the traditional woman's role – and thereby score some points as tough and daring in the discourse of power as well. Two thirds of the male interviewees, on the other hand, stress their experience of a class journey, whereas less than half of the women do the same. A closer look reveals that this is probably caused by the actual background of the male interviewees in our material. But the men also more frequently claim a humble and modest lifestyle, which gives them a positive position in the national identity discourse, and at the same time strengthens their position in the discourse of gender.

The interviews of persons with an economic power base are additionally more dominated by the discourse of power, while the interviews of persons with a political power base are dominated by the discourse of national identity. This is less surprising, as business culture is more hierarchical than political culture, the former with CEOs and other strong leader roles, the latter more team oriented, based on political parties. The dominance of the national identity discourse among persons with political power can be explained by the fact that their power base is national, they need the votes of as many people as possible, and “Norwegian-ness” is the value they share. A vast majority of the interviewees with a political power base focus on the class journey story, while less than half of those with an economic power base do the same. This may demonstrate the democratic value of the class journey in the political world, but also suggests that it is easier to get to the top in politics than in business without an elite background.

## Conclusions

Given the fact that both the choice of and the portrayal of people with power in Norwegian society often differ from what one expects from a business paper with a neoliberal stance, the first conclusion one can draw is that social and discursive practices probably count. When a business paper, in a country where strong political currents can be described as “state individualism”, tries to appeal to a larger public it seems that other questions are asked and other aspects highlighted on Saturdays than on weekdays. But there is also another, interesting point to be made: The three discourses we have detected in the texts are largely what make the interviewee recognisable to a broad and diverse public. Close scrutiny of the profiles reveals that the three discourses are almost



like a grid, where the more unique information about the protagonists can be placed. We also find that the interviewees try to balance the presentation of themselves within the three discourses, to obtain what they regard as a positive position in all three of them. The overall impression of the person in question is thereby to a large degree shaped by the proportion of the different discourses. In some cases a certain value will assure a positive position in more than one discourse – like mountain climbing which may be positive in all three discourses. Other values might be positive within one discourse and negative in another. An example of this is competitiveness and a strong career orientation. These are values that can be positive for a business person when the issue is power, but negative from a national identity discourse point of view, and even more questionable when it comes to gender. Along with the three discourses the interviewee's professional role constitutes a complex web of possible positions. In several cases one can spot a negotiation between the journalist and the interviewee about the position in which the latter should be placed.

We can therefore draw the conclusion that the three discourses function beyond making the interviewee interesting and legitimate to a diverse public. Consequently, one can say that this particularly “individual” genre is almost as much about broader collective phenomena, as about the individual – herself or himself.

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## CHAPTER 5

# How Journalists Portray Political Leaders: The Personalization of Prime Ministers and the Connection to Party Affiliation in Swedish News Coverage

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*Journalists not only represent political leaders in terms of their policies and political competence. The personalities and private lives of leaders have also become an important component in mediated stories and narratives crucial for voter identification and interest. This chapter explores how the Swedish press reports on prime ministers' social backgrounds, personal appearance and leadership characteristics in relation to party affiliation. The empirical material consists of news reporting on four former Swedish prime ministers: two from the Swedish Social Democratic Party; and two from the Moderate Party. The findings show that it is not only party affiliation that is of interest to journalists in reporting on prime ministers. Broader societal trends of what it means to be a politician in a certain time and era also influence reporting.*

**Keywords:** personalization, political journalism, Sweden, narrative, personalities

## Introduction

The personalization of politics has been widely discussed in recent years, both in academic literature as well as in the public debate. Politicians are not only understood in connection with the policies they make and their political competence, but also through their personal characteristics and lives. The personalities of politicians have become a key part of mediated stories and narratives crucial for voter identification, emotional connection and interest (Alexander, 2011; Langer, 2010; Stanyer, 2013). Political leaders also apply personalization strategies themselves, creating an appealing image based on attractive personal traits and characteristics in order to seize media attention and market their policies (Campus, 2010; Helms, 2012). Personalization has been further triggered by social media, which allow politicians to bypass journalists and to communicate directly with the public, and in so doing more freely create the desired image. The newly elected American president, Donald Trump, is the obvious example. Not only leaders but also political parties can be understood as brands providing recognition and cohesion for voters through their policies, history and ideology. Therefore, the increasing focus on political leaders as individuals not only means that they act more often as spokespersons for their respective parties, but also that they embody the party brand through their personal life and personality. Parties and leaders thus engage in a constant interaction of positive, or negative, reinforcement.

The personalization of politics is closely intertwined with the notion of media logic and its focus on dramatization, conflict, and a tendency to avoid complexity in highlighting political actions and leaders (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Mazzoleni & Schultz, 1999). In addition, the ideal of subjectivity in journalism, as a way for journalists to create a sense of identification and explain complex reality, contributes to the personalization of political actors (Steensen, this book). Personalization has contributed to make journalistic products out of anonymous and complicated policy processes, where politicians draw upon their private sphere as an asset in manufacturing their political identity (Smith, 2016). Corner (2000) uses the concept of mediated persona in stressing that political identity is always constructed and negotiated in relation to societal values: “The projection of an optimal political self will often require careful attention to

popular values in light of the range of possible projections, which any given politician has available to them” (p. 394). Advantages and disadvantages in this process can be age, gender, ethnicity, appearance, class or other time specific qualities.

In Sweden, the change towards a more media oriented political scene started in 1976 when the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP) lost the election after 40 years in power (Premfors and Sundström, 2007). For example, SAP prime ministers Ingvar Carlsson and Göran Persson put an increasing emphasis on media experience when recruiting ministers and other political staff as compared to their precursors (Sundström, 2009, p. 154). This trend has coincided with journalism becoming more investigative and independent, which amongst other things has contributed to blurring the distinctions between public and private (Petersson et al., 2006). The role of PR and news management was for example crucial for rebranding the Swedish conservative party, the Moderate Party. The rebranding started with Fredrik Reinfeldt taking over the role of leader in 2003. The transformation of the party involved the acceptance of parts of the traditional Social Democratic welfare state. This was, for example, manifested in the party borrowing rhetoric from the SAP by emphasizing the importance of labor, something that was clearly articulated when the Moderate Party called itself a party for working people (Ekengren & Oscarsson, 2015).

This study explores how four Swedish prime ministers were portrayed in four leading newspapers, and how personal characteristics were described as embodying values and norms belonging to their respective political parties. This will be done by focusing on social background, personal appearance, and leadership characteristics, identified as important categories in previous research. Two of the chosen prime ministers are from the SAP (Göran Persson and Ingvar Carlsson) and two from the Moderate Party (Carl Bildt and Fredrik Reinfeldt).

## Previous research

The personalization of political leaders can be ascribed to general trends in contemporary society such as the decline in party identification and political ideology as well as the rise of celebrity culture and identity politics. In such an

environment, the personal becomes a fruitful way to attract voters who are not interested in formal politics. At the same time, the personalization of politics can be a double-edged sword. For example, Foley (2008) argues that the increased focus on political leaders may contribute to a leadership decline since the attention given to leaders distances them from their party base. Moreover, the personalization of politics creates a situation in which politics is embodied within leaders and as such becomes a source of direct competition between political parties. This embodiment tends to fuse policy initiatives with leaders' personal characteristics, making it difficult to differentiate between critics of policies and the leaders themselves.

The notion of personalization has been widely discussed in the literature from various perspectives. For example, Langer (2006, p. 23) makes a distinction between presidentialization and personality politics. Presidentialization refers to individual politicians' exposure at the expense of political parties, whereas personality politics focuses on leaders' personalities in political discourse involving aspects such as family, competence, personal appearance, personal qualities, and upbringing (Langer, 2007). Regarding presidentialization, Oegema and Kleinnijenhuis (2000), in their study on the coverage of political leaders in Dutch media, show that although political leaders play an important role, political parties still dominate news coverage. Similarly, Reinemann and Wilke (2001, 2007) found no evidence of an increased individualization in German news, stating that the news media's focus on the Chancellor has always been high. Based on a comparative study on media coverage of election campaigns in six European countries (Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), Kriesi (2011) did not discover an increased focus on individual leaders, the Netherlands being the exception. Also studies made by Karvonen (2010) and Adam & Maier (2010) confirm this picture. Based on a comparative study on the personalization of politics in Germany and the UK, Holtz-Bacha et al. (2014) show that references to political or professional qualities outnumbered personal references in recent general elections. At the same time, personal life and personal qualities played a bigger role in the UK than in the German coverage.

Other studies find an increase in personalization. Langer (2007) demonstrates in her study on British prime ministers that political leaders have become more visible in news coverage in the twenty-year period she studied. Moreover, references to personality have shifted from foremost leadership qualities to

aspects related to leaders' personal lives. A key period was the Blair Era, which altered expectations regarding the exposure of private persons in public discourse (Langer, 2010). At the same time, leaders differ in their will and talent to make strategic use of personal qualities and personal life in public (*ibid.*). For example, Tony Blair's personality was used to strengthen the image of the Labour Party, whereas Gordon Brown assumed a more private role. David Cameron had a similar ambition to Blair when he started off as leader for the Conservative Party. He acknowledged the party's image problem in representing the rich and privileged few, and its need for change. In order to come off as an ordinary modern man, Cameron was reported cycling to work, wearing designer sneakers, and using fair-trade products (Smith, 2008). David Cameron shows similarities to Blair in emphasizing the link between the family life orientation in his private life and his launching of various family and environmental policies as a way of "authenticating his political positions" (*ibid.*, p. 67).

Moreover, the personalization of politics is closely connected to the notion of celebrity politics. From a feminist perspective Van Zoonen (2006) argues that celebrity politics works against female politicians who are not, compared to their male counterparts, able to benefit from the opportunity provided to fuse the personal, political and popular into an attractive political image due to the inherent polarization of femininity and politics. According to Smith (2016) the early 1990s saw a new type of masculinity, which embraced traditional feminist domestic attributes with a special emphasis on fatherhood. During this period, the "new man" category appeared, where political leaders were keen to appear "like ordinary people" with an active family life, friends and other interests beyond politics (p. 103). This was also a point in time when the personalization of politicians and celebrity culture in general made an upswing. "Personalization, celebrity and fatherhood all come together in British politics, most notably in the persona of Tony Blair" (*ibid.*, p. 103). The trend continued with the American President Obama. One component of the new type of politician was the ability to relate to voters by being one of them. This strategy involves the delicate balance of being an ordinary "one-of-us" person while at the same time someone extraordinary, in an age that promotes egalitarian values yet expects unusual leadership qualities and competence (Smith, 2009).

In a Swedish context, there has been limited research on the subject. Johansson (2008) conducted a study on the prominence of Swedish party



leaders in election campaigns. The study showed a weak trend of increased personalization in tabloids but not in broadsheets. Bjerling (2012) demonstrates that the amount of personal characteristics mentioned in Swedish news coverage increased between 1979 and 1988, but after that remained the same. For example, references to family increased dramatically throughout the years studied, whereas references to physical appearances decreased. News reporting related to personality characteristics, competence, conviction and morals increased over this time period (p. 179-180). This study aims to increase knowledge on the personalization of politics and in particular in connection with party identification in a Swedish context.

## Material and Method

The empirical material consisted of news, opinion and feature articles from the four major newspapers in Sweden: two tabloids (*Aftonbladet* and *Expressen*); and two daily morning newspapers (*Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*). The following prime ministers and mandate periods were included in the analysis: Ingvar Carlsson, *SAP*, 1994–1996; Göran Persson, *SAP*, 1996–1998; Carl Bildt, *Moderate Party*, 1991–1994; and Fredrik Reinfeldt, *Moderate Party*, 2006–2010.

The prime ministers were selected based on party affiliation. Time periods were chosen so as to incorporate their first time in office except for Ingvar Carlsson, where the empirics cover his last period. As a result, part of the coverage is focused on summing up Carlsson's political career, which may make journalists less inclined to attribute negative characteristics. The selection of his last period was due to the fact that he entered office by replacing Olof Palme who was assassinated in 1986. In light of this fact, his first period was quite special compared to the other prime ministers. Beyond that, for practical reasons it was also difficult to use his first period in office since the digital database I used first started keeping an archive of articles from these newspapers in 1995.

In collecting the articles, I used the database *Mediearkivet* which is owned by *Retriever*. The search was made based on the name of each of the respective prime ministers during the selected mandate periods. The first 64 search pages of links to articles, based on relevance, were selected for analysis. The material was thereafter categorized and analyzed based on information related to upbringing,

appearance and leadership characteristics. The analysis is based on the entire text corpus related to these three aspects, but the presentation highlights the most commonly identified characteristics. The analysis focuses on the descriptions and judgements provided by the journalists; that is, not the statements given by the prime ministers themselves or by other actors such as other politicians, experts or opinion polls. This is the case since I am interested in the journalists' descriptions of political leaders and their subjective notions. The number of articles in the analysis includes the following: Bildt, 168 articles; Reinfeldt, 132; Carlsson, 72; and Persson, 130. One shortcoming is that the material collected for Carl Bildt did not include *Aftonbladet* and *Svenska Dagbladet*, and as a result the empirical material for him is dominated by *Expressen*.

## Analysis

### Upbringing

#### SAP

Ingvar Carlsson is described as having a traditional Social Democratic upbringing. His father was a warehouse worker and his mother a cleaner and seamstress. When Ingvar was 12 his father died, and he had to contribute to the family economy by taking various part-time jobs. After finishing compulsory education, he pursued a master's degree in politics and economics at Lund University, where he also became chairman of the SAP student club and met Prime Minister Tage Erlander. Carlsson's career kicked off when Erlander asked him if he wanted to come to Stockholm to work as his political secretary. Ingvar Carlsson's journey towards becoming prime minister is often summarized in headlines like "From a Wooden Shanty in Borås to the Sager Palace," in this case followed by an ingress saying that "It has never escaped Ingvar that he belongs to the working class. Deep down he hates the upper class, instinctively and morally" (*Expressen*, 19 August 1995). Carlsson's journey can be understood as not only a personal journey, but also as a symbol for the Social Democratic Party making anything possible, and where background no longer determines people's destiny. As summarized in the following quote:

Ingvar Carlsson personifies, both through his background and his work, the Social Democratic dream. He started off with a poor upbringing and significant social hardships but succeeded in becoming a diligent student, a member of the Swedish

Parliament and the leader of the Swedish Social Democratic Youth League. He also assumed several arduous political assignments and ministerial posts and later became party leader and finally Prime Minister (*Aftonbladet*, 8 October 1995).

Compared to Carlsson, there are few mentions of Göran Persson's social background in the empirical material. In one article, we get to know that his father was a construction worker, who was occasionally unemployed. One specific story, which according to the journalists was often told by Persson himself, is that his father could not afford to visit the dentist and as a result had to have his teeth extracted (*Aftonbladet*, 30 May 1998). Within the SAP there is a long standing tradition of the party leadership role being narrated through personal experiences of social injustice, in order to emphasize a working class background (Pauli, 2012). In telling the story of his father, Persson could demonstrate that he shared party members' backgrounds and ideals, something that made him a legitimate representative for the working class. However, this class narrative never really takes off and Persson's personality receives more journalistic attention than his family background. For example, we get to know that he did his military service at the lowest possible rank, and that military officers and friends remember Persson as "the man with the enormous body" (*Expressen*, 30 March 1996). Furthermore, Persson is portrayed as a person who is not afraid of authorities. For instance, Persson called the Minister of Defense himself, explaining his legal rights, when military superiors did not give him permission to attend political meetings (ibid). Persson's background is not described as embodying the Social Democratic Party in the same way as Carlsson's, even though journalists, if they wanted to, could have created such a narrative based upon his upbringing and social class. Thus, journalistic descriptions of political leaders are not automatically based on party affiliation, but may well be based on other frames of references and interests.

### *The Moderate Party*

In the coverage of Carl Bildt's upbringing and background there are numerous references to his aristocratic background, such as accounts of family reunions at the aristocratic Nobility House in Stockholm. We also learn that Bildt was not the first in his family to become prime minister, since his great, great grandfather held the office between 1888-89 (*Expressen*, 24 May 1993). In this

way, Bildt fits nicely into the stereotypical description of the conservative party as a party for the privileged and rich. In regard to his early years and his personality, he is in general described as being something of a nerd:

The good little boy already from the outset. A guy who drew fire trucks and fighter planes during lessons. [...] His father was a major, his mother a housewife. Calle<sup>1</sup> himself was a boy sitting with his nose in American aviation magazines (*Expressen*, 16 September 1991).

Another article about his upbringing states that: “There was not much glue sniffing and smoking” (*Expressen*, 14 November 1993). Beyond the nerd image, he is also at times depicted as having an arrogant personality, such as in the article with the headline “Carl Casts His Shadow over Others” (*Expressen*, 19 April 1992). Compared to the practice of scholars emphasizing the “ordinariness” of political leaders, Bildt is interesting since descriptions of his background, interests and personality stress the opposite.

The media image of Reinfeldt differs from Bildt in some key aspects. Similar to Persson, there is limited information on Reinfeldt’s early years and social background. One of the few remarks is about how his mother was “absolutely convinced” that her son would become prime minister one day, since he had always been structured and well-organized (*Expressen*, 18 September 2006). The reasons for the lack of class related information, compared to Carlsson and Bildt, is of course difficult to know. It could well be that class was no longer discussed in society in the same way that it had been, or that Reinfeldt has a less stereotypical and therefore, from a journalistic perspective, less interesting background. The only references to social background are made by Reinfeldt himself, complaining that the Moderate Party is perceived as a party for rich people:

And he adds that despite the fact that he carried out one of the biggest transformations of a Swedish political party ever, that work has still not managed to make up for decades of stereotypical images of Moderates as rich men’s kids. [...] “ I myself have felt that sometimes. I have a simple background, with parents who had no higher education degrees when they met. I have lived in simple apartments and townhouses. Nevertheless, the stereotype is ascribed to me as well. Anders Borg and Sven Otto Littorin have

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1 A common Swedish nickname for a boy named Carl.

similar backgrounds to me, and we have all noticed that people did not want to accept us as common people. That weighs us down” (*Dagens Nyheter*, 14 June 2010).

As can be seen, Reinfeldt emphasizes that he and his fellow colleagues are ordinary people, and in doing so he distances himself from the traditional image of the party, personalized by Bildt’s aristocratic and privileged background. This should also be understood in light of Reinfeldt’s project of rebranding the party into the “New Moderates”, aimed at attracting working and middle class voters. Similarities can here be drawn to David Cameron’s ambition to modernize the Conservative Party and to shed its right-wing image by utilizing his private life as a way of becoming more authentic and thus modifying the party brand (Langer, 2010, p. 67).

## Personal appearance

### SAP

In the empirical material, there are few references to Ingvar Carlsson’s appearance, except for one where his face is drawn in the shape of a foot. Several humorous references are made to this. In contrast, Göran Persson’s appearance is often mentioned, and in a negative way:

Göran Persson looks like a prime minister from the old days, and that is one of his problems: His image is wrong, out of tune with the subtle signals of what is socially correct in our time. They who socially set the agenda today are slim and fit, and yesterday’s workers who are round and pudgy are stigmatized (*Aftonbladet*, 22 March 1997).

Persson’s appearance here becomes one explanation for his inability to attract voters. Moreover, the frequent remarks about Persson being overweight can be understood in relation to class. Obesity is often connected to descriptions of working class people and their lack of self-control (Olivia, 2014; Skeggs 2004, pp. 99–105). Persson’s appearance is also linked to actual political decisions and to the negative caricature of Social Democrats as old-fashioned and pompous.

This bodily continuity is, I think, one of the reasons why Persson manages to pursue a political agenda that at the time was unthinkable to a large majority of the people

[...]. Only a real “Sosse”<sup>2</sup> can make the great system shift. Göran Persson is the real “Sosse” embodied. Visually, I mean. He looks exactly the way I always pictured a Social Democratic municipal politician would. [...] No matter how much he speaks of budget cut downs and misery, when one sees Göran Persson one starts to think of the authoritative gavel and firm handshake, and newly built residential areas, large-scale road projects and increased pensions (*Expressen*, 10 April 1995).

That Persson is as outdated and not in touch with his time resonates with a study by Langer (2007) on British prime ministers, which showed that journalists showed much more positive interest in the appearance of Blair and Cameron than Major and Brown, where the first two were described as modern and trendy and the latter as outdated “last century” styles (p. 66). Even more interesting is how descriptions of Persson’s appearance work as a way of understanding both his personal characteristics and political actions.

### *The Moderate Party*

Both Bildt and Reinfeldt are portrayed as young-looking and well dressed. The news article below describes a meeting between Bildt and a group of younger people on a TV show.

Carl Bildt, 44 in July, works between 80 and 100 hours a week, traveling as a big shot around Sweden and the world, making speeches, giving interviews, trying to hold the government together, battling the galloping budget deficit and growing unemployment. Yet he looks like a confirmation candidate. This became particularly evident yesterday when he went up against ten young people on Channel 1. There was no visible difference [in their appearances], but the guy in glasses rules the country<sup>3</sup> (*Expressen*, 17 May 1993).

In general, there are few connections made between the appearance of Bildt and his political work, in contrast to Persson.

When it comes to Reinfeldt, the journalists describe how he goes to the gym on a regular basis and that he lost 14 kilos before the election campaign. Also Reinfeldt’s clothes are discussed, for example, in relation to how statesmanlike they make him look: “It was Fredrik Reinfeldt’s fifth summer speech as party leader. [...] yesterday he wore a new gray suit to emphasize that he is Prime

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<sup>2</sup> The Swedish nickname given to members of the Social Democratic Party.

<sup>3</sup> Referring to Carl Bildt.

Minister and statesman” (*Aftonbladet*, 10 August 2008). There are few negative remarks regarding his clothing. The only time Reinfeldt is criticized is when he and his wife dress too casually during a state visit in China (*Aftonbladet*, 14 April 2008). It can also be noted that the Moderates, as part of their re-branding, recommended party members to wear causal clothing, which meant “leave the tie and the pearl necklace at home” (c.f. Gustafsson, 2013).

## Leadership characteristics

### SAP

The descriptions of Carlsson as a person are fairly consistent. He is in general portrayed as “a stubborn working ant with a strong sense of duty, meticulous, Lutheran and professional” (*Expressen*, 19 August 1995), all characteristics of the traditional working class ethos. Another frequently repeated story, which ties neatly into the Social Democratic tradition, is that he never aspired to become prime minister. Rather, he took the assignment out of duty and loyalty to the party when Olof Palme was assassinated in 1986. He never adjusted to being constantly monitored by the media and his political opponents, and was happy to resign and “finally be free” to do whatever he wanted (*Aftonbladet*, 19 August 1995). Carlsson is seen as an ordinary man who wanted nothing more than to lead an ordinary life. This narrative fits nicely into a working class tradition in which anti-pretentiousness has been central and where party leadership is seen as impersonal, that is, no one is indispensable (Skeggs, 2011, p. 11; Gaffney and Lahel, 2013, p. 498).

Another often referred to characteristic of Carlsson is his high sense of morals. Again, the story fits nicely into the Social Democratic movement where enriching oneself is one of the worst things a leader can do, and where any sign of such behavior inevitably leads to a loss of confidence and eventually an end to one’s political career (Barrling Hermansson, 2004). During the time period studied, Carlsson’s morality was tested in one of the most remembered political scandals in Sweden. His “crown princess” Mona Sahlin got caught using a government credit card, and the scandal put an end to her chances of succeeding Carlsson. Instead of being associated with Sahlin and her lack of morality, the scandal seemed to strengthen the image of Carlsson as a man of strong morals. In the coverage, he is described as torn between two principles: his moral standards when it comes to the use of taxpayers’ money

and the loyalty that comes with friendship. “Ingvar Carlsson is burning with eagerness to save a friend and a close co-worker. But he cannot hide his strong morals [...] ‘One shall not use a business card [for personal purchases]’” (*Expressen*, 19 October 1995). This means that Carlsson “will fight like a tiger for Mona Sahlin” in various situations “but not when he thinks that she has acted incorrectly” (*Expressen*, 23 October 1995). Carlsson is portrayed as the opposite of Sahlin, “A man who rather takes the bus than a rental car, and pays for his beers at the hotel with crumpled banknotes rather than using plastic cards” (*ibid.*). Not only Sahlin, but also other SAP politicians at the local level have been indicted for tax evasion. Again, Carlsson is portrayed as their opposite and as “the last prime minister from the old days [...]. An honest statesman who pays with his own money for taxis when on business trips, and who took a five hour bus trip home after his final party meeting rather than ordering champagne and the government plane” (*Expressen*, 9 March 1996). In this way, Carlsson’s high moral standard is not only ascribed to him as a person, but to a traditional Social Democratic type of ideal leader, driven by loyalty to society and party and subordinating him/herself to the collective (Barrling Hermansson, 2004; Madestam, 2009). The descriptions of Carlsson’s character work as a way to strengthen the image of the traditional Social Democratic Party, and at the same time show that the party and its representatives are changing.

Turning to Persson, the image of him is more negative. His personality and leadership style attract considerable media attention. At times, Persson is directly compared to Carlsson. For example, journalists report that Carlsson used the pronoun “we” when talking about the government, whereas Göran Persson says “I think,” “I have decided,” and “my government” (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 28 June 1996). Another story describing the difference between the two prime ministers is highlighted by the obligatory photo sessions in connection to EU summits; Persson is said to “always place himself in the center of the picture, whereas Carlsson was on the end” (*Aftonbladet*, 23 June, 1996). They also differ in terms of morals. For example, Persson is often interrogated about his travelling both for and outside of work (*Expressen*, 25 November 1997; *Aftonbladet*, 16 December 1997), and is also portrayed as stingy. For example, as a child he was constantly looking for bottles to recycle as a way of making money, which earned him the nickname “the bottle” (*Expressen*, 2 September 1994). In more recent stories, Persson is often seen stealing candy at a shop



near the parliament, and he often claims to have no cash as a way of forcing co-workers to pay for his coffee and cakes (*Expressen*, 8 April 1996).

The most recurrent theme of Persson is his “bossiness”. In the article “Blunt Persson”, he is said to “cause discontent and uncertainty” among the people around him (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 1 February 1998). Apparently, Persson’s nickname is “HSB” (“He Who Decides” translated from Swedish), which according to sources dates back to his time as a local politician in Katrineholm (*Expressen*, 2 September 1994). Yet on the flipside of being accused of being bossy is the fact that he makes things happen. However, this negative coverage of him dominates the news, and even the journalists themselves comment on it. One journalist summarizes the news coverage of Persson while he is still Prime Minister:

A person who does not think, does not read books, is educated in “Katrineholm-politics”, provincial, a loser, one who feels sorry for himself when being criticized and who gets bored at EU meetings. It seems like Persson can only be described through clichés. This is probably due to the fact that he personifies all of the old traditional prejudices about Social Democratic leaders – uneducated, authoritarian and pompous – who are at best capable of ruling their municipalities, but who are not capable of behaving themselves in more sophisticated settings (*Aftonbladet*, 20 January 1997).

Persson’s media image is also interesting compared to political leader ideals stating that politicians should be loving, easy going and friendly, embodied by politicians such as Tony Blair (Smith, 2016). Persson’s alleged bossiness resonates badly with this image. He is also described as having problems with female voters and party members (*Expressen*, 15 December 1997).<sup>4</sup> “Women did not like him. One female party member said that he could make remarks such as ‘I think that you have gained weight, sweetie’” (*Expressen*, 6 September 1998). His inability to attract female voters was seen as problematic within the SAP. Persson tried to change this image but failed. According to one journalist, Persson “hugs voters and is calm and thoughtful in front of the cameras and microphones. But then he forgets [...] and is captured on the spot as the self-centered male decision maker”. This reporter also describes how leading female Social Democrats were “crushed by Persson’s leadership”, describing Persson as

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4 It should however be noted that Persson, as did Carlsson, stuck to the strategy “every other seat for a woman” when appointing ministers (Sundström, 2009, p. 154).

a man who is “unable to control his instincts, which makes him just take the lead and push others to the side” (*Expressen*, 10 September 1998). In response to the negative media coverage, PR strategists were called in to work hard on building a more attractive image of Persson. “It is the reasoning and listening Persson the Swedish people should see, preferably women” (*Dagens Nyheter*, 20 March 1996).

Some articles describe Göran Persson’s merits in the EU and other international settings. One recurrent story is that Persson finds EU meetings boring and as a result is not very engaged. Often he comes off as “uncertain” compared to when he was Minister of Finance and knew “everything” (*Expressen*, 12 January 1997). Yet, descriptions of Persson on the international scene are not only gloomy. For example, when Persson visited Merrill Lynch (the world’s biggest investment firm) in the capacity of Minister of Finance, he said he was mocked for Sweden’s poor finances by “grinning financial puppies”. Yet, after his contributions to reforming the Swedish economy, he is praised for his self-confidence and political skills (*Expressen*, 4 November 1997). It can be noted that his media image became more positive during his second term of office, something that can at least partly be explained by Persson’s skillful management of the Swedish EU presidency, but also by his increasing ability to handle the media (Sundström, 2009, p. 165). Also worth noting is that the leadership ideals characterizing the SAP have traditionally been two-fold: authoritarian; and democratic. An authoritarian style is needed in order to avoid internal conflict and keep the party together, whereas the more democratic, listening ideal is a way of connecting with the members. Over time, these ideals have been challenged. Persson continued to apply both. Even though he was heavily criticized for his authoritarian leadership, he managed to keep internal party conflicts at bay. According to Pauli (2012), questioning the traditional ideals within the SAP did not result in any clear ideas on what to replace them with. Instead, more weight was given to the leader’s personality and how it matched the party’s needs. One explanation for the critical media coverage may well be that a lack of clear ideals, and the subsequent emphasis on personality, unleashed criticism both from the party itself and from journalists. In comparing the two SAP leaders, Persson can be understood as the flipside of Carlsson, who is portrayed through a positive traditional Social Democratic ideal of being modest, moral and loyal. In Persson’s case, the journalists rather play on the negative connotations of Social Democratic Party leaders as uneducated,

authoritarian and pompous. In any case, both images build upon traditional stereotypical ways of understanding the party and its leaders.

### *The Moderate Party*

Carl Bildt is described as a fact-seeking politician who knows policy issues in miniscule detail. He is portrayed as interested in history, technology and foreign policy but uninformed about sports and popular culture. Moreover, he is regarded as “always busy”.

Visits, telephone calls, letters, meetings, trips, lunch with the government at noon, a press conference, a foreign newspaper that would like to ask some questions, speeches, opinion articles, Helmut Kohl calls and wants to talk for a while. “Carl cannot keep this pace forever. No one can,” says one of his collaborators in confidence (*Expressen*, 3 January 1992).

Bildt is also described as bad at connecting with people, which makes him come off as cold (*Expressen*, 7 December 1993). He is portrayed as self-confident to the extent that he lacks compassion and regret, a typical “qualified technocrat” (*Expressen*, 7 September 1994). News reports also stress that he is self-aware and has a sense of “untouchability, derived from his upper class inherited arrogance and verbal, witty elegance” (*Dagens Nyheter*, 6 September 1994). On the EU, and the international, scene he is described as successful, and he apparently really enjoys it, as reported during a visit in Germany: “Carl Bildt is happy. He is out in the big wide world, away from the little Swedish pond” (*Expressen*, 23 June 1993). In another account from an EU setting, one journalist describes how he experiences “150 journalists listening impressed to the self-confident Swedish guy in the spotlight. He speaks perfect English without a script. Quickly and without hesitation, he answers all the questions” (*Expressen*, 23 October 1991). In addition, he reportedly socializes well with his international counterparts, where his “genuine knowledge regarding security policy is respected” (*Dagens Nyheter*, 6 February 1992). In contrast to the other prime ministers, there are limited references in the empirical material when it comes to his leadership style. One of the few things mentioned is that Bildt is often surrounded by a group of old friends from the Moderate Party, who all adore him, something that indicates a group-think mentality (*Expressen*, 19 April 1992). In many ways, Bildt is portrayed as the opposite of Reinfeldt’s ordinariness and inclusive leadership.

Reinfeldt's leadership style is often referred to as "listening" and "modern" (*Dagens Nyheter*, 14 September 2008).

Fredrik Reinfeldt is a soft, modern boss who, in contrast to Göran Persson, listens to his co-workers. Furthermore, he is said to be straightforward with what he wants but allows his co-workers to work independently. Internally, he comes off as a thorough, humble and matriarchal leader as opposed to the arrogant patriarch Göran Persson (*Aftonbladet*, 11 July 2008).

Reinfeldt built his role as politician on being balanced and ordinary (Forsild, 2012). This is also illustrated in the coverage, where he is seen as a:

[...] Controlled politician who seldom allows himself to be pushed out of balance. He came off, for the most part, as an initiator who after much reflection came to the conclusion that Sweden is not on the right path. And he has taken on the heavy task of turning the country in another direction (*Aftonbladet*, 4 September 2006).

Reinfeldt is also contrasted to Persson in relation to female voters and politicians. Apparently, female voters had a lot of confidence in him, as illustrated in the following headline published on International Women's Day: "Women's Choice: Fredrik" (*Expressen*, 8 March 2008). When it comes to morals, there are a few articles dealing with the fact that he had employed au-pairs and nannies at very low salaries. "The pattern is clear. The 'contractual and real wages' that the Moderate leader speaks so amply about, do not apply when he himself employs people. Both his political and his private morals reveal shortcomings" (*Aftonbladet*, 14 September 2006). Yet, in general, Reinfeldt's morality is not a recurrent theme. It is possible that he would have been criticized more if he had been a Social Democrat. There are only a few negative remarks regarding Reinfeldt's leadership style, such as one made by a journalist who claims that "there is a significant trait of egocentric hubris in this eternal 'listening'" (*Expressen*, 9 August 2009). A few times, it is mentioned that he looks troubled and too serious, clearly addressed in one article: "He has sometimes been accused of lacking both humor and charisma, but here – along with six of his closest aides – he is relaxed and enjoys a few laughs" (*Expressen*, 9 November 2008).

One way of giving credit to Reinfeldt is to compare him to other popular leaders such as the iconic former SAP leader, Tage Erlander.

Fredrik Reinfeldt is like a modern "Father of the Nation". Calm and secure. More youthful in his appearance than his role model Tage Erlander. He is just what a nice

father in the most modern country in the world should be. [...] He vacuums the house, makes beef stew and is involved in his children's lives. Beyond that, he builds confidence and speaks with a firm and clear voice (*Expressen*, 23 May 2010).

In the passage above, the traditional Social Democratic role of the “Father of the Nation” is interwoven with the notion of the modern man who takes an active part in his children's lives and in the home. Reinfeldt's emphasis on ordinariness can be connected to what Smith (2016) refers to as the “new man” category where political leaders are keen on appearing “like ordinary people”. References to traditional, popular SAP leaders are also interesting in relation to Reinfeldt's ambition to rebrand the Moderate Party into a party for the middle and working class.

## Conclusions

The study at hand sets out to explore news coverage of Swedish prime ministers and their personal characteristics from the perspective of party affiliation. In general, the news texts show that leaders' personalities are frequently interwoven into journalistic narratives, which is one indicator of a shift in media coverage towards more personally oriented coverage of political leaders (Smith, 2008). Moreover, similar to findings in the British context, the study shows that in Swedish media coverage personal characteristics are frequently connected to political parties, foremost in discussions of upbringing and leadership style.

Yet the study reveals no clear patterns in terms of how leaders from the respective parties are reported on or understood. The issue of upbringing is interesting since it is not only a way for journalists to portray the prime ministers, but also a way for the prime ministers to market themselves by embodying traditional party ideals. The prime ministers are described as embodying their respective parties, their ideologies and policies, in various ways and degrees. Carlsson provides the best example of how personal characteristics are directly linked with the party, in a positive way, embodying the notion of the “good Social Democrat”. This is done through stories of his modest upbringing, success despite structural obstacles, honesty, and low-key personality. Persson aspires, through his personal experiences of a class society, to take on a similar role. However, no such journalistic narrative is created. In contrast, Persson is portrayed as embodying traditionally negative perceptions

regarding the Social Democratic Party, and described as a greedy, patriarchal person with an old-fashioned and “trade union boss” mentality. In general, the bullying character of the news coverage of Persson raises questions regarding journalistic norms and ethics. The two Moderate leaders are also portrayed differently, mirroring the re-branding of the party. Whereas Bildt is depicted as embodying a traditional stereotypical view of the Moderates as a party for the rich and privileged, such descriptions are lacking when it comes to Reinfeldt. Rather, Reinfeldt prefers journalists to highlight his ordinary background, interests and life. This narrative fits much better with the re-branding of the Moderates as a party for working and middle class people. The strategic and deliberate use of personal characteristics and life styles as a way of authenticating the party brand is interesting and underlines the need for more research in the intersection between public relations and journalistic studies in the Swedish context.

The study demonstrates that there is not one standardized way in which prime ministers have been portrayed in terms of party affiliation and personal characteristics. This does not mean that journalists do not use preconceptions about the various parties and their histories when reporting on political leaders. For example, both Carlsson and Persson are reported on and understood through the lense of what it means to be a Social Democrat, but also in light of contemporary trends in leadership ideals. One such trend is what Smith (2016) refers to as the “new man” category, which emphasizes ordinariness in terms of interests, habits and taste. This ideal fitted nicely into how Reinfeldt was and wanted to be portrayed, which coincided with the re-branding of the Moderate Party. This highlights the fact that not only party affiliation plays a role in assessing and understanding prime ministers, but also the broader societal trends related to what it means to be a politician. Thus, journalists’ subjective notions become channeled through the prisms of societal norms and common knowledge. It should also be noted that other aspects beyond journalistic attitudes and trends have an impact, such as the strength of the opposition, the prime minister’s position within his/her own party, as well as the success of various public relations efforts. Moreover, there is a need to further explore the role of journalism, including the lack of journalistic scrutiny, in an era characterized by an increasing use of social media and the ability for political actors to communicate directly with their audience.

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## CHAPTER 6

# Reading *The National*: Shifting Subjectivities in a Stateless Nation

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*This chapter analyses the ways in which Scottish, British and European subjectivities are reproduced in *The National*, an openly pro-Scottish-independence newspaper launched shortly after the unsuccessful independence referendum of September 2014. The term “subjectivities” refers here to the range of “subject positions” (left-wing/right-wing, social-democratic/neoliberal etc.) which the paper makes available to its readers. While the chapter pays due attention to captions and other textual elements – analysed using tools borrowed from semiotics – its main focus is on the graphic design of the paper’s front covers, most frequently dominated by a single image occupying around three quarters of the available space. These images are subdivided into various categories. The largest group, accounting for around 45% of the total number of covers, features actors mostly from the world of politics. Individual exposure here is intense, with seventeen of the actors accounting for 60% of the images in this group. The second largest group of front-cover images, accounting for around 40% of the overall total, are metaphorical in nature and work to provide the larger ideological frame of *The National*’s journalistic output. Foucauldian discourse analysis is used here to map the discursive universe created in relation to such questions as Scottish independence and the recent UK vote to leave the EU. The clearest finding is that the plasticity of subjectivities – as opposed to the relative fixity of identities – has allowed a debate on nationhood to be simultaneously a debate on political ideologies: social democracy as an alternative to neoliberalism.*

## Introduction

The front cover of the first passport I ever owned displayed in capital letters the words “British Passport: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland”. In its inside pages it went on to further designate me as a “British Subject: Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies”. My current passport has on its front cover the words “European Union: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland”, with no indication of either subjecthood or statehood, while a rather complex note on the third page includes me by implication among both “British citizens” and “British nationals”. These documents thus give written form to a range of “positions” which have been made available to me at different moments in time and within different legal and political frameworks. While I am well aware of all of these designations, none of them actually corresponds to what I might call my own sense of my “national identity”, which I would always state as Scottish: this tension between my “felt” nationality and my technical nationality (or more precisely statehood) is symptomatic of my membership in a “stateless nation”, i.e. Scotland, a nation which currently lacks the political resources necessary – and perhaps even the will – to aspire to the status of nation-state (Law, 2001).

Along with many other academics working in this field (Foucault, 1972; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Hall, 1996), I will use the terms “subject position” and “subjectivity” interchangeably to refer to the kinds of “positions” outlined above. A subject position or subjectivity is different from “essentialist” conceptions of identity (D’Cruz, 2016, p. 17) in that, while the latter view identity as something “inherent” or located in the individual him/herself, subject positions are socially constructed discursive potentialities made available to us at a societal level. In the words of Bhabha:

The move away from the singularities of ‘class’ or ‘gender’ as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation – that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world (1994, p. 1).

Since which subject position we choose to (or are obliged to) occupy at different times can vary significantly, our “identity” in that sense is always constructed, negotiated and in flux. If, for example, I need the assistance of a British Embassy somewhere, my identity in that situation is technically but also inescapably British. If I attend a football match where Scotland is playing against another national team, it is Scottish (I might even wear a kilt).

In this chapter I will look at how the conditions of possibility enabled by the “open character of every discourse” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 113) have allowed the relationships between Scottish, British and European subjectivities to participate in an ongoing process of change in Scotland. In particular I will look at how one element of the Scottish press – the recently launched openly pro-Scottish independence newspaper *The National* – contributes, primarily through its front covers, to the construction of Scotland as what Benedict Anderson calls an “imagined community”. For Anderson, a nation, far from being material and fixed, “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991, p. 6). He further argues that the most powerful enabling force in the construction of these “imagined communities” has historically been what he calls “print capitalism”, which would eventually lead to the emergence of the press in its various forms and more recently to what are loosely termed “new media” (Blanken & Deuze, 2007). He has the following to say of the widely dispersed reading communities which print capitalism has enabled, which are nonetheless brought together by the relative simultaneity of the act of reading: “These fellow-readers, to whom they [other readers] were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community” (p. 44).

This chapter, then, examines the complex relationships and tensions between an increasingly prominent – though not yet politically dominant – “Scottish” imagined community and a still resilient but increasingly challenged “UK” counterpart, both coexisting in a shared (national and international) political space. It will analyse the particular forms this confrontation takes in the field of print capitalism, focusing on how a range of individuals are presented both as actors in their own right and as part of much larger discursive and ideological frameworks.

## **Profiling *The National***

The political process which led to the launch of *The National* on 24 November 2014 had been gathering pace and strength in Scotland for the best part of a decade. The key date was 5 May 2011, when the Scottish National Party (SNP) led by Alex Salmond won an outright majority in the Scottish parliament, an event which marked a fundamental change in the public understanding of Scotland as an “imagined community”. Salmond immediately began negotiations with the UK

government (a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition led by David Cameron) to hold a referendum on Scottish independence with a view to changing the status of Scotland from stateless nation to nation-state. The referendum was held on 18 September 2014, and the result was a win by what came to be known as the “No” camp (i.e. those opposed to independence) with 55.3% of the vote. This result was much closer than most people had anticipated and, by clearly demonstrating the existence of a sizeable pro-independence constituency in Scotland, was the key factor leading to the emergence of *The National* just over two months later.

The new paper, launched at breakneck speed, belongs to Newsquest (the UK arm of the American media company Gannett) and is published by the Herald and Times group. Initial circulation results were heady, peaking at around 60,000 in the first week (for a population of just over five million), but quickly fell back to around 15,000, eventually stabilising at just over 10,000 copies a day. This is a reasonable if not spectacular performance compared with other Scottish “quality” newspapers. *The National's* stable-mates *The Herald* and *The Sunday Herald* have circulation figures of 28,800 and 21,000 respectively, while the Edinburgh-based *Scotsman's* figures are 19,400: these figures, from the Audit Bureau of Circulation (February 2017), reflect the broader phenomenon of declining newspaper readership alongside the resulting “shrinking public square” (Gill, 2016, p. 23) and the correspondingly risky nature of the venture. *The National's* political stance was clear in its opening issue where it announced itself in its strapline (and continues to do so now) as “The Newspaper that Supports an Independent Scotland”. An initial one-week trial period was extended to a five-day-a-week pattern until 7 May 2016, at which point it moved to six days a week.

Among a range of unusual features, *The National* heralds its all-embracing “Scottishness” by publishing weekly columns in Scotland’s two minority languages, Gàidhlig (Gaelic) and Scots, a Germanic language closely related to English but sharing a number of morphological, lexical and phonetic features with some of the Scandinavian languages (Kay, 1986). While a Gaelic column is not an entire novelty in the Scottish media – *The Scotsman* has offered one for many years, as has the *West Highland Free Press* published on the Isle of Skye – no newspaper to date has ever published in Scots, despite the fact that it is the most widely spoken language in the Scottish Lowlands (the number of speakers is usually estimated at around 1.5 million, but this figure is almost certainly too low).

Language is a powerful constructor of national subjectivities (O’Donnell, 2007; O’Donnell & Castelló, 2009), and this change in the linguistic landscape,



Figures 6.1 & 6.2. A *National* front page in Scots, and a second featuring Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978), Scotland's best known Scots-language poet. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

however small, is not without importance for the range of subject positions now publicly available to those living in the country.

The second major event to affect the profile of *The National* was the referendum on the UK's continued membership in the EU promised by David Cameron in his 2015 manifesto. This referendum was held on 23 June 2016 and resulted in a victory for the "Leave" camp. In stark contrast to other parts of the UK, 62% of Scottish voters and all 32 Scottish local council areas voted to remain. David Cameron resigned immediately and was followed as Prime Minister by Theresa May. As a result of these and other changes, three of the five current Scottish political party leaders and the new British Prime Minister are women (Nicola Sturgeon, Ruth Davidson, Kezia Dugdale and Theresa May), to whom we might add Leanne Wood, leader of the Welsh Nationalist Party Plaid Cymru. In addition neither Kezia Dugdale nor Ruth Davidson make any attempt to hide or in any way downplay the fact that they are gay, while Patrick Harvie, leader of the Scottish Greens, is the UK's only openly bisexual politician. This undoubtedly changing gender landscape has had clearly visible effects on newspaper coverage of issues such as gender inequality, gender violence, gender stereotyping and so on, with the corresponding changes in the range of available public subjectivities which such political readjustments always bring.

## Analysing *The National*

In this chapter I will concentrate almost exclusively on the front covers of the paper. There are several reasons for this choice of focus. Due to economic constraints *The National* operates on an extremely tight budget with a skeleton staff. As a result it relies heavily on agency copy, including a significant portion of its sports coverage for instance, its specifically “national” identity as a paper being carried by a limited range of “home-grown” features:

- A small number of high-profile columnists and bloggers: award-winning journalist Lesley Riddoch, founder of the Radical Independence Campaign Cat Boyd, and “The Wee Ginger Dug” [sic] (pseudonym of blogger Paul Cavanagh).
- Above all the very unusual make-up of its front covers where *The National* relies heavily on image rather than text, every image taking up around three quarters of the space available. This particular front-page style was pioneered by Richard Walker, former editor of the *Sunday Herald*, who took over as editor of *The National* on its launch. One of his *Sunday Herald* covers had in fact been among the most commented-on front pages throughout the UK in 2011, when an injunction was granted prohibiting the naming of footballer Ryan Giggs in England and Wales in relation to an alleged extramarital affair: the injunction was without force in Scotland which has its own legal system, as a result of which the story was freely covered there.



Figures 6.3 & 6.4. Front-cover designs in the *Sunday Herald* and *The National*. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.



Figures 6.5 & 6.6. Two prize-winning front covers. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

The great importance *The National* gives to its front covers was clear from issue 1 (shown above). This combined a metaphor of the Fourth Estate “watch-dog” function of the press (“we have our eye on you”) with the social issue of child poverty. On 8 May 2015 it published no fewer than three different covers related to the Scottish parliamentary elections the day before (the third appears as Figure 6.46 below), while on 17 September 2016 it published two different covers, these having been selected from designs sent in by readers (in the first immediately above, the thistle is a long-standing emblem of Scotland, while the “2” in the second refers to “indyref2”, an abbreviation widely used to refer to the possibility of a second independence referendum).

*The National’s* front-cover images are, with very few exceptions, accompanied by a caption or captions, thereby combining the dynamic axis of narrative and the static axis of image. Kress and Van Leeuwen emphasise how both of these can work together:

Both language and visual communication express meanings belonging to and structured by cultures in the one society; the semiotic processes, though not the semiotic means, are broadly similar; and this results in a considerable degree of congruence between the two (2006, p. 19).

Meyrowitz gives a more detailed explanation of the functioning of the caption. The impact of a “representational symbol” such as a photograph



or image, he argues, derives from the fact that “the photograph is understood in one act of seeing: it is perceived in a gestalt” (1985, p. 96). However, the lack of linguistic elements which makes this immediate impact possible can also result in the meaning of the image being unclear, or even ambiguous, as a consequence of which “people often rely on a picture’s verbal caption to determine the picture’s specific meaning” (p. 98). The force of the caption in the overall generation of meaning was very clear in the course of this research since many of the images encountered would have defied successful interpretation without recourse to the accompanying text.

Two forms of semiotic analysis are mobilised to deal with the visual elements of *The National’s* front covers. The first originated in the writings of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and would reach its peak mainly in the nineteen-sixties and seventies in the work of Roland Barthes (1957, 1988) and Umberto Eco (1978): in this study it takes the form of a broadly structuralist approach to the images analysed, taking into account features such as composition, colour palette, relative size and position, proxemics (how close the actors depicted are to each other), haptics (whether they touch each other in any way), and hexis (their general bodily disposition).

The rather different form of semiotics developed by American polymath Charles Sanders Peirce is also used, in particular his classification of signs into three:

- *Icons* in one way or another resemble, in however stylised a manner, the object they represent: representations of individuals in this study all fall into this category.
- *Indexes* represent by indirect association – for example smoke, while not being fire or representing fire in any iconic way, is universally understood as an “index” of fire. The relatively few “news” images catalogued here – floods, ruined buildings and the like – fall under this category and are not analysed in particular detail.
- The relationship between *symbols* and what they represent is purely a matter of convention (red for danger, green for “go” and so on) – all metaphorical representations included in the data set are part of this group.

This typology has been extremely useful for classifying the different kinds of representations, thus allowing a more fine-grained analysis.

## Reading the Numbers

At the time of writing (16 September 2017, two days before the third anniversary of the Scottish independence referendum), the paper had just published its eight-hundred-and-fiftieth edition. Quantitative data on the corresponding front covers has been gathered using spreadsheet software. For the purpose of analysis these covers are broken down into the following three sets (there is a certain amount of double counting since hybrid iconic/metaphorical and individual/group images, of which there are 90, have been entered under both categories):

- Set 1 includes all 585 *iconic* front-cover images featuring one or more individuals, further broken down as follows (from greater to smaller exposure):
  - Subset 1 includes 236 covers featuring 17 individuals appearing 5 or more times
  - Subset 2 includes 145 covers featuring 120 individuals appearing between 1 and 4 times
    - This gives a subtotal of 381 covers featuring 137 single individuals
  - Subset 3 includes 98 images featuring 2 or 3 individuals
  - Subset 4 includes 106 images of larger groups of any size
- Set 2 includes 43 covers with *indexical* images
- Set 3 includes 316 covers with *symbolic/metaphorical* images

The following “headline” conclusions can be drawn at this point:

- Iconic representations of single individuals and metaphorical images are by far the two largest groups, accounting jointly for around two-thirds of front covers
- Groups are the second largest category, accounting for around one quarter of front covers
- Indexical (“news”) images constitute a very small percentage of front cover images (5%)

If we look more closely at what we might call the “elite” group – i.e. those whose images appear five or more times – this list is as follows:

Nicola Sturgeon, current Scottish First Minister	59
Theresa May, current UK Conservative Prime Minister	39
Jeremy Corbyn, current UK Labour Party Leader	19

David Cameron, former UK Prime Minister	17
Kezia Dugdale, current Scottish Labour Party Leader	12
Ruth Davidson, current Scottish Conservative Party leader	11
Alistair Carmichael, current UK Liberal Democrat MP	11
Donald Trump, current US President	8
Alex Salmond, former SNP First Minister	8
Jim Murphy, former UK Labour Party MP	8
Boris Johnson, current UK Conservative Foreign Minister	6
David Mundell, current UK Conservative MP	7
George Osborne, former UK Conservative Chancellor/current MP	7
Andy Murray, current leading Scottish/British tennis player	6
Ian Duncan Smith, former UK Secretary of State/current MP	6
Tony Blair, former UK Labour Party Leader	6
David Davis, current UK Secretary of State for exiting the EU	5

Of these only Andy Murray does not come from the world of politics. Of the remaining 117 individuals in the “four-or-fewer-appearances” group only 14 appear more than once, accounting for a total of 30 covers, and five are now deceased. The remaining 68 consist mostly of (not necessarily minor) politicians, a medley of more or less well-known media or sporting celebrities, a couple of academics and even, on one occasion, the Queen... There are also 35 individuals who were presented “anonymously”, these appearing mostly as tokens of a specific type (doctor, fisherman, immigrant and so on), where the type is of more interest to the overall discourse of the newspaper than any particular individual, to the extent that several appear only from the neck down: in fact the usefulness of such anonymous exposure resides specifically in its ability to address broader issues, where an anonymous student might “represent” problems in the educational sector, for example, or a fisherman difficulties in that industry. Of all the representations these come closest to what we might, with Barthes, call a “degree zero” presentation, one which “has a generic form; it is a category” (2010, p. 54).

Whether any individual or group appears in the news is the result of a complex set of factors, and changes in political fortunes can result in sudden falls from grace (David Cameron, George Osborne, Jim Murphy) or equally sudden increases in exposure (Theresa May, Donald Trump). However, the quantitative element of this study makes it clear that things are in reality much more complex than this, and that there is no direct relationship between political “weight” and exposure, a point I return to below.

## Reading the Visuals

**Individual exposure: the bad and the ugly.** Visual representations will be classified by extent of variation from Barthes’s “degree zero”: such a presentation would typically show the individual(s) concerned looking straight ahead, in the middle of the frame, and with little else in terms of posture, dress code and so on to attract particular attention (other than perhaps a smile). As he puts it elsewhere (though with reference to food), they offer a “no frills” representation (2010, p. 85):



**Figures 6.7 & 6.8.** Nicola Sturgeon/John Swinney and Robert Smith (AKA Lord Smith of Kelvin) at “degree zero”. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

As we will see later, any positive deviation from degree zero is carried almost entirely by Nicola Sturgeon (with a little help from Andy Murray), the vast bulk of all other front-cover images deviating to the negative. I will focus on these first. A particularly useful tool is the so-called “rule of thirds” according to which the “power points” of an image are not in the centre but at the intersection points of horizontal and vertical lines dividing the image into equal ninths (Kragas, 2005, p. 9). According to this rule, for example, the image of Nicola Sturgeon on the next page (her first individual appearance in *The National*) would be more balanced than the second of Theresa May, who appears boxed in and dominated by the caption.

Numerous other examples of this technique in operation, particularly in its negative variant, can be found, but simpler techniques are also much in evidence.



Figures 6.9 & 6.10. The rule of thirds applied to Nicola Sturgeon and Theresa May. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

Immediately below is the third image to appear in *The National* (chronologically speaking) and featuring Jim Murphy, then leader of the Scottish Labour party and one of the most high-profile representatives of the “No” camp during the referendum. As can be seen, the slightest change in the direction of his gaze is enough to move his representation from neutral to decidedly “shifty”, while a perplexed-looking Jeremy Corbyn peering over his glasses looks like someone out of his depth:



Figures 6.11 & 6.12. Jim Murphy and Jeremy Corbyn avoid the camera’s gaze. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

Other downgrading techniques include posterising the individual concerned, showing him/her in black and white, showing only a fragment, or moving them to the side and/or bottom where they are overshadowed by their surroundings, or, even worse, showing them from the rear, as in the following images of David Cameron:



Figures 6.13 & 6.16. David Cameron in various negative guises. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

Individuals presented as “out of touch” can appear as spacemen/women (David Cameron and Kezia Dugdale below):



Figures 6.17 & 6.18. David Cameron and Kezia Dugdale on another planet. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

Appearing as a Martian or Frankenstein’s monster offer other options – the latter clearly based on Boris Karlov’s monster though totally lacking in its “redemptive” possibilities (Eco, 2011, pp. 271/295):



Figures 6.19 & 6.20. Anti-independence politicians Michael Gove and Alistair Carmichael in monster mode. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

As we slide further down the negative slope only part of the individual in question might be shown. Below we see Boris Johnson almost literally as a “half-wit” while half of a snooping Theresa May disappears behind a hedge:



Figures 6.21 & 6.22. Boris Johnson and Theresa May only half there. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

Perhaps the ultimate indignity is to appear merely as a silhouette, as in these images of Kezia Dugdale:



Figures 6.23 & 6.24. Kezia Dugdale as a shadow of her former self. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.



Or perhaps not. The ultimate indignity may be to have your identity hijacked by a character from popular culture, the images below showing Theresa May as Cruella de Vil and Alistair Carmichael as The Terminator:



**Figures 6.25 & 6.26.** Theresa May and Alistair Carmichael in pop-culture alter egos. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

Occasionally historical figures are also appropriated. A recent cover (14 September 2017) featured Theresa May as no less a personage than King Henry VIII.

An unusual but undoubtedly interesting feature of *The National's* coverage is what I will call multiple exposure, where Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) is used to make the same individual appear a number of times in the same image. There are five of these, the second image below presenting what can be seen as “a supra-*mise en-abyme*” (Mavor, 2013, p. 350), a representational technique where a main image contains smaller representations of itself within it:

The ideological burden of such representation seems very clear: the more times an individual is reproduced in the same image the more negative the overall representation is.

**Individual exposure: the good.** Only two individuals (Nicola Sturgeon and Andy Murray) enjoy consistently positive exposure from *The National*. Images of the First Minister mostly comply with the “rule of thirds”, which has the advantage of allowing space for a caption without disturbing that compositional arrangement. Rather than attempting to glorify or glamorise her in any way, the emphasis



Figures 6.27 & 6.28. Theresa May ad infinitum... Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

tends to be on a woman getting on with the job, an emphasis consistently underpinned by her businesslike but generally workaday dress code. Such representations can very exceptionally border on the aggressive, their unorthodox and slightly chaotic composition suggesting that things are about to get “shaken up”:



Figures 6.29 & 6.30. Nicola Sturgeon plays good cop/bad cop. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

A small but growing number of images show her in mid-close-up from the side addressing an obviously present but out-of-shot audience. In terms of the proxemics, we might usefully contrast this with the presentation of David Cameron in a similar style of shot:



Figures 6.31 & 6.32. Nicola Sturgeon, David Cameron and the poetics of space. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

There are only two “mythologising” images, the first appearing the day after the first anniversary of the referendum (19 September 2015) and the second on the day of the following year’s Scottish parliamentary elections (5 May 2016): one in black and white urging support for independence, and showing a very young Nicola Sturgeon waving a saltire – a white Saint Andrew’s cross on a blue background, one of Scotland’s two unofficial “national” flags – and the other in yellowish tones stressing *The National’s* view of the way forward for Scotland (this image is also available on a tee-shirt which can be purchased from the paper’s online shop):



Figures 6.33 & 6.34. Nicola Sturgeon: nation and myth. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

Both images have a distinctly “retro” and even “propaganda-like” feel while the image on the left below – another interesting *mise en abyme* – has echoes of the “Motherland is Calling” Soviet poster of 1941, one of the most famous Soviet posters of the time (Bonnell, 1999, p. 265):



Figures 6.35 & 6.36. Propaganda-style images (copy of the Родина-Мать poster kindly supplied by the Hoover Institution Archive, Poster Collection, Poster RU/SU 2317.23R). Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

These few exceptions notwithstanding, the overriding representation is what we might loosely call “realist” in that there is relatively little that departs from a rather old-style popular photographic representation which “eliminates accident or any appearance that dissolves the real by temporalizing it” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 76).

**Small Group Exposure.** The slightly greater number of actors present in small-group exposure enables additional semiotic resources to be mobilised highlighting, for example, that individuals are somehow “in the same boat” or on opposite sides of an argument:



Figures 6.37 & 6.38. Theresa May sinking with Boris Johnson vs. squaring up to Nicola Sturgeon. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

At times proxemics, hexis and gesture combine, as when Ed Miliband appears to be intimidated by a rather threatening Cameron, while the empty space between Sturgeon and Murphy in the second image stresses their ideological distance, her relaxed attitude also contrasting strongly with his more defensive posture:



Figures 6.39 & 6.40. Nicola Sturgeon and Jim Murphy miles apart. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

As regards haptics, we might usefully contrast Sturgeon’s rather formal handshake with Cameron with *The National*’s presentation of her meeting with EU President Jean-Claude Juncker:



Figures 6.41 & 6.42. David Cameron, Nicola Sturgeon and Jean-Claude Juncker: a handshake vs. a warm embrace. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

Images featuring three actors can suggest more complex power relationships, often enhanced through the use of CGI as illustrated below:



**Figures 6.43 & 6.44.** Anti-independence politicians (Blair, Murphy and Osborne) as zombies vs. a serene Nicola Sturgeon surveying Miliband and Osborne. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

Where some level of individual identification is needed for larger groups, the technique of composite presentation is almost invariably used whereby smaller separate images of each of the individuals involved are presented. The numbers can vary from four or five through several dozen to numbers so large they are impossible to count. There are 19 cases of this type: the second image below shows Nicola Sturgeon surrounded by all the SNP Members of (the UK) Parliament elected on 8 May 2015:



**Figures 6.45 & 6.46.** Individuals bound by a common purpose. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

**Large Group Exposure.** Images of larger groups can be subdivided into the following classes:

- *Groups* are made up of individuals who share some kind of permanent (e.g. family) or short-term project-oriented (e.g. protestors) or otherwise institutional identity (e.g. members of the House of Lords), where that group identity is more important than their individual identity. These groups, of which there are 40 examples, go from the small (families) to the very large (the 300 Lords). Their ideological significance varies but is always clear, particularly in the case of the House of Lords, routinely presented by *The National* as a site of unjustified privilege.
- *Crowds*, which appear on 43 occasions, are large groups of people – ranging from perhaps a dozen to many thousands – where individual exposure is all but impossible. They are mostly either festive (e.g. celebrating Catalonia’s national day or sporting victories) or in mourning as the result of mass shootings or other atrocities, though there is an increasing number of “crowds” of refugees. Crowds are not automatically incompatible either with a degree of individual exposure, or with a direct challenge to their status as “anonymous” (the second image below refers to David Cameron’s description of immigrants as a “swarm”):



**Figures 6.47 & 6.48.** The comfort and loneliness of the crowd. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.



A number of *The National's* covers produced in the run-up to and after the 2014 independence referendum combined (anonymous) individual exposure with a supporting crowd. Below on the left is a largely unidentifiable crowd of independence supporters and on the right a similar crowd in close-up with one individual in particular standing out:



Figures 6.49 & 6.50. A question of perspective. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

The latter was not, however, my first encounter with (variations of) this particular image. It had appeared on the inside pages of *The National* on 30 June 2016, and I had already come across two very slightly different versions of it in a study of how the Catalan press covered the Scottish referendum in 2014 (Castelló et al., 2015). These versions accompanied articles appearing in the Spanish-language *La Vanguardia's* International Section on 18 September 2014 and in the Catalan-language daily *Ara* on 19 September 2014. Very similar images then appeared again twice in the Scottish press on the first anniversary of the referendum, in the *Sunday Herald* on 13 September 2015 and in *Scotland on Sunday* on the same date. This is a striking example of dispersion across national boundaries (I return to the concept of “dispersion” below).

There is a small but useful academic debate on whether, in such cases, we are dealing with a *crowd*, a *mob* or *the people* (Beasley-Murray, 2002). However, these competing discourses are best seen as part of “a complex rhetorical

strategy of social reference” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 145) where “working people” can be represented as “something more than a favoured mob [or] a desperate and unruly crowd” (Unger, 2004, p. 53). For *The National*, crowds are always this “something more”: they stand against aggression and injustice and demand solidarity: even when no-one is picked out for individual attention, these shots have an important framing function as visual expressions of elements of *The National*’s worldview which also feature in many of the individualised presentations.

## Reading the Symbolic

The term “symbolic representation” refers to cases where meaning is expressed mainly metaphorically (though also occasionally metonymically) by means of images. The two images immediately below exemplify the differences between iconic, indexical and symbolic representation. On the left is an indexical expression of war in Syria (ruins are not war, but point towards war). On the right we see a hybrid form combining iconic representation of John McDonnell (UK Labour Shadow Chancellor) with a metaphorical expression of the crisis affecting that party in the form of a house on the verge of collapse:



**Figures 6.51 & 6.52.** The destruction of Syria vs. the collapse of the British Labour Party. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

At this point I will turn to Foucauldian discourse analysis in order to grasp the more complex dynamics of symbolic representation. This approach, based on the work of French theorist Michel Foucault, differs from both of the broadly structuralist frames used so far with their detailed analysis of the inner mechanics of specific (visual or linguistic) texts. This difference lies primarily in the fact that Foucault had no interest in any specific text of any kind as an object of study in itself. As he puts it in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, his kind of analysis “leaves the final placing of the text in dotted outline” (1972, p. 84).

Foucault talks not of texts but of “discourses” – for example discourses of national identity such as the ones we are focusing on here – and of “discursive formations” which arise out of the coming together of discourses on the same broad topic but spread across a wide range of fields: for example, discourses of national identity can emerge in relation to hard news (the case here), sport (very common), advertising, television drama, literature, poetry, music and so on, each of these with its own distinct vocabulary and style. Discursive formations are therefore “systems of dispersion” (p. 41) – they have no single identifiable author and are made up of “statements” emerging from a wide range of “surfaces of emergence” (p. 45). They do not present what Barthes might call a “unary” message (2000, p. 41), being on the contrary “a space of multiple dissensions; a set of different oppositions whose levels and roles must be described” (Foucault, 1972, p. 173).

Importantly for this project, “archaeology”, as Foucault called his approach at the time, does not limit itself simply to the study of expressive forms, but “also reveals relations between discursive formations and non-discursive domains (institutions, political events, economic practices and processes) ... it seeks to define specific forms of articulation” (pp. 179-80). Such an approach lends itself productively to the analysis of *The National* being undertaken here, as this newspaper combines its own range of expressive modalities to engage in ideological conflict originating in broader Scottish, UK, EU and even international institutional frames.

Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) is also used here as a complementary analytical tool. This approach explicitly challenges the Classical Greek view of metaphor as decorative or ornamental, and stresses instead “its role in the development of ideology in areas such as politics and religion where influencing judgements is a central goal” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 8). “Vehicle” and “source domain” are the terms used in CMA for the concrete element which conveys in more tangible terms the abstract concept which the metaphor aims

to express, known as the “target domain” (Charteris-Black, 2004). Thus in Shakespeare’s well-known phrase “If music be the food of love, play on”, “food” and “music” are the tangible/audible vehicles for the abstract concept “love”, which they simultaneously express and bring closer to the reader’s/listener’s experience. Though the number of vehicles used by *The National* is large, certain patterns and repetitions can be identified. There are numerous flags (mainly saltires and EU flags), eight images deploy submarines or missiles, the target being defence spending, while another ten show maps of Scotland with varying meanings. Some of the numerous metaphors of imprisonment and entrapment (walls, barbed wire, padlocks, shackles, clamps, nooses and so on) are very striking, and range from the grim to the beautiful:



Figures 6.53 & 6.54. I want to break free... Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

Other vehicles include blackboards, schoolboys/girls or lecture theatres for education (five examples) and flowers or candles for mourning (ten examples, the topic however being in most cases terrorism). We should beware of assuming that the same vehicle will always refer to the same topic or be part of the same discourse: as Lakoff and Johnson argue, “metaphor, by virtue of giving coherent structure to a range of our experiences, creates similarities of a new kind” (1981, p.151, their emphasis). Take for example the two images below using an abacus as the vehicle:



Figures 6.55 & 6.56. Danny Alexander and George Osborne fail their maths exam. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

The captions clearly inform us that in the first case – featuring then Chief Secretary to the Treasury Danny Alexander – the target is financial dishonesty, whereas in the second, featuring George Osborne, the target is economic naivety and incompetence, thereby creating novel similarities between concepts not normally regarded as overlapping.

A detailed examination of all of the metaphors mobilised is not possible, but the sample provided should make it clear that while semiotics is a valuable tool for the analysis of individual images, something different is required at the level we are dealing with here. This was a conclusion reached several decades ago by Barthes when he moved from his structuralist to his poststructuralist phase, particularly with the publication of *Mythologies*. For Barthes myth is fundamentally ideological in nature – it is, as he puts it, an essential element of the “passage from the real to the ideological” (2009, p. 168) – and it is at this point that myth and discourse at least partially merge.

## Reading the Discursive

Given the scale of the dataset, in order to keep the analysis manageable I will focus here on a small selection of the captions accompanying individual images of Nicola Sturgeon, always bearing in mind that they operate within a much

broader frame of other captions and metaphoric visuals which reproduce the same discourses as those itemised below (the discourses mobilised are shown in italics):

- 12 February 2015  
**LEADING WITH THE LEFT**  
Sturgeon offers olive branch to English progressives as she unveils alternative to austerity  
*UNITY/PROSPERITY*
- 7 April 2015  
**STURGEON DEMANDS THE TRUTH**  
Carmichael must question the whole approach to politics after saying memo leak is just ‘one of those things’  
*HONESTY*
- 10 October 2015  
**EQUALITY: THE TIME IS NOW**  
‘I don’t want my niece’s generation to still be fighting these battles. I want us to actually try to win these battles for the next generation of women’  
*EQUALITY*
- 20 April 2016  
**WE’LL SPEND AN EXTRA £500M [MILLION] ON THE NHS [NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE]**  
*CARE*
- 25 June 2016  
**INDEYREF2 [a second independence referendum]: WE’RE READY**  
‘I am proud of Scotland and how we voted yesterday. We proved that we are a modern, outward-looking and inclusive country and we said clearly that we do not want to leave the European Union. I am determined to do what it takes to make sure these aspirations are realised’ NICOLA STURGEON  
*OPENNESS/PROGRESSIVENESS*
- 18 August 2016  
**YOU ARE NOT JUST BARGAINING CHIPS**  
Sturgeon meets EU nationals [living in Scotland] and demands a guarantee from Theresa May that they can stay in Scotland

*INCLUSION/JUSTICE*

- 24 August 2016

**YOU CAN'T OFFER US SECURITY**

Sturgeon says Downing Street's [i.e. Theresa May's] silence is 'increasingly negligent' and confirms indyref2 still 'highly likely' as Scotland's Brexit bill predicted to hit £11.2bn

*SECURITY*

*The National*, in fact, through its individual exposure and broader visual and textual frame generates a Manichean universe divided along the following lines

Care	Negligence
Competence	Inequality
Equality	Incompetence
Dependence	Independence
Honesty	Dishonesty
Humanity	Inhumanity
Justice	Injustice
Legality	Illegality
Openness	Closedness
Progressiveness	Regressiveness
Prosperity	Poverty
Security	Insecurity
Solidarity	Insolidarity
Stability	Instability
Unity	Disunity

The first column designates the discursive universe of *The National* itself and those who share its worldview, in particular Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP more generally: the stuff of dreams but also of discipline and hard work. The second column is its anti-universe, the stuff of nightmares, a number of which actually appear on the front covers of *The National*, the second image below in particular mobilising a very long-standing conflation of shadow and dread in Western culture (Stoichita, 1997 – see in particular the *Égoïste* advertisement reproduced on page 36 and the stills from *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* and *Nosferatu, a Symphony of Horror* reproduced on page 151):



Figures 6.57 & 6.58. The stuff of nightmares. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

Despite the diversity of images and metaphors, this Manichean universe structures *The National's* discursive output from top to bottom and from side to side, and so far has remained entirely consistent throughout the paper's relatively short existence. While the negative axis of this matrix is the politics of austerity, the positive side is not simply independence – i.e. statehood – but a symbiotic fusion of independence and social democracy. The longest caption to date appeared on 11 November 2016, a few days after the US elections, and exceptionally taking up more than half the page. It read, quoting Nicola Sturgeon:

There is more of an obligation on us now than there perhaps has been on our generation before and this is the time for all of us, no matter how difficult, no matter how controversial and unpopular it may be in certain quarters, to be beacons of hope for those values we all hold so dear.

The accompanying article foregrounded a number of social issues – most centrally racism and misogyny – with no mention of independence whatsoever. The paper's most striking cover to date – a special wraparound cover featuring an artwork by Scotland's most prominent living artist Peter Howson – again foregrounded not independence (though it is implicit in the Union Jack in the background) but the theme of austerity, of which poverty was clearly a motif:





**Figures 6.59.** Peter Howson’s dramatic depiction of Scotland under UK rule. Facsimile reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

The Manichean nature of this universe explains many (perhaps all) of the apparent conundrums in *The National’s* coverage. For example, it explains why Ruth Davidson, the current leader of Scotland’s second-largest political party, did not appear in her own right on any front cover until 12 September 2016 (issue 508). While the unexpectedly good showing by her party in the snap general election held in the UK in 2017 has to some extent reversed this trend – she has now appeared on 11 front covers – images of her remain invariably negative or trivialising and her tally of front covers continues to appear paltry compared with Nicola Sturgeon’s 59 appearances:



**Figures 6.60 & 6.61.** Ruth Davidson – irrelevant bit player in Tory in-fighting or disappearing into the background. Facsimiles reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

In short, while the *tactical* importance of individual exposure for ideological reasons is abundantly clear, the *strategic* construction of reality in play can only be achieved if that exposure is placed within its broader discursive environment. And this applies not only to individual exposure but also, for example, to the extraordinary group exposure enjoyed by the Australian Brain family who featured in eight front covers in *The National* between 12 May 2015 and 21 September 2016. They had been ordered by the British Home Office to leave the UK despite having already lived in Scotland for six years, having now become an integral part of the local community, and much was made of the fact that their son was now a fluent Gaelic speaker. On 20 September 2016 the family were finally granted leave to stay, a development which triggered front-page coverage in *The National* the following day under the headline “VICTORY!”

## Shifting Subjectivities

The (for many completely unexpected) result of the UK referendum of 23 June 2016 to remain in or leave the EU has thrown the UK political scene – and the identities/subjectivities it nourishes or attempts to stifle – into considerable turmoil. The result has been particularly complex for Scotland since, as mentioned earlier, *all* its local council areas voted to remain in the EU but are now in a position where an exit from the European Union, which will take Scotland with it, seems inevitable. This is despite the fact that the country’s majority support for continuing membership in the EU has always been clear, and so has *The National’s* – on 23 June 2016 it broke from its own tradition and used a front-cover strapline (for that day only) announcing it as *The Newspaper that Supports Scotland in Europe*: since then, stretching well into 2017, many headlines and metaphoric images – e.g. entwined saltires/EU flags, handshakes also in the colours of both flags – have stressed a new ideological alignment between Scotland and the EU which attempts to bypass the rest of the UK.

Predictably, the position adopted by the SNP and by *The National* both before and after the EU referendum received much criticism (not to mention scorn) from opponents, mainly on the grounds that it was incoherent and therefore flawed: it was not logically possible, they argued, to be simultaneously *against* union with the rest of the UK (the SNP’s position during the 2014

independence referendum) and *for* union with Europe (its current position on the EU). The following brief extract from a letter to the Editor published in *The Herald* on 15 June 2016 – a week before the EU referendum – gives a flavour of this coverage:

THE SNP's attitude towards the in/out EU referendum is now beyond parody.

Here is a party who wanted (and held) an in/out UK referendum, labelled this as Scotland's "one opportunity", now hint that a rerun may be only a few years away, and yet don't want us even to hold a vote on continued EU membership ("Legitimacy warning over EU poll" *The Herald*, June 10).

They warn about the risks and dangers of leaving the EU, having spent most of 2014 dismissing warnings against leaving the UK as "scaremongering".

The critics of this position have, however, failed to understand neither *The National's* nor the SNP's position on these matters: they have, on the contrary, viewed it as an opportunity to engage in the "space of dissension" opened up by the EU referendum to counter the discourses of independence and corresponding subjectivities which the paper and the party promote. Such a strategy necessarily involves a struggle over what the ultimate goal of this discourse is. An overt discourse of independence is, as mentioned earlier, while certainly present (clustering in particular around election and referendum dates), not among the most frequently articulated within *The National* and the SNP's discursive frame. Their favoured discourses are those given on the left-hand side of the list presented earlier, where independence is seen not as an end in itself, but as a *means* to achieve the political objectives which those discourses express. If membership in the EU is more likely to lead to such an outcome, as the SNP and *The National* argue, then that is logically preferable to a continuation within the UK where these objectives are much less likely to be achieved. And so the circle, however unlikely it might seem, is effectively squared. Subjectivity, being socially constructed rather than inherent in nature, can also be deployed strategically.

Rather than *The National's* stance being internally contradictory, the two sides of the debate simply occupy antagonistic spaces within that particular discursive formation. In terms of national and political subjectivities and statehoods these processes are of course extremely complex: my current EU/UK passport for example – in its UK dimension always a statement of "technical" affiliation rather than cultural belonging – is already becoming obsolete, while

my sense of Scottish (stateless) nationhood remains, like that of many other Scots, very much alive. Both *The National* and the SNP have become important players in the debate regarding a possible future Scotland outside the UK but still as a member of the EU (ironically, having two Irish grandparents I could yet apply for Irish citizenship and thus technically regain the “EU” element of my identity). Such a scenario may not yet be a possibility, let alone ever a reality, but for *The National* the dream is still worth dreaming.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued, using *The National* as a case study, that essentialist understandings of national identity represent a significant obstacle to a workable understanding of how this concept operates and is mobilised in contemporary societies. It calls for a social constructionist approach where such identities are seen as constructs which can be put into play as elements of political and ideological strategies through the use of visual, linguistic and other (e.g. news hierarchy) discourses. This requires a clear understanding of the difference between topic and theme as understood within this broader discursive frame: the topic of much of *The National's* output may be independence, but its central theme is the quest for a society organised along social democratic lines in opposition to an increasingly challenged neoliberal hegemony.

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**Part III**

**Evolving Roles, Changing  
Narratives**



## CHAPTER 7

# Ask a Journalist: Roles, Relations and Subjectivity in Online Reader–Journalist Dialogues

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*If you could ask a journalist anything – what would it be? The Norwegian online paper VG.no was not sure what to expect when it launched its general “Question and Answers” forum in 2014 as an integrated part of a complex live studio. In this chapter, I examine which topics the readers raise and how the journalists respond to them in samples from 2014 and 2016. I also discuss which roles the journalists take on when acting as studio hosts, and to what extent these micro-dialogues contribute to a more open or even subjective kind of journalism. The analysis shows that the hosts throughout both periods alternate between four main roles: the neutral news oracle; the online pathfinder; the comforting psychologist and the like-minded buddy. The hosts mirror the styles and relationships suggested by the readers, unless the readers ask for their professional or private opinions. In that case, the hosts step back into a traditional news discourse. The relationship between each individual reader and the answering journalist therefore remains pseudo-intimate, as the host might get personal, but not subjective. However, the textual environment turns more hostile during 2015, and in the 2016 material the readers take a more critical stance towards VG.no’s journalism in general, and immigrants in particular. Consequently, the hosts increasingly act as verbal sparring partners, which constitutes a fifth and somewhat more confrontational journalistic role.*

**Keywords:** Digital journalism, interactivity, genre development, interpersonal meta-function, social semiotics



## Introduction

“I am reading somewhere else that there is a fear of attacks in Europe now. How realistic is this? I am terrified and troubled by anxiety. Best, Anna”

The question above is posed in the “Question and Answers” forum of Norway’s leading online paper *VG.no*, 4 July 2014.<sup>1</sup> The person who is supposed to answer is neither a psychologist nor a terror expert. She is a young, freshly educated journalist who at this moment happens to be studio host for *VG.no*’s fledgling round-the-clock news forum. How can she best respond to the scared reader? *VG.no*’s own news on the subject could definitely cause fear: American Intelligence claims that al-Qaida is in the process of developing an “invisible” bomb for terror attacks on airplanes, something that is currently causing stronger security checks than usual at European airports. Repeating the story may scare the reader even more. The intimate style of the question may rather call for a comforting answer, for instance by persuading the reader that she has nothing to worry about. But what kind of journalistic role would such an answer imply? What kind of relations are journalists expected to establish with their readers?

Both nationally and internationally, *VG.no* is considered a spearhead in experimenting with new ways to engage their readers. The media house has a long tradition of innovative online experimentation by trial and error, in particular when it comes to interactive features (Barland 2012, Lund 2013, Lund, Olsson & Hågvar 2016). *VG.no* frequently argues that the readers as a group always know more than any single journalist can know, and that dialogue therefore will bring more information to the news table. Moreover, dialogical features may enhance the readers’ engagement and loyalty to the newspaper, particularly if the readers perceive themselves as really noticed as individuals and treated with respect (Hermida & Thurman 2007). Anna’s question above also illustrates that being in touch with the newsroom can make a real difference to the individual reader’s perception of the news. In this context, *VG.no*’s Q&A forum is a highly relevant case for studying interactive innovations in online news media.

In this chapter, I will examine what kinds of questions *VG.no*’s journalists choose to answer, and what strategies they tend to use in their responses. I am

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1 For brevity, I will hereafter refer to “questions and answers” as “Q&A”. Readers’ nicknames have been altered.



**Figure 7.1.** VG Direkte Nyhetsdøgnet 5.7.2014 10.37 a.m. Facsimile reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

particularly interested in the implicit text norms for interpersonal symmetry and subjectivity. My research question is: *Which interpersonal relations are established between journalists and readers in VG.no's Q&A forum, and how subjective are the participants?*

## Background: From terror trial to general breaking news

VG.no's Q&A forum is an integrated part of a complex live studio called "VG Direkte Nyhetsdøgnet" ("VG Live 24-hours News", hereafter "Nyhetsdøgnet"). In 2014, the studio also included a running news feed with short updates, a video section with the potential for live streaming, and a Twitter feed dominated by statements from the emergency services (figure 7.1).

The first version of this studio was designed to cover the trial of the Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik in 2012. The idea had been circulating in the newsroom for some time, and the important trial gave VG.no the opportunity to realize it (Lund et al. 2016). For the next few years, the studio covered selected breaking stories. In May 2014, however, VG.no decided to open the studio on a permanent basis, turning it into a more general news format that provided short, immediate updates on a

diverse mix of breaking news. An important motive was to strengthen the bond with the readers, according to VG's Executive Editor Christian Brændshøi:

A crucial idea is that VG-journalists would be available for questions and input from the users at all times, and that we will make this communication visible on the front of VG Nett and VG Mobil. [...] At the same time, we open up more communication and interaction, and have the opportunity to be personal in our dialogue with the users. Being open about our journalistic practice ties us closer to people and adds an extra dimension to VG's distribution of news (Glesnes, 2014, June 11).

This change redefined the social function of the Q&A forum. Previously, the readers had asked about the specific story the studio was set up to cover. Now, the readers could ask whatever they wanted.

Nyhetsdøgnet proved itself viable. Towards 2016, *VG.no* narrowed and simplified the interface and included commercials, while keeping the mix of news updates, tweets and questions and answers (figure 7.2). Overall, Nyhetsdøgnet settled in as an integral part of *VG.no*. An important part of this process was the continuous and implicit negotiation between readers and journalists about which kinds of questions and answers they considered relevant and appropriate, and which interpersonal style they were supposed to use.



**Figure 7.2.** VG Direkte Nyhetsdøgnet 11.5.2016 11.25 a.m. Facsimile reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

## Theory, method and material: Building relations through text

When analyzing how interpersonal relations are represented and constructed in texts, *social semiotics* is a suitable theoretical framework. Halliday (2014) argues that any use of language serves three metafunctions: the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual. These metafunctions can be applied to multi-modal texts as well (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, Baldry & Thibault 2006). The *ideational* metafunction is the text's quality of constructing a certain representation of the world. For instance, the angle of a news story will inevitably affect the readers' perception of what has happened. The *interpersonal* metafunction is the text's quality of constructing a certain relationship between the communicative participants. For instance, a news text might construct the journalist as more powerful and knowledgeable than the readers, or it can establish a more symmetrical relationship by reaching out to the readers and asking for their interactive contribution or even help. Finally, the *textual* metafunction refers to the applied principles of cohesion and coherence that enable the text to be perceived as meaningful. For instance, we may ask how and to what extent the distinct elements of *VG.no*'s online news studio fit together to make up a coherent whole.

In the case of *Nyhetsdøgnet*, the interpersonal metafunction is crucial, as the main purpose of the text is to stay connected with the audience. We can identify different kinds of relations by analyzing features like style (formal or informal), modality (the degree of reservation or commitment to what is said) and speech acts (stating facts, making evaluations, making promises, asking questions, etc.). However, the ideational metafunction is important as well, as the social roles are closely connected to which kinds of questions the readers raise, and how they frame them. Some world views qualify as legitimate by receiving a proper response from the host, whereas others are met with discursively circuitous answers – if they get published at all. In the end, this also affects the textual metafunction, as the range of questions and social roles may or may not entail a coherent set of text norms. If the hosts act inconsistently when deciding which questions to answer and how to answer them, the readers might struggle to grasp the social meaning of the studio, and vice versa.

The coherence and stabilization of text norms is furthermore a matter of genre. According to Miller (1984), genres are rhetorical strategies developed

to handle the exigency of recurrent rhetorical situations. Thus *VG.no*'s initial terror trial studio was not a genre; it was merely an innovative format. But as the format evolved, it has gradually achieved a more stable and general social function, namely the combined task of providing immediate news updates and strengthening the bond with the audience. The analysis below will therefore also describe the formation and evolution of a new genre, as suggested above.

Obviously, *Nyhetsdøgnet* shares several features with existing genres. It is closely related to journalistic live blogs, as studied by Thurman and Walters (2013) and O'Mahony (2014). Several online papers launch such blogs to cover specific stories in real time, very much like *Nyhetsdøgnet* did between 2012 and 2014. The above studies confirm that the format<sup>2</sup> is increasingly used, and ask whether live blogs will eventually supplant traditional news stories online. What distinguishes *Nyhetsdøgnet* from most live blogs, however, is the intention of covering a full range of news simultaneously, the complexity of features within the interface, and the close dialogue with the readers. From previous studies of interactive journalistic formats we know that hosts may need to take on a complex journalist role in order to meet different kinds of questions with relevant responses (Beyer et al. 2007). A study by Steensen (2012) suggests that both the host and the audience might prefer to assign the host the role of an expert, taking control over the conversation. We might therefore expect the reader–journalist dialogues to differ somewhat from the discourses of social media or news stories' commentary fields, which are sometimes found to be quite confrontational or hostile, and more focused on stating personal views than asking for others' evaluations (Winsvold 2013, Hughey & Daniels 2013).

The analysis below is based on two samples of questions and answers from the forum, and two qualitative interviews with selected studio hosts.

The main text sample consists of all questions and answers posted between 28 June and 14 July 2014, just a few weeks after *VG.no* had launched the round-the-clock version of the studio. By then, the readers had had some time to get to know the new format, whereas the text norms were still not properly settled. This means that journalists and readers found themselves implicitly

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2 Both O'Mahony (2014) and Thurman and Walters (2013) refer to the live blog as a *format*, but I believe there are good reasons to rather consider it a *genre*, cf. Hågvar (2016).

negotiating how the studio in general, and the forum in particular, should be used. I will therefore analyze the sample qualitatively in order to identify topical and relational patterns.

For comparison, I have retrieved a second sample between 7 and 11 May 2016. Due to increased reader activity, this shorter period contains about the same amount of posts as the 2014 material (ca. 50). The 2016 sample can indicate whether the text norms have changed since 2014, possibly evolving towards a more stabilized and manifest genre.

To be able to understand how the studio hosts perceive their own role, I have also conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with one of the hosts from each sample. I will be referring to the 2014 host as «host A» and the 2016 host as «host B». Both hosts were active in both periods, but they were more active in respectively 2014 and 2016. They were interviewed separately in December 2016.

## 2014: Six kinds of questions

In the early months of Nyhetsdøgnet, none of VG.no's journalists were specifically employed as studio hosts. Instead, they volunteered for this role in turns. According to host A, those who wanted to be hosts were often young shift workers in temporary positions, whereas the most experienced journalists preferred other tasks. The host was responsible for what was published in all sections, including answering the readers' questions. Host A recalls no specific guidelines for selecting and answering the questions. She would make running decisions in dialogue with her news editor. Thus, the following patterns of representations and relations reflect continuous journalistic evaluations rather than a predetermined strategy for how the studio should be used. The questions from 2014 fall into six main categories.

### 1. Questions about news stories

Some readers ask about matters they find insufficiently covered in the news:

**Mr. Hansen:** Hi, what are the charges against Sarkozy?

**Jamilah:** Dear Vg, what is going on in Palestine right now is very sad and inhuman. And they need all the help they can get. Will any relief organizations be sent, like the Red Cross etc.?

**Ayan M:** Hi, vg, I wonder if Israel wants peace?

As we can see from the examples, the questions range from simple requests for facts (Mr. Hansen), via fact requests combined with expressing an attitude (Jamilah), to more overarching questions that call for a more elaborate and possibly subjective view from the journalist (Ayan M). In general, questions about the news are answered in the impersonal style of the common news discourse, often supplied by links to previous stories on *VG.no*. For instance, the host answers the tricky Israel question by recommending a previous interview with the embassy's spokesperson. The host obviously takes care not to step into the opinion journalists' domain of interpreting and explaining the news. Still, there seems to be a small opening for general empathy, as the initial sentence of the answer to Jamilah indicates:

Hi Jamilah,

Such a conflict is sad for all parties involved. From what VG knows, Doctors Without Borders and the Red Cross are supposed to be in the conflict areas. [...]

## 2. Media critical questions

A distinct group of the questions are mainly rhetorical ones, aimed at ridiculing or criticizing certain aspects of *VG's* journalism. For instance, Sunniva believes one of the police tweets published in the studio suffers from imprecise language:

Cf message from the police at 07:17 about the fire in Sel; Guess it's not often the police announce that they are about to start a fire?? Or that they are planning to commit a crime ;-)?<sup>3</sup>

The police tweet read:

Regarding forest fire in Sel. Watches on the location during the night – helicopter on stand-by – planned start up again at 0900 today.

There is of course a slight possibility that Sunniva really has misunderstood the tweet, but it is unlikely. The studio host must therefore choose whether she should join in on the joke or clarify what the police meant. She does the latter:

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3 I have tried to keep the original grammatical errors etc. in the translation of the quotes.

Good morning!

These messages can be a bit cryptic as Twitter demands you to limit yourself to maximum 140 signs. As I understand it, what was planned to start up again was further extinguishing, but now it turns out it is not necessary. The local newspaper Gudbrandsdølen Dagingen reports that the fire is out: followed by URL

Sunniva's attempt to establish a common, implicit humor fails. Maybe she has missed the genre; ironic comments of this kind are rare. However, quite a few readers explicitly criticize VG's writing or coverage of particular stories:

**Arne:** Oh I pity you poor, poor Oslo folks, it was raining more than this in Bergen yesterday, where was VG then?

**Torgeir:** Can someone in VG tell me why you have 20 stories on a totally meaningless football match as top stories, when there is a war in the Middle East which concerns millions of people's lives?

In such cases the host generally answers in a fair and polite way:

We are monitoring the situation on the Gaza strip continuously, and we will continue to do so. At the moment we have several stories on the situation in the Middle East on our front page.

However, if the readers make too problematic assumptions, the host may dispute them:

**Stig:** Hi, reading your new update from 05:56. Why have you not included the information that civilians were flocking towards the building after the Israelis had sent warnings of a bombing?

**Answer:** Hi Stig. What are your sources that this was the case?

The forum does not allow Stig to reply directly, but he passes on documentation via another question and actually gets the information included in a subsequent story on *VG.no*. Such instances of real dialogue with readers providing useful material are still very few.

### 3. Questions about the weather report

One of the largest group of questions in early July 2014 was about the weather. There is no reason why *VG.no*'s journalists should have any better meteorological



skills than the common reader, and readers who are able to post questions online, should presumably be capable of using online weather services as well. Nevertheless, there is a stream of questions like this:

**Sonia:** Hi. I wonder if there is going to be a lot of rain and thunder next week in Oslo? Have checked the forecast, is it as bad as the last time? I'm very scared of thunder and lightning. Is there any chance it will change?

**Ronald:** Hi, how is the weather going to be in Asker today, have heard there is going to be rain is this correct?

Again, some questions merely require facts (Ronald), whereas others expose an additional need for comfort (Sonia). The host tries her best to answer in a supportive way:

Hi, Sonia!

Sadly, it seems to be quite rainy, and possibly even thunderstorms, from Monday on. According to the current forecast, anyway. On *pent.no* [*VG.no*'s own weather service], you can follow and compare the forecasts from both Yr and Storm: [URL]

We should be aware that the sample is from a period when parts of Norway were flooded, and there had been a number of news stories about the weather. Still, the majority of questions are not related to extreme weather at all. It rather seems like the readers inspire each other; if one of them asks about the weather at his or her whereabouts, it is often followed by similar questions from others.

The fact that readers prefer to ask *VG.no* a question and wait for an answer instead of checking online weather services right away, is puzzling. Still, a similar feature occurs in the fourth group of questions: traffic related ones.

#### 4. Questions about traffic and driving directions

Because of the current flood, several roads were closed or hard to drive on at the time I collected this sample. This may be the initial reason why a great deal of the questions are about driving directions:

**Filip:** Going up to Skeikampen tomorrow – and am not very well acquainted with the local area. Starting in Vormsund... How do I drive?

These readers obviously believe that the journalist is updated on which roads are closed or not. Occasionally, the host tries to link to the traffic advice from highway authorities, but nevertheless ends up searching in Google Maps on behalf of the reader: “I am not familiar with this area, but Google Maps suggest you drive Rv3 and E136 from Hamar.” Sometimes even Google cannot solve the issue:

**Vilde:** Driving to Ålesund tomorrow morning. Which road should we take?

**Answer:** Hi Vilde. Hard to tell, where are you driving from?

In general, the readers often seem to prefer asking *VG.no* about their everyday problems instead of checking with the primary source of information, which may be only a phone call away:

**Grete:** Is Strandtorget shopping mall in Lillehammer closed? Lies close to the E6 and the parking lot is usually flooded. Q is then if the water has risen a lot?

**Answer:** Hi! They are open!

## 5. Questions about the host’s private life or working conditions

One reader has picked his nickname from a song by the Norwegian veteran rock singer Åge Aleksandersen from Namsos, and has noticed something striking about the young, female host’s profile picture:

**Levva Livet:** You look a bit like Åge Aleksandersen. Are you related?

**Answer:** Hi, you! Do you mean me? No, but I’m also from Namsos, and I am of course a big fan of Åge :)

It is fairly common that readers try to establish a private conversation like this with the host. Contrary to the failed attempt to make fun of the police’s tweet, the hosts answer posts like these in a personal and humorous style. Thereby, the readers are implicitly assured that questions like this lie within the genre:

**Jon “Karl” Pettersen:** Hi Stein-Erik! Why don’t you tell us a bit about how things are rolling at VG now in the middle of the night? Is there still a huge bunch of you there, or are you all alone? Can you put your feet on the table and sleep, or is it work?

[New message:] Some extra information: Here at Marbella the weather is nice and warm, and I am having a cool lager on the veranda before I hit the sack. Would like to hear “Africa” with Toto if possible.

**Answer:** Hi, Jon. What’s rolling in VG now is that I’m sitting here trying to keep you updated on what’s happening around the world during the night, together with the nice and pleasant Victoria. Things aren’t cooking as much as in the daytime and evening, but I can’t write here that I put my feet on the table, in case my bosses should read it. I would be happy to change Akersgata for Marbella, too. Hehe, you can at least get a link to the song on YouTube, we have to be that service-minded. [URL]

Being private in this kind of question is apparently not in conflict with the journalistic mission. The host may chit-chat and play along, and may even share her music preferences, as long as she does not state subjective views on news matters.<sup>4</sup>

## 6. Questions about what to ask

The readers obviously have some problems grasping the social function of the live studio. The last group of questions is a kind of meta-discourse – readers asking what they are supposed to ask about, or how the studio really works:

**Ola:** Fascinating, this service. How does it work? Is there a person who picks and writes everything? A bit like Twitter. How many keep the site open now? How many are the most on a regular day?

The six categories presented above suggest that the Q&A forum is receptive to a wide range of ideational meanings. It is evident that the discourse differs distinctly from the discourse of conventional user commentaries in online newspapers. As mentioned above, research on debates in online news has shown that posts are often conflict oriented, in the sense that it seems more important to argue for one’s own point of view and criticize the opponent’s arguments than to seek mutual agreement. The conflict may include conspiratorial thinking, personal attacks and other forms of domination techniques (Winsvold 2013, Nising 2013, Trygg 2012). In *Nyhetsdøgnet* anno 2014, we do not find much of this. One reason could be that the forum is pre-moderated,

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4 For simplicity, I refer to the host as «her» or «she» when I am not aiming at one particular person. In reality, the hosts are both male and female.

which enables the host to pick the questions she prefers. However, one of the hosts states in an answer that he “tries to answer most questions”. Another explanation could be that because the reader has to direct the question at a specific, identified individual, the interpersonal relationship encourages popping a real question instead of tossing another opinion into the crowd. This brings us to the investigation of the interpersonal metafunction, and the exploration of which roles the studio host needs to adjust to.

## 2014: Four journalistic roles

To answer the six kinds of questions, the host needs to interchange between four distinct roles.

### 1. The neutral news oracle

We have seen above that questions about the news are often answered in a quite neutral, distant voice resembling that of a news story. Sometimes, the answers look like short news items in themselves, except for the personal opening greeting, which seems to be mandatory:

**BoGo:** Has Lebanon made any statement about Israel’s military action? Heard earlier that two rockets from Lebanon were shot towards Israel, but have there been any further actions/statements besides this?

**Answer:** Hi BoGo, Thanks for your question. Friday morning an area in northern Israel was hit by a missile shot out from Lebanon, according to the Israeli army. The spokesperson for the Israeli Defence Forces said that the country has responded to today’s rocket attacks from Lebanon with artillery. Israel suspected a Palestinian group sympathizing with Hamas to be behind the attack. This is according to NTB. At the same time, a source from Lebanese security confirmed that up to three rockets were sent from their side of the border.

The answer is stripped of any evaluation of the kind we would expect to find in a more personal narrative (Labov and Waletzky 1967), such as “As you can see, the fight goes on.” Furthermore, even though BoGo asks an explicit yes/no question, the answer is implicit. BoGo might not even find it relevant: He already knows about the rockets and is asking for the Lebanese view, but the answer only provides new information about the Israeli reactions. The text is

also inconsistent when it comes to deixis – ways of referring to the situational context. Even though the answer is published on a Friday, the answer initially refers to “Friday morning” before continuing with the deictic marker “today’s rockets”. The “Friday” reference is probably influenced by the traditional news discourse, as naming the weekday instead of just stating “today” would make the dating more precise for late readers. Altogether, these features make the answer impersonal and construct an asymmetrical relation between the uninformed reader and the well-informed, impersonal and professional news medium – in accordance with the relationship we can observe in ordinary news stories.

The host may also turn to the role as neutral news oracle when she needs to answer angry or sarcastic comments, and when the readers ask for her interpretations or opinions. The discursive discrepancy will then be a signal that the questions in some way violate the text norms of the genre, thereby receiving another kind of response than they expect.

## 2. The online pathfinder

Often, the host answers a question by providing a link to a website with more information. This is usually the case when readers ask about something they could have figured out themselves online. However, the role can also be a strategy to avoid answering questions that are vague or too private:

**Hi. What do you “journalists” earn ? :)**: Hi wondered how much you journalists these days make a year?

**Answer:** Hi, Here you will find an overview of the salary statistics for Norwegian media corporations in 2013: [URL]

When the readers prefer to ask *VG.no* about the weather forecast, opening hours and traffic directions instead of searching for the answers themselves, the interpersonal function of the forum comes to the fore. Questions and answers of this kind both presuppose and construct a relationship of trust between the newsroom and the readers. The same mechanism can be observed in other online fora where the users share a common interest or identity: “Going out for a night on the town, does anybody know when the bars close tonight?” (*Kvinneguiden.no* 25.5.2015). It establishes a quite intimate discourse community (Swales 1990) with more symmetrical relations than we

found for the role of the neutral news oracle. In this sense, *VG.no*'s ambition of bringing the readers closer has succeeded.

Obviously, the relationship is also determined by the host's reaction. And the host does tend to write in a more personal style when answering "pathfinding" questions than when answering general news questions:

Nice to hear that you would like to subscribe. For more information you can enter this site: [URL]

[...] Have you tried VG's weather service [www.pent.no](http://www.pent.no)? Here you will get the forecasts from both weather services at the same time. :)

[...] But there is always a possibility that E6 will open again tomorrow. Follow the traffic messages here: [URL]

Contrary to the news oracle, the online pathfinder may personalize her answers with smileys and slightly lowered modality. However, because the host merely functions as an intermediary, the personalization is modest. An analogy could be the smile and appearance of a friendly clerk at an information desk. In fact, host A mentions "the service-minded" host as a sub-category of the pathfinder, since an important task is to answer general customer questions about *VG*, like the subscription example above.

### 3. The comforting psychologist

Some of the readers have bigger worries than finding their way to Ålesund or deciding whether to bring an umbrella or not. They are in search of a mutually understanding journalistic voice, hoping the host can bring some comfort or reassuring facts. The question I mentioned in the introduction is in this category:

**Anna:** I am reading somewhere else that there is a fear of attacks in Europe now. How realistic is this? I am terrified and troubled by anxiety. Best, Anna

The host tries her best to ease the reader's fear, while at the same time staying on the subject:

**Answer:** Hi, Anna. I guess you are referring to the note of concern that American Intelligence has published, in which they suspect that terror groups in Syria and

Yemen are in the process of making a new kind of “invisible” bomb – which neither metal detectors nor bomb dogs can discover. From what we know so far the threat is not very specific.

In the concluding sentence, the host downplays a story that most newsrooms presented as a much more serious threat the day before. *VG.no*’s own story was headlined “Fear ‘invisible’ plane bomb. Stronger security check at several European airports”. In the text, *VG.no* points to “intelligence information” saying that “bomb experts from the Yemen-based al-Qaida group AQAP have travelled to Syria to meet members of Jabhat al-Nusra – another group affiliated with al-Qaida – to develop a bomb that is not exposed before the terrorist is on board the plane”. The story stresses that “the al-Qaida group AQAP has been responsible for several of the most sophisticated attempts to strike on a plane in the last few years”, and these attempts are then carefully listed. When the press contact at Oslo Airport claims that they have not received any instructions on stronger control, it appears almost like a dangerous exception, since “a range of European airports” have sharpened their security at the USA’s request. *VG.no*’s closest competitor *Dagbladet.no* dramatizes the story even more. Their headline reads “Al-Qaida’s best chemist has developed a bomb that is not discovered in security checks”. Above, we see two disturbing pictures of the dangerous chemist, the caption starting with the word “FEARED” in capital letters. The lead follows: “Fearing attacks in Europe now: Here is the story of Ibrahim (32).”

Newspapers often use such rhetorical techniques to trigger the readers’ emotions, in this case a sense of fear. When conversing with the readers directly on the forum, though, the journalists may have to do the opposite. In the 2014 forum, it is hard to find signs of exaggerations, strong bias, personification, contrasting, polarization and other features we often associate with a “tabloid” news discourse. The studio host cannot answer: “Yes, we really have to watch out for this extremely dangerous bomb maker from Yemen!” Instead, the forum fills a unique role as a counter-discourse to the most speculative aspects of the news. Host A recalls:

There were several such questions. [...] I understand well that she got nervous. It is interesting that you call it “the comforting psychologist”, because I have not thought about it that way. But you may be right, the idea behind [answers like that] might actually have been to comfort.

The host may get even more personal than in the above example. Here, another girl is afraid of thunderstorms:

**Lise:** I just cannot figure out those weather reports. See they vary a lot from yr and storm. Live at Romerike and hate thunder and lightning. Do you know if anything like that is coming here and how long it will last? I am scared.

**Answer:** Hi, Lise! I can see thunder is predicted at Romerike, but yes, the forecasts seem to vary a bit. If you use pent.no you can compare Yr and Storm and possibly learn some more. I guess you just have to steel yourself and prepare for thunder and lightning. It is not much fun, but then again, it usually turns out just fine :)

In this role, the studio host balances acting as a comforting friend and a provider of information. As long as she does not give any personal advice, the text norms apparently allow expressions of empathy and comfort. In retrospect, though, host A believes that in some cases a better solution would be to cite a reassuring source instead of taking on the comforting role herself, as she could be at risk of stating facts that have not really been confirmed. Still, for questions like Lise's above, there is obviously a need for a certain intimacy that exceeds the role of the ordinary news journalist. I call this role "the comforting psychologist" to highlight the focus on mental issues, although one could also argue that the relationship just as much resembles one between friends. Fully symmetrical relations between pals, however, are best described through the host's fourth possible role, outlined below.

#### 4. The like-minded buddy

"We have a somewhat more personal tone at times", says Executive Editor Christian Brændshøi about the live studio. He uses the expressions "informal tone", "loose format" and "personified style" and draws parallels to social media (Hågvar 2016, p. 494). It is not hard to find examples of the studio host acting like the reader's buddy. The journalist who is compared to Åge Aleksandersen, responds in a lively manner with both a smiley and personal information, and the host who is encouraged to tell what is "rolling" in VG during the night, does it with humor and self-deprecation on the reader's terms. Oral phrases like "Hehe, you can at least get a link to the song on YouTube" resemble the style of social media.



Most questions in the “private” category are answered in this way; those who approach the host with a personal question get a personal answer in return. It is interesting that the hosts even bother to answer questions like this. The ideational content has probably no interest for others than the submitters, and it has nothing to do with news journalism. When they still do, it could be explained by the interpersonal metafunction: The studio hosts may wish to appear cool, friendly and forthcoming, and maybe also illustrate that they happily receive all kinds of questions. By the summer of 2014, only 4-5 questions were published on a regular day, and the live studio’s social relevance would drop severely if it did not generate traffic and interactivity. Just staying in touch then becomes a rhetorical aim of its own. In Roman Jakobson’s terms we could say that this role highlights the *phatic* function of the language, “messages primarily serving to establish, to prolong, or to discontinue communication” (Jakobson 1960, p. 355).

Host A agrees that the questions could get quite intimate:

I have more than once been proposed to, asked on a date and things like that. I have not let those questions through. However, sometimes it has been like a pleasant break at work to communicate a bit informally. I have never felt any discomfort or had any negative experiences with the personal questions.

In 2014, then, most of the personal and informal questions were quite nice and innocent. During the next two years, this changed quite severely.

## 2016: Being a sparring partner in a hostile environment

The comparative sample from May 2016 shows signs of both genre stabilization and development. The forum still contained questions about the weather and other trivial issues, and both of the interviewed hosts agree that the four journalistic roles from 2014 still applied. By now, the studio was no longer run by random volunteers. Instead, four journalists were employed as full-time studio hosts, which indicates that *VG.no* was strongly committed to the studio.

The most striking development since 2014 is that the majority of questions were now a response to the current news (70 % of the sample). Furthermore, about half of the questions took a critical stance towards the host and/or *VG.no*’s journalism. Some readers pointed out factual errors or grammar

mistakes in news stories, whereas others expressed their political views, often on immigration:

**CharlieRiot:** Have you reflected upon that the way you have strangled the debate in Norway for years about immigration (last exemplified by [teacher and Pegida-leader] Max Hermansen), is radicalizing Norwegians. And I haven't even touched upon economy/safety.

**Vegard:** Why is VG not writing about an attack on the police of Borås, Sweden yesterday where a woman was stabbed. It was a gang of boys and perhaps of boys with an immigrant background since you are ignoring this?

**Paul:** When you are so naïve that you do not see where Sweden is going, I am sure you can understand why the circulation of Norwegian papers is decreasing. Why don't you put the police station fire on the front page?

Some of the posts were not even questions, but mere statements:

**Gentleman:** 2.5 billion to the asylum seekers ... there are obviously no limits as to how much money there is for such measures. What about 2.5 billion to old people's homes and dignified aging for the very oldest? Grrr ...

To some extent, the discourse of the Q&A forum had thereby moved towards the conflict-oriented discourse of the readers' comments below ordinary news stories. In most cases, the studio host remained quite neutral and simply referred to published stories on the matter, as in 2014. However, when presuppositions turned too controversial, even the host might answer in a polemic style:

**Marius:** Why are not Swedish authorities engaging the army to clean out these districts with criminal immigrants?

**Answer:** Hi, Marius! This is because it would be a massive scandal and a huge tragedy if the authorities intervened and "cleaned out" a certain district where most of the inhabitants probably have not committed any crime at all. Still, it is probably correct that this is a problem the police cannot solve by themselves, but rather something that the society as a whole needs to address. Read more about parallel communities in Sweden here.

Host B recalls that the discourse of the questions suddenly turned more hostile around the summer of 2015 and confirms that it remained so throughout 2016. She believes the main reason is the sudden increase of refugees to Europe:

When I came back from my summer holiday [in 2015], I found that the questions had become so racist that I had a hard time dealing with them, they had turned so mean. So I will say that this has changed a lot. I do not know if it is because of Nyhetsdøgnet itself, or if those who are very active in the commentary fields have just turned to Nyhetsdøgnet.

Towards the end of 2016, the majority of questions the hosts receive are racist or hostile in other ways, often aimed towards media in general or identified journalists. Host B has several times had to report death threats to the police and block specific readers. She estimates that 19 out of 20 questions are not published, often because they violate Norwegian law. Furthermore, the widespread hostile discourse in the questions that remain unpublished, might eventually affect the tone of the answers that *are* published, such as the answer to Marius above:

A lot of this does not get out. And we are sitting there browsing through it, and I can feel that I get emotionally affected myself because it is so coarse, so nasty. Both because it is such a mean way to speak about other people, if they have a different skin colour or whatever, but we are also wallowing in an enormous disgust for the media. So I think that when he answers like that, it is because he has read 20 messages and brings them with him into that answer, and possibly reads even more into that question than is really there. I can sometimes find myself interpreting everything in the worst possible way, that everyone is posting with a racist agenda. So even if it is just a question, when I read “criminal immigrants” I get so discouraged that I ... Then you answer that it would be a “massive scandal” or something like that.

Host B suggests a fifth journalistic role, namely the one “in which we discuss and sometimes even quarrel with the readers”. We might call this role *the sparring partner*. Host B stresses that when stepping into this role, she is careful to base her arguments on facts, not opinions. A lot of the questions build on evidentially wrong assumptions which can be met within a traditional truth-seeking journalistic discourse. However, host A points out that some presuppositions are too unethical to respond to at all:

There are many who claim that so-and-so politician has killed so-and-so. Totally crazy things. And then they ask: “Why don’t you write about that?” Obviously, I

cannot let that question through without also publishing the claim. So we will not answer those questions.

This discourse of hostility was rarely to be found in the 2014 material, even among the unpublished questions, according to host A. In addition to host B's explanation, this might suggest that the studio has been gradually adjusted to previously known genres and discourses, in this case how readers are used to commenting upon news stories in commentary fields below the stories or in social media. At the same time, the hosts answer far more questions than before, and the majority of published contributors seem to agree on discussing the news. As the ideational and interpersonal discrepancies are reduced, we may say that the genre is settling. The impact of the genre was further confirmed when a travel agency copied the interface of the studio and used it for content marketing on *VG.no* in January 2016, and several times later. As the purpose of most content marketing of this kind is to imitate journalistic genres, the example is a kind of "approved" stamp for the studio as a functional genre within the text culture.

## Conclusions

I opened this chapter by asking: *Which interpersonal relations are established between journalists and readers in VG.no's Q&A forum, and how subjective are the participants?*

The analysis has found four distinct journalist roles that run throughout the period, and a fifth role that has been evolving since 2015. The four basic roles of the host represent four stages of increasingly symmetrical relations, from the distanced news voice to the buddy-like chattering voice. The host mirrors the style and relationship suggested by the reader, as long as the question does not require her professional point of view. When readers start asking questions of a political or possibly controversial nature, she steps back into the sober news discourse and refuses to contribute any analysis or opinions in her answers. The same thing happens if readers try to engage the host in satire or jokes about news stories.

Host A states that although there are no official guidelines, she is never in doubt about which role to take on: "It is difficult to describe how I make those judgements, but it all comes natural to me."

These findings suggest that there are some stable text norms for the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions of the Q&A forum. On the whole, the host is allowed to be *personal*, but never *subjective*. She is clearly not supposed to step over the line to the opinion journalists' domain, although questions that ask for such evaluations seem to have increased during this period. The task of informing the audience is really about collecting and repeating facts that are already published elsewhere, either in *VG.no*'s regular news stories or on other websites. Thus an important part of the forum's function is to recycle old news. However, the development of the hostile readers' discourse towards 2016 has stretched these boundaries to some extent. As the fifth, more argumentative journalistic role has evolved, the hosts have become more inclined to debate the readers, although in a modest way.

Considering the textual metafunction of the forum, internal coherence was strengthened from 2014 to 2016, as the range of topics and discourses narrowed. Somewhat paradoxically, the stream of hostile discourse actually makes it easier for the readers to make sense of the Q&A forum – you know what to expect – whereas the journalists find their roles increasingly challenging.

Do the hosts' diversified roles contribute to further openness about *VG.no*'s journalism, as intended? The answer depends on which kind of openness we are talking about. Host B argues that the forum makes *VG.no* more open about *what* the journalists know, and *how* they know. By 2016, the hosts must regularly defend their stories by pointing to particular sources or confirming that they are aware of certain facts that some readers claim to be lacking. Host B states that “this should be an ambition, because how we have been thinking is not always self-evident”. On the other hand, journalistic *evaluations* of, e.g., a given source's credibility or the choice of a certain angle are rare – in fact totally absent from the analyzed material. At most, stories might be vaguely defined as “important” or “not prioritized today”. The small glimpses readers get of the newsroom's inner life, are utterly trivial: “I can't write here that I put my feet on the table, in case my bosses should read it.” Readers who ask for journalistic judgements, then, are instead met with (often previously known) facts: “At the moment we have several stories on the situation in the Middle East on our front page.”

Therefore, the hosting roles do not serve as grounds for more subjectivity in journalism. If anything, the pseudo-subjective style that sometimes comes to the surface is really about mirroring the readers' style of approach and telling

them what they want to hear – although the sparring partner role represents a slight exception in the 2016 material. The openness, then, does not lie in the ideational information provided, but in the interpersonal style that in certain areas constructs a more symmetrical relationship between readers and journalists.

What *has* turned more subjective, on the other hand, is the role of the reader. The major increase in prejudiced and harsh questions is somewhat unraveling the symmetrical relationship that the journalists strive to establish. Somewhat paradoxically, it has been the readers who have become open about their views and practices, instead of the journalists being open about theirs, as was officially intended.

In a broader perspective, these findings touch upon ongoing scholarly debates about media innovations, genre development, user involvement and journalistic transparency. The evolution of VG's Q&A forum illustrates how current ideas of user involvement and transparent journalism might come in conflict with more traditional journalistic norms and discourses, such as the distinction between news and views. Thus, the present study echoes conflicting discourses on transparency, as identified by Vos & Craft (2016). Moreover, the study raises questions about how the connection with the actively contributing audience might affect the newsroom's conception of the audience as a whole, cf. Barnes' discussion of "the ecology of participation" (2016). Further case studies of similar genres or formats could dig deeper into such matters.

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## CHAPTER 8

# The Journalism of “Returning”

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*The Marikana Massacre of August 2012 calls into question existing methods of South African news production during times of national crisis. This paper examines two diverse communication strategies that contributed to the problematic media coverage ahead of the shooting. It then considers the very different approach utilised by two media teams in its aftermath; referred to by the reporters as a journalism that required “returning” to the affected communities several times to better understand their socio-economic realities. Through the consideration of notions of Ubuntu journalism, it is clear that the individual exposure afforded in the wake of the crisis should have been better employed throughout. This would have allowed for a better public understanding of the dynamics involved, and the economic realities faced by those families on a day-to-day basis.*

**Keywords:** crisis journalism, individual exposure, source subjectivity, Ubuntuism

## Introduction

On 16 August 2012, South African police fired live bullets into a miners’ protest at the Lonmin mining company, killing 34 of those gathered there. Much of the television footage of what was briefly termed as the “Marikana massacre” (and then later “crisis”) was literally over the shoulders of the police. This was a poignant visual confirmation of the overall media coverage of the entire scenario from its beginning. There was almost no coverage from the miners’

or their families' perspective. Approximately 3000 men had gathered at Lonmin mines as part of a protest for better wages in order to improve their well-being and standard of living. Yet, due to communication strategies adopted by both the media and the miners themselves, the dire circumstances in which they lived were not conveyed to the public, who instead were presented with images of an unruly mass of protesters seemingly unprepared to negotiate. The coverage of this incident, and the failure of the media to provide critical and informed coverage of the crisis, has been heralded by many media analysts and practitioners as a watershed moment in South Africa, with the majority agreeing that "the media let us down" (Wasserman, 2013). This chapter considers how a lack of individual exposure<sup>1</sup> and subjectivity facilitated the crisis, as it did not create a better understanding of the miners' demands amongst the general public. It concludes by demonstrating how the post-crisis coverage, specifically a supplement titled *Fate of the Families* published one year later, incorporated these two significant elements, and by doing so, allowed for improved representation of the realities of the families affected. It may be argued that the use of more personalised narratives in order to demonstrate the plight of a community is in many ways compatible with the African media ethic of Ubuntuism.

## Marikana 16 August 2012

The past decade has seen a growing number of wildcat strikes in the mining sector in South Africa, with many occurring between May and September each year. A wildcat strike occurs when workers take industrial action outside the organisation or approval of the relevant union. In August 2012, one such instance occurred at the platinum mine owned by Lonmin at Marikana, an area close to Rustenburg in northern South Africa. The dispute was originally covered by the national media as a labour negotiation for a wage increase that had escalated into a full strike as the trade union, workers and mine management failed to reach an agreement. There were sporadic outbreaks of violence that the media attributed to conflicts between the two established trade unions, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Association of

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<sup>1</sup> Understood to be the use of personalised narratives to 'expose' or uncover facts or objective reality through the use of storytelling techniques (Steensen, chapter 2).

Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), and their members. This suggested that normal systems of negotiation had broken down, and it raised the question of legality. While labour laws uphold the right to strike, labour action must occur within traditional bargaining frameworks. Thus, the event was referred to as being a wildcat strike, and the police were called to the scene to establish order.

It was true that the workers were no longer operating under the trade union. Believing that the sparring unions were not actually representing their best interests, the Rock Drill Operators decided to appoint their own representatives and then drafted a memorandum outlining their poor working and living conditions justifying their request for a significant raise. It was triple their current earnings.<sup>2</sup> Without fully understanding the realities of those individuals and the families relying on them, such a large raise could not be justified by the media when reporting the demands to the public. It is at this stage that a more personalised narrative may have lent more urgency and clarity to the situation. These narratives may have included the following two points identified by Hayem (2015): the Rock Drill Operators often face the most danger in the extraction process due to their use of explosives; and secondly, due to high unemployment in the area, it is not unusual to find that miners are the sole source of income for their families. It is a high-risk position in terms of both personal safety and community welfare.

Despite the large and often vocal gathering (in terms of chants and singing), the miners' individual voices were noticeably absent in the media coverage. This has been attributed to two significant communication approaches adopted by the parties involved in the labour dispute responsible for representation. The first was the one adopted by the media. It may be traced to established international patterns of coverage of trade unions where greater emphasis is placed on industry and what big business thinks, rather than the plight of the workers. This will be discussed in more detail later.

The second was part of a communication strategy adopted by the miners themselves. A desire to be recognised, coupled with the decision to speak directly to their employers about their conditions, meant that the miners broke from the trade unions to broker a deal by themselves (Hayem, 2015). Aware that there was a danger that they would be perceived as renegades, it was

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<sup>2</sup> At the time, the average salary was approximately R4000 (280€) a month.

decided to emphasise the fact that the workers themselves were united in their goal, and thus all mobile phones were switched off. This created what Tongia & Wilson (2007, as cited by (Walton, 2014)) describe as a form of self-imposed “network exclusion”: individuals were not allowed to use their own social networks to promote a collective cause, but rather the cause was strengthened through the unity of the group and its coordination. It was imperative to the workers that no single person stood out as the “face”. Even their appointed spokesperson remained anonymous and was referred to as “the man in the green blanket”<sup>3</sup> by journalists wishing to attribute material to that source. The fact that many miners could not afford the airtime required to engage with social media online, nor had airtime for lengthy calls, helped the collective maintain that consent. Those who did try to break the silence had to resort to a free service of “please call me” texts to journalists due to their financial conditions (Walton, 2014). The situation was further complicated by the inability of the miners to adequately or eloquently express the reasons for the wage increase themselves, due to most having little formal education. This, combined with a poor grasp of English, limited their ability to address a larger audience. Had the miners been better informed as to how best to engage with the media, they may have rethought this strategy. It may have been effective in terms of demonstrating solidarity, but it was not that effective in terms of building empathy or mobilising support amongst the general public. Individual exposure that allows for personalised narratives has been shown to have more impact in this regard. Perhaps allowing the media the possibility of literally and figuratively engaging with the miners could have altered the frames employed, allowing for better representation and understanding of their daily struggles.

The chosen tactic also created more unintended complications. The miners were enacting a lot of cultural heritage as part of their chosen negotiation strategy. They emphasised oral tradition, rites and rituals. Oral traditions allow for the construction and dissemination of “shared experiences”, foundations that build a sense of community and belonging. Hayem (2015) notes that by making the decision to gather on the *koppie* (hill) close to the mine, the strikers were following the tradition whereby public meetings should be held in the sight and knowledge of all, so that all may participate or hear. It was therefore even more unfortunate that the closed channels of communication between

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3 Later identified as Mgcineni “Mambush” Noki

the protesters and media observers did not allow for these cultural nuances to be explained to, nor by, the news media. The miners’ perspectives and opinions were instead seen to be less-than-forthcoming, and therefore under-represented, almost to the point of being invisible as individuals. Instead of creating an image of unity, the lack of individual engagement or elaboration of the strategy used, created the image of an unruly “other” unprepared to reason or be rational.

With a few notable exceptions, the media described them as men made all the more dangerous by the fact that they were armed, backwards, “tribal” (they sang traditional martial songs, the same sung during the Mpondo Revolt, to stiffen their courage) and irrational, since they used the services of a *sangoma*, a diviner, to strengthen their bravery and protect themselves from bullets (Hayem, 2015, p. 5).

Why had the police elected to use such a violent response to the strike? In their book, *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and A Case to Answer* (Alexander, Sinwell, Lekgowa, Mmope, & Xezwi, 2012), it is proposed that the relationship between “big business” and the state has become so converged that a threat against one is seen as a threat against both. This brings us to the second communication strategy under discussion – the one adopted by the media. In a study of media coverage between 13–22 September 2012, Duncan (2013) found the following spread of news sources: 27% business or economic partners; 14% mine owners; 11% unions; 10% political parties; 9% government; 5% police; and only 3% miners. From these statistics, the media definitely aligned themselves more with official sources from the industry and government. Notably, even though the success of the negotiations had implications for the families reliant on those wages, only 13 of 162 articles had female sources. This was despite the fact that some of the families were more readily accessible for comment than the miners themselves. Most were settled in a community a short distance from the area where the strike took place. This meant that the very reason the miners were striking – better living conditions and wages to support their families – remained unexplored and the audience was ignorant of their plight. Duncan (2013) argues that this demonstrates “symbolic annihilation”. A term coined by Gerbner (1972) referring to “the absence of representation, under-representation or distortion of particular social groups, with the intention of maintaining social inequality” (Duncan, 2013, p. 86).

A later study (Rodny-Gumede, 2015) found that of the 162 news articles from 12–23 August 2012, 151 mentioned violence in connection with the miners, in comparison with 46 in connection with police. The general consensus seemed to be that the police were acting “decisively” and had been left with no alternative but to respond with deadly force in order to disperse the illegal gathering. The news frames in place leaned more towards conflict than peace, based on existing patterns of coverage of labour disputes. Any desire the miners had to present their arguments from a “subjective” perspective (Hayem, 2015), in this case to be understood as a collective argument informed by their own perspectives and realities in order to create empathy or understanding, was thwarted by the lack of representation in the media.

In terms of labour disputes, there is a trend in news media coverage to rely on official sources and to have a pro-business bias. This is in part due to the larger pool of resources industry and government can muster in order to manage, and in many ways dominate, information flow to news organisations (Schudson, 2002). They also employ people schooled in public relations and communication strategy. The same is not always true of worker’s organisations, even more so when workers elect to represent themselves. Marikana was a tragic testimony to those established news routines. Operating in an area far from their headquarters in Johannesburg, and unable or unwilling to solicit the knowledge of local community media, journalists generally relied heavily on police sources. They did not seem to account for the reality that official sources are as much agenda-setters and exhibit agency to suit their own purposes as those who stood on the other side of the “picket line”. Without understanding the local context, South African journalists mirrored parachute- and pack-journalism seen mostly amongst foreign reporters arriving to cover African crises:

This shows how dislocated reporters are from what is happening on the ground in communities in South Africa; they only cover communities when there is violence (Cowling interview on 17 February 2014, cited in (Rodny-Gumede, 2015))

The lack of critical inquiry became so embedded, that once shots were fired, the media present at the scene failed to “see” what was happening in front of them: the second killing field a few hundred metres from the front line of the police. Eventually uncovered by academic analysts (Alexander, Sinwell, Lekgowa, Mmope, & Xezwi, 2012), it was clear that a second line of police had

been operating further along the road and had fired indiscriminately into fleeing miners running from the front line. In this situation, the established journalism practice of relying on official forces for more “factual” information was flawed. Arguably, the media used these facts as though they were value- or agenda-free (Duncan, 2013). This simply is not the case. The Marikana massacre effectively demonstrates why individual exposure that allows for more subjective reporting may be increasingly important in order to mobilise a better public understanding of specific socio-cultural contexts. It is therefore interesting that it was precisely this approach that was adopted after the crisis.

## Revisiting Ubuntu in the wake of Marikana

Recently, the term “*Ubuntu*” has become something of an international buzz word. While some may associate it with Linux software programmes, for many, it heralds from a traditional African ethic which states: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through other persons). It is the latter that forms the focus of this research. It highlights that it is indeed possible for media coverage to focus on the daily realities of an individual in order to build understanding of a community, without in any way compromising the ability of the journalist to gather facts and critically analyse them. The tenet originates from Bantu-speaking people in Sub-Saharan Africa and stems from the belief that the individual should act in and through the interests of the community. It is important to note that the views of what is “moral” fluctuate over time, and as such it is a flexible and fluid term among a specific group who identify those needs based on the situation and environment. Essentially, it is an African philosophy that appeals to many, as it suggests qualities such as valuing community, friendship, social harmony and respect for others (Metz, 2007).

Questions are often raised about whether this philosophy may be considered to be an African media ethic and implemented accordingly. While theoretically promising, the debate has many nuances as to its relevance in the contemporary newsroom. In some literature, this principle is aligned to or associated with Western normative theories, such as communitarianism or social responsibility. In its most beneficial guise, it calls for empathy with, and a perspective “from”, the people. Chasi & Omarjee (2014, p. 230) state that in addition to being viewed as a “collectivist approach that does not privilege the concerns of individuals, the argument is that *Ubuntu* enables individuals to



address existential concerns that have a bearing on how they live life". As a form of communal journalism (Skjerdal, 2012, pp. 644-645), *Ubuntu-ism* suggests that media practitioners should start by acknowledging that they are first and foremost members of a community, secondly they are journalists or representatives who speak on behalf of or within that community, and thus with that knowledge, act accordingly. *Ubuntu* is not a practice *per se*. It is seen as a guiding principle. Interestingly, there is little consensus as to whether objectivity is relevant or not in this approach. It is more about the meaning behind the purpose of the journalism: the voice of the public or citizen is therefore a vital source for the media.

It is important to note that *Ubuntu* journalism may mirror some aspects of quality feature journalism. Previously referred to by critics as "soft news" relegated to tabloids, glossy magazines and personal columns, there has been a tendency to dismiss this reportage as being "what might interest the public instead of what is in the public's interest, hence weakening the role of the news media in a democracy" (Franklin 1997 as cited in Steensen, 2011, p. 50). In recent times, however, there has been more support for, and interest in, *quality* feature journalism that uses storytelling techniques to draw attention to key news events using a more human angle to better engage readers in serious public discussions. While referring to the human aspect of the story, feature journalists are still able to separate themselves from that reportage. *Ubuntu-ism* builds on this further by employing the use of the individual's position within, and their relationship to, a community to better enunciate the hard facts that need to be addressed in order to enhance that community's or society's political, economic or social well-being.

Yet, it would be remiss not to note that there are also discussions as to how *Ubuntu* as a normative approach has been used to present an alternative national agenda in post-colonial South Africa (as discussed by Fourie, 2008). In these situations, it may be anti-Western in sentiment and thus not necessarily envisaged as a means to advance existing practices, but rather replace them. Skjerdal (2012) notes that Francis Kasoma captured a renewed determination amongst the continent's academics to review African journalism practices when he stated in 1996 that the greatest tragedy of African journalism was that it too closely mirrored the norms in the North. This sentiment has been carried forward as those media analysts argue that Western practices reinforce neo-colonialism, misinterpret local culture, and are at odds with African moral

philosophy. The difficulty is that as of yet, no suitable alternative has been identified.

There are real and immediate practical challenges to adopting the suggested approaches in the South African media. With reference to *Ubuntu* journalism specifically, the first is that the term *Ubuntu* has been occasionally misappropriated by government leaders in the past, who used it to suggest that critical reporting works against the interest of the community. Not surprisingly, this argument is usually brought forth during allegations of poor conduct or corruption. It is used as a shield against accountability or transparency, rather than a genuine belief in the growth and development of society. This naturally makes media practitioners sceptical of its use as a paradigm. Metz (2015) concurs that in such cases, the government is choosing to adopt a selective reading of *ubuntu*. He argues that exhibiting solidarity and having an empathetic awareness does not necessarily mean that all actions should only emphasise the positive. Instead, it is about actions that make the person, group or community better, or positions them better. In other words, positive and constructive criticism with the objective of improving the community has relevance. Investigative journalism is pivotal as it also highlights challenges to the community and areas requiring improvement.

There are also tensions as to which community is being served – the broader national one, the political one, or a specific cultural group. Some believe that *Ubuntu* in its purest sense may be better suited to smaller, more traditional communities and community media. This is another core challenge: journalists themselves do not understand what “*Ubuntu*” journalism would mean in practical terms. When interviewed by Rodney-Gumede (2015b), a sample of South African journalists responded in similar ways to these two examples:

I have no idea what is meant by *Ubuntu* journalism. What is *Ubuntu*? It strikes me as something people bring up from time to time to reinforce “othering” of African people (SABC respondent 2, as cited in Rodney-Gumede, 2015b, p. 120).

I recognise the need to rethink how journalism is conducted... I am not clear on what *Ubuntu* means in this context and what it would contribute (SABC respondent 7, as cited in Rodney-Gumede, 2015b, p. 120).

At the same time, most South African journalism programmes continue to educate media practitioners from the point of view that objectivity, and by

extension, detachment, is still the best path to obtaining truth or fact. While many agree that this perspective is flawed, most continue to see it as a necessary routine to maintain in the absence of any other suitable alternative. Until it becomes a tangible option with definite guidelines, *Ubuntu* does not meet those parameters. Yet, the ideal persists largely due to what is deemed a “powerful *human-centred concept*<sup>4</sup> for an empathetic, communitarian engagement in seeking solutions to problems” (Chasi & Omarjee, 2014, p. 232). As has already been discussed, during the crisis, the decision by both miners and the media to depict the group as one collective had limitations that worked against the notion of individual exposure which could have provided better insights into the situation. It is therefore significant that the strategy adopted after the crisis, as part of a national recovery phase, more closely echoes the principles of Ubuntuism through the use of a personalised approach. This case study also addresses to some extent the concerns raised in the interviews above.

## “Marikana – The Fate of the Families”

In response to the clear lack of “unofficial” sources (although, arguably people affected directly by an event should be considered “official” in terms of credibility), there were several attempts by South African media houses to rectify this gross oversight by paying tribute to those who had been killed. Two notable pieces stand out, in that they used extensive first person accounts and narratives from family members about the loved ones they had lost, and the impact this had on their own livelihood and future. Thereby these embody elements of individual exposure and Ubuntuism.

The first is an online compilation published by *City Press* and *Media 24 Investigations*, titled “Faces of Marikana”: 9 September 2012. The feature won a Sikuville Award for SA Story of the Year (Wasserman, 2013). At the time of the writing of this chapter, it was still accessible online (*City Press & Media24 Investigations, The Faces of Marikana*, 2012). It contains short stories of the victims as told by their families in the form of obituaries. In some instances, short videos accompany the text. In each, the person featured speaks in their own language, with English subtitles provided. The common theme is one of pride and dignity. Notably, although the journalists do provide some context as

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4 My emphasis

to who speaks, the striking difference is that the source is prioritised and placed at the centre of the report. For example:

His father, Mboneni Ngxande, said it was difficult for the family to speak about their son, who was a rock-drill operator at Lonmin, as it was not acceptable in their culture to do so before a funeral. However, Mboneni said his son had a wife, a child of his own and two other children who relied on his wages from the mines. “He had warned us about the strike and raised fears that he might lose his job and have to come back home. He said he had no choice but to join in the strike because everyone was involved,” his father recalled. “I really got worried because we kept hearing on the radio there was violence at Marikana and that people were dying,” he said. News of his death came as an enormous shock as the Mphumzeni they knew was a peaceful person (City Press & Media24 Investigations, 2012, p. I).

There is also a slide show with a photo and brief description of each miner killed (City Press & Media24 Investigations, Multimedia - South Africa - Faces of Marikana, 2012). The images used are a combination of photographs taken from official documents (identity books or passports), or are typical family photographs taken by relatives and friends.

This online collection is an eternal memorial that can be visited frequently by anyone who wishes to remember and reflect. However, while the Internet provides the ability for such a memorial to become a national space, one must question the choice of the platform of delivery considering the technological access of the actual families involved. While effective in a collective sense, it could well be a cemetery that those affected families may not be able to visit.

The second case, and the one that will be discussed in more depth in this chapter, was a newspaper supplement published one year after the crisis by the *Mail & Guardian* in collaboration with OSISA (Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa), titled “*Marikana - the Fate of the Families*”: August 2013. The supplement appears online (Tolsi & Botes, 2013), and was also printed in a newspaper version that could be handed to families as keepsakes. This addressed the question of accessibility for those affected.

What makes this supplement noteworthy, is that it contains both byline and source subjectivity (as discussed by Steensen, this book), and the application of these two key concepts will be illustrated in the discussion that follows. In addition to these elements, it is also interesting that it was supported and resourced by what many consider to be a “quality paper” normally critical of

government policy and activities. Yet, in this case, the reporters do not adopt a typical interrogative role. Instead, in this supplement, the reporters write a reflective piece at the start, about their own role and the approach they adopted. This is then followed by personal narratives from one or two members of each family who receive half a page or a full page to talk about their personal feelings or situations faced one year after the killings occurred. These are almost entirely informed by the chosen spokesperson or people, and include many direct quotes:

Ntandazo used to send home R2000 a month and now, Nosakhe says, “There is no money to buy my children clothes” and by the middle of the month, “there is only salt and soup” in the kitchen (Tolsi & Botes, 2013, p. 16).

“There is no money going into the bank, I am just taking money out, but how can I say ‘No, I mustn’t withdraw money’ if the children fall sick, or we need to eat?” she asks. “I can’t buy red meat. I don’t buy sausages anymore. Or Tastic rice. I just buy the basics,” she says, longing for the time when her husband would take the family to a fast-food chicken outlet on payday. “We would get a six-piece meal,” she remembers. “Whatever drinks we wanted — and ice cream for Babalo.” These are luxuries now (Tolsi & Botes, 2013, p. 19).

All articles are accompanied by a stylised and professional photo of the person who speaks, captured by the news photographer in an artistic fashion, in their actual house or surroundings. A theme of bleakness or simplicity is common to all these images. It is blatantly clear to the audience that this is an impoverished community with limited resources and means in a semi-rural area. Occasionally, the piece is also accompanied by the only photograph the family has of the person. In many cases, this is often an official identity document photo – an image that rarely does a person justice, nor does it invoke any specific memories related to family, personality or that person’s interests for those who remain.

Niren Tolsi and Paul Botes, the two journalists largely responsible for the collection of material and representation of the families, were able to interview more than forty sources for the supplement. Of these, 72% were female – most of whom were wives, or the mothers of the miner’s children. All had relied on the victims as their sole source of income. Parents of the miners (28%) and siblings (9%) also discuss how in some cases they have had to step

in to help the wives and children left behind. It is a sad testimony of social and historical inequalities that few of the women affected have education beyond high school, and some even less than that. They are aware of their predicament, and many discuss the unlikelihood of finding employment to be able to support their families themselves. There are references to official sources, such as the Farlam Commission of Inquiry or lawyers, but these are in passing and form part of the person’s narrative, as opposed to being primary sources themselves.

This particular supplement makes for a powerful message. While many of the families are now financially destitute, there are no calls for charity or advocacy. Their narratives are presented simply “as is”: a glimpse of the very real challenges they face. This is a clear example of the individual’s subjectivity presented and accepted as fact. This requires the reader to enter into an understanding of that reality of, and with, the “other”, and that state is not questioned as being anything but their truth. Arguably, this may present a case of subjective journalism that does not dilute the “facts”, and is more informative, than a reinterpretation of events by a reporter striving to remain objective or detached. The source is quite literally the “consequence expert”.

## Reflections on “returning” to the source

In the introduction, “What Happened to the Families?” (Tolsi & Botes, 2013, p. 2), the two journalists write about their experience, and how their role changed given the different impetus and focus. This approach falls well within Steensen’s (2011, this book) definition of byline subjectivity, and also mirrors the core principles of Ubuntuism. The individual is not presented merely as a source by the one who observes and reports, but rather both source and observer are active participants in creating an understanding of that community’s experiences and concerns.

The supplement starts with an explanation of what motivated Tolsi to request the assignment after attending one of the funerals:

The resignation of those tasked with attending to the dead miners’ families highlighted the vulnerability of the families and their communities. It became important to understand the consequences of the Marikana killings on families and communities that were already marginalised and impoverished (Tolsi & Botes, 2013, p. 2).

There is thus an explicit intention to shift away from more conventional news gathering practices, to one that resonates with a conscious decision to use one's own voice or communication channels to contribute to a group's well-being or welfare (as described in the previous section). The two journalists speak of "documenting" experiences in an effort to "move away from mainstream media's snapshot pictures and easy headlines" that "requires being embedded in space and subject" (Tolsi & Botes, 2013, s. 2). This is a sentiment that almost embodies notions of the social responsibility model inherent in Ubuntuism, as is recognised in the statement: "We subscribe to a belief that journalism should be thoughtful, responsive, empathetic and relevant".

They note that the type of news gathering practices used for this media coverage is a "slow journalism". This time reference is in part due to: the sensitive nature of the conversations that needed to be handled delicately; that fact that interviewing all members of the surviving families is itself time-consuming; the poor infrastructure that made access difficult; as well as the need to allow time for reflection and contemplation when preparing the stories for publication. *City Press* reporter Lucas Ledwaba experienced similar infrastructure challenges when collecting the information for the *Faces of Marikana* website, and in fact, was unable to meet with some of them due to poor road conditions in rural areas. He posted a short video<sup>5</sup> on YouTube highlighting the challenge of reaching one family in Lesotho.<sup>6</sup> It is clear that there are both physical obstacles to information gathering in remote communities, as well as the journalistic practice challenges required for the profession to approach news about marginalised communities differently. These aspects should certainly be included in educational programmes, and discussed as very real concerns that should be anticipated and planned for when reporting in countries with such varying environmental and socio-economic conditions.

The task took eight months to complete, a rarity in the contemporary 24-hour news cycle:

It involves driving long distances into the deep recesses of rural South Africa — and getting lost, often. It has meant navigating the roles of traditionalism and patriarchy

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5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8JKEo5p9Bs>

6 Marikana is approximately an eight hour drive from Lesotho, which also demonstrates how far from home some of the miners had to travel to find work.

involved in a community deciding who gets to tell what stories, and in how grief is confronted. It has meant encountering the indomitable spirit of South African women often (Tolsi & Botes, 2013, p. 2).

Time is always an interesting component in contemporary news production. There is an inherent tension when it is discussed: one needs time to do due diligence when gathering information at a moment in history when time is no longer deemed a relevant factor to the audience due to instantaneous delivery mechanisms. There is some disjuncture between the need to be well-informed, and the need to know now. The two are not always compatible. In many instances, it is not unusual to find several types of coverage running simultaneously on news sites. There is invariably live coverage which can include regular updates and social media messages, and then there are slightly more (although not necessarily always) analytical pieces that are being updated on a less frequent schedule (in some cases, daily or weekly). This supplement points to another level of time: reporting that has taken one year to gather in order to provide a richness and depth of understanding not otherwise possible or achievable in the instances mentioned above. In this case, time must be deemed an investment and treated as such. As supported by what the journalists themselves admit, it is only once they are given this important resource of time that they are able to reap the benefit of sharing local knowledge and insight.

It is significant that the last comment of the journalists refers to the very group absent from the original coverage: women. It is a sad irony that the very people omitted during the crisis are key to the discussion after. In truth, their prominence to the “story” has not changed. The chosen narrative frame alters their centrality in the coverage. This again emphasises the flaws in the original approach: sources essential to reflection and contemplation were rendered invisible to the audience. By providing these figures with the platform to express their concerns and the challenges they face, the decision to opt for collective labour action outside the trade unions becomes more comprehensible to those of us unfamiliar with the specific context. Once more it appears that journalists following non-conventional methods of gathering information for a news report are more likely to listen to a range of sources, rather than adhering to a predetermined media narrative (Wasserman & Hyde-Clarke, 2016).



## Conclusions

Yet, despite this chapter demonstrating that this specific case presents an improved model in terms of building public understanding of a community through individual exposure, the reality is that such an approach is unlikely to be adopted across all news genres. Critics of more community or resource driven journalism argue that aside from notions of Ubuntuism being idealistic, there are also the economic realities of the media industry, the competitive nature of news services and personnel that often result in scoops and sensationalist reporting that will continue to support the more commercially viable frames currently in use. Very few media houses can afford the luxury of time and personnel to compile reports of this nature during a crisis. Crises by definition are fast paced and sensitive to escalating factors. However, a good counterargument is that crises rarely appear from nowhere. Wildcat strikes are a common phenomenon in South Africa, and often affect the mining sector. As such, national news agencies should have large archives of information devoted to this subject, and to the communities involved. It would only behove agencies if they had better contacts and cultural knowledge of the communities affected. A similar solution has been suggested for conflict situations by those advocating for peace journalism in South African news (Hyde-Clarke, 2012; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2012), the creation and maintenance of a “living” folder of source information may allow for better informed publics less likely to support conflict as a solution. It could be drawn on, as a situation starts to escalate towards a crisis. It should not be left to journalists to improve community relations after the crisis has occurred. It should be an ongoing endeavour.

In the end, we are left with more questions than answers. Does this case provide evidence that there is space for more reflective reporting in news media that is not the “exception” after a crisis, nor is relegated to opinion journalism spaces such as editorials or columns? Alternatively, does this case merely emphasise the need for more in-depth investigative journalism (as suggested by Duncan 2013), one that is compatible with the Ubuntu ethic?

Perhaps this case demonstrates that there is an interest amongst the media to explore alternatives to existing practices. Clearly, there should be an ability and flexibility of journalists to shift between different styles and formats to elicit different meanings. This suggests a reflexive journalist, one who has developed the necessary competencies to distinguish between groups and

group interests, and government policies or national patterns – and has the authority or institutional support to do so.

For the purposes of this chapter, this intent to change practices can be extended to describe and justify a “journalism of returning”: returning to substantiated investigative practices; returning to a community to understand it better in order to represent it better; returning to a crisis after a time of reflection and contemplation in order to avoid returning when another crisis occurs; and returning to the norms and values that are the core of social responsibility in the media. This returning to better understanding and representing a community or collective sits at the heart of the Ubuntu ethic. It suggests that while the journalist may stand *apart* from that community in terms of their own affiliations and interests, they must to some extent “expose” themselves as reflexive individuals to become *a part of it* to better serve, or at least, report its needs or reality. As is suggested in a number of chapters in this book, the journalist becomes the bridge between that community and the greater society – not at all a neutral space but an intentional point of crossing.

This argument does not necessarily point towards media advocacy or activism. Instead, it suggests that there is a need for a greater awareness of the responsibility inherent in the choice of content and delivery used in news reports. Journalists may not “speak” as a source, but they knowingly affect, or “have a voice” through their choice of sources, narrative or frame. The danger is that too often it appears that news reports follow patterns of broad generalisation and categorisation that tend to have a leaning towards the dramatic or conflictual to improve ratings while driving down costs. There is little evidence of mindfulness or contemplation in that pattern. If there is to be a shift in how collectives are represented through individuals, particularly in terms of how local communities are covered by national journalists, then there should be a correlated shift in the belief and assumptions of what constitutes the role of the media in society in relation to the communities it serves. A journalism of “returning” suggests better allocation of resources, time and some degree of critical immersion – but most importantly, “returning” requires critical contemplation and reflection.

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## CHAPTER 9

# A Nation Betrayed – The Dramatic Coverage of a Doping Case

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*This chapter is a study of the coverage of a doping case concerning one of Norway's most renowned athletes, the female cross-country skier Therese Johaug. The case gained massive attention in the media of a country where cross-country skiing is considered the number one national sport. The chapter is a critical discourse analysis of a news story based on the press conference where the case first became public. The story that followed in the country's largest print newspaper, Aftenposten, on 14 October 2016, is a genre hybrid that is becoming increasingly prevalent in news media today. It includes elements from both the news report, the feature story and the commentary. In my analysis, I discuss how the individual exposure of this case has a highly dramatic character. Deep emotions and agony almost on a religious level are evoked by the represented verbal expressions and visual images. A role gallery of victims and opponents is created. I argue that this role gallery conforms to traditional gender roles in a way that may unintentionally influence the interpretations of the message in the text. The role gallery also includes the journalist's positioning of himself as part of a victimized unity: the Norwegian people. I discuss how the coverage elevates cross-country skiing as an expression (and creation) of national identity. Thus, a crisis for one of Norway's cross-country skiers is portrayed as a crisis for all Norwegians.*

**Keywords:** emotionality, narrativity, doping in sports, national identity, critical discourse analysis

## Introduction

On 13 October 2016, the news was out: The leading Norwegian female cross-country skier, Therese Johaug, had tested positive for a banned substance in a routine urine sample.

The announcement was made at a press conference hosted by the Norwegian Ski Federation (NSF, *my abbreviation*). Here, Johaug and her physician, Fredrik S. Bendiksen, explained the circumstances leading to the treatment of cold sores and the use of *Trofodermin*, a cream containing closterbol – a synthetic anabolic steroid that is on the World Anti-Doping Agency’s (WADA) list of banned substances.

The day after, on 14 October, a portrait of Johaug in tears covered the front page of *Aftenposten*, an Oslo-based national newspaper, and Norway’s largest printed paper by circulation. The headline was “A Google search could have uncovered the doping ointment”, and the coverage of the Johaug case filled nine consecutive pages of the print edition of *Aftenposten*. In this chapter, I will examine how *Aftenposten* exposed Johaug and other key actors. I concentrate on a news story produced by the journalist Robert Veiåker Johansen (Appendix, *my translation*), including photos by Stein Bjørge. The headline is: “When there is nothing left to believe in.” Although the title is open to different interpretations, it indicates that the text covers more than the concrete information that emerged during the press conference held on 13 October. The text subsequently presents an interpretation of what had happened in this case. A key issue raised by the journalist is: “What can we believe in?” Part of my analysis and discussion concerns *whom* this question of belief encompasses. This part revolves around who is presented, how, and through which means. Other parts of the analysis discuss what may have influenced the perspectives expressed in the news story, as well as the possible interpretations of the news story. I argue that certain ideological perspectives are articulated through how the journalist positions himself as part of a victimized unity, as well as through the way aspects of national identity and gender roles are constructed in the text.

## Theory and analytical approach

I will do a critical discourse analysis (CDA) in order to interpret the construction of meaning in the coverage in *Aftenposten*. According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), CDA sees discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of social practice:

Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s), and social structure, which frame it: The discursive event is shaped by them, but also shapes them (p. 258).

I take into consideration different semiotic resources – different modes of expression, both verbal and visual – in a multimodal analysis of verbal text and visualization, including the front page and the following three pages in *Aftenposten* (see Figure 9.1 below). I base the analysis on the social semiotics of M.A.K. Halliday (2004), and the visual grammar of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), i.e. theories of how meaning is created by language and other forms of expression in a social context. I also draw on theory and analytic approaches as presented by Hågvar (2007), Skovholt & Veum (2015), and Jørgensen & Phillips (1999), who partly build on the theories of Fairclough, Halliday, Kress and van Leeuwen.

In the analysis, I will look particularly at *genre*, *voices* and *roles*. The text consists of narrative elements and thus I will use tools of narrative analysis, including A. J. Greimas' actantial model, illustrating how stories are made up of, or structured by, certain roles in a specific relation to each other (Hågvar, 2007). Even though Greimas is more of a structuralist than a social semiotician or a discourse analyst, I find the actantial model useful in analyzing how the actors are presented in this news story.

Knowledge of context is crucial to understand and assess how meaning is created and interpreted (Skovholt and Veum, 2015). Fairclough (1992) distinguishes between three dimensions in critical discourse analysis, namely *social practice*, *discursive practice* and *text*. The last dimension concerns the text itself. Discursive practice includes the processes of production, distribution and consumption of the text (Hågvar, 2007; Jørgensen and Phillips, 1999). Social practice includes the cultural contexts of the text, i.e. social, historical, situational, institutional and societal contexts. The analysis attempts to place the text in contexts that I consider relevant in order to give a plausible interpretation of the news story.

## Contextual analysis

### Social practice: Doping in sports

Doping as a widespread form of cheating in all sports causes major concern, and may be considered a consequence of the increased commercialization of





Doping cases frequently get major news coverage in international media. News value may influence the prominence that a particular news story gets within the overall composition of selected news (Hjarvard, 2012). Decisive factors in cases of doping in sports may be linked to, for instance, *whom* it concerns (e.g. celebrity status), *how* the doping was done (e.g. intentionally or not) and the *closeness* or *familiarity* of the situation (e.g. popularity of the sport). In this news story (see appendix), interactions of these factors help to explain why the Johaug-case got and continues to get extensive media coverage in the Norwegian press.

## Social practice: Norway and cross-country skiing

A popular saying in Norway goes like this: “We are born with skis on our feet”, and illustrates the significant position of cross-country skiing in Norwegian culture. Skiing has a long history, dating back to the era of the Vikings. The polar explorer and “national hero” Fridtjof Nansen named cross-country skiing *the sport of all sports* in 1890 (Bergsland, 1946). In Norway, cross-country skiing is still seen as *the sport of all sports*. Paradoxically, this form of skiing is not particularly celebrated outside the Nordic countries.

Broadcasts of cross-country competitions with leading skiers maintain high viewing and visiting rates in Norway. It is one of few sports where Norwegians get top ranking. Cross-country skiing is also a favoured sport and interest of Norwegians on a hobby basis. Enthusiasm for cross-country skiing can be considered an expression of national sentiment and an arena that unites the country in an *imagined community* (Anderson, 1983). The royal family and the people come together to cheer a shared Norwegian concept.

In recent times, many Norwegian skiers at the top level have attained higher status as national celebrities, thanks to the media and highly priced sponsorships. Case studies of sports news in selected Norwegian newspapers from 1950 to 2015, point to an increase in the individual exposure of athletes (Roksvold, 2015). The commercialization of sports, and a growing celebrity idolization culture, interact. This leads to the adoration of sports heroes in general, and Norwegian cross-country skiing stars in particular. They are highly visible in the media, and get attention far beyond how they perform in sports. Therese Johaug especially, has become a popular, famous and very exposed skiing-celebrity in recent years.

## Situational context: The press conference and a related case

The fact that Johaug tested positive for a banned substance in a routine urine sample, became public during the press conference hosted by the NSF, October 13. This setting, or the situational context, as we may call it (Skovholt & Veum, 2015), constitutes the concrete frame for the text in the appendix. The key persons appearing at the press conference were Therese Johaug, the physician Fredrik S. Bendiksen, and The Norwegian skiing president, Eirik Røste. The coverage focuses on the explanations given. According to the quoted speakers, the doping test result was caused by the use of an ointment, purchased by Bendiksen, for the treatment of mouth sores.

Earlier in 2016, another Norwegian cross-country skiing scandal attracted a lot of attention, namely the doping case concerning Martin Johnsrud Sundby, a leading *male* skier. In July 2016, the NSF announced that he tested positive for banned substances caused by the use of asthma medication. Subsequently, Sundby was suspended for two months, and was deprived of his medals from the World Cup and Tour de Ski in 2015. Thus, two doping cases hit the Norwegian cross-country skiing elite, which until now had been regarded as “clean and sober”.

## Textual context

The Johaug case was enthroned as the most important news in *Aftenposten* on 14 October, as it was in most of the leading national newspapers on this day. *Aftenposten*'s coverage fills most of the newspaper's first part, the news section. A portrait of Johaug also fills most of the front page. The coverage is classified as “sports”, however, there is no such marking inside the paper, indicating that the case is of significant newsworthiness, expanding what would usually be in the sports section.

Nine pages are marked and devoted to “The doping case” inside the paper. The text in the appendix, is marked “The tears”, in addition to the overall marking. The *cotext*, the surrounding text within the newspaper (Hågvar, 2007), includes other news stories covering the same case. One of these is the commentary on the preceding page entitled “When high self-esteem ends in apathy” (p. 3). Subsequently, on page 7, is a description of the circumstances in which the ointment was used, under the headline: “When everything went wrong in Livigno”.

This is followed by a discussion from a medical perspective. Here the Director of the Norwegian Medicines Agency is quoted as saying: “Incomprehensible that an ointment labelled with a doping warning was used.” A list of other athletes, who have tested positive for use of the same substance, is presented on pages 8-9. One news story (p. 10) looks back at Johaug’s career, “7 moments that made her the Ski Queen”. Finally, there is a reportage from Johaug’s home village, entitled “Tears in Dalsbygda”. A note on the same page describes reactions in the foreign press, under the title “This is a disaster for Norway as a skiing nation” (p. 11).

Together the news stories constitute a whole. The various news stories see the case from different angles, each one indicating that the other perspectives may have been decisive for the focus and form of the specific news story by Johansen (see appendix). Each news story strives to have a separate and unique approach, also in terms of *genre*.

## Genre hybridity

On page 3 in the newspaper, we find an expression of opinion, written by a sports commentator in *Aftenposten*, Ola Bernhus. The news story is marked as a commentary, and the journalist is presented with an image byline, typical of the genre. On the next pages follows the news story by Johansen, also presented with an image byline. This is marked as a commentary in the online version of the newspaper, but not in the printed edition. Possibly, because the text draws on different genres.

Roksvold (1997) defines three main genres of journalistic texts as follows: *News journalism* provides information about what has happened, or will happen. *Opinion journalism* discusses how we should relate to what has happened or will happen. *Feature journalism* portrays what has happened, in an engaging way. The text (the appendix), adapts key elements from the news report, the commentary and the feature story, indicating that there are interactions between various text norms and genres. Johansen expresses his subjective opinion on the matter. He also includes descriptions and an informative approach linked to the press conference itself, which is typical for reportage. At the same time, elements of narration are prominent. The text includes detailed descriptions, creating an engaging story.

The Language Council of Norway presented “kommentasje” – in English: “commentage” (*my translation*) – as a newly coined word in 2007, meaning:

A type of reportage that is coloured by the journalist's opinion, where the distinction between commentary and reportage is indistinguishable (Hornmoen, 2015). Mathisen et al. (2016) point out that commentage is an example of a genre mix of commentary and feature. Commentage can be seen as a relatively new phenomenon, and is not a well-established journalistic genre. It may contain elements from all three main genres, presented above, which this text does. Readers may identify the text as belonging to a type of genre, which can influence *how* they read and interpret it. The norm interaction we find here may therefore invite a variety of interpretations for different readers, as I will argue in the following analysis.

## Multimodal analysis

### The front page: Johaug in agony

The information that emerged during the press conference the day before constitutes the core of the coverage, meaning that the news had already reached massive media coverage online and on television when this paper edition arrived. Since a paper edition cannot bring the news first, it must strive to offer something different, something unique for readers who are already informed. *Aftenposten* highlights something of significance by fronting the statement in Bernhus' commentary: "The price for Norwegian arrogance is now paid by Martin Johnsrud Sundby and Therese Johaug". *Aftenposten* signals that the matter will be discussed in a specific perspective, a point of view that intends to create curiosity, provoke or appeal to readers.

The striking feature of the visualization on the front page is the explicit exposure of *emotions*. A close up photo of Johaug dominates the front page. It exposes her desperation as displayed at the press conference. Above the photo is a smaller and contrasting photo of Bob Dylan, who was announced the winner of the Nobel Literature Prize on 13 October. Both are framed somewhat to the right in the layout, with text on their left. Dylan's gaze is directed downwards, and Johaug's upwards. Dylan, the winner, is at the top, and Johaug, who is anything but a winner at this particular moment, is below – creating an interaction between the two cases, and expressing a certain symbolism of today's *winner* and *loser*.

The headline on the front page concerning Johaug's case is directly linked to the content of the story by Johansen (appendix), highlighting elements



**Figure 9.2.** Front page, *Aftenposten* 14.10.16. Facsimile reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

from the text: “A Google search could have uncovered the doping ointment”. The following sentence underlines Johaug’s emotional expression: “When Therese Johaug was caught for the use of illegal substances, the world around

her fell apart”. In the photo, Johaug is decontextualized, meaning there is no situation surrounding her in the picture (Skovholt & Veum, 2015). In that way, Johaug and her raw emotions become the main theme.

Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) have introduced a distinction between structures of representation, which include *narrative* and *conceptual* representations. A narrative representation structure expresses something that is happening, an act or a process of change. The photo captures Johaug, as she seemingly drags her hands down her cheeks, a posture many will identify with, as something one tends to do in a hopeless or frustrated situation. Johaug’s posture alludes to the iconic painting by the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, “The Scream”. The painting is famous for its powerful expression of agony. Narratives may be so embedded in the way we experience the world that they help us define what we see (Simonsen, 2016). Icons which may be incorporated into our imagination, can create a story in images, and more or less unconsciously affect the interpretations and emotional reactions of the beholder.

*Vectors* can also express action, often in the shape of imaginary diagonal lines in the image. A vector connects the participants as doing something to or for each other, expressing narrative patterns (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In the photo of Johaug, a vector is derived by the direction of her glance, which is upwards and slightly to the right (to the beholder). This perspective indicates what she may be looking at. It also serves as an expression of how she feels. Johaug is looking at the ceiling, however, the posture may be



**Figure 9.3.** The photo of Johaug on the front page, *Aftenposten* 14.10.16 (see fig. 9.2 above), and the iconic painting by Edvard Munch, “The Scream” (1893). Photo: © Munchmuseet. Reproduced with permission; no reuse without rights holder permission.

interpreted as a glance directed towards the sky. We tend to associate this gaze with deeply religious motives, as an expression of hope or hopelessness, or in images of someone who prays to God. The depiction is thus an indicator of the intensity of feelings that *Aftenposten* tries to create in this presentation. There are striking similarities between Johaug's expression and postures that prevail in religious motifs and variations of "The Suffering Madonna", an icon that is common in Catholic and Orthodox Church decorations:



**Figure 9.4.** The photo of Johaug on the front page, *Aftenposten* 14.10.16 (see fig. 9.2 above), and a depiction of "The Suffering Madonna". Illustration by Endre Barstad, reproduced with permission; no reuse without rightsholder permission.

Kress & van Leeuwen distinguish between four coding orientations (*naturalistic*, *sensory*, *technological* and *abstract*). Coding orientations are sets of abstract principles that communicate how texts are coded by specific social groups, or within specific institutional contexts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 165). In the photo of Johaug, naturalistic coding is salient. The colors are naturalistic and the photo appears unpolished, creating authenticity and realism. The photo is likely to be perceived as depicting reality. We get the impression of seeing Johaug unvarnished, as she in fact was when the picture was taken. The close-up of her face creates an impression of proximity, establishing an intimate and personal relationship between the viewer and the viewed. Interactions of different semiotic resources thereby create a dramatic and realistic expression.



# Visualization inside the paper: A story about the tears

The visual elements inside the paper are all photos from the press conference. On page four is a photo of Johaug, apparently captured at the same moment as on the front page. Here, Johaug is depicted from a different angle, in half-profile. Her glance is again directed to the sky, with a perspective towards the verbal text on page 5. The posture, as well as the headline “When there is nothing left to believe in”, imparts religious connotations.

This photo establishes a part of the story, which continues in the verbal text on the following pages, labeled “The tears”. This caption introduces a kind of omnipotent narrator, the journalist expressing what it *looked* like Johaug was thinking and feeling: “She talked for 8-9 minutes. Several times, it looked as if Therese Johaug was thinking, ‘What am I doing here? What is going on?’” The photo is in black and white, which makes it appear less in touch with reality, and less as something happening “here and now”. Black and white photos are often seen as connecting to the past. There may also be another form of symbolism in this; a way of suggesting that this is not necessarily picturing the



Figure 9.5. Page 4–5, Aftenposten 14.10.16. Facsimile reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

truth, and that the time perspective is extended or eternal. The photos are rather telling a story, which is established and interacts with the verbal text.

On page six, there are two photos:

Both are in black and white, which makes them part of a cohesive narrative in the story about the tears. The upper and largest image shows Johaug surrounded by a majority of men. To the left is a solid bunch of press photographers, and on the right a man stands looking at her. Behind her, a few more men are entering the room, including the Communications Manager of the

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6 | DOPINGSAKEN TÅRENE

6 | Fredag 14. oktober 2016 | Aftenposten



Veien var lang fra bakkeren i pressekonferansenrommet til stolen hun skulle sitte på. Therese Johaug var meget preget da hun møtte pressen på Lillevald i går.

**Forbetteles**  
i fra forrige side.

Ski forbundet da det var hun som var Johaug's skis. Han skrev: «Den mulige straffen for anklager jeg står overfor, har potensial til å ødelegge meg, min familie og min fremtid. Hvis jeg blir diskvalifisert fra disse rensene, risikerer jeg å bli sett på som en jukset, uansett forklaring. Jeg ber dere vennligst å forstå at jeg har fulgt reglene og vært i god tro.»

Den gang tok legen Knut Gabrielien skylden for Sandbys assamblesk, og senere takk han seg.

Det ble raskt klart at rensens skulle gjentas i går. Fredrik S. Bendiksen malte på. Han anklaget henne etter at han hadde svart på spørsmålene han fikk, var at det som det finnes rettsikkerhet for idrettsutøvere, bør ikke Therese Johaug straffes for hans feil.

**Hva kan vi tro på?**  
Klartretningen er full av doping. Den er omtrent like full av merkelige dopingforklaringer. En salve mot muskler er ikke nærheten av en på toppen.

Vihar humret når uterlandske utøvere har fortalt sine historier: Sprinteren LaShawn Merritt, som forklarte den positive prøven sin med at han hadde tatt et penslelignende middel. Ben Johnson, som hverdne noen hadde lurt noe i sportsdrikkens hans. Spikeren Tyler Hamilton, som skyldte på at han hadde en utført trykling.

Men denne gangen utspiller dramaet seg i vår egen bakgård. I landet med ølen, laksen og skisporten. I den eneste idretten i verden der vi alltid er best i



Skiøkonen 2016/17 inneholder blant annet verdensmesterskapet i Løst. Om Therese Johaug får også det, er fortsatt svært usikkert.

verden. Det handler ikke om en finne, en østerriker eller en østruripeer. Det handler om Therese Johaug. Og det skjer noen måneder etter at det handler om Martin Johnsrud Sundby. De to er verdens beste skiskipere.

Håndretningen av Sandbysaken var røppe med på å bygge opp det norske folkes tillit til norsk skisport. Med Johaug-saken på toppen er det ikke rart at mange tvivler på å tenke: «Hva kan vi egentlig tro på?» Trafikken på svenske nettsteder fra norske podreser var stor i går for hva trodde de det. De som ser på norske skiskipere med litt andre øyne?

Svenske Expressen: «Skidvärldens snyggast last, öhen ser ut som Miliblogg og öbnaljen som nu kan följa Johaug. Kollen ga Aftonbladet: «Skämt ut Norge og hele

sporten og Johaug blåst av konkurranse». Dette er konkurranter som i årets er blitt partier, fragilt, etterlatt og ydmyket av Johaug og Sundby og en brude andre medlemmer i motbakke etter motbakke der skiskisuser har forflyttet seg. De har blitt hørt: «Dere vil være verdens og mesterne. Dere må bli bedre utøvere, bedre skis, mer gull og en smertevåler så stor at den trenger en Jøhanger for å få partier. Nyheten om Johaug var som en pakke for flere av dem.

**Regi Norges Skiforbund**  
Poliske Justyna Kowalczyk, som i mange år har kritisert norsk skisports bruk av medisin, i ret og sløst ut et bilde av den forbudte salven med dopingarbeiden på sin Twitter-profil.

Det skulle egentlig ha vært en fredag. Norges Skiforbundsplan var å arrangere sitt årlige skick «off» på Lillevald stadion for å markere at vinteren snart er her. 65 utøvere fra seks grenar var herjet til Oslo for å kaste gull. Invitasjonene var sendt ut for flere uker siden.

Men noen få i Norges Skiforbund visste hvilken dag det ville bli. De innvidde holdt munnen. Løst som ingenting. Vi snakket troas all om en gang som klarte å holde Martin Johnsrud Sandbysaken hemmelig i 18 måneder. Bare noen timer før det store trefet skulle starte, trodde fortsatt hun som var vert, han som skulle styre skidrettsrennens, han som til daglig jobber med informasjon og utøvere som skulle møte opp, at all gikk som planlagt.

Så begynte skiforbundsmaskineriet å mangle. De skilte ble oppringt og fortalt om avlysningen. Pressekonferansenrommet på Lillevald ble ryddet. De fem som skulle sitte på podiet ble drillet. Norsk fotografantvill ble møtet med informasjon, først som den korte medlingen i langrennsrennens Therese Johaug har testet positive på et forbudt middel, deretter den lange som fortalte om menneskene.

Men det effektive i skidrettsforretningen tok på ingen måte skikk oppover kombeten fra bukkapet. Skispreidert Erla Røne skit ut som han hadde blitt i å riddes over natten da han tok ordet.

«Det er en sørgens dag. På mange måter litt uventet. Jeg tror alle her forstår at det som ikke skal hode, det som ikke er mulig at skjer, har skjedd.

Men det har det. Og nå er spørsmålet: Hva skjer nå?»

14.10.2016/16.10.16

➤ Haddet legen sett nærmere på bol, skulle varselklokkene ringt  
Ther-Øystein Endtje, tidligere idrettslege

➤ Johaug-saken viser at det kan være nyanser også i doping. De som tidligere har frontet livstidsutestengelse, bør tenke seg om en gang til.  
Joachim Wallin, forbundsleder NISO

➤ Hver gang vi ser en norsk skiløper heretter, vil vi tenke vårt  
Trond Blindheim, netter Høyasolen Kristiansund

Figure 9.6. Page 6, Aftenposten 14.10.16 Facsimile reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

NSF, Espen Graff. Yet, Johaug is the only one mentioned in the caption. In this photo she is contextualized, visually captured as a part of more extensive surroundings. She “moves” in the picture, more specifically, she is on the way to the podium. “The distance was far, from the backdoor of the press conference room to the chair she was sitting on”, as the caption says. The caption also highlights that she was “[...] very emotional when she met the press”.

The second photo on the same page, a smaller one, is placed in the middle. On the wall behind her is a sort of shadow play. Two shadows appear. One of them is hers. The other belongs to a man outside the frame. This is a vague contextualization, creating a kind of eerie feeling that something is smoldering in the background, behind Johaug.

Overall, the visuals have one focus: Therese Johaug. The pictures and captions in combination highlight her feelings. What may seem most striking is that none of the photos inside the paper include Bendiksen, even though he is central in the verbal text. Another key actor in the text, the NSF, only appears by virtue of the context in the first photo showing the surroundings at the press conference and in the shape of a shadow in the second photo.

## Verbal text: Two levels of story

The first part of the verbal text is based on what emerged during the press conference (appendix). The opening lines establish a kind of plot:

The story they want us to believe is as follows: In September this year, a sports physician with 36 years of experience walked into a pharmacy in a small alpine resort at 1800 meters altitude in northern Italy.

The text then presents descriptions of the events that led to the present. There is a chronological sequence, leading to a kind of *point of no return*, as in classic storytelling. The turning point is when Bendiksen tells Johaug that she can start treatment with the ointment. This story ends with the scene where Johaug declares her innocence.

Then, a related matter is introduced and included as part of the context, namely the doping case concerning Sundby. The journalist makes a point of the fact that “we” have laughed at others (foreigners) who have been convicted of doping, and now it is our turn. Then the text presents reactions to the Johaug case in the foreign press, mainly Swedish newspapers. The final part of

the text takes the readers back to the press conference (here and now), with the NSF as the central actor. The text ends with the rhetorical question: *What happens now?*

We find two levels of story in the text: 1) A story dealing with the doping-ointment and the explanations given by Johaug and Bendiksen. 2) A story that highlights the issue in a larger context, with the NSF in the leading role.

## Actors in the text: Painting portraits

Johaug is naturally the main character in the real situation, as in the text. She is established as the emotional character, and definitely the most visible. She is characterized not only as “the world’s leading female cross-country skier” but also as “The furious woman”. Descriptions of her personal feelings, as well as of her appearance, are key elements in the text: She is “full of sorrow”; “Her face and eyes were red, she sobbed, sniffled and wept”; “Every half minute a deep sob welled up from Johaug” “struggling to breathe”; “small and frail”. She is also described as very needy in the situation that led to the treatment: “[...] Therese Johaug’s lips were so sore that they were bleeding. She looked as if she had crossed the desert without water”. On a previous occasion, however, she was “so excited that without notice she jumped into the arms of King Harald on the grandstand of the Holmenkollen ski arena”. The function of the exposition underpins her emotional nature. At the same time a contrast is created between the winner that readers are used to seeing (and want to see), compared to Johaug here and now.

Bendiksen is established as highly rational and cautious. He was dedicated to his work and conscientious in his profession as a physician. According to the text he was even nicknamed “The Pedant”. His characteristics of being careful and vigilant are linked to descriptions of his work routines:

This was a sports physician who, like all other sports doctors could have sleepless nights fearing that some of his athletes would end up in a doping case. A doctor who cross-examined athletes about their dietary supplements. A doctor who never left a bottle of water unattended.

These descriptions are in stark contrast to the story of the purchase that led to the situation in which they now find themselves: At that time “Norwegian sports doctors were on red alert”. People in Bendiksen’s position were, or should have been, on high alert due to Sundby’s doping case.

Inadequate action to prevent the use of this specific treatment for mouth sores is repeatedly pointed out in the text: “But this September day in Livigno, Italy, Fredrik S. Bendiksen did not even read the ointment’s leaflet”, and: “Nor did he type the name of the ointment’s active ingredient, clostebol, into the Google search field”. The lack of expected action in this situation is underlined by words like *not even* and *nor*. It also implies a possible defect of character.

The NSF is directly linked to words expressing its powerful and leading position, mainly by the use of metaphors: “Direction: The Norwegian Ski Federation”, “Then the Ski Federation machinery started grinding”, “The Norwegian News Agency (NTB) was fed with information”. NSF is the actor who rules and maintains all that goes on: “After all, we are talking about a gang that managed to keep the Martin Johnsrud Sundby case a secret for 18 months.” This part of the text points out that the NSF managed to keep *both* cases secret until the last moment. The image created is that the NSF is a calculating, resourceful and powerful organization.

## Voices in the text

The journalist makes limited use of direct quotations, and the central voice in the text is the journalist’s own voice. Only Johaug and Røste (the President of the NSF) are cited directly. Bendiksen, however, is only quoted in terms of a few incomplete sentences baked into the journalist’s renderings, such as: “*He* has studied this night and day over the past week”. *He made* “a mistake”. *It is* “his responsibility”. In one paragraph Johaug is quoted directly in this way: “I will fight and show everybody that I am so (*here she banged hard on the table in front of her*) innocent in this case.” Within her statement, the journalist includes his own observation, pointing out how she banged on the table. This way of putting Johaug directly on stage makes the situation appear close to the reader. The journalist creates an engaging text, and functions as both a storyteller, reporter and someone who expresses opinion.

At one point in the text, the journalist exposes how *he* felt about the situation he witnessed:

Reading the words in hindsight is one thing. But to experience them “live” from the addled, crying and at times desperate voice was something entirely different.

It was “listen to me, look at me, believe me”, and if it was not true, it was Hollywood.

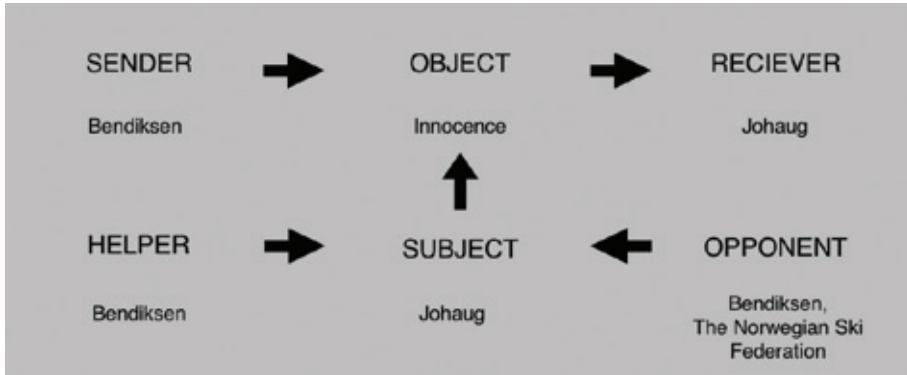
The journalist strengthens the pathos appeal of the text, as well as his own ethos and trustworthiness as a reporter. This specific part of the text may be interpreted in different ways. The Hollywood reference can be understood as support for Johaug’s declaration of innocence, in the sense that this is *not* Hollywood (after all, Therese Johaug is a cross-country skier – not an actor). The link to Hollywood in this context may also be interpreted as a way of suggesting that she *is* acting, a way to express that the story presented may not be something we can believe in. It makes the reader aware that it is the *story* that is presented, not necessarily the reality.

Other parts of the text question the story presented about the treatment. The doubt is mainly expressed regarding Bendiksen’s role, for instance here: And the most remarkable thing about this story is that he fails to explain why he did not. (*read the ointment’s leaflet, or Google the ointment. My comment*). He remembers everything else from those days in painstaking detail.” The journalist implicitly suggests that the action, more precisely the lack of action, by the doctor does not make sense. The text also raises the question: “But how could a man who is paid to be so awake, sleep so heavily?” This obviously does not match the doctor’s personal characteristics as “The Pedant” and so on, indicating that the journalist doubts the explanations given.

## Role gallery: Victims and opponents

In Greimas’ actantial model a story always has a *subject*, struggling to reach a goal or to achieve an *object*. On the way towards achieving the goal, the subject meets *helpers* and *opponents*. There is also a *sender*, someone who has to give something away, and a *receiver*. I include the actors Johaug, Bendiksen and the NSF in the model, because they are presented in a kind of narrative based on Johaug’s and Bendiksen’s explanations:

Johaug is the *subject*. She appears both as a victim and as someone with heroic qualities. Her goal is to exonerate herself, to prove her *innocence* and to be believed. Johaug is then also the receiver. Bendiksen is an opponent in terms of being a destructive part. He failed in his job as the protecting doctor. He can also be considered her helper, because he takes on responsibility and the blame.



**Figure 9.7:** Roles according to Greimas' actantial model.

This makes Johaug appear *more* innocent. Bendiksen is the *sender* – he must give up something (his job), for Johaug to achieve her goal. Another opponent is the overall responsible party: the NSF. To underpin the roles presented, I find it necessary to look at *how* these roles emerge in the text.

As I have already pointed out, Johaug's emotions are constantly in focus. To some extent, this is natural, considering her very emotional appearance during the press conference. In contrast, however, men are given other personal qualities throughout the text. The contrast contributes to the construction of Johaug as the weaker part, and as a victim. For instance, in the citation here: "Small and frail, surrounded by serious men". The men in the text appear to be rational and professional, and physically larger. The criminologist Nils Christie (1986), amongst others, has described the characteristics of a society's *ideal victim*, as the weaker part, preferably a woman facing an opponent, often a man who is larger and stronger. At the same time, Johaug as victim has heroic qualities: she is "the world's leading female cross-country skier". An ideal victim has a good errand. Her project is respectable and she encounters resistance from bigger and apparently stronger men (even though she may in fact be physically stronger than any of them).

In the text, Johaug is held accountable for the situation she is in, but only to some extent. In a quote picked up from another context, Johaug said: "I never take anything I am offered without checking it first. Whether it is an ointment or a tea. I check one, two and three times." There is a mismatch between what she has claimed she does, and what she actually does. Her respectable project is questioned. However, responsibility in the situation is mainly linked to Bendiksen, who had the last word in the story of the

ointment: “Now she asked the doctor if the ointment was on the doping list. That way she put her career and her reputation as a skier in his hands. He replied that she could start the treatment”. The only time Johaug is explicitly held accountable is not with the journalist’s own words, but in a principled statement from a professor and physician, Inggard Lereim. He is quoted as follows (p. 4): “It is good that the team doctor takes on responsibility, but the athlete is always the one responsible”.

Still, Bendiksen is framed as the one who should have acted differently. His ability to take precautions is at the same time established as one of his foremost qualities. However, he performed one last decisive action (in the absence of other actions), namely the final one, which eventually resulted in the situation: “Rather than seeking more information about an ointment he knew little about, Bendiksen put it in Therese Johaug’s hand”. The journalist quotes the physician’s final message during the press conference: “[...] if there is justice under the law for athletes, Therese Johaug should not be punished for his mistake”. In this manner, Bendiksen takes on the blame and his presence in the text terminates here. The text then leans perspective towards another guilty part, the NSF, as an opponent to Johaug by virtue of not having lived up to their general and superordinate responsibility.

The text presents a narrative based on the explanations of Johaug and Bendiksen. Thereby a role gallery is created. However, this is not a classic story with a coherent narrative, even though it may contain fragments of narrative, the text is composed and complex – as is the role gallery.

## Roles on a superior level: Another victim

On a superior level, the text presents another and unfinished story, which constitutes a more complex role gallery. This story extends beyond the questions of guilt that include Johaug and Bendiksen. The story on a superior level is derived from the first story based on statements from the press conference. The text takes a new twist from the point where Sundby’s case is drawn into the context. The journalist thereby connects the two doping cases, and emphasizes the similarities of Johaug’s declaration of innocence during the press conference, and the expressions Sundby used in a letter to the International Sports Federation. Both situations resulted in the resignation of their sports physician. Thus, the story about Johaug and Bendiksen is part of a bigger picture.



The journalist highlights incidents of doping associated with three foreign athletes to illustrate that Johaug's and Sundby's doping cases are of a more innocent kind. This brings in another point of view. These were cases that affected athletes from other countries. Now, everything is different:

But this time the drama is unfolding in our own backyard, in the country with the oil, the salmon and skiing – in the only sport where we are always the best in the world.

The country itself, Norway, is affected. Thus in the text, Johaug is not the only one to be considered a victim.

A personal approach that includes the reader is introduced in the opening line: “The story they want us to believe is as follows [...]” Form of address is included as an analytic category to make sense of the interpersonal metafunction in a text. The use of pronouns has consequences for the structure of the relationship between reader and creator of the text (Skovholt & Veum, 2015). A journalist who includes himself in a larger “us” and “we”, signifies that we – the journalist and the readers – are one. It is a direct and personal form of address, which can have powerful effects. “We” can be used to illustrate an ideologically uniform entity (ibid.). The journalist is teaming up with the readers, that is to say the *Norwegian people*.

Johaug's doping case thus involves a correlation with the Norwegian people, and those responsible for Norwegian cross-country skiing on a professional level. As expressed here:

The way the Sundby case had been handled hardly increased the Norwegian people's confidence in Norwegian skiing. Now with Johaug's case in addition, no wonder many are forced to think: “What can we actually believe in?”

In this part of the text, the journalist presents the assumption that the readers are familiar with how Sundby's case was handled, and that many share the opinion that this treatment was not optimal. The statement accommodates the claim that the Norwegian people have had confidence and trust in Norwegian skiing up to this point. The headline is also interesting in this respect; “When there is nothing left to believe in”. This sentence lacks a subject, which makes it appear somewhat unclear as to who believes or does not believe. My interpretation is that it is the journalist – on behalf of the Norwegian people – who cannot believe. The question of what to believe or not implies that until now someone must have had faith in Norwegian cross-country skiing. The headline

is an expression of a broken trust between the Norwegian people and Norwegian cross-country skiing. The NSF is presented as the overall responsible actor in the text. Thus, the NSF is appointed a guilty party, facing a second victim, the Norwegian people.

## The text in context: Expressed ideology

The first part of the text adds up to a kind of *plot* in which the question of guilt is central. Which plot is chosen and which roles the actors are assigned, will of course depend on the information available, but also on the society's and the narrator's values and ideologies, as emphasized by Alnæs (2015). In this text, Johaug's own declaration of innocence during the press conference may have affected the plot. She is the protagonist and her message becomes central. Johaug portrays herself as a victim of someone else's mistake. Bendiksen underpins her role and accepts his own role as a scapegoat. The beginning of the text, "The story they want us to believe [...]", in light of the question raised at the end, "What happens now?" tells us that the story is unfinished. More is to come. However, the fact that Johaug in the end will be held responsible, and the fact that she probably will receive some form of penalty, is not a matter of discussion in the verbal text. Whether the adjudicating authority accepts Johaug's and Bendiksen's explanations will be decisive for the penalty. The assumption is that it was Bendiksen who bought and gave Johaug the ointment. But she is still the responsible one. However, the outcome of the case is still uncertain (at the moment of writing).

The text is saturated with a kind of distrust in Bendiksen's explanations. Questions such as "But how could a man who is paid to be so awake, sleep so heavily?" indicate the journalist's lack of confidence related to the story presented. In the text, the qualities of the males and the female conform to traditional gender roles. The woman is emotional and to some extent even appears as uncontrolled in her emotional outbursts. The men are portrayed as serious and rational. They also appear as encircling and powerful. Such characteristics may contribute to creating an understanding of – and sympathy with – Johaug as a victim. Because of this, the readers will not necessarily interpret the text according to the journalist's apparent intentions, if the journalist's actual purpose is to sow doubt about the explanations given, and accordingly, about Johaug's *innocence*. Why this is not expressed more explicitly in the text, may

be related to the journalist's own doubt. The journalist does not have a secure basis for definite conclusions. The information he has access to is limited. The news story has been written within a few hours after the press conference. Therefore, the insinuations are vague. Thus, from a moral standpoint, the text mainly expresses a lack of confidence in those responsible for Norwegian skiing, the NSF.

We find two levels of victim-villain-stories in the text. The overall story includes the Norwegian people and the Norwegian Ski Federation on a professional level. This victim-villain variant can be seen in the context of one form of journalistic ideology, first presented by political scientist Olof Petersson (1994). In the ideology of journalism, news stories tend to portray ordinary people in the role of victims, while those in powerful positions represent the villain role. The journalist usually becomes the hero who solves the conflict – or at least puts it on the agenda (Hågvar, 2007). In this context, depending on how one interprets the text, the critical gaze directed at the NSF may be justified or not. My point here is rather to emphasize that this is a form of professionalized journalistic tradition, linked to the idea of journalism's role as the fourth estate and the community watchdog. The text lives up to this discourse by placing the Norwegian people in the position of the victim and the NSF as the villain.

The journalist positions himself as part of a “we” and “us” and thereby creates an intimate relationship with the reader. The salutation form can thus be used intentionally to engage the readers. The reader is drawn into the text as a co-victim. As emphasized by Wahl-Jørgensen: “[...] personalized story-telling enables empathy, or the identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives.” (2013, p. 132). An expression of opinion in that context is that the “we”, the Norwegian people, now have less trust and confidence in Norwegian cross-country skiing, or at least *we* should have. Many readers will probably identify with this. However, many Norwegians may feel neither trust nor distrust in this matter. Some simply do not care about cross-country skiing (or about Therese Johaug as a celebrity). Their existence is excluded from the text. The generalization must necessarily be understood in light of cross-country skiing's strong position and long tradition in Norway, and in light of the increasing and widespread individual exposure and commercialization of sports. Nevertheless, the text reproduces and activates a national discourse, i.e. structures an image of the nation (Jørgensen and

Phillips, 1999), and in this way serves to define cross-country skiing as part of the national identity.

## Conclusion

In the text, the subjective interpretation of the journalist is prominent. This breaks with the objectivity ideals of news reporting and must be understood in light of the genre as a kind of comment or commentage. Interactions of text norms and genres, however, may contribute to different interpretations of the text, as I have suggested.

The various role assignments in the text have created a kind of two-parted story, or victim-villain story on two levels. The verbal text involves actors who barely appear in the photos, and amongst them are representatives of the overall responsible actor (NSF). When they appear, they serve to stage a context, for instance in the shape of a *shadow*, as something encircling if not directly threatening, not only to Johaug but also to the *Norwegian people*. These framings are supported in the verbal text.

The coverage not only plays on Johaug's but also on the readers' emotions. The pathos appeal is prominent in both text and visualization. In that respect, this specific news story complies with the idea of emotionality as a central strategic ritual in journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). The extensive coverage of the case in *Aftenposten* (and other Norwegian newspapers) is striking. In addition to the extent of the coverage, the minute details reported also give it a very dramatic character. Further, textual and visual elements used in the story actively create allusions to emotions on a religious level in terms of belief and faith. This, and the assertion that the Norwegian people are affected by the case, serve to establish cross-country skiing as a kind of secular religion for the whole nation. Thus, the analysis in this chapter illustrates how journalistic representations based on a doping case can create a form of collective catharsis in society.

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## APPENDIX

# When There is Nothing Left to Believe in.

Pages 5-6 of *Aftenposten*, 14 October 2016, author's translation.

**The darkest day.** Mouth sores will pass. The Johaug-case will not.

*When There Is Nothing Left to Believe in*

About cross-country skiing:

Robert Veiåker Johansen

Journalist in *Aftenposten*

The story they want us to believe is as follows: In September this year, a sports physician with 36 years of experience walked into a pharmacy in a small alpine resort at 1800 meters altitude in northern Italy. Fredrik S. Bendiksen, a medium tall, baldheaded man with glasses, a fixed gaze and clear voice, had an important errand for the world's leading female cross-country skier.

After far too many days in far too strong sun, Therese Johaug's lips were so sore that they were bleeding. She looked as if she had crossed the desert without water. She needed treatment. The ointment Trofodermin ended up in the doctor's shopping bag.

This was a sports physician who, like all other sports doctors, could have sleepless nights fearing that some of his athletes would end up in a doping case. A doctor who cross-examined athletes about their dietary supplements. A doctor who never left a bottle of water unattended.

Someone could sneak something into it.

## Everyone on duty

Besides, only two months had passed since the world's leading *male cross-country skier*, Martin Johnsrud Sundby, had to announce that he was deprived

of victories, prize money and was banned for two months for violating anti-doping rules. The Norwegian Ski Federation could not tolerate more. Norwegian sports doctors were on red alert.

But this September day in Livigno, Italy, Fredrik S. Bendiksen did not even read the ointment's leaflet.

Nor did he type the name of the ointment's active ingredient, clostebol, into the Google search field.

And the most remarkable thing about this story is that he fails to explain why he did not. He remembers everything else from those days in painstaking detail. "The Pedant," they called him. But this he cannot remember. He "has studied this night and day over the past week". He made "a mistake". It is "his responsibility". But how could a man who is paid to be so awake, sleep so heavily?

Those who "googled" Trofodermin and clostebol yesterday, quickly found that the drug is on WADA's prohibited list; that it is not permitted in Norway; that it tends to be mentioned in connection with bodybuilding in Brazil. The Italian pharmacy where the ointment was purchased even says that it comes with a doping warning on the label.

Rather than seeking more information about an ointment he knew little about, Bendiksen put it into Therese Johaug's hand.

She has previously explained her routines: "I never take anything I am offered without checking it first, whether it is an ointment or a tea. I check one, two and three times."

Now she asked the doctor if the ointment was on the doping list. That way she put her career and her reputation as a skier in his hands. He replied that she could start the treatment.

On Friday, 16 September she provided a routine urine sample at home in Oslo. On 4 October cross-country skiing manager Vidar Løfshus phoned her, and life as Therese Johaug once knew it, would not be the same for a while. Such cases are not like mouth sores that finally will heal.

## The furious woman

One time Therese Johaug was so excited that without notice she jumped into the arms of King Harald on the grandstand of the Holmenkollen ski arena. On that occasion, in March 2011, she had just won the World Cup's 30 kilometer distance at home.

Yesterday, 2,050 days after she had earned tens of millions in advertising and prize money, she was full of sorrow – but mostly enraged.

Most of the people in the room heard her when the back door to the press conference at Ullevaal Stadium was opened. Her face and eyes were red, she sobbed, sniffled and wept. She walked the 25-30 long steps forward to the podium – small and frail, surrounded by serious men.

Advertising posters were cleared away to the sides of the room. She was dressed in neutral civilian clothes. Not a sponsor in the world would want to be associated with substances on the prohibited list.

Communication Manager Espen Graff explained what was going to happen. Every half minute a deep sob welled up from Johaug on his right side. It was as if she was struggling to breathe. She rubbed her eyes. Hid her face in her hands. When she got the floor, she looked at sentences on a sheet in front of her. “Completely broken.” “Insanely devastated.” “Totally indescribable.” And not least: “I will sit here with my back straight and tell everything. I have *zero guilt* in this matter.”

Reading the words in hindsight is one thing. But to experience them “live” from the addled, crying, and at times desperate voice was something entirely different. It was “listen to me, look at me, believe me,” and if it was not true, it was Hollywood.

Johaug told about the sores on her lips, about the ointment. She had first tried one ointment during the gathering in Livigno, but it did not work. Then she went over to Trofodermin, again after asking the doctor if the product was on the doping list.

She finished her eight minute long speech as follows: “To get a guiltless (positive) doping test (result)<sup>1</sup>, is every athlete’s worst nightmare. But I will fight and show everybody that I am so (*here she banged hard on the table in front of her*) innocent in this case.”

The words had some similarity to those Martin Johnsrud wrote in a letter to the International Ski Federation when he was in Johaug’s situation. He wrote: “The possible penalty for the charges I face, has the potential to destroy me, my family and my future. If I am to be disqualified from these races, I risk being seen as a cheater, regardless of any explanation. I kindly ask you to understand that I have complied with the rules and acted in good faith.”

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<sup>1</sup> My words added in parenthesis.



At that time doctor Knut Gabrielsen took the blame for Sundby's asthma medication, and subsequently resigned.

It quickly became clear that this routine was to be repeated yesterday. Fredrik S. Bendiksen had to go. His farewell message after answering the questions, was that if there is justice under the law for athletes, Therese Johaug should not be punished for his mistake.

## What can we believe in?

Sports history is full of doping. It is also full of strange doping explanations. An ointment for mouth ulcers is not near the top 50 on the list.

We have chuckled when foreign athletes have told their stories: Sprinter LaShawn Merritt explained his positive test by saying that he had taken a penis extension medication. Ben Johnson claimed someone had smuggled something into his sports drink. Cyclist Tyler Hamilton put the blame on an unborn twin.

But this time the drama is unfolding in our own backyard, in the country with the oil, the salmon and skiing – in the only sport where we are always the best in the world. It is not about a Finn, an Austrian or an East-European. It is about Therese Johaug. And it happens a few months after the Martin Johnsrud Sundby case. These two are the best cross-country skiers on the planet.

The way the Sundby case had been handled, hardly increased the Norwegian people's confidence in Norwegian skisports. Now, with Johaug's case in addition, no wonder many are forced to think: "What can we actually believe in?" Traffic on Swedish websites from Norwegian IP addresses were massive yesterday. What did they believe, those who see Norwegian skiers with slightly different eyes?

The Swedish newspaper *Expressen*: "Ski World Beauty Caught", "She looks like Mühlegg" and "The detail that may now dethrone Johaug." From *Aftonbladet*: "Embarrassing for Norway and the Sport" and "Johaug Taunted by the Competitors."

These are competitors who for years have been left behind in the races, abandoned and humiliated by Johaug and Sundby and other Norwegians uphill after uphill wherever the Skiing Circus has moved. They have been told: *You have to train harder and smarter. You need better equipment, better skis,*

when there is nothing left to believe in

*better glide and a waxing trailer so large that it needs an aircraft hangar to park.*  
The news about Johaug was a gift package to several of them.

## **Direction: The Norwegian Ski Federation**

Polish Justyna Kowalczyk, who for many years had criticized the use of medications in Norwegian skiing, simply posted an image on her Twitter profile of the forbidden ointment with the doping warning.

It was intended to be a day of celebration. The Norwegian Ski Federation's plan was to arrange their annual "kick off" for the winter season at Ullevaal Stadium. 65 athletes from six different forms of winter sports were brought to Oslo for the event. The invitations had been sent several weeks ago.

But a few people in the Norwegian Ski Federation knew what this day would be like. The insiders kept quiet, behaving as if nothing had happened. After all, we are talking about a gang that managed to keep the Martin Johnsrud Sundby case a secret for 18 months. Until a few hours before the big event was supposed to start, the host to be, the person in charge of image streaming, those responsible for communications and the athletes that would attend, all of them still believed that everything would happen as planned.

Then the Ski Federation machinery started grinding: The athletes were phoned and told about the cancellation. The press conference room at Ullevaal was cleared. The five who were going to sit on the podium were drilled. The Norwegian News Agency (NTB) was fed with information, first came the brief message "Cross-country skiing star Therese Johaug tested positive for a prohibited substance", then came the long story about the mouth sore ointment.

But efficient crisis management by no means diverted attention from the message. The Norwegian Ski Federation's President Erik Røste looked like he had become ten years older overnight when he took the floor.

"This is a day of sorrow. In many ways, a bit unreal. I think everyone here understands that what should not happen, has happened."

But it has. And now the question is: What happens now?



## CHAPTER 10

# Patient Narratives: Health Journalists' Reflections, Dilemmas and Criticism of a Compelling Journalistic Tool

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*Media stories of health and illness are omnipresent. The plethora of available health stories not only inform and educate, they invite us to engage, identify and act, thereby priming basic feelings of fear, hope, identification and a sense of justice. In recent decades, the patient narrative based on the personal experience of individual patients, has come to represent a recognizable genre across hybrid media and popular culture. Patient narratives are rhetorically powerful, but the patients themselves may be in a vulnerable state and in need of particular carefulness. For the 12 health reporters and editors interviewed for this chapter, exposing individual patient stories raises different ethical challenges than using professional sources, potentially altering the balance between professional empathy, involvement and distance. The chapter illuminates the professional dilemmas, ethical considerations and critical reflections that the health reporters experience in their use of personal patient stories as cases and journalistic tools.*

**Keywords:** health journalism, narratives, professional ethics, human interest

## Introduction

The aged celebrity who gives another tell-all-interview about his ailing health. The four-year-old who suffers from a rare syndrome and can die tomorrow.

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The community fearing for their lives if the local hospital is closed down. The healed patient who found a miracle cure. The chronically ill women fighting for a medical diagnosis. The three-year-old cancer victim, and the twin brother he left behind.

We meet intimate stories of suffering, strength and support across networked media, popular culture and in the news media (Frank, 2013). Today, personal stories of illness and health thrive on networked and social media platforms, where the unedited, lay-expert voice of the patient recognizes and makes visible perspectives that have previously been private, peripheral or invisible (Orgad, 2005). Social media are designed to encourage emotional expression and engagement (Hermida, 2014; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016), and in hybridized media landscapes emotional approaches are crucial to attract and engage much-needed news audiences (Beckett & Deuze, 2016). These patient narratives engage, touch and provoke us. They offer us insight, identification and empathy, and can provide support, community and empowerment for those involved (see among others, Hansson and Wihlborg (2015)).

At the same time the mediation of people's personal struggles also potentially simplify, emotionalize, (self-)expose and push vulnerable people into public scrutiny (Coward, 2013). For media organizations, patient narratives thus represent both a potential and a professional responsibility. The use of human exemplars as a narrative tool in health and science journalism has been common, yet contested (Amend & Secko, 2012; Hinnant & Len-Rios, 2009; Hinnant, Len-Rios & Oh, 2012; Karpf, 1988; Morlandstø, 2006; Mullan et al., 2006; Seale, 2002; Tanner, Friedman & Zheng, 2015; Viswanath et al. 2008). For health journalists in mainstream news organizations, working with and on patients' personal stories can challenge ethical codes. Patient narratives are powerful, but the patients themselves may be vulnerable and in need of particular carefulness. For health journalists, employing patient narratives challenges the professional balance between empathy (to listen and understand), engagement (to get involved in the story) and distance (to keep a critical overview) (Glück, 2016; Morlandstø, 2006).

To contribute new insights into how journalists and editors meet these challenges the present chapter asks: *How do health journalists and editors reflect on the editorial practices and ethical dilemmas they face when patient stories are used as narrative tools and sources?* Based on in-depth interviews with 12 Norwegian health reporters and editors, I aim to contribute to health

journalism literature in particular, and more generally, to the reinvigorated academic discussions on emotions, vulnerability and ordinary people in professional quality journalism. Working with vulnerable sources is resource-demanding; it tests regular professional boundaries and ethical principles, yet offers unique insights and underreported perspectives (Larssen, 2009). Still, how journalists meet vulnerable sources has been largely under-researched in extant material on source-reporter relations, which has largely emphasized media-elite relations (Manning, 2001). To fill this research gap and discuss ethical awareness and dilemmas are all the more urgent today, when more individuals going through trauma and illness share their inner thoughts, feelings and experiences across and between media platforms; the mainstream media's monopoly as news producers has been fundamentally challenged; and journalists must produce more news for more platforms in less time than before (Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Waisbord, 2013).

## **Analytical framework: Emotionalizing mediated health debates?**

The news media possess the power to let people speak or to silence them, to give groups a voice or leave them voiceless (Couldry, 2010). Pioneering systematizations of media access have illuminated how official, authoritative, professional sources, enjoy crucial advantages in the competition for news access (see Manning (2001) for an informative overview). In health journalism, numerous studies of sourcing practices identify the dominant sources to be scientists, medical experts and government officials (Amend & Secko, 2012; Forsyth et al. 2012; Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Scammell, Karapu & Nikora, 2007; Hornmoen, 2010; Morlandstø, 2006; Viswanath et al., 2008). The health sector is characterized by rapid progress and the expansion of medical science, described as the medicalization of society (Clarke, Mamo, Fosket, Fishman & Shim, 2010; Conrad, 2007; Nettleton, 2013). As contemporary health and medical science is increasingly specialized and technical, health reporters are largely dependent on medical expertise (Tanner et al., 2015; Viswanath et al., 2008) and often perceive themselves as translators and interpreters of medical information (Forsyth et al., 2012; Hinnant, Jenkins & Subramanian, 2016). Over the last 50 years, the relative dominance within the elite segment shifted from health authorities and individual physicians to expert sources in medical

research and, more recently, the pharmaceutical sector (Hallin, Brandt & Briggs, 2013; Karpf, 1988). Medical experts are used to clarify, shape and illustrate stories, and to lend credibility to the story and reporter (Amend & Secko, 2012, p. 260). Scientists in particular are perceived as trustworthy sources, secured by credible processes (peer review), institutions (universities) and experts (independent academic researchers) (Forsyth et al., 2012). Reflecting this authoritative position, journalists often foreground biomedical stories and templates as a core issue in the coverage (Hallin et al., 2013; Hodgetts et al., 2007; McCauley, Blake, Meissner & Viswanath, 2013), whereas the costs and failures of medical interventions are largely ignored (Schwitzer, 2013).

The structural factors that give advantages to elite sources do *not* give them *carte blanche* access to the news, however. Elites can rarely control (promote and restrict) information flow at their own convenience, and are confronted by external competition, intra-elite conflicts and negotiations with journalists (Manning, 2001, pp. 148–49). In the health sector, traditional medical authority has increasingly come under pressure, as medical expert-patient relations have changed profoundly over the last 50 years (Frank, 2013; Karpf, 1988; Nettleton, 2013; Wright, Sparks & O’Hair, 2013). The traditionally strong professional authority of medical doctors has been continually challenged in societies where the right of citizens to be informed and to criticize established powers has been gradually established (Schudson, 2015); ordinary people take greater responsibility for their health (Wright et al., 2013); and expectations and claims for treatment are higher (Nettleton, 2013). Particularly, consumer and patient rights groups have become comparatively more vocal (Nettleton, 2013). The strong lay perspective challenging traditional medical models corresponds with the emergence of the women’s liberation movement (the personal is political) (Karpf, 1988, p. 59). Patients, their families and organizations are regular voices in health news, and became a stronger influence from the 1970-80s onwards (Hallin et al., 2013; Karpf, 1988), although they have rarely represented a dominant source group. Also some patient groups are more present than others (Morlandstø, 2006). In a recent survey among Norwegian health journalists, however, patients constitute the most used sources according to journalists (Aarebrot, 2015), serving as a point of departure for this study.

Related to this, a vital discussion in studies of health journalism concerns the narration of health news - how to balance *clarity* (making science and

medical developments accessible to the broader public) and *credibility* (without being inaccurate, sensationalist or emotional) (Amend & Secko, 2012; Hinnant & Len-Rios, 2009; Hinnant et al., 2012). In short, how to make medical and health information more accessible by using human elements,<sup>1</sup> photos or illustrations, info graphics, conversational tone and metaphors, whilst avoiding medical terminology and simplifying complex technical information (see Hinnant et al. (2012) for comprehensive discussion) is the problem. For journalists and various stakeholders in the health sector, the personal narrative represents a tool to make socially important issues more interesting for modern audiences through personalization, storytelling, case histories and model histories (Kantola, 2012). It is also appealing in that it helps readers identify with the story, reduce stigma (for certain conditions or illnesses), ground learning and make health information more accessible, and in this way affects the public (Hinnant & Len-Rios, 2009, p. 104). Moreover, these narratives represent the idealized little-person-against-the-state perspective in professional journalism (Karpf, 1988).

In their study of exemplar use in health journalism, Hinnant et al. (2013) find that journalists use exemplars first and foremost to educate and connect (humanize, identify and diminish the abstraction), as a journalistic tool to grab the public's attention (an anecdotal hook). Health journalists recruit cases from medical experts, clinical trials, or among their news audience, something that raises concerns over strategic use of exemplars to promote other interests (Hinnant et al., 2013, p. 550). Further, there appears to be a growing gap between the abstract, complex and technical discourses of medical and health care experts and the feelings, challenges and claims expressed in personal health narratives. Health journalists are recurrently under criticism from the medical community for oversimplifying medical information, as journalistic formats are perceived as undermining scientific requirements for credibility (methodology, rigor, precision and validity) (Hinnant et al., 2012). More specifically, the personal narrative has been criticized for emotionalizing and simplifying mediated health debates at the cost of scientific reason (see Hinnant et al. (2013) for in-depth discussion).

Whereas one line of research primarily analyzes exemplars as journalistic tools to make health news more accessible, a critical tradition has analyzed how

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<sup>1</sup> Also called human exemplar, human interest, individual story, case or personal narrative.



patient narratives and human exemplars are key ingredients in recurrent standardized health news narratives: a traditional conflict between a ruthless system (health authorities) and those who represent victims/patients (lawyers or medical doctors) (Seale, 2002). By foregrounding individual struggle and confronting responsible authorities, the news media meet their professional ideal of being a critical advocate for vulnerable groups in society. The media's right to access information, investigate powerful actors, and reveal failures and malpractices is widely acclaimed (Cook, 1998; Iyengar, 1991) and established in far-reaching freedom-of-information laws in a range of countries (Roberts, 2005). Individual narratives give voice to personal, intimate experiences in contrast to silence or abstract expert jargon, which, historically, has largely ignored these perspectives, and thus they potentially empower new groups and individuals and democratize public health debates (Coward, 2013; Frank, 2013; Mullan et al., 2006). In these standardized health stories, the media often and instinctively rally behind the patient/victim (Karpf, 1988; Morlandstø, 2006).

In general, individual stories are explanatory narratives incorporating cause-effect accounts which simplify the processes they explain, convey credit or blame, and distribute individual responsibility (Tilly, 2008). Hence, personal narratives represent certain types of reasoning, explanation and justification related to the individual's rights and claims, which often increase the attribution of responsibility to the authorities (Boukes, Boomgarden, Moorman & de Vreese, 2015). Public health authorities (Figenschou & Thorbjørnsrud, 2016), as well as medical doctors and nurses (Aarebrot, 2015) are critical towards such strong journalistic framing of health, at the same time as they claim that health journalists are easily influenced or manipulated by various interests and stakeholders with hidden agendas (Morlandstø, 2006, pp. 240–241). For medical professionals and authorities, the particular rhetorical power of personal stories (based on authentic experiences of the witness who lived the story) and the experiential legitimacy it gives the patient (Frank, 2013) represent a type of critique, which is difficult to counter in current emotional mediated debates (Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016). In essence, the perceived truth and authenticity coming from emotional involvement and personal experience challenge expert and professional arguments and insights (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016, p. 135).

As mentioned above, patients' narratives pose different ethical challenges for health journalists than professional elite sources (Glück, 2016;

Morlandstø, 2006). In essence the Norwegian code of ethics (a set of normative guidelines adopted by the Norwegian Press Association) defines the overarching journalistic task “to protect individuals and groups against injustices or neglect, committed by public authorities and institutions, private enterprises, or others” (Code of Ethics, 2015, 1.5.). The code of ethics defines professional norms according to this overall aim – stressing editorial independence and critical distance from powerful influences. Furthermore, the code provides a strict privacy protection, which can only be breached if it serves the public good (Larssen & Hornmoen, 2013).

Historically the main emphasis has been on publishing and the end result (the journalistic text), but in recent decades, the need to be tactful throughout the journalistic procedure (including research, data gathering and source relations) has been added although the wording is vague (Larssen & Hornmoen, 2013, p. 82.). In critical reports where patients are interviewed to voice systemic critique, the watchdog role potentially conflicts with the need to protect vulnerable sources. This is stated through the imperative to show consideration for people who cannot be expected to be aware of the effect their statements may have, and to never abuse the emotions or feelings of other people, their ignorance or their lack of judgment (Code of Ethics, 2015, 3.8). It is the *ethical responsibility* of the journalist to judge whether their sources are ready to talk to the reporter, make their story public and meet the attention that may follow (Larssen & Hornmoen, 2013). Such a sensitive approach to vulnerability is arguably more urgent when dealing with people fighting illness and health issues, and their families. At the same time, critics argue that it is patronizing and a crude simplification to portray patients as a passive and powerless group, what Goggin (2009) labels *the charity discourse* in journalism. Different patients have various degrees of agency and control over their own story, representing a heterogeneous group with different motives, abilities and access to the public. What patients do share, in one way or another, is that they go through a difficult, challenging time, and particularly people in shock or grief are often more vulnerable than others.

## Method

This chapter analyzes how health reporters and editors reflect on employing a personal narrative in their reporting, based on in-depth interviews with 12 Norwegian reporters and editors who specialize in health. The author and a

colleague conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with media professionals (health reporters and editors of medical media, 12 interviews). Additional interviews were conducted with leaders of influential patient organizations (3 interviews) who interact closely with health reporters in the process of finding and recruiting patients for the media.

The interviews were conducted in two rounds (March–April 2015 and April–June 2016) as part of a larger research project on mediated health debates. Each interviewee was asked to reflect on the key characteristics of health journalism such as sourcing strategies, narratives, ethical concerns and challenges. During the interviews, which opened as general conversations on health journalism in Norway, all interviewees brought up patient stories as important voices and compelling narratives. The follow-up discussions and critical reflections concerning patients as valuable, yet vulnerable sources comprise the data analyzed in this chapter. The interviews, lasting from 60 to 90 minutes, were digitally recorded, transcribed and de-identified. The reporters and editors interviewed, named Reporters 1–10 and Editors 1–2 to protect their anonymity, largely reflect the decentralized Norwegian media structure representing regional newspapers (3), the main national newspapers (4), the national broadcasters (3) as well as specialized health magazines (2). Their titles vary, and they are based on different newsdesks within the news organizations, but they were all responsible for health coverage in their newsroom at the time of the interviews. Whereas both of the editors were male, all of the interviewed reporters were women. The gender imbalance in our sample indicates that most specialized health reporters in Norway are women, a pattern found in most international studies of health journalists (see among others Tanner et al. (2015) and Viswanath et al. (2008)). In light of the gender imbalance, it should be noted that female health reporters are found to be more likely than their male colleagues to use human interest framing, controversial new information and the need to change behavior as story angles (McCauley et al., 2013).

The editors and reporters interviewed are all skilled communicators and experienced public speakers, potentially more able to control and frame the interviews than non-elite interviewees. To avoid formulaic well-rehearsed statements, the interviewers (who have extensive experience with interviewing media elites) carefully prepared follow-up questions and included examples from the media coverage. This methodological approach provided the

opportunity to get behind the general compliance with professional norms and ideals and to reflect on dilemmas in contemporary health journalism. Such dilemmas involve critical reflections on voice vs. exposure, criticism vs. campaigns, context vs. simplification – the ethics, production and political impact of individual narratives.

## **Analysis: Conflicted perceptions of a powerful tool**

### **Professional evaluations**

Overall, the interviewed health reporters and editors perceive health to be a topic, which is both universal and deeply personal at the same time, due to the perceived emotional proximity of the topic. As explained by a long-term health reporter: “It is immediate and close... for all. Everyone is affected in one way or another, themselves or their near family. It is an issue which touches people’s private sphere” (Reporter 2). Her colleague in a national broadcaster, emphasizes that health stories invite viewers to relate to the news: “[...] It always involves human beings - patients or next of kin or user – everyone relates to health in various ways throughout their lives” (Reporter 1). Health concerns life and death, and often documents crisis or trauma that could potentially harm the public or someone they love: “Stories of individual patients burn into our minds ... there are many of these personal stories and they are important because if it happens to one person, it has probably happened before, and it could happen again” (Reporter 4).

“What characterizes health journalism is *case journalism*: Journalism about people we can identify within a story.” This statement by an editor of a medical newspaper, illustrates how personal stories, most often those of the patients or families affected, were imperative to convey the perceived urgency and emotional proximity of health issues. The interviewees gave various arguments for including personal narratives, and employed them in various formats. Beyond identification, reporters stressed that individual voices and experiences can make complicated medical issues accessible for the general audience. According to a television health reporter: “I include a case in a news story because I have to exemplify the issues or explain to the viewers what it is all about... [...] It is not primarily to address politicians or the authorities, they know the topic, it is to get the public to understand what is at stake” (Reporter 3).

A reporter from a national newspaper, states that a case always has to add to and nuance the story to be included, “It needs to tell an important story and illustrate the topic in a representative way” (Reporter 9), a functionality or pedagogical argument for including personal stories<sup>2</sup>. Another, and related argument stresses the need to include those individuals who are directly affected by or involved in a story. To give those affected the right to be represented and a public voice. A senior reporter, who has specialized in health politics, explains: “We cannot cover health and ignore those directly affected – the healthcare system exists for the patients, and it would be very strange if they were invisible in the coverage” (Reporter 4).

Other interviewees present patient exemplars as journalistic tools to document systemic failure and maltreatment, “Because if someone does not receive proper treatment, the consequences can be dramatic and ensuing reports follow a very traditional script” (Editor 2). Particularly those interviewees who have covered health policies point out the rhetorical power of a striking, dramatic case, and how the right case (often understood as charismatic, deserving and vulnerable) could mobilize, draw political attention to a problem and push politicians to act on the issue. Illustrating the mobilization argument, an editor in a healthcare magazine explains that even though they are a specialized health sector publication targeting health professionals, they seek to employ the patient narrative rather than a professional or medical narrative to maximize impact and attention:

We framed a major investigative reportage on school nurses around the potential consequences for the pupils, as we documented how school nurses did not have time and resources to deal with the students’ health issues. It was a story about children and teenagers, but underneath it was also a story about health professionals, priorities and hierarchies, so there are always many agendas at play (Editor1).

A senior reporter in a major national newspaper, is worth quoting at some length:

The best stories, which are also well-read and of high quality, contain a case that represents and exemplifies an issue, which potentially affects many and that many identify with. And these reports are better when our story contributes to solving the issue

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2 Confer Pannti’s (2010) discussion on the journalistic rationale behind including emotional elements in the news.

at stake. [...] I remember there were two heart-wrenching stories, which demonstrated systemic failure after a large-scale merger in the hospital sector. A young, single mother who did not get proper testing, did not receive treatment soon enough and lost months of her life. The other, a young boy, a cancer survivor, fell out of the system and was not called in for his control... They made an uproar and were very moving stories to write. It not only affected me, but the entire newsroom and newsdesk were involved. Those are typical stories with an impact (Reporter 10).

In addition to pedagogical and political motives, a commercial imperative and push towards a more engaging, emotional and immediate journalism was a recurrent issue in the interviews. For the health reporters in commercial TV, a face or human exemplar is a requirement in every health story (a medium argument). Others, working in radio, print and online, explain that it has gradually become a demand from the editors and the newsdesk to include at least one case. In the online editions, particularly larger health features were systematically put behind the paywall to boost digital subscriptions. A reporter from a national newspaper put it this way: “Online, we have to trigger the reader’s curiosity... a universal, substantial topic with a broad headline is not enough, you need a compelling story” (Reporter 9). Consequently, health stories with a personal angle are prioritized on the front page, in the headlines and online, to attract much-needed audiences. The immediately felt connection to a compelling personal health story, thus exemplifies the strong belief within contemporary media and politics that people respond to emotions rather than facts or ideas (Ahva & Pannti, 2014; Beckett & Deuze, 2016, p. 3). Overall, there is a strong agreement among all interviewees that although personal stories have been part of health journalism for decades, patient cases have become more of an imperative in the contemporary media landscape.

Although they recognize the relevance of exemplars and employ them frequently, the interviewees are ambiguous towards the plethora of personal stories in contemporary health reporting. Many interviewees share a concern that personal narratives may move health news towards a simplistic, emotional, black-and-white style of reporting. This skepticism largely corresponds with traditional journalistic perceptions of emotions as unprofessional and symbols of low quality, tabloid reporting (see Pannti (2010) for discussion). The criticism further dovetails with media criticism from the medical community, which warns against the emotionalizing and oversimplification of mediated

health debates (Hinnant et al., 2013). The editor in a specialized paper, serves as a particularly outspoken representative of this position, describing Norwegian mediated health discourse as a *tyranny of cases*. He elaborates:

By a 'tyranny of cases' I mean how journalists obviously know that the emotional trumps the rational in many settings, and to hook the reader you need to bring in the emotional argument, right... And if you find elderly Kari, who has to live in the nursing home bathroom, then you know it will catch the readers' attention. But I believe that this tyranny of cases blocks systemic, more rational health reporting. And I see a tendency among journalists here, compared to other countries, of going too far in that direction (Editor 1).

Although all interviewees acknowledge the necessity of humanizing health news, most share a concern that the case narrative has become too dominant. Further, although all interviewed reporters argue that they strive to combine exemplars with written data, experts and background information, there is a shared concern that this is often demanding to put into practice. The pressure to include cases at a time when production resources are limited, deadlines shorter and news formats briefer, represents a common concern among reporters, who feel that the possibility to include substantial, thematic information in this situation becomes more limited. An experienced broadcast reporter pinpoints the challenges of routine health reporting:

Within the one minute twenty I have per story, I must squeeze in a case, the Health Minister and someone who thinks the minister is stupid [...]. So time pressure is the very prosaic explanation, but it does not entirely excuse the dominance of the personal, we do tend to fall in love with the case and then struggle to explain it in its proper context [...]. It is a generic challenge in journalism, but particularly in case-oriented health reporting, we should reflect on these issues: that it is actually not enough to tell only the individual story, but explain why and how it happened, what can be done differently and how experts perceive the issue (Reporter 4).

Some of the interviewees differentiate primarily between the media outlets and story formats in their criticism against emotionalizing and the lack of substance and context, distinguishing between quality and popular, specialized and general, broadcast and newspaper. Others argue that case-orientation is symptomatic of Norwegian popularized journalistic middle culture (Editor 1, Reporter 8). Some interviewees worry that the pre-defined roles and positions

in health reporting, where most stories are narrated from the perspective of innocent, deserving patient victims, can scare away medical professionals, scientists and experts from participating in the media, which again risk reducing the number of informative, specialist voices (Editor2).

Related to this, several interviewees are concerned that the media's tendency to foreground mistreatment and wrongdoing in the health sector, gives a skewed representation of the overall state and success of the healthcare system (Reporter 5). According to a reporter in a national news organization, the health sector presented in contemporary case-oriented health reporting shows crisis, the atypical single cases and tales of horrible conditions: "(I)t sounds like waiting lists are endless and patients fall between cracks all the time, which is not representative". (Reporter 2). Overall, these interviewees worry that the media may contribute to a public discourse on modern healthcare that does not allow risk, failure and death (Editor 2).

## Professional dilemmas

Patient cases are asked to share their experiences and feelings in a difficult life situation, first to a reporter, then with the general public. Even though being used as a human exemplar in the media potentially involves exposure of personal trauma and struggle, the interviewees agree that finding and recruiting individual cases is easier than expected. All the interviewed reporters from general news organizations use patient organizations or professional organizations (such as the doctors' organizations, nurses' organizations) as facilitators to find and put the journalist in contact with the right patient, medical doctor or nurse on short notice (Reporters 1–10). Other strategies to identify compelling cases or stories representing a topic or development include: Monitoring patient blogs or patient support groups in social media to discover new, gripping patient voices and recruit experienced patient voices (Reporters 1, 3, 9); sharing calls for particular experiences or stories in the reporter's social media networks (Reporters 3 & 10) or through the news organization's social media sites (Reporter 10); asking friends, family and colleagues if anyone knows someone who fits the case description (Reporter 9); and monitoring local and specialized media, for engaging individuals and unusual stories. In addition to the reporters' own initiatives to research and find patient cases, they are very often contacted by patients or interest groups and organizations with stories they want covered by journalists. According to a reporter in a regional newspaper, most of the individual patient



initiatives are simply put aside: “A lot of people contact us to complain and whine over everything they are dissatisfied with. We have a high threshold for pursuing these stories [...]. We are not medical experts and it is difficult for us to decide to what extent patients have received the wrong treatment” (Reporter 5).

Initiatives from organized patient interests represent a more complex challenge for the interviewees. In the interview setting all reporters declare that they shy away from pre-packaged information from professional stakeholders, although they may still use some of the information from these subsidized packages. Most relevant here – health journalists often outsource the direct recruitment of patient cases to external interest groups. For the interviewees who report that they have to produce more stories, for more platforms and more formats than 5–10 years ago, using patient organizations as facilitators is more efficient. Moreover, when patient organizations recruit patients they can select patients who are vocal and representative cases, who can articulate their feelings and experiences to a broader audience. Patient organizations further prepare patients for the interview situation and recruit patients who are ready to go public with their story. Through these practices health reporters “share” the responsibility of vetting patient cases with patient organizations, although the ethical responsibility lies with the journalists. The interviewed reporters underline the importance of a strong personal motivation for sharing patient narratives, and the motivation ranges from information about rare illnesses and diagnoses, health campaigns and education, public attention and mobilization for better treatment or living conditions for individuals and patient groups.<sup>3</sup>

The interviewed editors in specialized publications take a more critical position regarding the patient organizations’ role in current health coverage. These editors argue that the general news reporters can be naïve and turn a blind eye to how various interest groups form unholy alliances and “push patients in front of them” in the news media to fight for their own sector, political, professional or commercial interests (Editors 1 & 2). The interviewed reporters from the mainstream news media organizations acknowledge the fact that patient cases can be sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry or patient organizations and that this challenges their professional practices: They acknowledge seeing “the agenda, but not always the hidden agenda, and there are grey zones” (Reporter 1).

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3 Larssen & Hornmoen (2013) find a similar strong emphasis on the cases’ personal motivation to participate in their study of ethical dilemmas in the literary reportage genre.

Although the interviewees in this study take a critical, distanced stand vis-à-vis the pharmaceutical industry, they distinguish between various interest groups and tend to lower their guard in cooperating with patient organizations, particularly through wide-reaching professional collaboration regarding patient cases.

Moreover, patients' narratives pose ethical challenges for health reporters regarding how to balance being a critical reporter and a fellow human being. For one thing, the interviewees all argue that it takes time to approach, recruit and fact-check patient stories. A television reporter explains how she approaches new patient sources:

We spend a long time on the phone first. I let them tell their story and during the first conversation interesting details often come up: They have photos, they have home video recordings, they have a support network that can be a valuable source. We first spend time on the phone, and then it takes time to check the veracity of the story – that what they say is actually what happened [...] In difficult cases I have them sign an informed consent agreement (Reporter 3).

This approach to vulnerable patient sources, exemplified here, illustrates how an experienced reporter who routinely recruits and employs patient stories balances professional distance and human empathy – she engages and takes the time to listen to the patient's story, and through this process secures details and contacts necessary to verify the story.

In addition to traditional source work, the interviewed reporters also highlight the extent to which they try to prepare the patient sources for the coming media exposure. Again, talking on television is more dramatic for most sources than giving an interview to a newspaper reporter. At the same time, most stories today are published on numerous platforms, including online news platforms with user comments. A health reporter working primarily for television – explains that they have to use extensive resources in preparing individuals for what a personal interview actually implies in a hybrid media reality:

One thing is to prepare them to be on television – that we will come with a camera; how television can make a great impact; that the story will be online; your portrait; that you can be debated in the online commentary section, such things. We also make them aware that we cannot go beyond a friendly professional relationship after the story is published, because many people get very attached to us, particularly as

they share their life story [...] I have talked to many people who tell me things they have never shared with their wife or children, and they do it on television. It is quite intense (Reporter 1).

This quote also illustrates the tight bond that can develop between reporters and sources who share their personal story: For non-professional sources who have undergone traumatic or dramatic experiences, the reporter who takes time to listen can serve as a proxy therapist. The reporter's need to balance closeness and personal bonds with professional distance, is arguably more challenging when patients and other vulnerable sources share their personal stories and experiences. Another and related ethical issue, concerns the reporter's responsibility to protect vulnerable sources who cannot fully understand the consequences of sharing their personal details and private suffering. A reporter in a regional newspaper puts it this way:

Not everything is published, sometimes because the patient is worried and other times because there is a risk taking such private things public [...] I believe that if people are putting themselves out there and share their story, they should feel safe and know that we will take proper care of them (Reporter 8).

Many of the interviewees say that they meet patients with important stories who cannot be exposed in the media, because they are deemed too vulnerable or the topic is too sensitive. Overall, from the interviews it appears that it is the reporters who protect the sources, rather than push them to share more than they are comfortable with. Nevertheless, the editor of a specialized, paper claims that his competitors in commercially-oriented media organizations expose details of suffering and illness unfit for the public. He further stresses that such sensitivity regarding individual cases should not be restricted to patients and relatives, but also involve individual health professionals who speak out and serve as illustrative cases without always grasping the potentially negative consequences of their media appearance. He says:

My journalists have a clear obligation to follow our sources closely, also regarding the consequences media attention may lead to. So we work extensively to inform and involve them, and discuss what it implies, for instance, to be on the front page. So I would say that we take responsible decisions, even though it may be boring sometimes, and we also de-identify the cases sometimes. (Editor 1)

Most interviewees explain that they strive to prepare the patient for the level of exposure their story will get: whether it will be headlining, whether it will be on the front page, if it will be available online (forever), and whether it will potentially be shared in social media. Some reporters have routines to inform their patient sources as soon as they know the degree of exposure. Others are hesitant to give promises they cannot keep, as they know from experience that the size and placement of a story is rather unpredictable and out of their hands in the final stages of production. It is a dilemma for health reporters, who wish to prepare and follow up their sources, that they have limited means of control over the scale of a story, after they have completed their reporting tasks. Reporters disagree as to whether the interviewed patients are actually aware of what they are putting themselves into or not. A health reporter in a regional newspaper elaborates:

I can tell them that their story will make a mark in the paper – but it does not seem like they are really prepared for the level of exposure they receive, although they realize it will be a prioritized story. Many times I have experienced that you prepare them for something and then the end result is different. Something happened somewhere else in the world [...] It probably makes them disappointed or angry, but they do not complain to me directly, they complain to their friends and network. We rarely hear about it except from interest groups. We often get a sense of how satisfied they are, however, during the quote check (Reporter 5).

Whereas some prepare the sources for the massive attention they may get, other reporters emphasize the importance of preparing the patients for the ephemeral character of media attention – “that they are in the center of attention, and then they blink and it is over” (Reporter 1). The interviewees stress that how patients experience the publicity and exposure varies significantly, and that it is rather unpredictable. It is natural, yet ethically challenging, that the reporter-source relation and editorial responsibility to patient sources usually ends abruptly after publication. In contrast to documentary makers and reporters who follow their sources for extensive periods of time and often keep in contact with their sources after publication (see Larssen & Hornmoen (2013) for discussion), the health reporters interviewed here are news reporters who work regular shifts with short deadlines. None of the interviewees or the media organizations they work for have routines to follow up the patient sources after the stories are public. The reporters stress that they do not have

the resources to extend source relations and follow up on all their sources beyond publication. Many stress that most patients are very satisfied with gaining a public voice, arguing their case and doing what they can to make a difference. As explained by a television reporter:

You never know the consequences of sharing a difficult experience on television – but most people are very satisfied afterwards, because they receive a lot of feedback from friends, family and people they have not heard from in a long time. They get a lot of empathy and they feel it is easier to talk about things. It is very rare to find anyone who regrets the story or finds it difficult (Reporter 3).

On the other hand, interviewees are aware of the fact that patients who share their personal illness narratives can have negative experiences post-publication, related to all kinds of unwanted feedback (gifts, money, cures or hate mail) from healers, advocates for various medicaments or diets, suitors and trolls. In addition, patient stories can be shared and debated on various networked media outside of editorial control. The interviewed reporters are aware of these costs of exposing personal struggles, but acknowledge that although they try to prepare and protect the patients, the individual response and experience will vary.

## Conclusions

This chapter has investigated how experienced health reporters and editors reflect on the use of the *patient narrative* in current health journalism. Based on in-depth interviews, the present chapter contributes empirical insights to ongoing scholarly debates on the emotionalization of (health) journalism. The primary task here has been to illuminate the professional dilemmas, ethical considerations and critical reflections professional health reporters experience when they employ personal patient stories as journalistic cases and sources. For the interviewees the narrative represents a complex and complicated tool – it gives them the opportunity to attract audiences, gain momentum in political debates, and put politicians in the spotlight by foregrounding the human consequences of their policies. The patient narrative thus offers the interviewed reporters and editors an opportunity to merge their normative journalistic self-perceptions (defending the little man) with increasing commercial imperatives pushed upon them to attract dwindling news audiences. This organizational push towards more personal case journalism, put upon the interviewees by the editorial management and the newsdesk,

corresponds with the broader trends of a more individualized and emotional contemporary journalism (Ahva & Pannti, 2014; Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Coward, 2013; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016). At the same time, health journalists' conflicted perceptions of the patient narrative reflect the ongoing debates both within the professional journalistic community and among journalism scholars on the role of emotions in quality journalism. Furthermore, criticizing journalists for emotion-alizing health discourses, is widespread across the health sector supported by scientists, health professionals and public health authorities.

The widespread, routinized practice of using patient organizations as case recruiters and facilitators, points to a potential risk for pressed reporters to become dependent on professionalized, powerful interest groups in their daily work, and moreover to outsource ethical concerns to these interest groups. Overall, the influence of organized patient interests corresponds with broader patient mobilization, increased patients' rights and the growing authority of lay expertise in current health debates (Nettleton, 2013). Having said that, the fact that the interviewed reporters lower their guard in relation to patient organizations calls for more analysis of the strategic initiatives and sector-wide co-operation between various stakeholders with common interests – argued in the media through compelling patient cases. This is particularly urgent to address in the current media situation, where reporters must produce more in less time. This points to the fact that patients represent a complex source category, ranging from innocent, vulnerable individuals, to well-connected individuals representing industry and political interest groups.

Finally, the interviewees highlight the delicate ethical dilemmas involved in giving voice and publicity to people in vulnerable positions. Health reporters and editors acknowledge the risk and unpredictability of public exposure, but generally do not go beyond the professional source-reporter relationship to protect vulnerable individuals, who make their experiences as patients public. This is primarily due to limited resources, continuous deadlines, and to a traditional critical approach towards all sources. This chapter has offered insights into these considerations and reflections from a professional journalist perspective. To fully analyze and comprehend the cost and potential of making one's medical story public, it is necessary to conduct more studies of how vulnerable sources themselves experience this process.

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## CHAPTER 11

# Bringing the Heroes Back to Earth: Science Journalism with Human Beings

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*This essay is an exploration of how narrative science journalism can affect the reader and her view of science. I argue that by triggering the reader's feelings, such journalism may have a strong effect on the reader's worldview and her perception of science and scientists. While many of today's research stories simply present new findings, the narrative genre can add elements such as suspense, empathy, and context. This can unlock deeper insight into research topics and processes. It may also contribute to narrowing the gap between scientists and the public, which may have positive consequences for society. Although writing about science in a narrative style implies clear challenges, I argue that narratives should have their place in today's coverage of science. Using a range of journalistic genres may contribute to a broader, and truer, picture of science.*

**Keywords:** narrative journalism, science journalism, subjectivity, critical reflection

## Introduction

We know more about the world than we have ever done before. Still many questions remain unanswered. As Friedman, Dunwoody, and Rogers (1999) point it out in the very first sentence of their book, *Communicating Uncertainty*: “Perhaps the most common outcome of the scientific process is not facts, but uncertainty.”

In the last few years, science stories have flourished in the media. When scientific uncertainty meets news criteria like conflict, sensation, and timeliness, collisions tend to occur. According to Andersen and Hornmoen (2011), 90 percent of the science coverage in Norwegian newspapers consists of news stories, meaning quite short stories following the model of the inverted pyramid that presents the most important news in the first paragraphs. Many of these stories focus on scientific findings. Andersen and Hornmoen have argued that news stories tend to push science into a format with little room for discussion, perspective, depth, context, or engaging narratives. Moreover, the scientist's role is limited; he or she easily becomes the expert who provides the answer.

In this chapter, I will explore a not so common genre in the coverage of science, namely narrative journalism, including characters, feelings, and elements of drama that we are familiar with from fictional literature. I will argue that this genre can make room for new kinds of science stories and new portrayals of scientists, and I will ask what the consequences of this might be. Throughout the chapter I will use an example from my own work, a narrative story published in the documentary magazine *Plot* in 2014, later awarded the “ViS-prisen”, a Norwegian prize for ‘critical, wise, and robust’ science journalism.

Different kinds of subjectivities will be addressed. One concerns my own role as a journalist, what Steensen in chapter 2 refers to as “byline subjectivity”. Another is the subjectivity of the story's characters, and particularly the scientist in the story. A central question is whether the portrayal of scientists can influence the reader's views of science and scientists. Finally, the reader represents the third kind of subjectivity touched upon in this chapter. Without the reader, a narrative would serve no purpose at all.

## Method and background

By exploring a less common practice in science journalism, and then reflecting on my experiences, I enter into a methodology of “reflective practice” or “critical reflection”, two expressions often used interchangeably (Fook, 2015, p. 441). According to Jan Fook, this methodology has appeared and developed in various fields, and is basically about narrowing the gap between formal theory and actual practice, and about trying to improve today's practice. Although my aim is not to contribute to fundamental changes in science journalism, I will eventually argue

that science journalism could benefit from narrative storytelling, where the individual has a more central role than in traditional news stories.

Critical reflection will unfold in a dialogue with other scholarly work. I will draw upon theories from fields such as science journalism, literary journalism, and media studies of literature and film, in order to gain a broader understanding of the topics I investigate. After all, both fictional and true stories have been told for thousands of years, and several academics have looked into how people may be affected by them, and why.

The chapter is based on a master thesis in journalism, where I used the same combination of practical experience and scholarly work to look into how narrative science stories may affect the reader and which challenges such journalism may imply.

## A scientist in difficulties

In the story published in *Plot*, we meet Giulio Selvaggi, the story's main character, in this opening scene from Bodø, a city in Northern Norway:

Flying into Bodø, Giulio Selvaggi enjoys looking out of the window. He looks down at the u-shaped valleys, formed by glaciers, and at the v-shaped valleys, formed by rivers. He looks at the fascinating white beaches, so far north.

Still, even a man of nature needs a roof above his head. Therefore, on an August day in 2013, he is standing at the top of a ladder, propped against an old wooden house outside Bodø. He holds a paintbrush in his hand. He wants the yellow color to be just as it was before; he will do a good job. His parents raised him to be a responsible person.

This summer day the whole family is painting and gardening: two children, a Norwegian mother, and an Italian father. They spend every summer at this place. However, everything has changed now. The yellow wooden house is no longer a holiday house. It can become their new home. One day they hope to pack their belongings in Italy and travel north for good: two children, a mother, and a father who is convicted for the manslaughter of 29 people (Pileberg, 2014a, *my translation*).

Selvaggi was one of seven academics and public officials convicted for manslaughter in L'Aquila, Italy, in 2012, after what people regarded as misinformation prior to a large earthquake.

Selvaggi was, and still is, a leading seismologist in Italy, but his life changed dramatically after the verdict. When I wrote the piece in 2012/13, I did not know that he would be acquitted in the appeal. He is presented as a seismologist, but also as a husband, a father, and an accused man, with all the pain, insecurity, and anger that involves.

The media often portray scientists as experts, and scholars have claimed that these portrayals may present scientists as heroes, positioned high above other people. Gregory and Miller (1998, p. 23) write that "... the overriding social message of science on television is that scientists always solve the problem, even though how they do so must remain invisible to the public". Nelkin has stated that scientists "appear to be remote but superior wizards, above ordinary people, culturally isolated from society" (Nelkin, 1987, p. 15). Hornmoen (1999) urges journalists to think differently: Journalists should not portray science as a separate culture, as this could create an unfortunate distance between science and the public, he argues.

The story about Selvaggi was part of Pileberg (2014b) in which I attempted to pick up on these issues, and also on what Pulitzer prize winning journalist and academic Jon Franklin in 1986 called *humanizing science*. He believed that by writing stories about science in literary form, journalists could contribute to giving people another view of science. He claimed that such stories could lead to readers feeling touched or even being changed.

## About the genre

I will briefly describe narrative journalism and journalistic storytelling. A simple definition of a story is a text that describes a sequence of actions. Often the story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and it gradually builds up to a turning point. It is told by a voice that is less neutral than what is common in news journalism (Bech-Karlsen, 2007).

Human beings have told stories for hundreds of thousands of years, and there is a long storytelling tradition in journalism. Writers like Daniel Defoe, Mark Twain, and Ernest Hemingway are famous for their non-fiction stories, followed by Truman Capote and Tom Wolfe, who introduced "new journalism" in the last half of the 1900s, also described in Chapter 2 (Steensen's chapter). Wolfe wrote:

[The form] consumes devices that happen to have originated with the novel and mixes them with every other device known to prose. And all the while, quite beyond matters of technique, it enjoys an advantage so obvious, so built-in, one almost forgets what power it has: the simple fact that the reader knows *all this actually happened* (Wolfe, 1973 p. 49).

He also gave names to techniques used by narrative journalists in his time: scene-by-scene construction, extensive dialogue, third person point of view, and detailed descriptions of the symbols of people's status life (Wolfe, 1973).

The narrative form also requires an *action* that works as an engine in the story, and it often portrays human beings' inner lives (Degregory, 2007). This means that the story has *characters*, just like movies or novels, but the characters exist in real life. Stories also often have a "universal truth", which is a deeper message about our lives or culture (ibid. p. 20). Mark Kramer (2007, p. 24) points to the importance of a topic with "emotional temperature".

I am not the first to explore narrative science journalism. Ted Anton and Rick McCourt wrote about "the new science journalists" and said that they belonged to three categories (1995, p. 4): "Those who write in an original style, those who investigate with new zeal, and those who pull together the data of specialized studies to identify important new trends." Hornmoen (2006) argued that literary journalism, in popular science magazines or news media, is commonly reduced to a semi-narrative form with an educational purpose, namely to improve public understanding of scientific knowledge.

The story about Giulio Selvaggi only partly fits into this picture. Selvaggi, the story's main character, is a scientist, but the story does not have an educational purpose in the sense that science results are simplified and communicated. At least that is not the story's main point. Rather, the story strives to dig into the scientist's role and responsibility in society.

Many terms have been used to describe narrative journalism, e.g. "literary journalism", "creative non-fiction", "new journalism", and "new new journalism". These terms share much of the same meaning and I will stick to the term "narrative journalism" in this chapter.

## The appeal of stories

Several scholars have claimed that narratives, whether fiction or non-fiction, seem to engage readers, viewers, and listeners in a special way. And several

scholars have tried to figure out why. Even Aristotle, the Greek philosopher who lived 350 years B. C., was puzzled by the number of people who gathered to watch tragedies, which even made them sad! He launched the *catharsis doctrine*, describing the comfort in watching stories where people are worse off than oneself. The doctrine, however, has not gained support in empirical studies (Vorderer & Knobloch, 2000).

Later, several theories have been launched. Oatley (1994) and Polichak & Gerrig (2002) point to how the *incompleteness* of the story triggers an engagement, or a response, in the reader. According to Polichak & Gerrig such responses can include trying to solve the character's problem or, if too late, thinking backwards through the story and making alternative action plans. These responses in the reader can even change her attitudes in real life, they argue. For example, if the story portrays an innocent young girl who is hit by a speeding car, it may make the reader more aware of speed limits.

The latter does not explain, though, *why* we seem to long for suspense and incompleteness. An important factor seems to be stories' ability to give us experiences and feelings that we do not have in our own lives. Zillmann (referred to in Vorderer & Knobloch, 2000, p. 66–67) launched a theory about "excitation transfer", where the reader feels an increasing excitement towards the turning point of the story. Then, after what he wished for has happened, the positive feelings intensify. Zillmann assumes that this condition, which is triggered in particular by stories in which heroes conquer enemies and challenges, has its own deliberating effect on people.

Both Zillmann and other scholars have stated that stories can give us big and intense experiences while we sit safely in our homes. In a narrative world we can experience simulations of alternative personalities, realities, and actions, and it does not cost us anything. In this way, we do not have to change our jobs, wives or husbands in order to understand what it is like, we can just read a story (Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004). A prerequisite is that we are submerged into the story, either by what Tellegen (1982) named "absorption", or by what Green & Brock (2000/2002) named "transportation". These two are quite similar, while absorbed the reader is still aware of herself and the world around her, it just assumes another form. However, if a reader is transported, she gets carried out of this world and into a story. She becomes fully engaged in the story world (Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004).

## Stories can humanize science

In 1986, the Pulitzer-winning journalist and scholar Jon Franklin wrote about humanizing science through storytelling. This is not something that scientists usually long for, according to Franklin:

The scientists want us to ignore the drama that proceeds in his laboratory, and, more important, in his mind. He denies that he has feelings about salamander tails and that he hopes for things and dreams of things [...]. And yet these characteristics make him human, make him real. They make his efforts, his frustrations, and his mistakes interesting and understandable. And *dramatic* (Franklin, 1986, p. 144).

Jon Franklin claimed that by using literary techniques, the journalist can add emotion to science stories, which in turn could lead to people feeling touched or even being changed.

According to narrative theories this is not unlikely, and *identification* might be a keyword. Cohen (2001, p. 247) describes identification in this way: “Identification requires that we forget ourselves and become the other [...]” This reminds us of what Freud, Wollheim and Bettelheim wrote decades earlier, that identification is an imaginary experience where a person gives up the awareness of his own identity, and experiences the world through someone else’s eyes (referred to in Cohen, 2001). Still, identification has proven difficult to conceptualize. In media studies it is often mixed with other concepts, such as liking a character or being similar to him, but these conditions require that the reader is self-conscious (Cohen, 2001).

Vorderer & Knobloch (2000) argue that identification does not fully describe what happens to an audience reading a story; they claim that *empathy* is a better word, as suggested by Zillmann (1994, p. 40). They argue in this way:

Usually the viewer or reader keeps clearly in mind the distinction between his or her person and the character in a drama. Very often cues in the drama will prevent the audience from feeling as the protagonist does, through information that the protagonist does not have (Vorderer and Knobloch, 2000, p. 64).

Vorderer and Knobloch believe that empathy can explain some of what happens when a reader is submerged into a story. The reader observes the character and either applauds or condemns his actions and intentions. If she applauds, the character becomes a kind of friend, or hero, for the reader. If, on the contrary, she condemns the character’s actions, the opposite happens: the



character becomes an enemy. The reader's "verdict" over the character will, in one way or the other, trigger the reader's hope for a positive outcome and fear of the opposite.

Whether you name it empathy or identification, the reader establishes a relationship to the characters in a story, and narrative genres have qualities that make this more likely. Cohen (2001) argues that transportation increases the chance for identification. According to Slater (2002), this also works the other way: The reader's feelings for the characters are essential for the reader's experience of suspense and drama. If the writer succeeds in constructing a credible main character, and if the reader views the main character as similar to himself or the person he would like to be, this can lead the reader to experience the world through the character's eyes. This again opens up new ways to understand things, and it can lead to a change in the reader's thoughts and actions, writes Slater.

Wied, Zillmann, and Ordman in 1994 (referred to in Cohen, 2001) demonstrated that a viewer's experience of empathy with a character was linked to how much they liked the film. Cohen (2001) therefore views it as probable that a strong sense of empathy or identification makes the viewer or reader like the message of the story more. Slater (2002) supports this; he believes that both the relationship to the characters and the plot or action of the story are important for the reader to get involved in the message, and that such an involvement can increase the message's influence on the reader's actions and attitudes.

Other fields of study also point to the importance of human relations when receiving a message. Dan Kahan and Donald Braman (2006) argue that every one of us chooses to listen to, and trust, people who share our basic values, and with whom we can identify. This is part of the so-called "cultural cognition theory" which has gained attention among communicators of climate and risk science. Based on this theory we can argue that humanizing scientists can lead to more people trusting them; the prerequisite is that they prove to have qualities and values that the reader recognizes.

The processes are not crystal clear, but several studies point to the importance of the relationship we establish to characters in a story or the sender of a message. This may affect our experience of the story, our actions in our own lives, and our understanding of the world we live in. Although most of these theories describe fictional narratives, studies suggest that non-fiction narratives affect the reader in the same way, as mentioned earlier. It may seem like

Jon Franklin was right when he wrote that humanizing science has the potential to *touch* or even *change* readers.

## Subjectivity in the earthquake story

In this story, the reader meets the Italian seismologist Giulio Selvaggi and his Italian-Norwegian wife Ingrid Hunstad. Selvaggi had received a serious verdict. In short, he and six other scientists and public officials were convicted after being accused of calming down the citizens in the days prior to the earthquake in L'Aquila, 2009. After a series of smaller earthquakes in the area, people feared a more devastating earthquake and desperately wanted advice about what to do. In this seismic zone there was a long tradition of bringing blankets to a piazza and sleeping outside in such periods, but after what people understood as advice from the experts, many chose to sleep in their homes. This became their doom.

The story was full of emotions. Entire families had been eradicated. Many were children. One of the persons I interviewed and who is portrayed in the story, had lost both his wife and his daughter. The pain was overwhelming. There was also a huge debate about whether the scientists were guilty or not guilty. In the end, this became a story about a scientist and his wife, both in an extreme situation. But it was also a story about a father and a mother; a man and a woman. They were sympathetic, reflective and kind, qualities most of us appreciate. In addition, it was a story about responsibility; about what society may expect from you when you possess specialist knowledge. Lastly, the story raised questions about justice and injustice: What the survivors viewed as justice – namely the verdict – was viewed as incredibly unjust by those convicted.

Writing a story that is full of emotions and controversy is challenging. What was right and wrong was not clear. Lives had been lost. Could the scientists have done a better job of informing about the earthquake risk? The opinions were split, but one misunderstanding was clear: The public had expected more answers from the experts than they were able to provide. People in L'Aquila wanted predictions of the future. Unfortunately, reassuring messages were conveyed through the media, though not by the scientists themselves. Later the experts did not agree on having reassured anyone. Myself, I clearly saw the complexity of the situation, and felt strong empathy with both sides, but after

investigating it I also got the feeling that the verdict was not right. Throughout the writing process this gut feeling continued to follow me, and some readers may experience the story as biased.

A story being regarded as subjective is not uncommon in journalism. Although objectivity has been held up as a journalistic ideal, scholars have argued that objective news journalism does not exist. Njaastad (2012, p. 91) claims that the personal opinions of the journalist, editorial opinions, and factors regarding the specific story – e.g. which sources being used – will always prevent journalistic objectivity. Still, he argues that “the unattainable ideal is still worth striving for”. The journalist must strive to be thorough, accurate, balanced, holistic, relevant, and significant. These are central journalistic aims and should be important to strive for in all journalism.

When we look at literary tradition, narratives are more open to subjectivity than news journalism. Hartsock writes: “The subjectivity of the literary journalist must take a more active role in the composition of the report in comparison to the relatively more submerged role implicit in the abstract nature of objectified journalism” (Hartsock, 1998, p. 63). According to Hartsock, subjectivity is necessary if the narrative journalist shall succeed in what Trachtenberg named an “exchange of subjectivities’ through the use of rhetorically ‘felt detail’” (Hartsock, *op.cit.*, p. 63). In other words: In order to trigger your reader’s feelings, you need to convey a human message.

The presence of subjectivity in narrative journalism is also emphasized in other chapters in this book. Steensen writes about byline subjectivity and source subjectivity, both being strongly present in narrative journalism. While the first refers to the journalist’s own experience, the second refers to the source’s subjectivity. Steensen writes that the journalists who wrote new journalism aimed to get involved, to be participants, in order to create a “truer” journalism, in line with existentialist ideas.

In my own work, I was strongly aware that I had two roles: I was a journalist, and I was a human being. I had to make a long list of choices: Who would be the main character? Which message do I wish to convey? Which voices and thoughts should be heard, and which voice should be used by the storyteller? I knew that these choices can lead the reader’s empathy in a certain direction, and even result in attitude changes. I also knew that I was covering a controversial case. All this requires an awareness of responsibility and ethics. I had to be aware of Njaastad’s advice and ask myself: Is this a significant story

to tell? Have I done a thorough job? Is what I am writing true? Still, I knew that the story would contain a large degree of subjectivity; both byline and source subjectivity. I could write a story that reflected reality, but I would not be able to write a story that reflected *all sides* of reality equally. It is a constant challenge for journalists: *We do* have considerable power; we get to choose which sides of reality to reflect.

I chose Selvaggi as the main character. His wife is also an important character in the story. Since narratives allow scenes and using a third person point of view, the characters' views are presented in passages like the following, from September 24<sup>th</sup> 2012:

A tall, blond woman sits in a courtroom. The accused is her husband, Giulio Selvaggi. On her first time in a courtroom, May 30th, she watched him take the witness stand. She was so nervous for him that she could not write. Today she will. Their daughter, Liv, has lent her a notebook. For Ingrid Hunstad writing is a way to escape from her thoughts.

It feels so embarrassing to be there. They, of all people. They, who through all their adult lives have been working for the good cause; for a greater understanding of how earthquakes hit. Today they should have been on the other side, together with the victims. How wrong it feels that the victims sit there scowling at her; that they see her as the wife of a killer (Pileberg 2014a, *my translation*).

The simple fact that Selvaggi is the main character, and his wife the second, increases the chance of bending the reader's empathy towards him. In order to have a more balanced story, I was careful to use a variety of sources. One important choice was to let one of the victims tell his version of the story. He was in the most terrible situation, having decided that his family should spend the earthquake night in their house. As a result he lost his wife and daughter. He blamed himself, and he blamed the experts for what he regarded as advice.

Another way to have a more balanced story, is to add context, so that the reader can form her own opinion. I added context both to the story itself and to smaller texts next to it. After communicating with the editor, I added even more context, and more sources, than what was the case originally. Still, it remained a piece with a high degree of subjectivity. Without subjectivity, this story would not exist in the first place.

## Goodbye, heroes

As mentioned earlier in this essay, scholars have cautioned against the heroic pictures of scientists that might be the result of traditional science news stories. Still, these arguments were presented in the 1980's and 1990's, and in my search I have not found much new literature on the topic. It may be natural to assume that our view of scientists has changed along with rapid changes in the media in general.

However, according to studies from various countries, where people have been asked to draw their image of a scientist, there are still strong stereotypes. In an interview with *New Scientist*, former BBC science journalist Quentin Cooper pointed to such depictions remaining unchanged for 50 years (Highfield, 2011). One study was conducted in Greece (Christidou et al, 2010); 171 young students' drawings indicated that their view of both science and scientists was quite outdated. For instance, scientists were most often depicted as male, working within STEM disciplines such as mathematics and technology, and they were wearing a labcoat more often than what is common in real life. Still, the authors noted that the drawings were a bit less stereotypical than what had been seen in former studies. Most likely, there have been some changes in the public's view of scientists, but there is evidence that stereotypes of scientists are maintained.

To refute these issues, Hornmoen argues that elements of personal characteristics should be seen much more often than what is the case today:

This is not only because it may give the reader or listener a necessary closeness to the material. It is also about making it clear that science is a human activity, that scientific studies in crucial ways are colored by the humans taking part in them. (Hornmoen, 1999 p. 218, *my translation*).

Also climate scientist Stephen Schneider pointed to the fact that science is based on values: "Values creep into virtually everything", he writes in a discussion. "For a scientist, the best way to deal with a value question is to do it explicitly. Try to know what your biases are and put them out in the open" (quoted in Boffey, Rodgers and Schneider, 1999 p. 89). Here, the science journalist can contribute.

I do believe that stories like the earthquake story contribute to painting a broader picture of scientists. In that story, the scientist is a man who did not

fulfill society's expectations. He is not a hero, but rather a human with limitations and no ability to predict an earthquake, just like the rest of us. In the media, there have also been other stories portraying scientists as humans, for instance the story "He Felt Worthless" (Berg, 2009, *my translation*), in the Norwegian newspaper VG. Here, we get to know medical scientist Jon Sudbø, who was caught cheating three years earlier. Berg spent two years trying to get Sudbø to talk to him. When he succeeded, he wrote a story with elements from narrative journalism, where the scientist is presented as a human being admitting his sins. Such stories are rare, and it is a good example of science journalism that is both critical and humane at the same time.

I believe that humanizing science can have positive effects. It can allow identification and empathy with the people behind the science, which may again lead to readers changing their views of scientists, perhaps seeing them more as humans and less as pure experts. In other words, narratives can make it clearer that science is a human activity, marked by the humans who perform it. This perspective can be an important addition to news stories focusing on scientific findings. The reader of a narrative may also experience science more from the "inside". The distance between the "people" and the science institutions, may diminish. However, when our feelings for the main characters – for example the scientists – are colored by empathy or identification, this can make us less critical towards the messages in the story (Slater, 2002). The journalist should keep her critical sense and be aware of her power.

Humanizing science, as I see it, does not necessarily involve portraying scientists. It can also involve portrayals of people that are somehow affected by science or people involved in scientific work. As long as the journalist succeeds in finding elements that can add feelings to the story, we can talk about humanizing science. There is a wide range of stories that can contribute to broadening our view of what science really is, and bring it closer to our own reality.

## Pros and cons of narrative science journalism

Writing about science in narrative style has its pros and cons. Such a story may be a better read than a news article, and since these stories are often longer than a news story, they can add more context and give a broader picture of what's going on. They can also contribute to a deeper understanding of what science really is. However, this also begs several questions. Is it really

important that people have a knowledge of science? And, will not the criteria for the narrative, just like the news criteria, force science into a format where it does not necessarily fit? I will briefly examine these questions below.

It is safe to assume that a basic knowledge of science and scientific processes is a positive thing, for individuals, democracy, and policy. There is more than one reason for that. Increased knowledge does not necessarily make people more positive towards science. On the contrary, Gregory and Miller (1998) argue that more knowledge makes us more critical. We learn that science is a human activity, not the job of oracles. If the gap between scientists and the public is narrowed, this can also lead to improved knowledge production as it is quite likely that scientists can learn from other people. For instance, Meyer (2006) has argued that scientists do not have a monopoly on common sense. It is indeed possible to imagine that increased knowledge sharing, in all directions, in turn leads to better and more informed decisions, in science, policy, and other fields.

Both source subjectivity and byline subjectivity can make the reader see the world differently. Perhaps the reader's world will look a little more like the world seen by the main character or the journalist. Awareness can be passed on, or opinions shared. As long as the story is truthful, and the journalist does thorough research, this can strengthen a story. When the reader sees the world through someone else's eyes, she may gain deeper insight. The Norwegian journalist Berit Hedemann expresses it this way:

As I see it, insight differs from understanding, insight is characterized by filling the body just as much as the brain, insight is "total" understanding. The understanding of a phenomenon, a causality, an institution, can be gained at universities. Insight can rarely be gained by studying. We gain insight through people, experiences, and relations. Insight implies a deeper understanding of complicated circumstances and relations. It changes our feelings and our actions (Hedemann, 2006 p. 21, *my translation*).

The story about Giulio Selvaggi was one of four narrative stories originally written as part of a master thesis, in which I reflected upon issues addressed in this chapter. In that work I realized that there are quite a few challenges in writing narratives about science. For instance, many scientists are used to being portrayed as scientists, not as humans. This can make it hard to enter their personal world. Moreover, ideas for narrative science stories can be difficult to find.

I needed to be patient, both in the process of developing ideas and when reporting. Another challenge occurred while writing the earthquake story: I saw that it can be difficult to cover a controversial topic using narrative techniques. Mixing feelings and subjectivity into a bowl of politics, science, unknown facts, and tragic consequences, was challenging.

Later it occurred to me that these challenges were linked to the framing of science that a narrative requires, just as other genres do. I was searching for faith, hope, and love in a world that can be tedious, professional, and complicated. I did not always find what I was looking for. In addition, making a coherent story out of lots of unknown pieces and fragmented facts, necessarily involves simplification. Although I spent weeks and months on research and interviews, the story does not present the whole picture.

I would not argue that applying narrative techniques is a “magic trick” that necessarily will improve today’s science journalism. However, I believe that using a range of journalistic genres can contribute to a broader picture of science and possibly position science coverage closer to reality than formulaic news depictions of what “new research shows” are capable of. Therefore, I would argue that we need science journalists who not only report new scientific findings, but also scientific processes, failures, or challenges. Moreover, if journalists *sometimes* get access to the humans behind the science, or in other ways portray science as an activity which affects peoples’ lives, this can make the reader experience science as more significant.

## The unanswered questions

Subjectivity is everywhere. Our opinions and thoughts are framed by our genes, our background, and the environment we live in. However, subjectivity is not always obvious to us.

In narratives, the reader meets real people, whether they are scientists, hairdressers, retirees, or writers. Such stories let the reader see the world through someone else’s eyes, and it can give her a closeness to the material that she often does not get from reading news stories following the model of the inverted pyramid. Narratives enable identification, empathy, and trust, but also the opposite. The reader represents a third subjectivity in this puzzle, and the writer must recognize that she is by far the most mysterious one.



In the last passage of the earthquake story, Giulio Selvaggi and his wife are back in Bodø, Norway. At this point, the reader has been brought to Italy during the days around the earthquake in 2009 and the following years. Now, Selvaggi stands by the sea, fishing:

Most of Norway is unknown to Giulio Selvaggi, but not Bodø. He feels so good here. It is like finding the perfect pair of shoes.

As he stands by the shore with his fishing rod, with his wife of 19 years next to him, they feel the weather changing. The air from the land brings the coldness from the glaciers, the air from the sea brings the salt, the mild weather, the rain. In two minutes everything can change.

What will it be like to be here in the autumn or in the winter, when it is cold and dark? How will it be for the kids, will they find friends here? “No matter what, it is better than being in Italy now,” Ingrid Hunstad says. If it were up to her, they would move tomorrow. But Giulio Selvaggi wants to wait. He’s fighting a battle in Italy, a battle for his freedom. What happened is not fair. He did a good job, and was convicted for it.

But it is nice to be able to breathe, not having to check the news first thing in the morning. It is nice just looking for porpoises in the sea or wondering which fish will bite. Up here, 67 degrees north, Giulio Selvaggi feels a part of wild nature. Nothing more, nothing less. Here he is free. (Pileberg, 2014a, *my translation*)

The story ends with an open question. What will happen to Selvaggi is still unknown. Time would show that he was acquitted in November 2014, along with all the accused scientists. One of the public officials got a milder verdict.

A question that will never have an answer is which effect this story had on the people who read it. Did it make them hope for him to be acquitted? I do not know. Did it change their view of science? I do not know. Perhaps some of the readers did not like the story’s subjective style, and therefore did not get so involved. Finding an answer to these questions would require a study of its own, and although a reception study was my initial idea when I started working on the master thesis, I soon realized that this was beyond my capacity. Still, I hope that most readers got something out of reading it. I also hope that it contributed to an understanding of the fact that science cannot give us answers to all our questions – even when we need them the most.

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## APPENDIX

# The Earthquake that Shook the World

*(My translation from Norwegian)*

An Italian court convicted seismologist Giulio Selvaggi for manslaughter, but Selvaggi believes that he simply did his duty. October 10, 2014 marks the beginning of a trial that has shaken researchers around the world.

*By Silje Pileberg*

**Flying into Bodø**, Giulio Selvaggi enjoys looking out of the window. He looks down at the u-shaped valleys, formed by glaciers, and at the v-shaped valleys, formed by rivers. He looks at the fascinating white beaches, so far north.

Still, even a man of nature needs a roof over his head. Therefore, on an August day in 2013, he is standing at the top of a ladder, propped against an old wooden house outside Bodø. He holds a paintbrush in his hand. He wants the yellow color to be just as it was before; he will do a thorough job. His parents raised him to be a responsible person.

This summer day the whole family is painting and gardening: two children, a Norwegian mother, and an Italian father. They spend every summer at this place, but everything has changed now. The yellow wooden house is no longer a holiday house. It can become their new home.

One day they hope to pack their belongings in Italy and travel north for good: two children, a mother, and a father convicted for the manslaughter of 29 people.

### *Italy, 31 March 2009*

**A car from** the institute INGV is on its way from Rome towards the mountain city of L'Aquila. In the car sit three of the world's foremost earthquake experts. Two are members of Commissione Grandi Rischi, a committee that gives Italian authorities advice about risk situations. The third person is Giulio Selvaggi, director at the INGV, the Italian Institute of Geophysics and Vulcanology.

L'Aquila is a beautiful medieval city in the Apennines. The baristas serve their espresso like in all other Italian cities, clothes are dried outside the windows, and students create a lively atmosphere in the streets.

However, for the last several months the citizens have been worried. A sequence of small earthquakes have shaken the city, and there are rumours of a big earthquake being expected. A retired lab technician has placed homemade radon measurement equipment around the region, and now he is predicting a large earthquake. The problem is only that such measurements haven't proved credible in scientific studies. Throughout decades of research, scientists have not succeeded in perfecting a single method to predict tomorrow's big quake.

Still, many people now hope that the experts can tell them what to do, whether to leave their homes or stay calm. Many have great expectations for the meeting which is initiated by the state civil protection office, Protezione Civile.

**When Giulio Selvaggi** enters the meeting room together with his colleagues, the room is full of people. Such interest! There are local authorities, people from Protezione Civile, and several journalists. The journalists must leave the room before the meeting starts.

Selvaggi looks forward to performing his duty. He will inform the people in power about all the small earthquakes that have been experienced in the area; he will explain that it *has happened* that a sequence of earthquakes has preceded a big quake, but that most such sequences finish without a big quake in the end.

He will say what he knows – about the past. He will not make evaluations for the future. That is not his duty.

**At this point** in time Selvaggi has no idea of all that will come. Nor has he any idea about the television interview that was made outside the meeting room a few minutes earlier, where the vice director of Protezione Civile, with a grandfatherlike calmness, asked the inhabitants to calm down.

He has no idea that 31 March 2009 will be a fateful day for Italy. No one can know such a thing, until the day arrives.

The meeting proceeds as such meetings often do. Data are presented, reports are passed around. Daniela Stati, the head of Protezione Civile's regional office, asks whether she should believe those who are spreading fear. The leader of Commissione Grandi Rischi, Franco Barberi, assures her that their claims have no scientific basis:

"The seismic sequences do not tell us anything about what will happen, but they certainly direct our attention to an area where, sooner or later, a large earthquake will hit," he says.

Another member of the commission, Enzo Boschi, concludes that a large earthquake is less likely in the near future, but that one can never know. He talks with aggression and determination:

"In Italy this is the zone which is most exposed to the risk of earthquakes, one of the zones. It can happen tonight, tomorrow, in one year, in twenty years!"

After the meeting Daniela Stati thanks the participants. She says that they have made it possible for her to calm the citizens.

The mayor of L'Aquila interprets things in another way: he decides to close some of the schools in the area.

## *L'Aquila, night of 6 April 2009*

**Surgeon and father** Vincenzo Vittorini wakes up because he has fallen to the floor. "Why am I lying here?" he asks himself and gets on his feet. Standing there, he turns towards his wife Claudia and his daughter Fabrizia – they all slept in the same bed that night – and says that they can be calm, it is probably over now.

They do not respond. It looks like they are still asleep.

In the small town of Albano Laziale, 130 kilometers southwest of L'Aquila, the seismologist couple Giulio Selvaggi and Ingrid Hunstad wake up because their bed has moved. Selvaggi's first thought is that the frequency is low. The quake comes from somewhere far away.

Immediately he calls the surveillance room at work, finds out where, how strong, and sends a prayer: “Thank you, God, it was not 7.” An earthquake of magnitude 7 can cause enormous damage, but this is 5.9 on the Richter scale, several thousand times weaker (the earthquake would later be measured at 6.2). Still, he knows that the earthquake has hit the populated city of L’Aquila.

Giulio Selvaggi does everything right this morning. He turns his feelings off. Wearing his pyjamas he calls the head of Protezione Civile and informs him about the strength and the place. Then he pulls his trousers on, runs down to the car and arrives at work half an hour later.

**When an earthquake** with a magnitude of 6.2 hits a concrete building with significant construction errors, there is little one man can do. The walls move. The roof moves. The floor moves. The movements are extremely fast and they go in all directions; up and down and to the sides.

Around Vincenzo Vittorini there is a darkness that he has never seen before. And the house is dancing. The walls, the floor, the furniture – they are all dancing. He feels as if he is inside a blender.

And then there is the sound. The terrible sound! It is not like a “booo-aaaaaah” like he has been told. It is more like a scream. It is a scream so high, that when Vincenzo Vittorini screams with all his might, he can’t hear a thing.

Five days after the visit of the earthquake experts, 309 people die in L’Aquila. The survival of Vincenzo Vittorini is an absurd miracle. For six hours, he is buried under concrete and furniture, crouched next to his and Claudia’s double bed. He listens to the gradually weaker sounds from his wife and daughter; he tries to speak to them, but his voice cannot reach them.

### *L’Aquila, 24 September 2012*

**A tall, blond woman** sits in a courtroom. The accused is her husband, Giulio Selvaggi. On her first time in a courtroom, May 30th, she watched him take the witness stand. She was so nervous for him that she could not write. Today she will. Their daughter, Liv, has lent her a notebook. For Ingrid Hunstad writing is a way to escape from her thoughts.

It feels so embarrassing to be there. They, of all people. They, who through all their adult lives have been working for the good cause; for a greater understanding of how earthquakes hit.

Today they should have been on the other side, together with the victims. How wrong it feels that the victims sit there scowling at her; that they see her as the wife of a killer.

Fabio Picuti, the prosecutor, is talking, loudly and slowly, so as to underline every single word. Dressed in a long black robe, he blames the accused for having kept scientific findings secret at the meeting in L'Aquila.

Why didn't anyone mention the study from 1995, which claimed a 100 percent probability of a big earthquake during the next 20 years? Why didn't anyone mention the book saying that a sequence of small earthquakes often precedes a big one?

"Here you see the flimsy, negligent, and inappropriate behaviour of Commissione Grandi Rischi," Picuti states.

Hunstad takes notes, but she can barely believe what she is hearing. "It is absurd," she says to herself. It seems like the prosecutor is cherry picking research material, presenting it as the one and only truth, and not as what it really is; namely pieces of transitory knowledge - later it would be turned down.

Inside the courtroom it is 30 degrees celsius, and no ventilation. After four hours Hunstad feels like she might faint any moment. She leaves the room and strolls over to the small wooden house next door, where three women run a coffee bar. They smile at her as she enters through the door. Hunstad feels relieved.

**Vincenzo Vittorini** is a middle aged man with determined, brown eyes. He is not happy anymore.

He regrets that Claudia and he made the decisions they made; he regrets having bought the apartment in the first place. It was a nice apartment on the third floor, with a wonderful balcony and a view of the green valley. They used to sit there during long summer evenings. However, he could have been perfectly happy without those evenings, if he had not lost his wife and daughter.

If only they had chosen differently. If only they had decided to do as his father would have done. When small earthquakes shook Vincenzo's birth home, his father always brought his family outside to sleep in a piazza.

If only they had not listened to the experts.

The experts had told them it was safe! Just before the meeting on March 30th, the vice director of Protezione Civile, with a grandfatherlike calmness, told the local TV station that people could calm down:



“The scientific society continues to assure me that it is a favourable situation. The small earthquakes release the energy (...).”

Therefore, when a pretty strong earthquake hit at 11 pm, 5 April 2009, and then a smaller one at 12.40 a.m., Vittorini and his wife told each other that what had been said seemed right; the more energy released, the better it is.

**What really happened in L’Aquila?** No matter how many people you talk to, no matter how many papers you read, the question never seems to have a satisfying answer.

What we do know is that relatives of 29 victims went to court. They claimed that if their loved ones had not been calmed down by authorities and experts, they would have left the homes that would later fall down on them.

Giulio Selvaggi, the five other scientists at the meeting and the vice director of Protezione Civile were accused of having given “incomplete, imprecise and contradictory information” prior to the big earthquake.

The trial received worldwide reactions. The world’s largest scientific association, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, sent an open letter to the Italian president and asked him to intervene. They called the accusation “unfair and naive”. The journal *Nature* called the verdict “perverse and ridiculous”, and encouraged people to protest.

Prosecutor Fabio Picuti had to defend himself.

“I am not crazy,” he told *Nature*.

“I know they can’t predict earthquakes. The basis of the charge is not that they didn’t predict the earthquake. As functionaries of the state, they had certain duties imposed by law: to evaluate and characterize the risks that were present in L’Aquila.”

According to Picuti, the risk assessment should have included the density of the urban population and the known fragility of many ancient buildings in the city center. Picuti claimed that the experts were more interested in calming down citizens than telling them how to prepare for an earthquake.

**On the other side** researchers claimed their innocence. They did not know what the vice director had told the local TV station before the meeting. Nor had they been invited to the press conference. They had come for the meeting, then left.

“I never reassured anyone,” Giulio Selvaggi says.

The minutes of the meeting support him. The e-mails he sent to worried citizens who contacted him before the meeting, also support him.

Massimo Mazzotti, Director of the University of California Berkely, wrote in a commentary that one of the scientists' mistakes, was that they did not correct what the politicians said to the media. The comforting messages that reached the inhabitants of L'Aquila in the days prior to the earthquake may have led them to make fatal choices.

Giulio Selvaggi experienced the trial as if he were outside himself, as if motion pictures were floating by him. He was convinced of his innocence and thought all along that he would be proven not guilty. That was what everyone around told him as well, all the colleagues, all the top lawyers, everyone, except one.

Ingrid Hunstad did her own thinking, and warned him, again and again: "The lawyers are taking this too lightly. They do not understand how serious it is."

### *L'Aquila, 22 October 2012*

**It is a perfect day** to be declared innocent. Outside the courtroom the sun is shining on the blue mountains. Winter is approaching, but it is almost 30 degrees.

The courtroom is too small for the attention this trial has received. People are pushing their way in between the chairs. Photographers are standing along one wall. The cameras are from Japan, Germany, Great Britain ... Italian Rai Uno is broadcasting directly. Giulio Selvaggi thinks about his mother who is sitting at home watching. He still believes that he will be declared innocent, but deep inside him a notion of injustice tingles.

In the back of the room are the relatives of the deceased. Among them is Vincenzo Vittorini. He wants justice.

The judge enters the room wearing a black robe. He looks straight ahead, then he bends his head towards the decree. The verdict is the same for all of the accused.

After a few minutes Selvaggi turns towards the woman who has been his wife for 18 years. He understood before she did: from now on, everything will change.

**Giulio Selvaggi, Claudio** Eva, Enzo Boschi, Gianmichele Calvi, Franco Barberi, Mauro Dolce, and Bernando De Bernadinis – five scientists and two public officials – all got the same sentence this October day in 2012: six years

in prison, legal interdiction meaning the loss of many rights during these six years, claims of EUR 7.8 million in total, and the loss of the right to receive salaries from the Italian state.

The verdict may be the first where scientists are convicted after a natural disaster. According to Norwegian Professor of Sociology Law, Kristian Andenæs, it may not be the last.

“It has become more and more common to call for punishment and other strong reactions,” he says.

If a public official made a mistake a few years ago, one was usually satisfied with expressing disapproval or – if more serious – financial claims. Today, more and more people and institutions are prosecuted if they make a mistake. Andenæs believes the reason is that victims get more attention, along with the idea that victims are better off if the responsible person is punished.

Andenæs still believes that the L’Aquila case is special. In this case, it is not clear whether the convicted have done anything wrong at all.

“This case revolves around people not being able to predict the future. This is a task involving a high degree of uncertainty.”

The case also revolves around communicating uncertainty to people who lack expert knowledge. On 31 March 2009, the inhabitants of L’Aquila were scared and nervous. Should the scientists have put more effort into communicating?

“If there is reason to believe that something can go wrong, those who know that have a responsibility to say so. It is hard to tell whether the experts should have been more active in this case,” Andenæs says.

He adds:

“Today, it is easy to say that they should have made an effort to enhance the information that reached the citizens of L’Aquila. But at that point, it may not have been as clear.”

*Albano Laziale, December 2012*

**Giulio Selvaggi** and Ingrid Hunstad offer a pair of slippers in their villa in the hills outside Rome. Selvaggi lights the fireplace, and they serve tea in a ceramic teapot from Norway.

Outside, the green garden is dressed for winter. The kiwi tree stands there with no fruit, and the caravan is parked in its usual spot. It has been driven thousands of miles. Every summer, it is driven from Albano Laziale in the south to Bodø in the north, with Hunstad’s parents behind the wheel. And a

few weeks later, it returns from Bodø up north to Albano Laziale down south. Then, Hunstad and Selvaggi are driving.

The afternoon sun is reflected on the Mediterranean several kilometers from their window, and the couple talk about the last few months, and years. Their lives changed during these years. In the beginning, they were a family like all others; then they turned into a family with a father convicted of manslaughter.

They talk about the two men in the fish store who start whispering when Selvaggi enters, about all the looks – at the supermarket, in the bank. They talk about guilt, about innocence, justice and injustice. They talk about the shock after the sentence, about depression, and about how time works, “in a perfect way”, to make people deal with what they never imagined they would have to experience.

They also talk about all the help they have received, mainly from abroad, including Norway. In Norway they have colleagues, relatives and friends. They relax there. Among the fjords and mountains at Hunstad, close to Bodø, they find the peace that has been so hard to find in Italy.

### *Bodø, August 2013*

**Most of Norway** is unknown to Giulio Selvaggi, but not Bodø. He feels so good here. It is like finding the perfect pair of shoes.

As he stands by the shore with his fishing rod, with his wife of 19 years next to him, they feel the weather changing. The air from the land brings the coldness from the glaciers, the air from the sea brings the salt, the mild weather, the rain. In two minutes everything can change.

What will it be like to be here in the autumn or in the winter, when it is cold and dark? How will it be for the kids, will they find friends here?

“No matter what, it is better than being in Italy now,” Ingrid Hunstad says.

If it were up to her, they would move tomorrow. But Giulio Selvaggi wants to wait. He is fighting a battle in Italy, a battle for his freedom. What happened is not fair. He did a good job, and was convicted for it.

But it is nice to be able to breathe, not having to check the news first thing in the morning. It is nice just looking for porpoises in the sea or wondering which fish will bite. Up here, 67 degrees north, Giulio Selvaggi feels part of wild nature. Nothing more, nothing less. Here he is free.

## ABOUT THE STORY

This story is based on communication with Giulio Selvaggi, Ingrid Hunstad, and Vincenzo Vittorini in 2012, 2013, and 2014, on observations in L'Aquila and Albano Laziale in December 2012 and on conversations with inhabitants. Other sources are photographer Tina Alnes Jørgensen, lawyer Marcello Melandri, seismologist Gaetano De Luca living in L'Aquila, seismologist Alessandro Amato at the INGV, professor Kuvvet Atakan at the Institute for Geoscience, University of Bergen, the Association L'Aquila Che Vogliamo, a long list of newspapers and magazines, the minutes of the meeting from 31 March 2009, Ingrid Hunstad's diary, and photo/video material accessible on the Internet.

## FACTS

### *The L'Aquila verdict*

309 people died because of the earthquake in L'Aquila, Italy, 6 April 2009. The earthquake had a magnitude of 6.2.

Relatives of 29 victims went to court, convinced that their loved ones had died because they had been calmed down by authorities and experts prior to the earthquake. Without these reassuring messages, they would have left their homes.

In 2012, seven people were convicted for the manslaughter of 29 people. Five were among Italy's foremost seismologists and geologists, and four of these were members of Commissione Grandi Rischi. The last two accused were both from Protezione Civile (civil protection).

Commissione Grandi Rischi's duty was to advise authorities in risk situations. Protezione Civile was responsible for informing the citizens.

The seven were convicted of analyzing earthquake risk in a "superficial, approximate and generic" way, and it was implied that they had taken part in a media operation to calm down the citizens. The reasoning of the verdict was 950 pages long.

After the verdict the leader, second leader and forming leader of Commissione Grandi Rischi stepped down from their positions. The verdict made it impossible for them to perform their duties.

All received the same sentence: six years in jail, legal interdiction, financial claims of in total EUR 7.8 million, and loss of the right to receive salaries from the Italian state. No one admitted guilt.

The appeal started 10 October 2014.

*After this story was published, the appeal court found six of the seven to be innocent. Bernardo de Bernadinis from Protezione Civile was given a milder sentence.*



**Part IV**  
**The Facets and Faces of**  
**Terrorism**





## CHAPTER 12

# Framing Perfect Victims: The February 2015 Copenhagen Shootings in Danish Newspapers

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*In this chapter, I examine Danish newspapers' constructions of ideal victims, using compassion and morality as vehicles for involving readers in dealing with a terror attack on Danish soil. I argue that this is done through personalization, and a strong focus on the identities of the deceased, as well as through the voices of journalists and politicians who express compassion. The analysis shows how the identities of the two victims from the February 2015 Copenhagen shootings are constructed within several, sometimes conflicting, media frames. The two victims undergo a reconstruction over time. Different Danish newspapers position themselves through specific framing of the two deceased, who were not known to the public before they died, but became high profile victims post mortem. I argue that the framings of the two are similar in the sense that they both draw on conventional depictions of victims. However, differences emerge when the representations of the victims are influenced by a ten year old Danish cartoon controversy. This controversy is believed by some to provoke potential terrorists to carry out terror attacks in Denmark.*

**Keywords:** terrorism, framing, national identities, constructivism, victimisation

## Introduction

In December 2015 the Danish newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* elected Dan Uzan as Dane of the Year. In October 2015 the French state honored him with the medal of honor “Medaille de Courage”, while another Dane, Finn Nørgaard,

was awarded the French Order "Arts et Lettres". In May 2016, both men received a newly founded honorary award from the Danish Parliament for "dying while demonstrating extraordinary heroism". They were also awarded a memorial plaque on a pillar in the hall inside Christiansborg, where the Danish Parliament resides. Both men were killed by attacker Omar Abdel Hamid El-Hussein in what is officially labelled as a terror attack in Denmark and referred to as "the February 2015 Copenhagen shootings".

The attack on 55 year old Finn Nørgaard happened on the afternoon of 14 February 2015, when he was shot and killed. He was a photographer, film producer and director, though not widely known in Danish society. He was shot outside the local hall Krudttønden in Copenhagen where he took part in a public debate about freedom of speech. It seems that Omar El-Hussein had planned to attack the participants of this event inside the center. The course of events that led to Finn Nørgaard's death have not been fully documented, but it is believed that he left the room before or during the moment when Omar El-Hussein was shooting through the windows of the building. On the street, Finn Nørgaard was shot while attempting to overpower Omar. Several policemen were wounded as Omar El-Hussein escaped from the scene. This attack at Krudttønden, the killing of Finn Nørgaard, and the wounding of several policemen were characterized by the Danish Prime Minister at the time, Helle Thorning-Smidt, and the police of Copenhagen, as an act of terror, and an intense hunt for the presumed terrorist began.

Dan Uzan, a 37 year old Jewish man, was shot at 1am by Omar El-Hussein on 15 February, just a few hours after Finn Nørgaard was killed. As he had done many nights before, Dan Uzan was guarding the Copenhagen synagogue and the appurtenant reception rooms as a volunteer. At the time of his shooting, a party of approximately 100 people were celebrating the bar mitzvah of a young girl in the buildings. Dan Uzan was guarding the entrance of the synagogue, unarmed, accompanied only by two policemen. The two policemen were also wounded in the attack.

Neither victim was known to the public before the attack, but the post-mortem news coverage of them quickly made them public figures. In this chapter, I deal with some of the reasons why this happened, in order to understand how the narratives about them played a key role in the media's agenda after the incident, the first on Danish soil with a fatal outcome since the 1980s.

I am inspired by the notion of the ideal victim (Greer, 2004; Hakala, 2012; Sumiala, 2013; van Dijk, 2009), the tendency to a certain framing of victims related to spectacular events (van Dijk, 2009), and the idea that victims undergo a process of construction following media logic, a “mediatization of the victim” (Hakala, 2012, p. 273). There seems to be a need in the media for explicit stories that are personalized in post-violent and dramatic events (Hakala, 2012, p. 273).

The aim of the chapter is to show the attempts to construct the two deceased as coherent subjects, and to demonstrate how some of the newspapers idealize the two in distinct ways. I will also investigate the parallels as well as the differences in the ways the national papers impose grief following the loss of the men, since the coverage was not that consensual or integrative. I argue also that some of the frames that I identify in this case can be traced back to a significant controversy in Danish newspapers years before the incident took place. Finally, I present the mutual relations between the mediated frames and the agendas of leading politicians, and argue that the coverage and the identified frames serve both editorial and political purposes.

In order to understand some of the mediated frames in this study I need to present a brief introduction to a settled dispute in Danish media. In 2005, the editor of the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* chose to print a number of cartoons that depicted the prophet Muhammed. The aim was to raise a debate as to whether Danish media self-censored or if they dared to criticize Islam. Since the beginning of what is known as *the cartoon crisis* or *cartoon controversy* the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* has asserted that Danes and Danish media suppress criticism of Islam, and that they thereby suppress freedom of speech. Ever since, there has been an ongoing uncompromising national public debate on the value of freedom of speech versus tolerance towards multiple religious stances. Hjarvard (2006) argues that there is a close relationship between “news” and “views” in Danish media and that the mediated debate has a political character. The binary idea of the need to prioritize between the two principles dominates Danish media.

The cartoon crisis is believed to be a major reason why Danish society has been a target for terrorists for many years. Lars Vilks, who was supposed to speak at Krudttønden when Finn Nørgaard was killed, has been an advocate for the right to depict the Muhammed cartoons in order to pay tribute to freedom of speech.

In the analysis I argue that the constructions of the personalities and identities of the two deceased men from the Copenhagen shootings aim to mobilize the audience and to engage them morally, based on the assumption that the audience engages in identifiable narratives that attempt to create empathy. The mediation of death, not least in this case, is a question of “politicization” (Christensen & Sandvik, 2014). As I will show, leading Danish politicians actually engaged in straightforward debates on the ways that the deceased are represented. Scholars stress that the media’s practices for accentuating questions of emotion in relation to people’s deaths, disastrous events and the like, can have both social and political aspects. Sentiments might serve a specific purpose: “Briefly put, without emotion there is no commitment or ethical action” (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen, & Cottle, 2012, p. 62). One aim of applying emotions in news coverage in a disastrous situation like a terror attack is to encourage the audience to take appropriate action and acknowledge moral obligations (Pantti et al., 2012, p. 77).

## Case

The February 2015 Copenhagen shootings can be defined as a high-profile tragedy (Walter, 2008, p. 245), and in such a case the victims and deceased often happen to be represented by idealized imagery (Sumiala, 2014, p. 100; van Dijk, 2009). This study deals with the construction of identities of the deceased who had not been known to the public before their deaths, but become “victims of dramatic violent actions” (Sumiala, 2014, p. 91). Their deaths can be labelled as the death of ordinary people dying under extraordinary circumstances (Kitch, 2000; Thomas, 2008), which in some specific cases are grieved and mourned in the media (Sumiala, 2014, p. 91). Humans can be victims in different ways, either as deceased, injured, eyewitnesses, bereaved (Hakala, 2012, p. 259) or survivors (van Dijk, 2009). In this case, I deal with constructions of deceased victims.

The media texts analyzed display a growing tendency to focus on the stories of ordinary people (Coward, 2013) as well as the media’s interest in “high profile victims” (van Dijk, 2009). Though the two men were not known to the public before they died, I will argue that they became celebrities afterwards (Kitch, 2000).

Because the February 2015 Copenhagen shootings are officially labelled as a terrorist attack, it can also be discussed whether the framing of Finn Nørgaard and Dan Uzan is to be analyzed as if the attacks were disastrous events, terror, crime or a combination (Greer, 2004; Linenthal, 2001; Pantti, 2009). A frame analysis of the ways the identities of the two men are constructed can contribute to shedding light on the ways that the media make sense of the societal impact of a terrorist attack.

## Sample

I choose to analyze five Danish printed newspapers, both broadsheets and tabloids. *Berlingske Tidende*, *Politiken* and *Jyllands-Posten* are broadsheets, whereas *BT* and *Ekstra Bladet* can be characterized as tabloids. The reason why I choose texts from the printed media and not news from the web, is that I expect more narrative accounts of the two deceased in print. News from the web is to a larger extent characterized by breaking news. I choose both broadsheets and tabloids, since some argue that a focus on emotions divides tabloid journalism from quality journalism (Pantti et al., 2012, p. 64).

I have searched the Danish media database *Infomedia* for texts with the two men's names from the days they were each killed, on 14 and 15 February respectively, until 4 April 2015. 173 texts had Finn Nørgaard's name in them, and 188 texts featured Dan Uzan's name. In addition, media texts from 1 December 2015 to the end of March 2016 are part of the coverage. Here 130 texts featured Finn Nørgaard's name, and 122 had Dan's name as part of the content.<sup>1</sup>

The choice of these periods represents the idea that mourning post disaster is not a defined process with a closure. Rituals related to death and loss are repeated in a cyclical way in society in general, and ceremonial news coverage is often related to anniversaries of disastrous events (Sumiala, 2014, p. 104). This is why media analysis of events, like the one studied here, benefits from the involvement of samples that follow up in cycles. Scholars argue that the traditional tendency of media coverage to fade out after a period, in some cases, is replaced by a "renaissance of rituals" (Walter, 2008, pp. 246–247), also pointed out by Kalvig (2014).

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<sup>1</sup> There are a number of doublets in both samples since the names of both men appear in parts of the texts.

## Constructions of coherent subjects

In this first part of the analysis, I will identify traits from the mediated framing (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) of the two men in order to detect the possible power of the media texts (Entman 1993). In this analysis, frames can be understood as a central organizing idea, sets of discourses and packages of sense, though not in a straight and unequivocal way, since ambivalence is expected to occur (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). The analysis will cover both specific textual and visual elements (Vreese, 2005). In addition, I will examine if the characteristics and constructions of the identities of the two deceased occur in defined frames. An additional point made by Vreese (2005) is that certain newspapers sponsor different frames, meaning that they include and exclude differently. Framing is, among other things, a question of what is being included and what is excluded.

Often, journalists present *a core plot*, which has the characteristics of a tale that the audience is somehow familiar with even though new details appear (Kitch, 2003, p. 180). When celebrities die the media describe the deceased, so we get to know the story of the person who has been lost, in some cases not only lost to the bereaved but to society in general. Kitch argues that, “When such an icon dies, then, something dies in ‘us’, and news coverage moves out of the realm of obituary and into that of tragedy” (Kitch, 2000, p. 185). This remark is highly applicable in the case of mourning the two men. Framing is a dynamic process, Vreese (2005) argues, and this is a particular characteristic in this case. I attempt to present this ongoing process and the dynamics of the framing.

### Dan Uzan

The course of events that led to Dan’s death is described as a fatal attempt to obstruct Omar’s plan to attack the synagogue. By his death Dan saved a number of other people from dying (*BT* 19.02.15); his death prevented a catastrophe (*BT* 16.02.15); “Dan Uzan gave his life for others” (*Berlingske Tidende* 16.02.15); and, “The location of him and the two policemen prevented an even worse situation than Dan’s death and the wounding of the two policemen” (*Jyllands-Posten* 16.02.15). This leads to a headline in *BT*: “Buried as a Hero” (*BT* 19.02.15), and a headline in *Berlingske Tidende*: “Goodbye to an Everyday Hero” (*Berlingske Tidende* 19.02.15). A consensual frame of heroism (Goldstein & Tye, 2006) runs through the media texts.

Hakala's (2012) point about the ideal victim as vulnerable and innocent is even more accentuated by Van Dijk, who argues that attempts are made by the media to frame high profile victims as having a sacrificial nature (2009, p. 4), since societies respond with sympathy to passive suffering. In the descriptions of the way Dan lived, and especially how he died, we get hints of the shadow of Christ: a victim of evil, unarmed, dying for others (van Dijk, 2009). Dan is a hero, a non-violent, self-sacrificing one. In the initial period after the attacks, the framing of Dan is that of the 'martyr with appropriate values', to paraphrase Sumiala (2014, p. 100). Not least the broadsheet newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* holds on to this distinct core plot of Dan, who sacrificed himself in order to save the Jewish community, and thereby the Danish community. In addition, the loss of Dan Uzan is to some extent the loss of a child, at least he is constructed as a proxy variable for a child, since children represent symbolic innocence (Moeller, 2002). This is emphasized through the media's extensive interest in his father's mourning (*Berlingske Tidende* 21.03.15, *BT* 21.03.15, *Jyllands-Posten* 15.03.15).

One question differentiates the texts: Did Dan Uzan belong to the small Jewish community or the broad Danish community – or both – after his death? A member of the Jewish community states that "he took the bullets" for the community (*Jyllands-Posten* 19.02.15). The newspaper *Berlingske Tidende*, which covers Dan's death with the most pathos, states: "The death of Dan Uzan has become all of Denmark's story" (*Berlingske Tidende* 25.02.15). This could be interpreted as if *Berlingske Tidende* wishes to state that Dan *took the bullets for Denmark*. An acquaintance of Dan from outside the Jewish community is cited as saying that Dan "also had friends 'on the other side' and that his appearance was never characterized by religion" (*Jyllands-Posten* 16.02.15).

Dan was "an angel", his father states after his death, Dan held the vision that "evil could only be defeated by kindness" (*Berlingske Tidende*, 21.03.15). He was "tolerant", "unprejudiced", and "caring towards all people", something that is repeatedly illustrated by the narrative of him playing basketball with people of all kinds of religious backgrounds (*Ekstra Bladet* 16.02.15, *Ekstra Bladet* 18.02.15).

The framing of Dan as a sacrificing, non-violent hero, is one of the two frames that stick to Dan in the weeks after his death. This is a strong storyline that "resonates with larger cultural themes" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 5) like the one of the sacrifice of Christ. In addition, the media's constructions of



his identity are linked to one of the dominant Danish media frames with an origin in the cartoon crisis: the frame that appeals to avoiding potential demonization of Muslims (Berg & Hervik, 2007). No severe attempts to demonize can be identified in the printed media following the attacks in Copenhagen, but the underlying message, particularly of *Berlingske Tidende's* framing of Dan, is that the attack should not be handled with revenge and further escalation of a cultural and religious conflict. Dan Uzan is constructed as a protagonist for this message.

## Finn Nørgaard

The attempts to frame the other victim, Finn Nørgaard, contain elements of a core plot (Kitch, 2000) but not as consistently as in the case of Dan. In some media texts, Finn is described as “unprejudiced” and “openhearted” like Dan (*Berlingske Tidende* 16.02.15). He was “a spokesperson for tolerance and intercultural understanding” (*Berlingske Tidende* 16.02.17), “very fond of children and young people” and had an “especially strong interest in the conditions and constraints of the marginalized” (*BT* 24.02.15). He wished to “bring about understanding between people across cultural differences” and envisaged “how inclusion of the marginalized can take place” (*Ekstra Bladet* 23.02.15, *Politiken* 25.02.15). He was a “brave person”, always “able to see the best in people despite their religious and ethnic backgrounds” (*Jyllands-Posten* 25.02.15). If one only takes these accounts into consideration, it could be argued that Finn is framed just like Dan: As an opponent to the further demonization of Muslims, in light of the 10 year ongoing Danish debate about tolerance towards religion and culture (Berg & Hervik, 2007). However, the framing of Finn is more political than the framing of Dan. In the quotes in this paragraph, it seems as if Finn had the “do not demonize agenda”, not only in his private life but professionally as well, since he produced films that deal with questions of inclusion. This means that he was less *innocent* than Dan (Moeller, 2002), since he took a more overt stance concerning questions of tolerance, inclusion, and integration, according to these texts.

The ambiguity in the efforts to construct Finn as a coherent subject relates first and foremost to the fact that Finn was participating in a public debate about freedom of speech in the local hall at the time he was shot. The competing media frames from the cartoon crisis is one reason why the

constructions of Finn as a coherent subject seem to vary more, and his appearance as an individual depends on the newspaper and the editorial line of the newspaper. Among the Danish papers, *Jyllands-Posten* has a special interest in Finn Nørgaard's preoccupation with the question of freedom of speech. This question has been much debated in Denmark since the beginning of the cartoon controversy, which was initiated by the same paper (Berg & Hervik, 2007). Therefore it is notable that *Jyllands-Posten's* constructions of Finn's identity are significantly different from the other papers in the first period of time following his death. In an obituary, the newspaper positions him as if he tried to conceal the fact that he was much engaged in this debate "since he was discreet by nature, this was only something he discussed with a few of his friends until the attack at Charlie Hebdo" (*Jyllands-Posten* 16.02.15). The characterization of Finn Nørgaard as an opponent of Islam is enhanced by *Jyllands-Posten*. This paper argues that people like him are suppressed in Danish public debate. This is why *Jyllands-Posten* appreciates his engagement in this delicate question.

But parallel to his participation in the arena discussing the suppression of freedom of speech, his involvement in producing documentaries about the integration of ethnic minorities into Danish society is applied to construct him as a proponent of tolerance, as well as a defender of the freedom to demonize Muslims (*Politiken* 16.02.15). Since the cartoon crisis, the two stances have been incompatible in Danish public debate and as media frames. Tolerance and freedom of speech are binary opposites.

This makes it difficult for some papers to position Finn Nørgaard in the same martyr role (Moeller, 2002) as Dan Uzan. It takes *innocence* to be framed as a passive suffering victim (van Dijk, 2009), and in a Danish context, it is not innocent to participate in public debate while holding on to the argument that freedom of speech is unquestionable.

At the same time, *Jyllands-Posten* contributes to the framing of Finn Nørgaard as an ideal victim. That the framing of him is complex, and that his *core* is difficult to detect and agree upon, can be recognized in a column in the same newspaper (*Jyllands-Posten* 28.02.15) where a right wing debater pays him tribute: "[He] got shot for one single reason: because he was unusually brave. This came as a big surprise to me. We are not familiar with middle-aged men from the creative class who suddenly act heroically." The fact that he, in the eyes of the debater, does not act as a stereotypical left-wing artist, who

ought to be a fleeing pacifist hiding when trouble occurs, makes him an ultimate hero.

When the newspapers apply frames in order to construct the identity of the deceased, strong attempts are made to leave a specific impression in the reader's mind (Moeller, 2002). However, in the case of Finn Nørgaard the initial phase does not lead to a consensual narrative, and the core plot becomes blurred. The narratives of Finn Nørgaard are ambiguous both within *Jyllands-Posten* and in comparing *Jyllands-Posten* with other newspapers following right after the attack. In the first phase, two competing and opposing frames in Danish media – avoiding the demonization of Muslims, versus protecting freedom of speech – are applied, in order to characterize Finn Nørgaard. Competing attempts are made to frame him within two of the most binary, conflicting frames in Danish media: The frame that urges not to demonize versus the frame of freedom of speech.

But there is still one struggle left regarding the framing of Finn Nørgaard. In the first days after the shootings, there is no overview of the course of events, and hence no explanation for why Finn Nørgaard faced attacker Omar El-Hussein on the street. It takes days before it is stated in witness testimonials that Finn made an active attempt to defeat the armed terrorist (*Berlingske Tidende* 20.02.15, *Ekstra Bladet* 20.02.15), and it is only from the disclosure of these statements that the idealization of Finn becomes significant. From that point, he is described as “courageous” and “righteous” (*BT* 20.02.15). The testimonials strengthen the narrative of Finn as a hero: “He refused to hide when he faced injustice, and so he ran straight towards the attacker to overpower him, and though he was shot to death, he prevented a massacre” (*BT* 25.02.15). After the details about Finn Nørgaard's death are established, they begin to influence the characterizations of him: “He was a hero and he died as a hero” (*Ekstra Bladet* 25.02.15).

The media construct “idealized identities” (Sumiala, 2014) concerning the deaths of both Dan Uzan and Finn Nørgaard, and the courage and sacrifice of both men become dominant in the narratives for a period of some months after they die. But it takes time before the frames containing the narrative that both men suffered passively through their sacrificial nature (van Dijk, 2009), and the constructions of their heroism in a Christian sacrificial manner, become an inseparable part of the discourses of the two (Goldstein & Tye, 2006).

A striking feature in this analysis is the absence of attempts to construct the identities of the two men in the broadsheet newspaper *Politiken*. Since the beginning of the cartoon crisis, the paper has taken a significant position in this controversy. *Politiken* has advocated for the do not demonize frame (Berg & Hervik, 2007). In the coverage of the February 2015 Copenhagen shootings, the paper refrains from covering the mourning of the two to the same extent as the other papers. It seems as if it avoids any involvement in emotionally loaded coverage. Both the wording of texts and choice of pictures are characterized by a remarkable absence of constructing the identities of the deceased.

## Mediated compulsory grief as sanctioned by the state

I will now first analyze the mediated grieving over the two men. Then I will examine how leading Danish politicians adapt the narratives of the deceased, and continue to use the frames provided by the media in relation to their own agendas. There is a significant general interplay and tacit agreement between the media and leading Danish politicians to mourn the two in the first period of time after the attacks, though the mediated frames differed as shown above.

In the case of high-profile tragedies, the media often engage in thorough descriptions of the grief of the bereaved (Chouliaraki, 2008; Walter, Littlewood, & Pickering, 1995). Mediated narratives are often bound up with emotions, (Pantti et al., 2012, p. 78), and there can be political reasons for emotionally loaded media coverage, since emotions of grief reinforce solidarity.

Media texts that cover memorial ceremonies and funerals as news, are especially “infused with emotions” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). Particularly through the use of pictures, the media attempt to display what Turner defines as “social drama” (see Simonsen, 2015a, 2015b). The death of two innocent victims is such a tragic event. Because grief seems so obvious, the media often find it unnecessary to quote sources or write directly about the drama in parts of the coverage. Instead, the assumption can be read indirectly in pictures (Sumiala, 2014; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013, p. 135). This is characteristic of this case as well, where pictures from the funerals, commemorations, and spontaneous shrines in front of the sites of the attacks play a dominant role in the coverage of the attacks.

Mourning the deceased is to a large extent displayed in pictures. Shrines from both crime scenes play an important role (Simonsen, 2015a, 2015b), and pictures of mourning people, both bereaved and people who are moved though they did not know the deceased, are numerous. Particularly displayed are pictures of the Danish crown prince and leading politicians from all political parties in the parliament participating at memorial ceremonies and the two funerals. There are a number of visual representations of the head of the opposition at the time, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, who grieves, though the prime minister at the time of the attack, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, is given the most attention, and a number of pictures of her looking devastated and crying at the two funerals are displayed on several of the newspapers' front pages (*BT* 19.02.15, *Jyllands-Posten* 19.02.15, *Berlingske Tidende* 19.02.15). Not only depictions of the grieving bereaved, but also of many official Danish representatives and leading politicians from different parties can be said to support the idea of grief "sanctioned by the state" (Walter, 2008, p. 242). Quotes from the official representatives about their grief can be found, although it is the visuals that dominate.

Before the shootings, the Danish Prime Minister in 2015, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, was criticized for not showing her feelings and private side, which affected her image negatively – a critique that is also identified in cases of other female prime ministers (Fonn & Lindholm, 2015). In a Danish context, it can be argued that it was news in itself that the prime minister showed emotion. Kitch argues that "news of feelings" as well as "news of facts" is part of the media coverage (2000). A number of pictures showing Thorning-Schmidt crying at funerals and memorials are published (*Berlingske Tidende* 25.02.15, *Ekstra Bladet* 19.02.15, *BT* 25.02.15), and headlines such as "Thorning in Tears" (*BT* 19.02.15) are ways to frame leaders who express their emotions in crisis, also observed in other contexts (Simonsen, 2015b). It can be argued that Thorning-Schmidt, in the initial phase after the killings, becomes the protagonist (Wahl-Jørgensen, 2013) in the media's representations of the official grieving over the two deceased. Helle Thorning-Schmidt is cited as saying that "she was angry that Dan Uzan got killed" (*BT* 19.02.15), although a few days later she states in *Politiken* (21.02.15) that Dan's funeral changed her way of understanding this anger, and she left the funeral and the encounter with the Jewish community with another more positive perspective: "Upon my departure I had more positive thoughts, that we are able to handle this. The Jewish community is very strong [...] And Danish society is strong as well".

Even though Thorning-Schmidt appears to be a protagonist in the media's representations of official Danish grief, the newspapers also shed light on the reactions from other politicians, and especially the agreement of mourning the dead. The pictures represent an agreement that the situation calls for mourning. In addition, they convey the message that officials gather across everyday disagreements and conflicts of interest (*Berlingske Tidende* 25.02.15, *BT* 25.02.15, *Politiken* 17.02.15), since there is no political disagreement in the process of mourning the two men in this phase. For a moment it seems as if the political elite are gathered and united in their grief over the two: "Ritualization of death [...] has the potential to create a subjunctive universe, a shared social world of 'as if' or 'could be' around death" (Sumiala 2014, p. 92).

After a terror attack, audiences are "invited to feel for, and act upon, the suffering" (Pantti et al., 2012, p. 63). News coverage is to a large degree a question of morality (Kitch, 2000), and in this case there is morality embedded in the media's invitation to mourn the two. Politicians play a part in this, and the storytelling of the grief has a dimension of moral purpose, an element that aims to engage. And maybe it mobilizes an audience as well (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013, p. 137). Emotions in media coverage might have a political outcome: Social change might appear, not through traditional politics, but through frames as stepping stones to mobilization (Pantti et al., 2012, p. 162).

The dominant mediated narratives of the subjects Dan and Finn are constructed as a counter balance to the anger and blame that might occur post disaster. In the news media, anger never becomes the prevalent emotion following the Copenhagen shootings. This is done through constructing the identities of the two as idealized victims, who become an antithesis to the meaningless terror attack (Sumiala, 2014, p. 102). The framing of the men who lost their lives for *us*, is an occasion to mobilize the audience and invite them to engage in moral questions. Through the media's overall unity on this question, the attempts to mobilize the audience are so dominant that they become "compulsory" (Pantti et al., 2012, p. 126).

## A hierarchy of grief

The plots of the narratives of the two men are not identical, but attempts are made to give the two men an equal status, to unify them, and mourn them in the same way. *Politiken* states: "It appears as if they both, though in different

ways, seem to have made a courageous effort to stop the alleged terrorist” (*Politiken* 16.02.15). In *Berlingske Tidende*, a columnist writes that “the murder of Finn was a murder of conversation” while “the murder of Dan was a murder of humanity”, all in all it was the “murder of two good men” (*Berlingske Tidende* 01.03.15). It was due to their sacrificial natures, and the fact that they were in the wrong place at the wrong time that they were killed, even though it appears from the framing that they were killed for different reasons.

However, in this last part of the analysis, I will present the media’s subtle struggles to define whether one is more worthy of grief than the other. The contours of a hierarchy of grief begin to manifest themselves not long after the attacks. Accounts of the deceased construct a hierarchy of grief (Andersen, 2013; Butler, 2004; Chouliaraki, 2008), as victims who die in the same incidents seldom receive equal public interest (Cathrine Bell in Sumiala, 2014, p. 92). Distinctions are made for dead people as well as for the living, and distinctions are displayed in controversies over whether some people are more worthy of grief than others.

One argument is that the death of Dan Uzan should be mourned the most, due to the vulnerability of the Jews. In a letter to the editor of *Berlingske Tidende* it is stated:

If you stretch your tolerance, you might get a vague understanding of how the aggressors resort to violence to oppose the criticism of and satire on their religion, but it is impossible to comprehend why they, as a cynical appendix, had to cause an attack on Jewish institutions (*Berlingske Tidende* 17.02.15).

This perspective is also found in a column written in the same newspaper by former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen. Again, a differentiation is being made between the causes of the attacks on the two men. Ellemann-Jensen argues that the lesson to be learned from the shootings is that “we ought to guard our Jews more actively and demonstratively [...] without the Jews our country would be a poorer country” (*Berlingske Tidende* 17.02.15). These perspectives are strongly criticized in another comment which disapproves of Ellemann-Jensen, who

ignores [...] the second victim [...] who is not mentioned as one of the citizens that Denmark has to protect [...] Ellemann-Jensen flirts with risky logic, when he attributes to one victim more right to protection than the other [...]. Two men were killed in Copenhagen this weekend. Both were in need of protection (*Berlingske Tidende* 19.02.15).

Even though a partial consensus is temporarily reached in the mediated frames of the two, and despite the fact that the plots of the narratives about the two and how they were killed is framed within a discourse of heroism in a self-sacrificial way, dissent continues. In December 2015, a very overt controversy over who to mourn the most, breaks out. Whereas the first debate seemed subtle, this is not the case in the debate that occurs later.

*Berlingske Tidende* is the paper that frames Dan Uzan most intensively, not only following the weeks and months after his death. In December 2015, the newspaper proclaims Dan to be “Dane of the Year”, an award that is given to a person who “has made a crucial difference for other people”. He receives this award after his death since “he has paid the highest price possible in order to safeguard other people’s lives. And because he literally did guard freedom of religion”. The chief editor states in his tribute to Dan Uzan: “He saved other people’s lives and sacrificed his own. This is the ultimate way to live up to the criteria for receiving the award.” The Danish Prime Minister at this time, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, is present at the ceremony, and he gives a speech where he states: “Dan symbolizes a year characterized by tough conditions and tough incidents. He has become an image of the threat against Danish Jews, but he is first and foremost a true Danish everyday hero” (*Berlingske Tidende* 09.12.15).

In his New Year’s Speech on Danish television a few weeks later, Lars Løkke Rasmussen begins with a tribute to Dan Uzan: “Dan possessed courage: the courage to be kind. He protected the guests at a confirmation party. He guarded others, without caring for himself.” The choice to enhance Dan Uzan, and not mention Finn Nørgaard, is strongly criticized in the months that follow. Finn’s sister expresses her devastation in long interviews carried out a year after the attacks (*Jyllands-Posten* 07.02.16, *Ekstra Bladet* 08.02.16), and the editor at *Ekstra Bladet* questions the prime minister’s choice: “The exclusion of Finn Nørgaard in the speech cannot be explained by obliviousness [...] It is ruthless, especially to Finn Nørgaard’s family” (*Ekstra Bladet* 02.08.16). The Chairwoman of the Danish Parliament Pia Kjærsgaard argues in a similar way:

I understand Finn Nørgaard’s sister. I have had the same thought. I have great, great respect for both – and their families. It is true that Finn Nørgaard has passed into oblivion, and that is not fair [...] I believe that Dan Uzan has received a lot of honor – which definitely is well-deserved. Though I have been thinking: Where is Finn Nørgaard in all this? (*Ekstra Bladet* 08.02.15).



*Ekstra Bladet* prints an interview with a retired professor of history, who states that:

It is peculiar and strongly conspicuous to mention the one, but not the other [...] one can definitely talk about ‘damnatio memoriae’ [...] [which] means that you wipe out the memory of someone [...] They also did so in Hitler’s Germany and in Stalin’s Soviet Union (*Ekstra Bladet* 08.02.16).

The first interview initiating the explicit questioning of whether Dan is worth more grief than Finn is presented in *Jyllands-Posten*, the newspaper that had acknowledged Finn Nørgaard the most, though the harsh critique that follows is in the tabloid newspaper *Ekstra Bladet*. The lack of a single unequivocal discourse leads to the construction of a hierarchy of grief. It is built up through a complex interaction of discourses (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 2).

The consequence of this overt controversy is that, in the months that follow, the media, politicians, and others make sure to mention both men when references are made to the shootings.

## Conclusions

In this chapter, I have analyzed a case of how death initiates journalism that involves the construction of identities and emotions. This is an example of the ways the media frame the identity of victims differently, and how media texts can be understood as tributes to people who die in spectacular and unforeseen events. Although the case analyzed in this chapter can be characterized by a low number of casualties and, in that respect, is not as disastrous and overwhelming as other recent terrorist attacks, it provides an opportunity for an in-depth analysis of how the media construct identities – also of the deceased. In this case, the journalistic media strive to construct the two men as coherent subjects, and they appear as highly valuable victims. As idealized victims they become points of identification for loss and suffering.

In the case of the Copenhagen shootings, the media coverage accords a great deal of attention to the deceased, to the bereaved family and friends, and to official representatives. The salience of this is to a large degree a question of repetition (Entman, 1993, p. 53). I argue that leading politicians take ownership of the frames provided by the media. It is difficult to detect any

independent attempts to frame the deceased among the leading representatives from the parliament.

I have identified a pattern in the way media frames are applied. Most of the media – and leading politicians – apply what seem to be consensual frames: The media cover the deaths of the two as a sacrifice to be remembered as heroism, which is constructed as an ultimate ideal. The constructions of both men's identities seem to underline the dominant ideology advocated by the media and the state: strive for peace and avoid conflict. This frame can be identified in many cultural and national settings, and it is not really questioned in the media or among politicians.

Another frame is more contested. This frame can be traced back to the beginning of the Danish cartoon crisis and has had a longer national history in Denmark. The frame regards the importance of avoiding the demonization of Muslims. A contrary frame in Danish public debate is the importance of freedom of speech. These are binary frames in a Danish context that have dominated public debate for years. They are oppositional, held in a dialectical relationship (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 6). The newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, that initiated the cartoon crisis, attempts to frame the death of Finn Nørgaard as a question of fighting for freedom of speech. However, this frame never fully prevails. Other crises following from disastrous events around the world have led to more consensual frames (Kitch, 2003) than in this case, but even though elements of disagreement can be identified, a dominant part of the Danish coverage is consensual.

All frames identified are prior to the case (Vreese, 2005) in the sense that they have been identified before, though applied in other contexts. An issue specific frame (Vreese, 2005) is that of the innocent victims. This frame can also be recognized in other cases where people are hurt in dramatic events often with a violent dimension. The frame has been applied before in similar cases, to depict different kinds of victims. But the media also sponsor generic frames (Vreese, 2005): one of freedom of speech and a second of tolerance towards Muslims. These frames are particularly related to a Danish context, and since the cartoon crisis the frames are brought into a number of different cases, which do not necessarily touch on dramatic events.

By framing the men as sacrificing heroes, whose death will not lead to conflict and exclusion of Muslims from Danish society, the media personalize a possible and suitable solution to the social problem of intolerance and conflict among people with different religious backgrounds. In this respect, mourning

the deaths is a way to gather the audience in a political project. The audience is invited to engage in a reinforcement of solidarity, though the attempts do not pass without controversy. Finn Nørgaard's sacrifice seems more complex than Dan Uzan's. The blurred narratives of Finn seem to trouble a coherent framing, and the apparent controversy of whom to mourn the most leads to a hierarchy.

The expansion of stories concerning emotions and sentiments is by some labeled as *tabloidization* since emotions like compassion and grief have been argued to be “entertaining” and “sensational”. In the case from Denmark, there seems to be a variation in the way the newspapers in the sample cover emotions and grief. However, it is not a difference that can be explained as a distinction between broadsheets and tabloids. It is the broadsheet paper *Berlingske Tidende* that covers the emotions and mourns the death of Dan Uzan most intensively, whereas the broadsheet *Jyllands-Posten* and the tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* acknowledge Finn Nørgaard the most in the later phase. People's emotional life and sentiments are included in broadsheet papers as well as tabloids (Coward, 2013). The distinctions in the coverage are to be found especially in the comparison of some of the broadsheets. The deaths of the two men also provided an opportunity for the media to restate their position in the cartoon crisis.

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## CHAPTER 13

# Work First, Feel Later: How News Workers Reflect on Subjective Choices During a Terror Attack

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*In journalism studies, the discussion of objectivity as a strategic ritual is long standing, while the impact of subjectivity and emotion upon journalism has received much less attention. During terror events, journalists' notion of objectivity as a strategy is likely to be challenged due to unexpected autonomy. In order to explore how this unfolds, we have interviewed 24 journalists in three different news organisations shortly after the Norwegian terror attack in 2011, where 77 people were killed. Studies of what journalists experience during a terror attack, and how they reflect upon their experiences, are scarce. The present study addresses this gap, and in particular looks at how news workers deal with dilemmas where their perceptions of professionalism are challenged.*

**Keywords:** 22 July terrorism, Norway, subjectivity, journalists

## Introduction

In 2011, Norway experienced a lone wolf terrorist attack. It was the worst event in the country since World War II. The terrorist first placed a car bomb close to the government building in downtown Oslo, where Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg had his office. The explosion killed eight people and wounded 209 others. Just less than two hours later, the terrorist went on to massacre 69 people, mostly youths, at a Labour Party (AP) summer camp.

Five years later, there is no lack of research on this terror event. Yet, few researchers have focused on how journalists experienced the tension between the need for informing the audience objectively and in a balanced way, on one hand, while on the other having to deal with a reality that might have appeared surreal at the moment. An important issue in understanding journalism is the notion of professionalism. Örnebring frames the notion of professionalism as a “bulwark against both excessive partisanship and rampant commercialization, or a tool used to achieve societal power without accountability and to ensure a steady supply of docile employees” (Örnebring, 2016, p. 20). In journalism, as well as in other professions, there is an ongoing debate on how “professionalism” may be understood. When it is applied to journalism, Örnebring contends that “manager and managed very likely have different ideas about what professionalism means” (Ibid., p. 21). According to Evetts (2003, p. 407ff, 2006, p.140f), the notion of journalistic professionalism can be divided into two competing forms: organizational professionalism and occupational professionalism. While Örnebring (2016) examines the financially failing models of legacy media, and the introduction of new short-term staff, few studies look at how journalism-as-work takes place during large crises, or as in the case in this article, during a terror attack. An important part of being a professional journalist is the application of journalistic practices and routines. Gaye Tuchman was the first to emphasise that news workers’ insistence upon “objectivity” had very practical motivations behind it. These include an enhanced ability to negotiate deadlines, relief from potential libel suits, and a riposte to any internal reprimands based on one’s content or delivery (Tuchman 1972, p. 660). Tuchman’s article launched a discussion that is still ongoing (Sjøvaag 2011, p. 23), because the journalistic notion of objectivity is closely linked to the emergence of professionalism in the field (Schudson and Anderson 2009, p. 92). As pointed out by Riegert and Olsson (2007), media research on crises,

disasters and extraordinary events has focused mostly upon the interactions among the media, state authorities and citizens, and less upon the “informational flow of the media” (2007, p. 137). Consequently, we are often left with questions as to why and how journalists act as they do during crises (see for example Jarlbro, 2004, p. 64).

Few scholars have looked at whether journalists experience a break with objectivity as a strategic ritual during an event like a terror attack, when family members or friends might be part of the tragedy or when they might even know the terrorist personally. If, under these (extremely subjective) conditions, journalists try to hold onto objectivity as a strategic priority, how do they do so? Karin Wahl-Jorgensen (2013) recently played on Tuchman’s famous 1972 article titled “Objectivity as a Strategic Ritual” in her own work titled “The Strategic Ritual of Emotionality”, which she describes as “an institutionalized and systematic practice of journalists of infusing their reporting with emotion” (2013, p. 129). The present study seeks to compare these two “ritual” modes of journalism at those times when everyday habits and norms are disrupted by decidedly emotional developments. In doing so, we ask if the “manager” and the “managed” handle the situation differently or similarly? How do, for example, journalists handle unexpected autonomy during a terror attack? And finally, when a large scale terror attack occurs, can we even talk about journalism as an institution in the same sense as before the incident took place, or does decision making during such unsettling events rest more on the subjective ability of the individual journalist?

## **Objective and impartial reporting during breaking news**

Tuchman (1972, p. 661) defined ritual as a “routine procedure which has relatively little or only tangential relevance to the end sought” and pointed to the fact that the eighteenth-century practice of bleeding patients to “cure” fever may also be viewed as a ritual. She understood strategy as informing the steps one takes to produce something. Schudson and Anderson (2009, p. 93) also look at the ways in which the profession’s norms relating to objectivity are negotiated and constructed. They cite Hallin and Mancini (2004, p. 34), who link professionalism to objectivity. The two scholars point to Walter Lippman



to explain the emergence of objectivity as an ideal. Lippmann argued that journalists needed to develop a sense of evidence and “acknowledge the limits of available information” (Schudson and Anderson 2009, p. 92). Objectivity was strongly linked to professionalism as well as to truth seeking. In fact, according to these scholars “understanding the emergence of objectivity would, in short, provide the key to understanding the emergence of professionalism” (ibid.). Rosalind Coward (2013, p. 8) uses the term subjectivity to characterise the shift from a reporter-constructed objectivity to an audience-driven attraction to subjectivity. When journalists start out as trainees, she explains, they will “learn conventions and techniques about reporting ‘impartially’ and communicating ‘objectively’”. Subjective reporting, she contends, often departs in content and style from the common-sense notion of journalism. Coward is not the only scholar to describe this division in the context of the huge increase in personal reporting and subjective journalism that appears to have accompanied the rise of social media (see Steensen, 2011; Hornmoen, 2015).

This article argues that journalists tend to be depicted simply as an extension of the media industry for which they work, rather than as creative individuals who might be socially aware. As Cottle points out, journalists “are more consciously and knowingly involved with, and purposefully productive of, news texts and output than they are often theoretically given credit for” (2000, p. 22). Analyses have shown that TV journalists and producers are very aware of the subjective strategic rituals of their daily practices. Rather than falling in line with Coward’s (2013, p. 8) claim that they always aim for “impartial” and “objective” reporting, they know how to organise their work so as to impact the final product as they see fit. In other words, as this chapter will demonstrate, the reporters interviewed for this article not only knew how to handle professional rituals and accommodate the needs of their sponsoring institutions, but also actively pursued their own ends and agendas. As they performed their roles as anchors, live reporters or investigative journalists, they applied various strategies with new-found autonomy.

Tuchman (1978, p. 47) distinguished between five categories of news: hard, soft, spot, developing, and continuing. While journalists had a hard time defining exactly what hard news was in her study, she concluded that a hard-news story was “interesting to human beings”, whereas a soft-news story was “interesting because it deals with the life of human beings” (1978, p. 48). She also emphasised that hard news was “a depletable consumer product” (1978, p. 51).

Although Gaye Tuchman's study took place in the 1970s, her findings and distinctions between various types of news are still pertinent. Journalists continue to be aware that hard news comes with a time limit and could expire, so that the first phase of hard-news coverage, in turn, is intensely competitive, as journalists race to acquire the most exclusive material.

Breaking news, such as terror events, is hard news, and part of what Tuchman called developing stories. Occasionally, a story simply grows as more facts are gathered, until they become what in her days was known as "what-a-story" (1978, p. 59; for later labels, see also Berkowitz 1992). Using the 22 July terror attack as the main study, this chapter investigates how reporters viewed their role in content production during this pivotal historical event on Norwegian soil. In the case of the 22 July terror event in Norway, reporters experienced a feeling of absurdity, and during interviews they would sometimes have problems expressing their experience. They could, for example, state: "I cannot describe it, it is too big"; it was "the biggest story in my lifetime"; "I did not believe anything like this would happen in Norway". Others more soberly categorised it as a big breaking-news story, but likewise acknowledged its profound impact on their lives and practice. This is discussed in more detail in the Discussion and Analysis section.

## Methodology

For this article, we interviewed twenty-four journalists in a semi-structured, qualitative manner between July and October 2011, including reporters, photographers, editors, middle managers and news editors. Our point of departure was a seminar at Norwegian TV2 during which journalists discussed dilemmas regarding the ways in which reporting on their own cultural context was sometimes "too close for comfort". This seminar inspired us to look more closely at those dilemmas, especially in relation to the abiding tradition of objectivity in journalism. In this chapter, the sample includes interviews from personnel representing three media organisations geographically situated close to the terror event.

The first is NRK (Norwegian Broadcasting Cooperation), the public broadcasting service in Norway that creates content for TV, radio and the web. The organisation consists of a central main office (located close to the city centre in Oslo) and several regional offices all over Norway (Erdal, 2008, p. 27–28).

NRK is funded by a license fee and is mandated by the Norwegian government through the Ministry of Culture. NRK is thus a government owned public service broadcaster. According to Trine Syvertsen (2008), all the Norwegian political parties except *Fremskrittspartiet* (Party of Progress) agree that NRK is the most important means of obtaining quality, diversity and national culture, and at the time of that study, politicians were less critical of NRK's content than of competing commercial channels such as TV2 and the radio channel P4. While NRK might have less freedom of action and more commitment as to what to broadcast, they have a more secure financial situation and do not have to depend on advertising and commercials like the other cases in this study, VG and TV2 (Syvertsen, 2008, p. 221–222).

The second organisation is the commercial counterpart to NRK: TV2 News. It was first established in 1992, and was created on the condition that TV2 would produce alternate TV news (Waldahl et al. 2006, p. 67). Since 2000, TV2 News has: had an increased focus on breaking news and live production; more focus on the presenters; developed new technology, speedier production, and more production of news content in less time with less resources. In 2007, TV2 established a 24/7 news channel, although as part of the already existing news production (Lund 2013, p. 110).

The third organisation in this study is the newspaper VG's online edition, which was established in 1995 (Lund and Puijk 2012, p. 71). The newspaper itself has an important place in Norwegian history as it was established by members of the Norwegian Resistance right after World War II. It is presently owned by the Schibsted Group. The newspaper has grown to be the biggest tabloid newspaper in Norway, and launched its online edition in 1995. This is the most popular Internet news site in Norway.

As mentioned earlier, as an illustrative case study in journalistic adaptation during a crisis event, we chose the lone-wolf terror attack in Norway on 22 July 2011. It remains one of the few terror attacks committed by a domestic right-wing individual, and it suited our study because it forced journalists to think "outside the box". There was nothing in Norwegian history nor in the Norwegian cultural psyche that could have prepared the populace for comprehending what was happening in their normally peaceful country on 22 July 2011, and journalists experienced the same lack of emotional and general coping mechanisms.

## Discussion and Analysis

### The “Managers”: Editors and reporters in the newsroom

Right after the bomb exploded at the main government building in downtown Oslo, a peculiar situation occurred in front of the VG building, a media house, across the street. The blast from the bomb blew out the front windows of the media building. Reporters were told to evacuate the building, and they then walked down the staircase before entering the street where there were wounded and dead people lying on the ground. Several informants noted that some of their colleagues started to run *away* from the situation. Likewise, during those initial chaotic moments outside the VG building, security guards began to restrict re-entry. However, several news workers decided that they did not want to comply with this restriction and forced their way into the staircase over the protests of the security guard. A senior reporter explained why he chose to return to the closed newsroom:

But I am used to working with breaking news and sudden events. [...] I felt like I should contribute. I expected that of myself and I am sure others expected this of me as well. And in comparison to a summer temp . . . I should contribute. And it was summer and not a lot of people were at work. There were a lot of summer temps, and I think they did a very good job that evening. But you can't expect them to run upstairs. And then maybe it is OK that . . . we'll have to do it then, sort of. (Senior Reporter VG Nett, 30.09.11)

The decision to disobey orders of the security guards as well as the police was hard but necessary, some felt. A younger reporter even said that he was willing to die for the newspaper in order to get information out to the audience (Online Reporter VG Nett). Reporters felt that objective, balanced reporting would help the public to be better informed in this most crucial phase and, at least in the very beginning of the event, did not focus on social media. According to these journalists, the only way to take control of the situation was to return to the one place they *could* control: the VG newsdesk. At the time, nobody knew whether a second attack would occur, but for four hours, these journalists remained in the newsroom. When asked if they thought they were in danger, several staff members recalled the example set

by their team leader, an experienced news editor who told them to make their own decisions:

He [the editor] sort of said, “You are here of your own free will. You are here voluntarily. I cannot vouch for your safety in being here”. (Senior Reporter VG Nett, 30.09.11)

In his own interview, the editor switches between sympathy for anyone who might want to leave and admiration for those who stayed (as all of them did):

There were perhaps one or two of those [reporters] who joined us later, who were uncertain whether or not it was a good idea, whether or not it was safe, but who chose to do it anyway. On their *own* initiative. But we had a strong team feeling. Maybe we thought that . . . We are located here, together, and doing this very important job. And there is a reason why we’re here. I believe everyone was motivated by the fact that we were located where we could get the job done. And that we had this incredibly important job to do. It had never felt more important than at that moment to get information out to the citizens. (Editing Manager VG, 16.09.2011)

Several of the staff members of this team who forced their way back into the newsroom emphasised that the job came first, and then came the personal realisation of the extent of the tragedy and its resonance. The leader of this group explained his approach to all of the day’s subjective experiences and emotions from a different angle, seeing them almost as valuable resources for the objective professional. He noted that it was, oddly, a dream for a journalist to be working so close to a breaking news event, even one as horrific as this. When asked to elaborate, he explained that he had long worked with people who had been through major events, and now felt he could identify with them and understand or even share in their strength: “To experience yourself what you have looked for in others . . . is interesting” (*ibid.*).

In contrast to the example above, the editors at TV2 had a slightly different challenge. TV2’s main office is located in Bergen, on the west coast of Norway, and another office is located in downtown Oslo, not far from the government building. Until the attack on 22 July 2011, this split arrangement had been frequently discussed internally at TV2. In October 1990, the Norwegian parliament had decided that TV2’s main office had to be located in Bergen (Syvertsen, 1997, p. 33) in order for the broadcaster to receive the concession to produce news in a commercial public service manner. As time went on, several staff members in the Oslo office felt that it was unfair that the Bergen office was

prioritised, because the Oslo office was the busiest part of the organisation. On 22 July, of course, several informants actually applauded the split arrangement, because TV2 Oslo was evacuated later in the evening, whereas TV2 Bergen could go on producing live coverage from its studio. When the bomb exploded, the Oslo news editor recalled being on the phone with the Bergen news editor:

I was sitting at my place at the newsdesk on the fifth floor in the newsroom and talking to [the evening news editor in Bergen] [...] We were brainstorming ideas to improve the 9 pm news broadcast. [...] which is quite ironic to think about afterwards. As we exchanged ideas aloud, there was an explosion. (Desk Editor, TV2, 25.08.2011)

At that moment, the Oslo news editor thought the sound of the explosion might have come from some of the technical production equipment on TV2's rooftop. The whole building trembled, and parts of the plastic lamps in the ceiling fell to the floor. About thirty people were in the newsroom, the editor recalled, and some screamed aloud, and ran back and forth. A couple of team members were sent to the government building, and then the phones started ringing everywhere and e-mails began to arrive. The news editor recalled that after two or three minutes, he knew it was a bomb attack, and that the bomb had exploded in the government quarters (Desk Editor, 25.08.2011).

From this point on, the news editor had to field various incoming inquiries, including calls from staff members in the field:

There was a lot of shouting and screaming . . . of course when you arrive at the government quarter and see the situation there, many reacted strongly. [...] You hear it on the phone. It is not difficult to hear that. (Desk Editor 25.08.2011)

This news editor explained that he understood the staff members' dramatic reactions, but then went on to advocate the ideal of objective and balanced media coverage by emphasising that when "you are at work, you *are* at work". He noted, for example, that one reporter had to go live on air with a victim's dead body behind her. He also said that he needed to send out a team of people who were not only colleagues, but also colleagues who were friends, to cover reports of shots being fired with an automatic rifle. This happened during the first phase when the massacre at Utøya was still going on. At that time, of course, TV2 Oslo was evacuating the building, and it was not possible to get hold of bulletproof vests. While the editor warned the group not to take any risks, he still chose to send them.

This news editor, then, clearly privileges capturing the event on camera at any cost. By using words like “shouting and screaming” to describe the reactions of his offsite colleagues, he distances himself from their emotional involvement and represents the ideal of the distant observer, someone who is cool and balanced and in control, with no emotional attachment. This editor’s behaviour is in marked contrast to the way in which the top news editor of TV2 News talked about his experience that evening. We held this interview three weeks after the event, and he displayed both an editor’s professional distance and an attitude of acceptance towards the subjective and emotional reactions of his colleagues:

We are used to covering the worst incidents in the world and we take on a role. Often the reaction comes afterwards, but you need to do your job. You reflect upon your work: “Okay, I need to hurry, hurry, if I am going to be able to produce this within the deadline. I need to fix this and that. This is shit but . . .” [...] then reactions follow. I also have the same reaction as many reporters speak about. I have covered the tsunami, and I have walked among dead bodies in Thailand. I have talked to the victims’ relatives and all that. However, this was different, because it happened at home. It did something to us. Also, as a reporter you understand that earthquakes happen. It is understandable that a bus full of kids might hit a rock wall. Of course it is a tragedy, but tragedies do happen. That a twisted person among our own people walks around and executes children, that should not be allowed to be understood. It is not possible to accept. The fear he spread around for about one and a half hours out there [on Utøya], the damage he caused, it is not possible to grasp. It awakens a different kind of feeling in you than during natural disasters or a huge traffic accident. [ ] Then I thought: “It is OK. Why should I be unaffected? Why should I be balanced now when so many people are experiencing an indescribable hell?” (News editor TV2 News, 11.08.2011)

This high-ranking manager at TV2 recognises the importance of showing empathy, compassion and emotion during an event such as this. He was also comfortable talking about it in our interview a couple of weeks later. His openness concerning his emotional state was clearly different from how our other informants explained their feelings. The reporters from all the other organisations emphasised that they prioritised the job, and dismissed their emotional responses in the name of their professionalism. In other words, the manager clearly expressed and processed feelings, while the news workers chose to

focus on routines and practices, and did not identify emotions as part of the journalistic profession, even during extreme events.

## The Managed: Reporters in the field

The situation in the newsroom may not have been significantly different in terms of news production and content management, but the situation in the field was creating new challenges.

NRK was headquartered further from where the bomb exploded than either TV2 or VG. One journalist informant recalled being notified by a flash message from the Norwegian News Agency (NTB) at about 3.40 pm. While he quickly grasped the magnitude of the event, the photographer he took with him was new to the job and slower to understand what was happening. When they arrived at the site, both saw that it was even bigger than they had imagined:

[At first] I am focused on not speculating on who was behind the attack. First of all, we did not know if this was terror. We observed huge damage, but did not know the motive. I remember keeping the options open, but concluding that we did not know what it is. It might be a gas explosion; it might be a bomb. We did not know. We needed to wait to hear what the police would say. Then, some of the experts in the studio, whom I heard talking through my earpiece, started talking about Al-Qaida. [...] I reacted to that, standing at the location, because in my experience it was too early [to make this statement]. [Senior Reporter NRK, 9.10.2011]

It is clear that the reporter on site saw things that made him gauge the situation differently from those journalists who remained in-house. Still, the experts in the studio were being encouraged to analyse in a vacuum, while the reporter had not been asked to do the same. Later, the police confirmed that a bomb had exploded, and the reporter realised that this invited such speculation. The NRK informants all remarked upon the gap between the news workers who were located safely indoors, and those who worked more independently outside. One technician who was immersed in work at the site lamented the fact that the indoor staff workers were better accommodated, and that the desk editors often lacked the competence to organise or allocate the right resources to the right person:



There were simple things, like the fact that we have some equipment that can be used in the city where we do not need a satellite, and we have some equipment that requires one. We can only use that if we can make contact with the satellite. But the satellite is not straight above; it is sort of to the side. So if a house blocks it, it won't work. So, downtown in Oslo, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. The editors didn't understand this. I tried to explain it a hundred times and how this is very important.

This statement notes the chaos of the initial phase of the event and highlights the problems associated with not having access to the right person with the right competence at the right moment. He then described the situation when he was working closer to Utøya:<sup>1</sup>

No one thought about us, and when you're sitting there and have been working twenty hours straight and haven't eaten in about twenty hours, uh . . . you get really provoked when you receive an email about how dinner is served and dessert, and I don't know what the fuck they are getting, you know. [...] All the organising for those out in the field was not good. [ Technician NRK, 9.10.2011 ]

In addition to concerns about organisational constraints, this quote shows how distance to the main office affects working conditions. Although the technicians do not have an editor looking over their shoulder, they were also affected by lack of resources. Here the technician shows how isolating it can be to work in the field. In this instance, the indoor environment appeared safer, more comfortable and more team-oriented. In other words, to be able to use their given autonomy and have more control over the work, they need to have the possibility to do so.

Even though reporters and technicians are assigned to certain missions when working outdoors and away from the newsroom, such work comes with dilemmas that require decision making without having to contact the editor. At TV2 for example, a team consisting of a reporter and a photographer arrived at the TV2 newsdesk from an assignment on Utøya, ironically, just as the event unfolded in Oslo, while the terrorist was making his way to where they had been. The experienced news reporter from this team ran straight to the government building, because he and his photographer had heard the blast in their

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1 The massacre took place on an island, Utøya, in the county of Buskerud, Norway.

car. The photographer followed and recalled how she just let her camera record everything, except for about five minutes as she crossed over from the street (Grubbegata) behind the government building and experienced a complete loss of memory (Photographer/ Reporter, 5.8.2011). She explained that she needed to take control of herself and make her own choice whether or not to continue filming: “Everyone becomes their own news editor, in a way,” she said. Ethical considerations were particularly individual: “You need to make some serious choices concerning what length you can go to”. This was true of the aforementioned, high-ranking TV2 editor as well, who described in great detail his own struggle to reconcile himself to his work, however difficult:

So this did a lot more to me as a human than as a journalist. . . I thought this was horrible. And I barely ate and slept. So I thought, “It is okay. Because why should I have . . . Why should I not be affected by this? Why should I be okay when so many people are feeling extremely bad?” So it is, it is manageable. But what I also said to myself is, “Now I am emotionally affected. I have to be more democratic, listen more, and have more meetings than usual, because I cannot trust 100 per cent in my own judgment”. So I just had to admit that I can’t . . . make a decision like “Yes! Let’s do it!” as I can do more easily when things are more distant. So I went for more of a . . . opened it up more, went for a more democratic style. And I hope that does not make me look insecure, but that it was seen as inclusive and . . . that better decisions were made because of it. (News Editor, TV2, 17.08.11)

Another reporter on 22 July went in a different direction and decided to rely on her own instincts and decisions. She was broadcasting live from the hotel where both survivors and their family members were being given shelter. She was among those reporters who were interviewing the people there, and had to decide who could manage it and who could not. She also described a dual role as both a professional journalist and a caring fellow human being.

Yes. Like those people I talked about and what I became the most aware of by being out there was “You have to be an empathic person”. That came quite intuitively to me. Later, I reflected upon the fact that this is part of my regular personality. I am frequently “out to get” politicians. Then, empathy is not part of my job. Then my style is very tough, you know. While the job I did here, it was . . . There was the professional part of me, but I also needed to use that part of my personality which I do not really use at work. It became sort of a dual role – which worked. (TV2 Reporter, TV2 19.08.11)

Unlike the previous informant, who felt that he would not be able to trust himself because he was emotionally affected by what had happened, this informant used emotions such as empathy, warmth and caring as part of her professional work. Compassion was even more important in this example, where the reporter witnessed a survivor in shock who was being surrounded by a horde of journalists:

A girl [survivor from Utøya, our comment] walks out from the hotel. She's going to the store. Journalists are flocking around her and she is standing up against a fence, that type of iron fence you can find on a pedestrian – you know, a high fence. And journalists are flocking around her [...] I am asking her questions as well. [...] And I look at her during the interview, and at all of the journalists surrounding her, pressing her up against the fence. And I turn to the photographer and say, "We are cutting this off. I can't be a part of this". I can tell that she is in shock. And I can tell from her answers and facial expressions that this is too much. But she . . . she is in a situation she can't get out of. She gets questions in English and in Norwegian and it is not a good situation. So we pull out and walk away and I say, "Just delete that interview, we're not sending it home. Remove it from the tape so that it doesn't . . . so that it won't come out in any sort of way". The photographer agrees. He was thinking the same thing almost before I was. Then I see a policeman and I go up to him and say to him: "Listen. You have to prepare these kids who come out here, that there is a lot of press here. Look up there. There is a young girl there. It looks to me as if she is in a situation she does not want to be in. I don't know for sure but someone should go up there and take responsibility". (Reporter TV2, 19.08.11)

These examples demonstrate a profound awareness of and ability to reflect on the ways in which subjectivity matters when individuals are confronted with ethical and other dilemmas during a terror situation. During times of terror, it turns out that the "managed" are less managed than usual, and rather find themselves in a position where they must rely on their own interpretation of what constitutes news, and what is in the best interest of the people affected and the audience watching/ reading/ listening. During terror and crises the "managed" are required to rise to the occasion, grasp the challenge inherent in not being managed and enter into the role of self-managers. As seen above, this requires journalists to be capable of managing their roles as professionals, but also to rely upon their subjective judgements and individual resources. This point is illustrated in the quote above where the reporter stepped out of

her role as a professional, even though it risked limiting her task as reporter, and rather used her personal judgement as a human. Interestingly, when the reporter was asked to verify her quote, she worried that she would get criticised for being unprofessional. Back in her everyday professional life she wanted an institutional confirmation to legitimise her behavior, and chose to disclose her identity as informant to the management when asking them to decide whether or not she should permit this quote to be published. Interestingly, when interviewed and reflecting back upon the event, the reporter wondered if that moment of humanity in fact could be viewed as a breach of professionalism. In other words, even if the managed appear to gain autonomy during crises and terror, actions may later be re-evaluated in light of existing journalistic norms and codes.

## The Affected: Reporters as sources

Many reporters felt that personal and subjective feelings had to be controlled. Journalists' reflections upon subjectivity versus objectivity, and upon their emotions during their coverage of a terror attack, clearly demonstrate that they remained well aware of their humanity despite the veneer of neutrality. This is especially so during big crises or terror events which affect entire communities, and thus increase the probability that journalists know victims personally. During the 22 July attack, reporters felt the importance of "the job first". Some reporters were faced with the challenge of how to handle professionally the fact that the attacker was a childhood acquaintance. A journalist who grew up geographically near the terrorist, in the same community, expressed sadness about not having been able to participate in the national grieving process, because he had to put that all aside and work:

I was born and raised in Oslo, and as it turns out, I was the same age and from the same borough as the perpetrator. Childhood friends of mine even remember him from when we were young. Personally, I think it is a shame that you [as a reporter] had to push these things aside. On the other hand, I felt it was rewarding to be able to communicate to hundreds of thousands or more readers. There are mixed emotions. But I . . . for my part the emotions were cast aside. I have considered taking a few moments to myself to go through all of this stuff, but as of now have not bothered to do so. 22 July was first of all work. The tragedy came next (VG Nett Online Reporter 2011).

This autonomy may also be extended to how reporters choose to be sources of information. The NRK reporter who grew up near where the terrorist lived, decided to handle this shock by writing a commentary for BBC online rather than agreeing to any interviews with his peers:

I did not want to be quoted as an interviewee in a talk-show or be “sound-bited” from that. But I understood that the information was going to be published, so I preferred to turn it into a narrative and state that this is my story. This is it! Bam! Here you go! Here it is! Then people can use it if they want, but I have told the story in my own words. [...] It was important for me to do it in such a way that I could control the quality, the way the words were uttered. [...] There were newspapers in Norway and in Sweden that used parts of it. And that was fine. It was better to do that than to do one hundred interviews with journalists asking trick questions. (Senior Reporter NRK, 9.11.2011)

In this way, this reporter took control of an unexpected finding: he actually knew the terrorist he had speculated about throughout his coverage. Instead of letting himself be turned into an interviewee, and thereby become part of the bigger story, he chose to engage differently with the news in order to protect himself. In other words, he chose his own strategy when it came to handling requests from his colleagues in the media and in the press.

A rising numbers of terror incidents affecting entire communities, including both big and small towns and countries, where reporters are challenged by the proximity of relations illustrate the difficulty for news workers to hold on to a professional role. Rather we see how this forces journalists to look for strategies elsewhere than in their professional role.

## Conclusions

This study has looked at whether and how journalists cope with, and reflect upon, subjective and individual choices during their coverage of a terror attack. Through an examination of the roles and perspectives of news personnel from three different institutions, TV2, VG and NRK, we found that journalists working in teams tended to modify their choices according to some overall personal and individual aim or goal of their coverage. Reporters assigned to work in the field had more latitude in making their own choices

and decisions — for example, the TV2 news reporter who alerted the police about her concerns for a young victim being crowded by the press demonstrated a high degree of self-awareness in doing so. Yet all of the journalists in the field who were confronted with emotional proximity to this tragedy explicitly emphasised that they retreated to the habits and norms of their professionalism in order to focus solely on their tasks. Later, they would try to dwell more on the event for personal and subjective reasons, though this was not always easy.

Editors and managers seemed better able to handle such situations in tandem with their personal and subjective emotional reactions. One contributing factor might be that the managers and editors stayed within the newsrooms and worked as teams, whereas the reporters in the field were more directly interacting with victims and ordinary people on the streets away from other journalists. On the other hand, some of the interviewed editors also shared the experience of the reporter out in the streets facing despair in terms of emotional upheaval. This raises the question as to whether news editors and managers atop the newsroom hierarchy allow themselves more latitude for their feelings than the regular workers “on the floor”. It is also important to note that journalists in the field are also often senior reporters with a higher status, particularly in television, and they may have more latitude in this regard as well.

Ultimately, it remains uncertain how much awareness journalists have of their personal investment in the news events they cover. While both journalists and managers rise to the occasion decisions often take place intuitively more than reflectively. Since some of the interviews took place several months after the incident, the reporters would have had time to reflect upon the fact that they needed to act and think outside the boundaries of how they on an everyday basis would have defined professionalism, and how this affected them during the coverage. This study finds that reflections on a deeper level turned out to be difficult for the informants. However, this only proves how important it is to aim for a better understanding of how journalists and reporters experience emotion during traumatic events. Moments of terror and tragedy bring such considerations to the fore, and further study would do well to engage with both the workers and the workplace to determine the nature of the negotiations that are required.

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## CHAPTER 14

# The Surface and the Soul: Purpose and Politics of the Terrorist Mugshot

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*When terror strikes, the terrorist is more often than not portrayed in a mugshot, an ID-like photograph with references to police mugshots as well as the passport ID. This has developed into the common iconography where modern terrorists are concerned. But how are we supposed to perceive this visual statement from the media? Is the mugshot a portrait of an individual or a category of anti-social criminals? Through the case of Anis Amri, the Tunisian who drove a stolen truck into a Christmas market in Berlin on December 2016, this article discusses the genealogy of the terrorist mugshot. It evokes the legacy of the physiognomic tradition in photography, as well as the history of the photographic portrait. It further discusses the agency of the photographic frame in the wake of terror and other dramatic events, and asks what the media gain and lose by adhering to this visual convention.*

**Keywords:** ID photograph, photographic frame, portrait, terrorist, iconography

## Introduction

On 19 December 2016, Anis Amri became the most wanted man in Europe for a few short days. The young Tunisian had driven a stolen truck into a packed Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12 and maiming more than 50 people. Within hours, his face was in every newspaper, on every news web page and on every television screen. His individual physiognomic features were on display

for anyone to see. Yet there was something generic about this exposure, as if Amri's individual features were just a minor modification of the modern terrorist-as-archetype: a young man of Middle Eastern descent. On 23 December, Amri was shot dead by Italian police and his face quickly disappeared from the news.

Amri's trajectory through life may have ended there, but his face has been added to the steadily building terrorist hall of notoriety. He was not the most famous, his crime not the most cunning. In several respects, he was a nobody, and thus easily forgotten by all who were not directly harmed by his actions. In this chapter, I will nevertheless use his story as a point of departure to discuss and develop Mette Mortensen's concept of the photographed face as a symbolic battlefield, exposing the often ambiguous fault lines between the individual as a private person and a political citizen (Mortensen, 2012, p.13).

When the media publishes an ID (or, ID-like) photograph, it may at first glance seem like a case of individual exposure. Yet, the physical shape and form of such photographs contribute to the shaping of a distinct and recognizable terrorist iconography. Regardless of the face filling the frame, and regardless of the origin of the actual photograph, the visual form of the terrorist mugshot has become a familiar and easily understandable image, drawing, as Mortensen points out, on visual references such as the automatically generated ID photo and the police mugshot. It is, of course, not the only way to visualize terrorists, but it may seem as if this particular visual language is reserved for society's most prominent social outcasts. But why do the media frame terrorists in this particular manner? How do these seemingly authorless portraits perform differently from other photographic portraits in the media? What is the purpose and politics of such apparently straightforward and artistically not very challenging depictions? While Mortensen elaborates the genealogy and multifaceted use of the ID photograph at large, my focus is limited to the terrorist mugshot's exposure in the news media. As Kress and van Leeuwen pointed out as early as in 1996, the newspaper (or digital web) page is not primarily a stage where the photograph is allowed to perform, but should be considered a semiotic space where numerous entangled relations simultaneously restrict and enable the way it performs. The processes behind such entanglements are sometimes labelled manipulation, but I will consciously avoid such language because it connotes a level of consciousness that is not necessarily relevant. To communicate quickly and efficiently the media play

with whatever tropes and conventions that work, or are available to them. It goes without saying that shortcuts and simplifications are part of these processes, still I believe it is interesting to investigate how, and at what expense, a visual convention is formed.

## Anis Amri's faces

“Every person’s story is written plainly on his face, though not everyone can read it.” This quote is attributed to the German photographer August Sander, one of the founding fathers of modern portrait photography. Sander worked in the 1930’s and his aim was to create a catalogue of the German people in the Weimar republic (Clarke, 1992). To him, physiognomy meant an understanding of human nature. As quoted in Clarke:

We know that people are formed by light and air, their inherited traits, and their actions, and that we recognise people and distinguish one from another by their appearance. We can tell from appearance the work someone does or does not do; we can read in his face whether he is happy or troubled, for life unavoidably leaves its trace there (ibid., p. 71).

When Anis Amri ran from the crime scene in Berlin, German police released two ID photos of him that were reproduced by European media (fig. 14.1). His ID had been found in the stolen lorry he used to crash into the Christmas market, and it later turned out that Amri had been under police surveillance until he disappeared a few months before he effectuated his crime (e.g. *The Telegraph*, 23.12.2016). These photographs were not meant to represent Amri as a person, but to identify the physical traits of a criminal fugitive. The media all over Europe used them. Yet, in the spirit of Sander, there is something to be learned from these photos. First, there is the obvious physical similarity between the two mugshots. The nose, the mouth and the rounded chin spell likeness. Second, and more interestingly, the person in the two images seems very different. The man on the left keeps his hair short, he has fancy glasses and his gaze may seem a little arrogant. The man to the right looks haggard, his hair is in disarray, he has shadows under his eyes, and he looks tired and maybe disillusioned. The two images obviously show the same man, but do they show the same person? Might his personality have changed over the years?



**ETTERLYST:** Tysk politi etterlyser den 24 år gamle tunisieren Anis Amri, som mistenkes for å ha stått bak massakren i Berlin.

## Identifisert av fingeravtrykk

**Politiet aksjonerte flere steder natt til torsdag i håp om å finne den hovedmistenkte etter terroren i Berlin.**

### ► BERLIN

Tyske myndigheter har utlovet en dusør på 900.000 kroner over hele Europa for informasjon som kan lede til en pågrepelse av 24-årige Anis Amri. ID-papirene hans ble funnet i lastebilen som ble styrt inn i en folkemengde ved et julemarked i Berlin mandag, da tolv mennesker ble drept og 48 såret.

Fingeravtrykkene til den et-

Der Spiegel skriver at myndighetene hadde Amri på radaren, men at han likevel klarte å komme seg unna. Süddeutsche Zeitung legger mest vekt på at politiet kastet bort tid.

– Det tok svært lang tid før det føderale politiet mistenkte Amri, heter det i en artikkel onsdag kveld.

### Jakten intensiveres

Tysk politi regner Amri som «bevæpnet og farlig». Jakten på Amri foregår over hele Europa, ettersom det antas at han kan ha reist ut av Tyskland i løpet av tiden politiet brukte på å avhøre den tidligere hovedmis-

**Figure 14.1.** Images of Anis Amri released by German police. Source: *Agderposten*, Norway, 23. December 2016. Facsimile reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

We do not know very much about Amri's life, but a compilation of several media sources tell us that he left Tunisia in the aftermath of the Arab spring, in 2011 (e.g. *BBC World*, *The Telegraph*, *VG.no*, all from 23.12.2016). Some suggest he had already been involved in minor criminal activities and that he may have wanted to escape Tunisian authorities. We know that he was 19 at the time he left his family; from interviews with his siblings it appears that he occasionally drank alcohol and that his dream was to make enough money to "buy a car and start a business". He entered Italy at Lampedusa, arriving illegally by boat, and in October the same year he was arrested for trying to set fire to a refugee reception centre. The circumstances behind this action are not clear, but he was sentenced to four years in jail. According to Italian authorities, he did not behave well in prison. He had a reputation for being a bully, although not a particularly religious one. When he drove his stolen truck into the Berlin Christmas market, he had been released from prison for about one year, and he had moved to Germany where he applied for asylum in the wake of the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean. This was denied and at the time of his crime he was facing expulsion.

One of his brothers stated to the media that there were no signs that Anis Amri was about to commit violence. Another brother, however, claimed that prison had changed him. "He went into prison with one mentality and when he came out he had a totally different mentality," he said to the BBC. Then he denounced his brother: "He doesn't represent us or our family" (*BBC World*, 23.12.2016).

The family further released their own photograph of Amri to the press (fig. 14.2). In this picture, he is visibly younger, more slender and he looks less certain of himself, like someone who does not like being photographed. His eyes meet the camera straight on, but his mouth is half open and a little twisted, as if he is about to say something or is considering a faint smile. But he also has a more open, attentive appearance; partly due to his half open mouth. This photo is not dated, but must have been taken before Amri left Tunisia.

Even a fourth photograph was circulated (fig. 14.3). It shows the young man in a tank top, displaying bulging shoulder muscles and sporting something that may look like a faint smile. The image is taken from below; it may actually be a smart phone selfie, to include not only the body but also the folded black cloth in a triangle shape with Arabic gold letters on the wall behind him, probably a quote from the Qu'ran.

**Familien til den hovedmistenkte tunisieren Anis Amri (24) ber ham overgi seg.**

«Hvis broren min hører på meg nå, vil jeg be ham om å overgi seg. Om ikke annet for familien, som vil bli lei, sier Abdelkader Amri, broren til den mistenkte, til reportere ved familiehjemmet i Tunisia, ifølge BBC.

Broren legger innforhånd til at han ikke tror broren står bak. Men dersom han er gjerningsmannen, vil det bringe vanære over familien.

Jeg er sikker på at han er uskyldig. Jeg vet hvorfor han forlot hjemlandet, det var for økonomiske grunner. Det var for å arbeide, og for å hjelpe familien. Han dro ikke dit for å utføre terrorisme, sier Abdelkader Amri.

#### Fingeravtrykk

Tysklands innenriksminister Thomas de Maizière bekreftet på en pressekonferanse i går ettermiddag at etterforskere har funnet fingeravtrykk av den hovedmistenkte Anis Amri.

Süddeutsche Zeitung stierne tidligere på dagen anonyme kilder på at fingeravtrykkene til den etterlyste tunisieren er funnet på semi-traileren

– på dæren på fererådsen. Thomas de Maizière fortalte videre at tyske myndigheter analyserte det for å være «høyt sannsynlig» at den mistenkte tunisier-

# – HAN ER USKYLDIG

ren er gjerningsmannen. Fox News melder at Amri i flere måneder før angrepet har blitt nektet å fly inn til USA.

#### Eneste mistenkte

Mandagens terrorangrep drepte tolv mennesker og såret 54 da en semi-trailer støte inn i et julemarked i Berlin. Bant de så røde er tolv regnet som hardt skadd. Flere av dem er i kritisk tilstand.

Anis Amri har så langt vært den eneste kjente mistenkte, for-

dri oppholdstillatelse hans ble funnet under fererådsen i semi-traileren. Politiet har ikke klart bekrefte om en eller flere personer kapret la stribles, og hvem som faktisk kjørte den.

Det har blitt utlovet en dusør på 900 000 kroner for dem bidrar med informasjon som gjør at Amri kan bli tatt.

Ifølge en anonym tjenestemann skal Amri ha kommunisert med terrorgruppes IS minst én gang og ha vært på flyforladeste i

USA. Han hadde i tillegg bånd til noen av Tysklands mest kjente islamister. IS har tatt på seg skylden for angrepet.

#### Bevåpnet

Politiet beskriver Amri som bevåpnet og farlig. Han skal være 24 år gammel, men ifølge politiet har han operert med flere forskjellige nasjonaliteter og fødselsdatoer.

Han er rundt 178 centimeter høy, veier cirka 75 kilo, har svart hår og brune øyne.

I går morgen skal det ha foregått en stor politiskasjon i Danmark etter tips fra noen som mente de hadde sett Amri. Letingen ga ikke resultat.



**KLAPPJAKT:** Anis Amri (24) er gjensend for en anonym politiskasjon. Dette uløste bildet er gitt AP fra 24-åringens familie. Foto: Pressfoto

**... men familien ber mistenkt terrorist melde seg for politiet**

**Figure 14.2.** Anis Amri as a young man. Photo released to the media by his family. Source: VG, 23 December 2016. Facsimile reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

This image includes more detail and as a case of self-representation it suggests that Amri wished to be remembered as a jihadist. Passport style photographs have a more limited purpose. They only register the physiognomic features, and are supposed to be void of emotions or other signs of personality. Interestingly, the photographs that are supposed to represent our truest self on our most important personal documents reveal very little about us, apart from the most prominent physical features. As Mortensen states (2012, p. 177), the security aspect in passport photographs is based solely on the relation between image and body, and a supposed correspondence between the two. Yet, it is illusory in today's globalized society to assume that a person's identity stays fixed when the body is mobile (ibid., p. 178). Actually, it is ancient knowledge that this relation is far from stable. Even Louis Bertillon, one of the founding fathers of physiognomy realised that resemblance is a fluid category somewhere between physical correspondence (the geometry of the face) and physiognomic correspondence (the face as an emblem of the character/type) (ibid., p. 265).

Together, Amri's faces document a change, from young man to adulthood. They might also document his transition from petty criminal to jihadist, but they do not provide enough information for us to be able to connect the dots. What happened to the young Anis' dreams and ambitions is, however, a



Figure 14.3. Anis Amri representing himself as a jihadist. Source: *Dagbladet*, 23 December 2016. Facsimile reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

question not only of academic (or human) interest, it may also be considered relevant from a security angle. It makes a significant political difference if we choose to understand Amri as inherently evil, if we blame his Christmas market terror act on potential Islamist radical forces he met in prison or after, or if we bear in mind that the obviously harsh confrontation with the European border regime in Italy may have been a catalyst in this young man's life.

It should be noted that to be open to such questions is not to relieve Amri or other terrorists of the responsibility for their actions. It is rather to acknowledge that a personality is not something that develops in a vacuum, and that



even extreme actions have relational aspects. The media's choice of imagery, however, signals to the public that we are not going to go down that road.

## The surface and the soul

In this article, I choose to discuss the terrorist mugshot as a portrait, simply because it displays a person's face. But how does it differ from other portraits in the media? To answer this question it is worth taking a brief look at the history of the portrait. Central to this discussion is the heritage from the physiognomic works of Johann Caspar Lavater and his *The art of knowing man by means of physiognomy* from 1783. This was a pivotal work in the European history of ideas and it came to influence (among other things) our understanding of certain aspects of the photographic portrait. Lavater saw physiognomy as a way to systematically decode human nature. As an example, he believed that the shape of the eyes could reveal genius. According to Mortensen, Lavater was not as certain about his theories as it may appear from modern historical accounts, and he was also contested in his own time. Yet, with the advent of photography in the early 1800s his thoughts were revitalised in particular in police work, physical anthropology and colonial thought, because the mechanical photograph was considered a superhuman documentary tool (Mortensen, 2012, p. 38–43).

As Sigrid Lien points out, the belief in physiognomy as a science in its own right also came to influence the art world, in particular the modernist portrait with its ambition to unravel a person's authentic self (1998, p. 24). Photography played an influential role in this development, because of the photograph's ability to record the human body accurately. In art, however, the focus gradually shifted away from this fascination for the surface and was replaced by the idea of the human self as something hidden, something that needed uncovering in a more complex manner. According to photography critic John Tagg: "The portrait is [...] a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social identity" (1988, p. 37). Little by little, the understanding of the portrait as a representation not only of the object in front of the camera, but also the person behind it, emerged.

Today's photojournalistic portraits belong to this latter category. We may distinguish between type portraits and psychological portraits (Lien, 1998, p. 24–51), but the portrait is probably the photojournalistic genre where the distinction between art and journalism is the most blurred. Several

photojournalists are conscious and deliberate about leaving their personal mark on their portraits, as auteurs or even artists. The ID-portrait, on the other hand, is where the physiognomic tradition has survived. Also, physical features are almost overstated in such photos, thus creating a deficit of meaning left for the spectator to fill. Returning to Mortensen's study, she makes a point about the ID photograph being without an author. The lack of an interpreting agent *behind* the lens has provided the ID photo with its aura of "true objectivity" when it comes to representing the person *in front* of the lens. It is worth noting, however, that the ID photo does not really transcend other contextual cultural codes, it has become a cultural code in its own right.

## Terrorism as a battle of images

With more and more biometric technology available, the days of the ID photo may very well be numbered as a favoured guarantor of a person's identity. In the media, however, this photographic genre is not likely to become obsolete any time soon. On the contrary, the ID-like photo resembles a so-called "kinder egg", providing one solution to three different problems. It identifies a perpetrator, it symbolically contains him/her in a visual form that spells deviancy and, as Lashmar (2014) points out, it humiliates the deviant *other* in a way that is calming and satisfactory to the public.

As a general rule, the role of the (Western) media changes when faced with major dramatic events that may tear society's fabric apart (e.g. Dayan and Katz, 1992; Kitch, 2000; Sumiala, 2013; Simonsen, 2015). Terror attacks belong to this category. Instead of contributing to rupture, it becomes vital for the media to perform damage control, to contain danger and insecurities, and to frame events in a way that signals that society, as we know it, is still in place and that the forces behind the attack can be controlled. Critical journalism kicks in in the later phases, when order has been restored. In the first phases it is more common for the media to concentrate on comforting the community, often by invoking easily understandable stereotypes of the deviant other.

In the case of terror attacks, visual strategies are particularly interesting as terrorism is usually strongly iconoclastic (e.g. Mitchell, 2005). Whether they are religiously motivated or not, what distinguishes terrorists from other murderers is that they kill people-as-symbols, while most killers have a personal

relationship to their individual victims. Al Qaida did not target individual people working at the World Trade Center in 2001, their aim was to hit powerful representations of American supremacy, global capitalism and the (conspiratory) idea of Jewish world leadership. When the Islamic State (IS) beheaded James Foley in 2014 they were more concerned about the symbolic effect of killing an American journalist than who Foley was as a person. It should be noted, however, that strategic targeting of victims is nothing new in warfare, and it is not exclusive for Islamic terrorists. To the Norwegian right wing terrorist Anders Behring Breivik, it did not matter so much who was present at Utøya youth camp on July 22, 2011. He cared more about their Labour Party politics, their interest in multiculturalism, feminism and humanism, than their individual identities (e.g. Borchgrevink, 2012; Simonsen, 2015). Terrorism may thus be blind and arbitrary, but terrorist acts are seldom devoid of emblematic meaning.

From this angle, the terrorist mugshot may be read as a symbolic counter attack. In this form and shape, the terrorist is identified, but simultaneously reduced to a poster character. According to Mortensen, this legacy was accentuated in its modern form by the massive suicide attacks on 11 September in 2001 where 19 Al Qaida jihadists crashed two hijacked passenger airplanes into the World Trade Center in New York, a third into the Pentagon and a fourth, meant for targets in Washington DC, ended in a field in Pennsylvania. The media printed their ID photos side by side and, according to Mortensen, there is a certain irony in the fact that the same portraits that secured the terrorists entrance into the US were the ones the media used to distinguish them as outsiders. One by one, each terrorist did not look deviant, and research has shown that they were actually conscious about not drawing any unwanted attention from border authorities. With their shaved chins and short hair, these 19 young men basically corresponded to American authorities' physiognomic ideas about what a good citizen should look like (Mortensen, 2012, p. 173–177). Yet, as a group, these images shaped the visual stereotype of the modern terrorist, based on what they had in common; their gender, age and (more or less visible) ethnicity.

The media did have access to other photographs, but still preferred the ID photos. Mortensen explains this partly with reference to the visual legacy of the “Wanted Dead or Alive” posters in US popular culture, particularly American Western movies, but also to the ID photograph's many

similarities to the police mugshot. The ID photo thus symbolically merged the police's formal registration of a criminal's physical appearance with the Wanted Poster's not very subtle insinuations about the vile criminal personality. One may even argue that the form has become the emblem and thus more important than the content in these cases. In later terror attacks, real ID photos have not always been accessible. In such cases, it has not been uncommon to crop portraits and to adjust their frames so that they look ID-like. In this way, the same effect is accomplished, and a similar visual statement is provided.

## Offending and non-offending images

We know from the literature that the murderer is the ultimate "other", and the more horrid the actions, the more the killer must be separated from society's "us". As John Taylor notes, "Murder is essentially uncivil" (1998, p. 125). Concerning media images of murderers, it is not new that they are presented in headshots (e.g. police mugshots, entering or leaving a trial or private snapshots). According to Taylor, this is another remnant of the nineteenth century physiognomic fascination for the relation between inner evil and its outward features:

Killers' faces still stand for "evil", as if killing is foretold in the shape or tilt of the head, or leaves its mark on brows or eyes. But these photographic revelations appear only after the events of murder detection or conviction (*ibid.*, p. 116).

The terrorist is the worst of criminals. Criminal actions, and in particular terrorism, make the criminal less entitled to a soul, and as a consequence they are less entitled to a true portrait, exploring their personality and psychology. The terrorist mugshot thus becomes part of their symbolic punishment. As pointed out by Foucault, crime, spectacle and punishment are historically interconnected, and public humiliation often constitutes part of the punitive process (Lashmar, 2014, p. 66). We may ponder a terrorist's human capacities, but in the wake of a brutal attack on innocent people, mostly as an anomaly. The ID photo coldly and mechanically focuses on a person's surface, and as such it is reductive, compared to other types of portraits. This reductionist process is part of the punishment as it reduces the complexity of the perpetrator's person-hood.

If the media act differently, they risk offending their public. This was the case in Norway in 2011, after the terror attacks in Oslo and Utøya, where the Norwegian right wing terrorist Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people in a few hours. When his identity was known, there was no ID photo of him, apart from an airbrushed version on his Facebook profile. The media had to choose between the staged and idolized images he had left in his so-called political manifesto and a snapshot of him in a police car photographed a few days later. In this photo, he sports a curious Mona Lisa smile and it looks as if he is pleased to be photographed. The Norwegian news media, and in particular the tabloid *Dagbladet*, used this picture again and again to the growing anger of the public (Simonsen, 2015, p. 214–255). Several people complained that showing Breivik's face was equivalent to promoting his ideology, and part of the audience launched a campaign against newspapers showing his face on the front page. They turned the papers in the newspaper stands with their backs to the public, as if they could punish the terrorist by way of punishing the newspapers.

The photograph of Breivik's face was a case of what the iconologist WJT Mitchell calls 'offending images' where the image seems to be "transparently and immediately linked to what it represents" (2005, p. 127). According to Mitchell, people often respond to images instinctively rather than rationally and imbue them with magical thinking. When people react physically to an image (like destroying them, mutilating them or turning from them), they react as if the image may experience whatever is done to it, as if it is what it represents. Mitchell further states that people respond to offending images as if the image was a pseudo-person:

...the image possesses a kind of vital, living character that makes it capable of feeling what is done to it. It is not merely a transparent medium for communicating a message, but something like an animated, living thing, an object with feelings, intentions, desires, and agency (ibid.).

For some, Breivik's face was thus not properly contained. Whether the classic terrorist mugshot would have been more acceptable is, of course, hard to know. Breivik was Norwegian, blue-eyed and homegrown. He did not fit the established terrorist typology simply because he threatened society from the inside, and not from the outside. An ID photo may not have been enough to symbolically reduce and control him. With immigrant or foreign-born terrorists this process seems much more automatic and tacit.

## The communal reflex and the ultimate other

What, then, is the purpose of the terrorist mugshot? According to art historian Michael Baxandall (1985), any image (or visual artefact or product for that matter) is the answer to a question. Somebody produced it and/or displayed it in a certain manner within a certain context for a reason, no matter how seemingly insignificant it may be. In Baxandall's wording this creates a "pattern of intention" that the analyst may explore. To find the correct question is not a straightforward process, since cultural production consists of entangled matters, and is continuously in transit and transition (see e.g. Svasek, 2007). Baxandall developed a method where he looks at three intertwined levels that he has labelled *charge*, *brief* and *troc*. Put in a rather simplified way, *the charge* refers to the overall purpose of the product, or even the family of products. One could claim that the intention of news photography is to convey timely visual material appropriate to the journalistic situation (e.g. Simonsen, 2015, p. 38–40). This transcends photojournalism, since plenty of news images were never photographed by a photojournalist, nor commissioned by a newsdesk. Yet we may deduce that an image we find in the news is considered newsworthy, and that it fulfils one or more of photography's classic roles within news journalism, as illustration, documentation or proof. The charge behind the terrorist mugshot, then, is that it provides some element that suits the journalistic convention labelled as news, and that media audiences will understand it as such.

*The brief* asks for a closer scrutiny of the circumstances that justify a concrete image in a concrete situation. In this case, the terrorist mugshot answers to the need to document the features of the antagonist's face. This need has several layers. While Anis Amri was on the run, the police investigation and the different authorities searching for him, of course justified the image. But there are also other needs involved. As humans, we have a deep psychological need to identify potential and real threats, and as media consumers we need to be informed (e.g. Shoemaker, 1996). As mentioned above, when it comes to dealing with an abrupt crisis, like a terrorist attack, the media play a soothing and repairing role in the initial stages. In this context, the ID-like photos seem to signal control over the situation, containment of the perpetrator as well as symbolic banishment.

To understand why this is, we have to search within what Baxandall calls *troc*, which corresponds to a broader context of culture and ideology, and

their conventions. In this particular case, the aesthetic conventions at play provide an interesting set of paradoxes that may help us deepen our understanding of the mugshot's purpose on a larger cultural scene. I have already mentioned some active elements of the genealogy of the modern terrorist mugshot: the physiognomic heritage and the legacy of September 11<sup>th</sup> in creating a modern terrorist iconography. I also suggested that the frame (understood as shape and form, not the process of framing a news story) plays a central role as the prime visual convention. We know from the literature that the frame is a vital element in photographic agency. To quote Hariman and Lucaites on the subject:

Framing [...] whether by the theatrical stage or the rectangular boundaries of any photo, marks the work as a special selection of reality that acquires greater intensity than the flow of experience before and after it. As they are framed, photos become marked as special acts of display (Hariman and Lucaites, 2007, p. 31).

Hariman and Lucaites study photography as icons of public culture and thus as a means to define the relationship between citizens and the state. Their focus is on photojournalistic images, but I would suggest that even the apparently authorless terrorist mugshots are interesting in this respect. According to what I suggested above, that the terrorist mugshot is a way to symbolically punish, reduce and contain the terrorist, it is the frame, not the face, that is the active agent. It is the frame that creates the theatrical effect and the frame is not without an author; it is an editorial tool of high efficiency.

As a telling example, let's look at a Norwegian front page showing the so-called "terror brothers" Said and Cherif Kouachi, responsible for the massacre of 12 cartoonists and journalists at the French satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 (fig. 14.4).

Both images have been highlighted with a thick, black frame, much thicker than the ordinary picture frame. This accentuates the images' status as terrorist mugshots and is confirmed by the headline ("The Terror Brothers"). What is particularly interesting in this case is that the sub-headings underneath the images invite us to read about the men's childhood, their youth and radicalisation. The photographs, on the other hand, have already locked them into one particular interpretation that will affect whatever the text may tell us. This is theoretically interesting because it turns Roland Barthes' observation

about how the rational, unilinear text anchors the multivocal and polysemic image upside down (Barthes, 1964). Barthes is one of the most influential photo theorists, and one of his main claims in his early investigation of photography was that text anchors and “violates” the polysemy of the image. However, the linguistic violence Barthes describes as imposed on the photo seems not to apply in cases like this. On the contrary, these images anticipate and anchor the text.

Another theoretically interesting point is that it is the frame that imbues the image with a kind of “repressive” agency. The frame has robbed the original photograph of its potential polysemy, and the image is left with repeating only one thing: “Look, these are terrorist faces.”

## The mugshot as anti-portrait

Maybe the terrorist mugshot should rather be seen as an anti-portrait than a portrait. The mugshot, whatever its origin, invokes, through the frame, the aesthetics of the photo booth image. It is a response to what Mortensen calls “a portrait hunger” that develops in the wake of a dramatic event, because we need to know who did it. Yet, the preferred iconography is reductionist, stripping the perpetrator of individuality. As mentioned above, this is an understandable response, but it comes at a price.

Even if they may share some commonalities, every crime is unique. There is no evidence to suggest that Anis Amri carried any personal grudge against anyone present at the market he crashed into in Berlin. The target must thus be understood symbolically, as an act of iconoclasm, linking him to other acts of terrorism. But he was also a person, and it would have been interesting to know how Amri interpreted the Berlin Christmas market as a symbol. His act may be interpreted in religious terms, since Christmas is a Christian holiday and Amri was a Muslim, or sociologically, as an attack on a society that explicitly did not want him. Or it might have been a combination. We may never know the full story, yet it does matter why people do what they do. In any court case, motive is vital to understanding the logic behind a crime. Understanding the “why” is not to excuse, but it may serve to prevent further criminal activity of the same kind. To do so, we need more images, not less.





**Figure 14.4.** Photographs of the Kouachi brothers, highlighted as terrorist mugshots by a thick, black frame. Facsimile of the Norwegian tabloid VG, 9 January 2015. Facsimile reproduced in accordance with the Norwegian Copyright Act.

## Conclusions

In this article, I have tried to untangle some of the codes and paradoxes that become apparent when we begin to investigate the terrorist mugshot, the way it is used and its aesthetic genealogies. It is a portrait, yet not. It denotes a fellow human being, yet not. As mentioned in the introduction, the ID-like mugshot

has become a favoured iconography for depicting modern terrorists. It has become a visual convention, a trope, and maybe a cliché. It does not tell us much about the terrorist as a person. We, the society, need it for other purposes.

News photography is supposed to talk to the public as citizens, and to provide us with relevant visual information (e.g. Hariman and Lucaites, 2007). In this respect, what Baxandall calls *the charge* is identical for all journalistic images, whether they are the product of a photojournalist or a layout person on the newsdesk adding a particular frame to a young man's face. To understand the politics of publishing news images it may be worthwhile to note that the terrorist mugshot has at least one thing in common with other portraits. The similarity is that the photographic representation (frame included) does not belong to the person in the picture, but to society. This is not always evident. Ariella Azoulay has written interestingly about how Florence Owens Thompson, the woman depicted in Dorothea Lange's iconic "Migrant Mother", felt misrepresented by it. To Lange, the photograph described the harsh conditions for US migrant workers in the 1930's, but Mrs. Thompson saw in it someone that was not *her* and subsequently tried to have the photograph put out of circulation. To paraphrase photo theorist John Roberts, Thompson failed to recognize "how this *image* of herself (not *herself*) has entered world history, and thus now functions well beyond her own control, or anybody else's, as a space for the reconstruction of historical consciousness" (Roberts, 2014, p. 7).

Lange's photo was a photojournalistic piece, openly and unambiguously published as a political commentary. The terrorist mugshot has no identifiable author and its political tendency is tacit, as expressions of power often are. To compare these photographs may thus seem like a case of apples and pears, but the point here is not the content of the images, but the politics of how and why photographs are put on display. It is to remind us that ultimately, news journalism relates to ideas regarding "the greater good", democracy and the needs of society.

To return to the framing of Anis Amri, we see that the ID photographs minimize empathy with the perpetrator as an affective option. We may be interested in his motives, but not in his individual psychology. It is always easier to seek refuge in stereotypes (e.g. "the foreign villain in Europe") than to embark on the more complicated journey of analysing whether or not his character was shaped in relation to his experiences in Europe. As argued above, the modern terrorist iconography not only identifies a criminal, it helps us to symbolically contain evil. As such it contributes to dodging the

epistemological claims on news journalism; the who's, what's, when's and why's. However, in today's complex and entangled reality, there might be a need to address the terrorist mugshot as an epistemological problem: When we visually group a multitude of individuals within the same frame, we symbolically make Tunisian migrants (Amri), frustrated young men from Europe's urban centre's suburbs (the Paris perpetrators in 2015) and upper middle class Saudis (Mohammed Atta and his September 11<sup>th</sup> co-terrorists) one and the same. The problem is that even if the mugshot corresponds to the immediate need of the public in the direct aftermath of an abrupt crisis, this politics of the visual may also easily develop into intellectual laziness. It is not wrong for the news media to use rapidly understandable forms, but we need to follow up with more complex material to better investigate the underlying causes of the problem. More challenging imagery should be part of this process.

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## Part V

# A Historical Approach: Tensions in Individual Focus and Exposure



## CHAPTER 15

# Individual Focus and Exposure: Some Historical Tensions

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*Individual focus, exposure and subjectivity in the media are complex phenomena, and have been the subject of much discussion. Understanding complexity often requires an attempt to understand the various historical circumstances from which a present-day phenomenon originated. What do we know about the origins of different kinds of journalism which have a focus on individuals in common?*

*This chapter is an outline of a few historical developments that can be seen as precursors to current modes and genres in the media where the individual in one way or another has a prominent role. The history of these genres is at the same time a history of tensions. These tensions may contribute to understanding why “putting a face on journalism” triggers such different reactions.*

**Keywords:** Journalism history, debate, narratives, consumer news, individualisation, tabloidisation

## Introduction

In this collection, we have presented examples of individual focus and exposure in journalism in a number of topics and genres, from political journalism via sports journalism to health journalism, from news and features to the use of photos. When we set out to study these complex phenomena, it was because we understand them both as relatively new, *and* as becoming exceedingly more



common in contemporary journalism. But we also regard them as complex. Are they good or bad for journalism, for the audience, for public debate?

Understanding complexity also often requires an attempt to understand the various historical circumstances that precede a present-day phenomenon. As all case studies in this book are of a synchronic nature, we will round off with a short outline of a few historical developments that we know, or have reason to believe, were the precursors to today's modes, genres and discussions.<sup>1</sup> We will concentrate on traits that have survived or that can tell us something about contemporary journalism. A look into the past may help us to understand the question we posed in the introduction: Why do different kinds of journalism – all having a focus on individuals – trigger such different reactions?

The history of many of today's discussions is at the same time a history of tensions. Tensions between commercialisation and democratisation, between different journalistic ideals, between the ideals of the press and the needs of the audience, etc.

Since one danger with today's rather ethnocentric, Anglo-American view of journalism is that one risks losing sight of all other local traditions, I will use examples from both "general" media history and from the Nordic countries. They often point in the same direction, but can also contribute towards filling in some gaps in the picture.

## I. The sound of the public sphere

The first area of tension is about who should be heard in the public space, and in particular, *how*. This discussion is currently at the core of discussions on online comments, social media etc. The tension between opening up the public space to the public, so to speak, and the situation just a few decades ago when the press still held the indisputable role of gatekeeper, has created considerable attention – and will probably continue to do so.

An important point to remember is that early newspapers were full of so-called user-generated content. The audience was not only present, the audience *was* to a great extent the press, and the personal voice was the normal voice.

History has taught us that the press first arose as an answer to the public's need to exchange information, mainly about economic affairs. The journalist

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is built on the author's paper presented at ICA 2017 (Fonn 2017).

did not even exist, news as we know it had not been invented, and the newspaper was most often a minor business in which the printer, the editor and the writer were one and the same man. The space that was not filled with ads, was mostly open to the audience, and this contributed to creating a public sphere (Chalaby, 1998; Eide, 2010; Schudson, 1978; Parsons, 1989).

Furthermore, genres were quite different from what we regard as newspaper content today – they could be poems, letters, travelogues, short reflections, essays, debates. Most of these were both personal and subjective genres – and at times even private.

The early attempts at giving the public the right to free speech, however, revealed the fact that debaters did not know how to differentiate between an identity as a private or public person (Eide, 2010, pp. 122–123). The themes were manifold, and it took time to become accustomed to having access to the public sphere. According to Høyer (1995), debates in old Norwegian newspapers could even be used to refute rumours about romantic relationships between members of the audience, as in an example cited from *Morgenbladet* in 1820 (p. 166). Furthermore, women's magazines, which must be seen as important sources of influence for much of today's media, had agony columns at least as early as the middle of the 1850s, and there is no doubt that the public voice was often present. According to *Guardian* columnist Catherine Hughes, the agony aunt column of the first British women's magazine (*The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, launched in 1855) had a spectacular fate: What started as an opportunity to seek advice on reluctant fiancés, difficult relationships etc., within a few years developed a life of its own. It slid into what Hughes calls "a downright pornographic" column, with a wave of personal and private confessions from readers, which the editors were unable to stop.<sup>2</sup>

In the regular press, political debate became ever more important as pervasive political changes in both America and many European countries laid down the principles of democracy and freedom of the press in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These currents eventually reached the outskirts of Europe, e.g. Norway, which in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century embarked on the road to parliamentarism. But even the political debate of those days could be quite personalised and subjective – not only in the sense that debaters were subjective on their own behalf, but also in the way that private circumstances and details of

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/dec/20/women-pressandpublishing>

opponents' lives were heavily criticised. Political arguments could often be accompanied by mutual personal abuse (e.g. Eide, 2010, p. 227).

In England and America newspaper journalism started to resemble the press of today from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when news became the paramount genre (Chalaby, 1998; Schudson, 1978). In many other countries this process was slower, although most countries eventually adopted the Anglo-American model. Many Scandinavian newspapers included genres throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century that would not seem recognisable today, and were partisan newspapers until well into the post-war decades. Yet they also adjusted to the news paradigm as a parallel development from roughly the 1880s onwards (Ottosen, 2010, p. 173).

The institutionalisation of the press and the professionalisation of journalism contributed to narrowing down the space open to the audience. For one thing, this happened because professional newspaper writers outnumbered the debaters, so that “news” replaced “views”. But it also helped to limit *how* the voice of the audience should sound. An immature public sphere was tamed. From Norwegian history we know that as the papers became more and more formalised as a social institution, they actively attempted to replace the emotional debate form with new genre norms more fitting to the new public sphere (Eide, 2010, p. 116). The press quite simply contributed to streamlining public debate by imposing certain frames for it.

Of course, these frames were not decided once and for all. The same struggle over the power to define what themes and what kind of language a public space could contain, has returned at each moment when new groups – labour, ethnic, gender – entered this sphere. The many publications that arose out of e.g. the labour movement gave much room to readers' letters (Chalaby, 1998, p. 26), but it took a long time before the debates and topics discussed among these readers reached the established press. The fact that some of them were even illegal for a long time, or that several editors throughout history have been imprisoned (f. ex. Chalaby, 1998; Eide, 2010; Ottosen, 2017) illustrates the point.

## II. Facts or narratives

A second area of tension concerns the form of newspaper content – whether it should be “fact” or “narrative”. One reason why broader parts of the audience gained access to public space was quite simply because more commercial

newspapers emerged. In the Anglo-American world, one can speak about at least two traditions from as early as the 1850s on: the “quality” newspaper for the upper echelons of society on the one hand, and the predecessors of modern tabloid journalism on the other (Schudson, 1978, p. 90).

In some kinds of publications, gossip and crime had been among the elements even as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but these genres started to proliferate when different kinds of cheaper publications started to emerge in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There are many theories about the rise of the so-called boulevard and penny papers. For one thing, new printing technology simply made them affordable to more people. But as cities grew, the relevant public grew as well. In traditional societies, most people knew their neighbours and their roles. In new urban societies, everyday life consisted of seeing a stream of strangers passing by. Who were they, how did they live, what happened in other parts of the city? With the new popular press, this led to the introduction of a hitherto unknown kind of surveillance of ordinary lives. In the US *The Sun*, established in 1833, changed journalism forever with its coverage of crime, as well as divorces and other details about personal lives (Spencer 2007). *The Sun* is also believed to have published the first ever piece about a suicide. In London at the same time, popular Sunday papers provided a mixture of sensation and sports, sex and crime, scattered with Dickensian poor and innocent victims (Chalaby, 1998; Sparks, 2000; Tulloch, 2000). In other words, they introduced the story or the narrative as a crucial ingredient in newspapers. The new press did not however cut out political content, but they gave their readers “a bundle” of stories, including “as much about political issues as they could give their attention to” (Hughes, 1940, p. 149, cited in Sparks, 2000, p. 20). In one way, newspapers became less informative. On the other hand, they may have packaged the necessary information in ways that made it more accessible to new groups of readers.

The rise of “tabloid” journalism sparked a controversy that points directly towards current discussions about individualisation of the media: The new public that emerged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century had the money necessary to make the newspaper industry grow (and particularly, the collective buying power to make business find it worthwhile to advertise in the papers). But they were also despised by the traditional upper and middle classes, as they had neither the

same education nor were believed to have the same rationality. “Instead they liked banner headlines, large drawings and photographs, snappy and spicy writing” – and human interest, as Schudson (1978) puts it. In fact, the middle classes probably also liked “banners and spice more than they cared to admit” (pp. 128–129). But the middle classes also needed to distinguish themselves from the new classes of newspaper readers. This can be seen as one important reason why two kinds of journalism continued to live side by side (*ibid.*, p. 90): factual information and dispassionateness was closer to the ideals of the upper classes, in contrast to storytelling and a focus on emotion that was more cherished by a broader audience (and that the more privileged pretended not to care about).

### III. The nature of narratives

A third area of tension is a “sub-tension” when it comes to narratives – it is about how real people should be represented in media narratives. Although tabloid-like journalism introduced more human interest, it does not necessarily follow that more people’s voices were actually taken seriously. Crime and tragedy were still the surest ways most ordinary people had of making it to the news, and a mixture of considerable social inequality and poor press ethics did not always do much for the way they were represented. Chalaby (1998, p. 163) cites numerous examples from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, like “Extraordinary Scare at Forest Hill”, “Death from Excitement” and “Fire in Glasgow: Exciting Scenes”.

In fact, news stories about crime, tragedies and other sensations bore with them an inherent risk – the risk of *othering* the individuals they wrote about, or identifying a visible difference between “worthy and unworthy” victims. In Norway, the tradition of popularised newspapers is much younger than overseas and dates back mainly to the 1930s, but the account of a murder in the quality paper *Aftenposten* from 1915 illustrates the problem *per se*: A young woman was killed in one of Oslo’s poorest neighborhoods. She had been married for four days, and the newspaper’s suspicion was immediately directed at her husband, a Swedish guest worker. Not only was the name of the guest worker disclosed at once, but the young murder victim was also described this way: “She was of the unfortunate kind that without hesitation moves in with any man who will give her a roof over her

head, something to eat and something to drink.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, it was implied that she had it coming.

Many have pointed to the reportage as a more fruitful way of representing individuals, often even with an ambition to leave the realm of the high and mighty and capture reality as it “really” is. And there is some truth to this: Even in times when the audience’s access to the media was limited, reportage was a genre where individuals could be more than one-dimensional walk-ons in the stories. One classic example is the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg’s article series in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* from 1886, “Among French Farmers” (later published as a book, *Bland franska bönder*, in 1914). The story, to a great extent told through individual farmers, land-workers and their opinions, behaviour, clothing etc., visualises class difference in France, but the characters are complex human beings, never simple victims or offenders. They all have their good and bad sides, as human beings do.

The featuring of ordinary people’s plight in reportage from this period ranges from the rather low-key portrait of the people in the French countryside to the both angry and sad account of child labour in John Spargo’s *The Bitter Cry of the Children* from 1906. Young boys, often no more than nine or ten years old, destroyed their health, injured their hands or other limbs and could even lose their lives working in mines and quarries around the United States. If they survived, but were disabled, they were often thrown away as useless workers.

The examples of great reportage in journalism history are many, from the works of the social reformers of the British 19<sup>th</sup> century via the muckraking tradition in turn-of-the-century America, to Martha Gellhorn’s war reportages in the first half of the 20<sup>st</sup> century (for a brilliant overview of reportage, from pre-journalistic times as well as from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, see John Carey’s edited collection *The Faber Book of Reportage*, 2003).

## IV. Spectator or participant

The next area of tension relates to whether or not the personal voice of the journalist should be heard – and whether it is really possible for the journalist, who is as much a part of society as are their sources, to be solely a spectator?

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3 Aftenposten 12 and 13 November 1915: <https://eavis.aftenposten.no/aftenposten/51691/>, <https://eavis.aftenposten.no/aftenposten/51372/>

This tension is of a rather new date, stemming from the introduction of the objectivity ideal in the beginning of the 20<sup>st</sup> century. Although many journalists still adhere to it, there has been no lack of debate about this ideal. The tension between subjectivity and objectivity in journalistic practice creates a considerable paradox, as some of the most prestigious journalistic reportages were historically permeated with participation and a personal voice (Coward, 2013, p. 21). There is even a solid tradition in which journalists, openly or in disguise, have taken on the plight of the people they wanted to portray. If the objectivity ideal were an *ex post facto* law, it would in fact mean that some of the most cherished classics of journalism were not journalism.

The subjectivity-objectivity dimension is elaborated in more detail in chapter 2, and this discussion is in no way confined to narrative stories, but a few examples of narrative journalism can serve to make the point in this limited space. John Spargo tried to do the same work as the young boys at the quarries, had his hands cut and bruised and spat anthracite after only half an hour just like the young children. His contemporary Nellie Bly gained access to a mental hospital in Boston by pretending to have a psychiatric condition, and experienced the abuse, the freezing cold rooms and inedible food that the patients were subjected to (*Inside the Madhouse* from 1887).

Spargo's and Bly's actions were efficient ways of showing the realities of the milieus they described, but were also acts of empathy. Gellhorn's journalism is another well-known example – she is said to have introduced a new kind of subjective reporting both during the Spanish Civil War and later about the Holocaust. The new element was that she focused on the civilians as well as on leaders and military strategy – and also included her own reactions to the atrocities the civilians were subjected to (Coward, 2013, p. 28). This method of reporting travelled across borders: Gellhorn's contemporary, Norwegian Gerda Grepp, the first Scandinavian reporter to go to Spain in 1936, had exactly the same attitude to her work and included reports on how the war affected women, children and the wounded in hospitals (Vislie, 2016). Her colleague Lise Lindbæk risked her life to get the best stories from the war, and also functioned as a caregiver and nurse for the soldiers (Slapgard, 2003).

## V. Enlightenment or trivialities

There is also a long-standing tension between enlightenment or public education and mere trivialities, which is particularly applicable to the

individualisation debate. Among other things, the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a wide range of – often quite non-commercial – magazines and journals that first and foremost attempted to contribute to public enlightenment. Høyer (1995) has collected a number of fascinating newspaper names from 19<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian history, illustrating the wish of periodical makers to try and reach out to the people “out there” – such as *The Citizen’s Friend*, *The People’s Friend*, *The People’s Voice*. Some were aimed at the least fortunate – as one title, *For the Poor Man*, illustrates well. Contact with the reader was, however, far more difficult to establish than for those publications targeting higher social strata. The editor of *For the Poor Man* had also soon to change its name: it turned out that its readers disapproved of being called poor – a message that was not conveyed directly to the editor, but through a group of teachers who worked among the poor.

One interesting thing about 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century public enlightenment publications is, however, probably that this is where we find the origins of what Fairclough (2010, p. 98) calls “synthetic personalisation” – a way of addressing the readers which pretends to speak to each and every one of them. There is an obvious kinship between this more modern form and the early publications with encouragement and advice directed at the readers. A plethora of magazines – and this was as common in the outskirts of Europe as in the English-speaking world – could specialise in anything from the best fertilisers to how to read the Bible. The publications would call on ordinary people to read books, or provide them with recipes for healthy food. A Norwegian magazine, established in 1810, directed particularly at people in the countryside, included information on how to best preserve one’s clothes, how to harvest wild plants, the harmfulness of tobacco – or good advice to young people who were on their way out into the world (Eide, 2010, pp. 189–191).

There is quite simply a tradition alongside the regular press where one finds many examples of the features that today are often described as reader-oriented. What the editor of *The Poor Man* probably did wrong, however, was that he did not know his public. Regional newspapers, local newspapers, and papers directed at certain groups – like political periodicals – were more successful. And again women’s magazines can be used as an example. Even in century-old magazines one can find many features that resemble today’s reader-directed consumer news – like home economics, lifestyle, relationships, health issues and Q&A columns. These magazines’ comprehensive



coverage of homemaking – recipes, nutrition, food preservation etc. – are often regarded as mere trivialities today, but were important information that very likely contributed to improving public health and even reducing the risk of infectious disease (Hagemann, 2013; Fonn, 2013).

Eide and Knight (1999) have pointed to the fact that this kind of journalism – which they call service journalism – was a natural result of modernity. People broke away from their traditional communities and their ascribed roles, and needed new advice on how to maneuver in a new and complex world. They also had money to spend, which led to a new relationship between news and advertising. Current discussions about content marketing (which very often uses synthetic personalisation) are in no way new – journalism history is full of examples of “news” which in reality was advice on what to buy (f. ex. Ottosen 2010, pp. 156, 278).

## VI. Personalisation of power

The last aspect of individual focus and exposure which we will try put into a historical context – and which is also rife with tension – is the personalisation of people with power.

In modern times different kinds of personalisation of powerful people, most notably politicians, have been criticised for taking the political out of politics and replacing it with prying into other people’s private lives, or confusing a politician’s personal qualities with the qualities of his or her political party – which has certainly often been the case. But personalisation has also been a powerful tool to make power accountable – of bringing people with power down from their pedestal.

Challenging the power elites became common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and thereby began the first real instances of personalisation of power in the way we recognise it today. Accountability is to an extent dependent on some kind of communication with the public, that people with power appear as real persons of “flesh and blood”. It is interesting to note Michael Schudson’s account (1994, see also 1978, p. 66) of the introduction of the interview in American journalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (whereupon it spread to Europe). One hundred and fifty years ago the interview was still not in common use. According to Schudson, American journalists could use interviewing as a method of collecting information as early as during Abraham Lincoln’s presidency, but making

politicians accountable by actually quoting what they say, did not become common until late in the century.

Pre-interview personalisation of the powerful can however be found at least as early as in the 1830s in Norwegian press history. The first known Norwegian investigative journalist was Peder Soelvold, who edited the newspaper *Statsborgeren* (*The Citizen*) from 1831 to 1835. He was intent on making peasants and other common people – “the little man in society” anno the 1830s – aware of their rights, and on making sure that the authorities followed the law. His writings were characterised by personalised attacks on civil servants and members of parliament – even by using “perfidious jargon” (Eide, 2010, p. 221, see also Høyer 1995, pp. 203 ff). Perfidious jargon did not necessarily do much for the cause in the short run, at least not for Soelvold himself, neither did the fact that some of his accusations could never be verified. He was libelled, imprisoned and died in a poorhouse at forty-eight. But in the long run even the unwise and daring acts of people like Soelvold probably contributed to dismantling any undue respect for people in power, and making investigations on behalf of the public acceptable.

By the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, press researchers can find various examples of “confrontational” interviews in Norway, but on the other hand fewer examples of investigative journalism (Ottosen, 2010, p. 173). American investigative journalism of the same period, the so-called progressive era, is however well known internationally – journalists from different Western countries often refer to the so-called muckraking period as extremely influential. Both Spargo and Bly belonged to that tradition (Bly was even the first journalist to be given the name muckraker), but a considerable share of the original muckraking stories concentrated on the interests of the public through disclosing power abuse among business leaders and politicians. Ida Tarbell’s *History of the Standard Oil Company* from 1904 (first published in *McClure’s Magazine* in 1902) is among other things an exposure of the aggressive techniques John D. Rockefeller used to make his Standard Oil Company a major business monopoly.

Another parallel, and to an extent intertwined, tradition stems from – again – the spreading of the news paradigm in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. News meant a focus on the timely – and as the word implies – the new. Politics however was – and is – a continuous process. As Chalaby (1998, p. 83) puts it: “To report on politics, the past needs to be constantly reactualized and this proved

increasingly difficult for journalists whose time reference concentrates on the last 12 or 24 hours.” In Britain, this led as early as in the 1880s to a coverage of politics that became “increasingly focused on personal issues and political figures, rather than on political issues and political principles. A major aspect of the personalisation of public life by journalists was the disclosure of politicians’ private life” (*ibid.*, p. 76).

What was lost as a result of this development? Before personalisation, major British newspapers published, among other things, parliamentary proceedings from beginning to end. On one hand, it is easy to see that this was a genre that did not appeal to everyman. But Chalaby argues that with the replacement of parliamentary proceedings by news (including what one must assume was increased use of interviews with politicians), some of the accountability disappeared, as the public no longer had direct access to political negotiations (Chalaby, 1998). The partisan press which developed in Norway at the same time was also characterised by long and detailed reports from political meetings. They were gradually replaced by interviews, but as late as in the beginning of the 1950s, these reports constituted an important journalistic genre (Hjeltnes, 2010, pp. 251ff). In these reports, readers could see dialogues between politicians almost like in a play (Ottosen, 2010, p. 182).

## Empowerment and exploitation

The affluent years of post-war society saw the rise of a new consumer society, securing wealth and welfare for new groups. The question of whether the developments described above meant “dumbing down or reaching out” (Sparks, 2000, p. 8) did not become less important as the 20<sup>th</sup> century proceeded.

At the same time, the tendency in journalism to put more weight on the individual and personal was strengthened, as a result of more influential tabloid newspapers, more use of photography, the introduction of television etc. – and subsequently also what Sparks (2000, p. 22) describes as a “mild tabloidisation” of the quality media. The rise of increasing individual focus and exposure has probably led to both an empowerment of the “little man” and an enrichment of the media, but also to unwanted exposure and exploitation – and consequently has created new tensions. It is safe to say that it has not always expanded the understanding of the lives of other human beings.

Individuals exposed in the media for example often still remain one-dimensional characters whose primary role is to fit into a more paramount frame.

Each new step in media development has led to new ways of presenting people, addressing sources and the audience, and even new ways of presenting and staging the journalist. Each new step has also led to deepened tensions and renewed concern for where journalism is heading: As Zelizer (2000, p. ix) for example has pointed out, after some years of television the initial criticism waned, but was replaced by criticism of the more superficial kinds of television programmes instead.

## The personal as political

The social changes of the 1960s and 70s in particular introduced new topics and new ways of talking in the public sphere. The freedom revolution associated with this period entailed a myriad of liberty movements where new groups claimed public attention, but one important and distinct feature was the focus on women's personal experiences under the motto "the personal is political". This movement did not initially strike a particularly strong chord either with quality or tabloid journalism, since this large group of readers was still often confined to the women's pages. Within a decade, these ideas had however spilled over into journalism in many ways (helped by a surge in female journalists). Topics formerly thought of as female – and thereby marginal – were increasingly reflected in news media, with papers and magazines advocating feminist issues like women's health, workplace equality, abortion rights etc. The former "female" journalism has probably influenced contemporary journalism greatly, as it brought health as well as a broad range of other formerly "private" issues – regardless of gender – into the public sphere (Coward, 2013; Hjeltnes, 2010). A long-term effect (which can also be attributed to the rise of New Journalism in the same period) is a more personal voice on the part of the journalist. New tensions arose from a rising tendency to include experiences that would earlier be regarded as private, and is among the many things explored in Coward's *Speaking Personally* – aptly subtitled *The Rise of Subjective and Confessional Journalism* (2013).

A more affluent society and more focus on everyday life also led to an explosion in consumer news. Edifying articles from the 19<sup>th</sup> century turned into what is today called service journalism, reader-oriented "more use than news"

journalism or how-to journalism, often with the use of “synthetic personalisation”. The tension between enlightenment and triviality still prevails – there is an ongoing discussion about whether journalism has now reached the uttermost borders of triviality, and the fact that the relative new-comer *content marketing* can often be hardly distinguished from this genre contributes to its bad reputation.

With the increased focus on the market and the rise of economic and business news directed at a broader public from the 1980s on, another inherent tension can also be noted: between reader-directed news that is useful to all the individuals it pretends to address, and news that in reality both requires and enhances a kind of competition among the readers. Stock market advice, and advice on market trends relating to buying or selling homes are typical examples (Fonn, 2015).

## A potent combination

The – preliminary – peak of journalism’s crusade for accountability must be said to have been reached when an American president had to leave office after the Watergate scandal in 1973. This important event in modern journalism history<sup>4</sup> also clearly illustrates how the two traditions of investigative journalism and individual exposure have somewhat merged into one – the scandal. It is currently difficult to imagine the media without the potent combination of power (in particular politicians), accountable individuals, and the scandal. Even in the Scandinavian countries, who have always lagged a bit behind the Anglo-American world when it comes to introducing new media phenomena, scandals have become much more common during the last few decades (Midtbø, 2007; Allern & Pollack, 2009).

Individual exposure, however, has its limitations where accountability is concerned, as it often means that one person is sacrificed, whereas the problems or misdeeds the press wanted to address continue as before. The advances that, after all, have been made in making power accountable during the last century or so also do not necessarily mean that all journalism about people with power has become especially irreverent. After more than a century in

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4 Watergate was much less of an impressive journalistic masterpiece than the myth will have it, but on the other hand, the myth has played a particularly important part in legitimising journalism’s role as a public watchdog (e.g. Zelizer, 1993).

which accountability has been a driving force behind the journalistic watchdog ideal, a considerable part of the increased focus on powerful individuals still consists of mostly uncritical celebrity news. There is widespread curiosity on the part of both the media and the public about who these people who run the country (or make a lot of money in business) are, and there sometimes seems to be as much interest in how political and other leaders live, as in how they work. But even this tendency may be attributed to some kind of democratisation – it can be seen as the preliminary last stage in closing the gap between the elite and the “people”, the gap between those who govern and the governed, but it is also based on a need and a wish for authenticity in contemporary culture (Coward, 2013, p. 3; see also Enli, 2015).

## Concluding remarks

This outline has given some historical context to the currents of individual focus and exposure that we see in the media of today: the history of the audience as media makers, the tension between “facts” and narratives, the tension between tabloid-style human interest and more in-depth reportage, the possible connection between public enlightenment and “reader-oriented” journalism, and the background for the personalisation of politics. All this can hopefully contribute to an understanding of what kinds of individual focus, individual exposure and subjectivity we are dealing with when we study the media – and why there are so many differing opinions on putting a face on journalism.

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