MA MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

Affective News: A Case-Study of the Work of Emotions in News Coverage of the 2010
Earthquake in Haiti

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Introduction

The study of affective discourse in the news is critical for understanding how world events become meaningful to audiences, and important in light of the fact that the profession of journalism maintains problematic ideas of the role of emotions in news texts. Within the ideals of journalism are notions that emotional narratives and affective discourses are secondary, or even degrading, to serious news stories. Other journalistic ideals view emotions as a kind of necessary evil to the selling of news. Lastly, in scholarship around the democratic potential of human interest or soft news stories (typically narrated using emotive language), there is an idea that soft news stories are only meaningful in so far as they act as a gateway to serious news issues. These theories of serious news degrade the role that the affects play in news texts.

This paper suggests that emotions and the deployment of affective discourse in news texts can be understood as meaningful beyond their work in selling news stories or acting as a gateway to serious issues. This paper is interested in the ascension of “serious” news, and the way in which emotion in the news became regarded as trivial and unimportant. More specifically, I examine the division between serious, factual, objective news and dramatic, emotional human-interest stories, and their associated classificatory terms “hard” and “soft” news. This paper attempts to problematize the characterization of serious news as non-emotional, and non-serious news as emotional, by demonstrating how the press’s commitment to the public sphere is an affective commitment predicated on the idea of “care.” As this paper argues, the press’s commitment to the public sphere, though, is vague and ambiguous. The effect of ambiguity around concepts of the public sphere and regarding ideas of care is that the press envisions care in differing ways.

The differential alignment of the press with humanitarian goals, thus, works to privilege certain sites and methods of care over others. In this way, news coverage reflects a politics of care that operates through the alignment of public sympathies with pre-existing authorities of aid, relief and assistance. In order to demonstrate the affective work of the press, this paper examines news coverage of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti..

Natural disasters are highly newsworthy events that are covered extensively in the media, and are considered to be important both by audiences and news organizations. This particular disaster has been accompanied by a breadth and depth of coverage uncommon to most natural disasters and continues to be covered in the media six months after the earthquake. Central to this quantity and quality of coverage are assumptions about what this kind of human tragedy means for global audiences, and interest in the dynamism of emotions attendant to such large-scale struggle. Another noteworthy feature of these stories is the way that affective discourses are differentially deployed in various locations and to disparate audiences. Lastly, the disaster precipitated action on an international scale, involving various levels of many governments, international organizations, professional and humanitarian groups, economic organizations, businesses, celebrities, and citizens around the world. Integral to this international response was the media circulation of information regarding the earthquake, and for my purposes, the deployment of affective discourses that work to make events meaningful. In sum, this paper attempts to outline how the subject of emotions is dealt with by the news industries, and what role emotions play in news texts using the specific case study of news coverage related to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The first section of the paper outlines how serious news came to be dissociated from emotions.

The second section of the paper uses the case study of Haiti to demonstrate how emotions structure and saturate news coverage.

PART ONE: On Emotions and Categories of News

The Origins of “Serious” News

Newspapers as we know them today are a relatively modern invention. Prior to the 18th century, the closest things to newspapers were newsletters in Europe and the United States that were produced for groups of commercial and political players¹. These newsletters were paid for by professional groups and governments, and informed their circumscribed audiences (political and professional men) of new information specifically relevant to their realms of professional activity. It was not until the American Revolution that newspapers began to be developed for public consumption. MacGill Hughes writes:

With the growing enthusiasm for self-government that led to the Revolution, the newspapers became the instruments of public opinion as well as of news. Official printers, who enjoyed the government patronage, printed newspapers endorsed and subsidized by the administration, while Tory sympathizers and the patriots replied to them in their own organs. The few journals that tried to give both sides were short-lived because both sides mistrusted them. After the Revolution the Federalists and the Republicans sought to capture public support by the founding and subsidizing of

¹ MacGill Hughes 2.

newspapers, for newspapers had proved themselves more effective than pamphlets in stirring people to action. The newspaper thus became the agency of a cause.²

Competing political groups funded these early newspapers, and their politics heavily shaped the tone and rhetoric of the newspapers. It wasn't until Benjamin Day's founding of the *New York Sun* in 1833, and the rise of the penny press, that an alternative news model was established: "the commercial penny press substituted the market for the mission. Its object was to sell, not influence"³. Instead of presenting information about international politics and trade in a sixpenny newspaper that catered to a limited ideological group, Day offered a new kind of commodity that was funded by advertisements and initially sold in the marketplace to artisans and mechanics. The newspaper contained information that was easier and cheaper to obtain, could be accessed by audiences across partisan lines, and would be sold on the streets rather than delivered to subscribers' homes. The contents of his paper were accessible, affordable and locally relevant—personal gossip, anecdotes, stories about wild animals and local crime—and these stories were written not in sophisticated political rhetoric, but instead, using the dialogue form⁴. It was this reporting of local stories, rather than the actions of government or wealthy industrialists, that first appeared in his paper, and it was the ushering in of these "inconsequential" stories that introduced human-interest stories to the American press⁵. The arrival of Day's newspaper produced a kind of antithesis to the partisan papers that existed before—his newspaper was met

² MacGill Hughes 5.

³ MacGill Hughes 7.

⁴ MacGill Hughes 8.

⁵ Ibid.

with moral indignation, as he siphoned the newspaper off from the political realm and housed it in the marketplace⁶. Day's newspaper not only changed the quality of stories, but also the press's economic model.

The broad appeal of these papers to audiences across partisan lines offered a different model for newspaper funding to the sixpenny press. Rather than having to be funded by a political organization and its partisan subscribers, newspaper producers could provide their newspapers to a broader public for lower prices, generating a larger readership and greater profits. An important tactic for a newspaper to be accessible to people across partisan lines was the diminishing of partisan writing and framing. Robert E. Park notes that the rise of the pennypress led to the important realization among newspaper publishers that “(1) that most human beings, if they could read at all, found it easier to read news than editorial opinion and (2) that the common man would rather be entertained than edified”⁷. The newspapers that once criticized non-partisan writing began to pare down their sophisticated, edifying language, and replaced it with sparse, “factual” writing. From the beginning, the practice of reporting facts was not an attempt to convey fixed truths. Instead, journalists approached facts as information that was most easily and commonly agreed upon. Park suggests that the art of reporting requires the journalist “to state the facts so that both parties to an issue will accept them as facts,” but these facts are subject to “a universe of discourse and, as I have suggested, every public has its own”⁸. The incentive for

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ MacGill Hughes xxiii.

⁸ MacGill Hughes xxv.

factual writing came less out of a commitment to some notion of truth, and instead was constituted by a need for clear and undisputable information that would be accepted by the widest audience possible in order to generate greater profits. Analysis, interpretation and editorializing were regarded as less profitable than facts, and so these forms of writing were relegated to editorial and opinion pages, rather than setting the tone of all news stories.

The presentation of facts has not only become the standard for serious news reporting, but more importantly constitutes the very existence of some kinds of news reporting. John Ellis suggests that televised news, for instance, is based on the problematic of “fact-finding”: “The [structure of the television] series is based on the repetition of a problematic. It repeats a situation, a situation which can be fictional or non-fictional. Hence the news series and the current affairs series both present a certain inquiring, fact-finding vision: the situation of reporters observing and collating information, then organizing it for presentation to an uninformed public”⁹. The centrality of facts in the news has bred a host of related news values that structure the form of coverage.

The ideal of factuality is often used interrelatedly with the word “objectivity.” Objectivity is a vague term that has garnered little definitional consensus, but David Mindich notes that objectivity has been used synonymously with detachment, nonpartisanship, the inverted pyramid, naïve empiricism, and balance. Detachment is regarded as important because it ensures that “the facts are doing the talking, not the reporter’s own preconceived notions”; nonpartisanship works to promote “both sides” of each story; naïve empiricism is the reliance on facts as truth; and

⁹ Ellis 243.

balance is important for “undistorted reporting”¹⁰. The inverted pyramid is the most prominent form of journalistic writing that presents “important” information (the “who, what, where, when and [if possible] how” of the events) in the lead paragraph, and is then followed by information of diminishing importance¹¹. This style rejects literary flourishes and editorializing and relies on minimal commentary and the recounting of facts. The presentation of “essential” information in the first paragraph is regarded as an important technique for newspapers because readers often have a limited amount of time to read the news, and by presenting the essentials first, readers can skip the rest of the article while staying relatively informed¹². Additionally, when the need for space in the newspaper necessitates that stories are cut down, editors will often remove ending paragraphs rather than have stories rewritten¹³. While it is employed because it is considered the most straightforward kind of reporting, it can also limit knowledge surrounding an event.

The politics of the inverted pyramid style are rooted in the style’s beginnings. The inverted pyramid appeared not first among journalists but instead in the work of notorious press censor Edwin M. Stanton, Abraham Lincoln’s secretary of war¹⁴. Stanton’s “terse, impersonal dispatches appeared unedited on the front pages of newspapers across the Union” during the Civil War period and this style of writing contributed overall to his “tight rein on discourse” and

¹⁰ Mindich 8.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² MacGill Hughes 69.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mindich 66.

to social control during the time period¹⁵. The state's ability to circumscribe discourse is an ability to limit the ideas and meanings that circulate among citizens. By severing sterile facts from their context or a more comprehensive narrative, the state can more easily re-contextualize or re-narrate the relevance of facts as needed. So, although the inverted pyramid and factual writing has come to be associated with clarity and truth, the roots of this style suggest that facts can be used in various ways and can in fact be misleading. The brevity of facts, in other words, can be used as a political tool to limit richer understandings of a news event.

Another consequence of coupling official state affairs with objective reporting is the production of categorical binaries that deem particular kinds of subjects and styles of writing as "serious," while framing whatever is left over as trivial, unimportant, or entertainment. There exists a linking of serious (factual) writing with political, militaristic and economic affairs, and a coupling of expressive, literary and interpretive writing with personal experiences, emotions, local figures, art and culture, the private realm (and relatedly, stories of women and marginalized groups) and individual expression. Just as serious news today reflects subjects that have long been taken seriously, trivial news or entertainment echoes realms of human experience that have long been considered of less or little importance. These divisions are associated with a classificatory system that organizes news into the categories of "hard news" and "soft news."

¹⁵ Ibid.

Hard and Soft News

Hard news refers to that which is presented through minimal commentary, bias and analysis (“just the facts”), and most often covers the subjects of politics, war, economics and some kinds of crime. Soft news, conversely, is an umbrella term for coverage of individual lives, human drama, lifestyles, the personal realm, unusual incidents, celebrity, art and entertainment. These stories are associated with sensationalism or writing styles that employ highly emotive language and dramatic narratives. By definition, soft news is regarded as less important than hard news. Indeed, soft news often frames its subjects as secondary to, or the human face of, “real” news. MacGill Hughes has an overlapping but somewhat different model for understanding the division of news, using the terms departmentalized news, big news and little news (synonymous in her work with “human interest stories”)¹⁶. Of relevance to this discussion of soft news is her characterization of little news. She suggests that “the little news attracts them [readers] all; to be interested, one need merely be human... Judged by any standard but that of circulation, the little news has no practical importance whatsoever”¹⁷. Further, she suggests that human-interest stories are “concerned with persons as human beings and in nonprofessional roles... it is why the mass public understands and enjoys it”¹⁸. In terms of how big and little news differ in style, she

¹⁶ Departmentalized news refers to routine news that caters to a circumscribed group of habitual readers, typically those who have a professional or amateur interest in the subject, and whose interest in a subject is continuous (e.g. the stock markets or sports sections). Big news does not refer to any particular kind of story, but instead is contingent on what is most newsworthy for the day. What distinguishes big news from departmental news is “the reader’s response”—where departmental news focuses on everyday information that informs the reader, but does not necessarily have urgent, dramatic impacts on readers, big news confounds the reader, for example, instances of “an act of God or any unfamiliar dilemma, such as murder, rape, and arson, or a prolonged emergency” (62). In her model, departmentalized news and big news are both framed as important for their relevance to behavior, thought and action, while little news is framed as that does not affect the reader and which does not incite action.

¹⁷ MacGill Hughes 64.

¹⁸ MacGill Hughes 68.

notes that the big news is “phrased solely to convey information as briefly as possible without sacrificing clearness” and the little/human-interest news is “written so that the simple-minded and the childish can follow it”¹⁹. The little news is anecdotal, suspenseful, may be written in dialect, and has relaxed standards around accuracy²⁰. This model overlaps with the hard/soft news paradigm in the way that it categorizes news by degrees of seriousness and relevance, but differs in the way that it measures these factors. In the hard/soft paradigm, categories are more contingent upon subject matter (again, hard news often is coupled with the subjects of government or business), where the department/big/soft news model deals more with applicability and relevance to audiences and their individual actions and behaviors. What the models share, though, are how writing styles are treated—serious news is conveyed in sparse, brief language, while trivial news employs literary or dialogic writing, is imaginative and less accurate. Additionally, her model overlaps with the hard/soft model in the distinction that important and serious news concerns public and professional matters, while personal and affective issues (what is “humanly” interesting) are conceived of as simple and childish. The hard and soft news classification system exists at the level of the news institution that employs these terms for practical reasons.

Sociologist Gaye Tuchman suggests that the reliance of non-specialist journalists, or the news industries more generally, on the unexpected or unfamiliar poses the problem: “how can an

¹⁹ MacGill Hughes 83.

²⁰ MacGill Hughes 68-70.

organization routinize the processing of unexpected events?”²¹ The classification of events as “hard” and “soft” news “had been prompted by the notion that the categories would enable the routinization of work” since definitions and prototypical examples could decrease the variability of events, and ease the work of turning the “raw materials of news” into coherent news stories²². This tactic, though, is problematic because the same event could be treated as hard news by one agency or as soft news by another agency, since journalists find it difficult “to apply consistently their distinctions between hard news and soft news”²³. In the case of coverage about the earthquake in Haiti, this confusion between hard and soft coverage is apparent in the reporting of a nation-wide disaster in the “soft” sections of many newspapers. One of the first stories about post-earthquake Haiti that appeared in the *LA Times* was called “Anderson Cooper in Haiti,” which provided early information about the work of the three main American television networks NBC, CBS and ABC that were struggling to report from Haiti since the communications and transportation infrastructures were deeply damaged. Though this article provides important information about the plans of major American news organizations working toward communicating the events of a destroyed nation, the story appeared in a segment of the paper called “Show Tracker: What you’re watching”²⁴, part of the Entertainment section of the paper. This section of the paper is traditionally reserved for soft news stories, but the content of this particular story demonstrates the difficulty of framing information as either soft or hard. “Entertainment” is a label designating a particular kind of content that is seen to be the opposite

²¹ Tuchman 111.

²² Tuchman 115.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Gold.

of “enlightening” or “enabling” information (illustrated in Robert E. Park polarization of entertainment and edification), but this kind of polarization hides the ways in which entertaining content and the entertainment industries are entangled with social, cultural, economic and political structures. The division between hard and soft news, then, obscures the layers and dynamism of events and experiences. Indeed, the categories of hard and soft regularly blur, since serious news is often best understood through emphatic writing and appeals to emotion.

The Softer Side of Serious News

A question that the categories of hard and soft news poses is how to understand coverage of serious events after the facts have been reported. It is in the news organization’s economic and professional interests to address the dramatic aspects of serious events, so long as the event remains of interest to audiences. Almost necessarily, the news broadcaster dips into what is considered the “human interest” side of serious events in order to provide new angles and fresh perspectives on unfolding situations. In this way, hard news content stretches itself into soft news content. But it is not just that most newsworthy subjects have a human element that pushes serious news to the boundaries of soft news. It is that audiences respond strongly to the narrative tactics and subject matters typically associated with the realm of soft news. Peter Golding and Philip Elliot illustrate how the news profession has built into its criteria of news values the value of “drama.” They write:

News stories are, as the term suggests, stories as well as news. Good ones exhibit a narrative structure akin to the root elements in human drama. To recall Reuben Frank, former President of NBC news in America, ‘joy, sorrow, shock, fear, these are the stuff of news’. The good news story

tells its tale with a beginning, a middle and an end, in that order... Dramatic structure is often achieved by the presentation of conflict, most commonly by the matching of opposed viewpoints drawn from spokesmen of 'both sides of the question'.²⁵

The employment of a narrative arc and the focus on, or embellishments of, emotions in a story are tools that assist the journalist with the writing of a story, and the audience with the comprehension of an event. What is implicit in their discussion is the notion that there is no significant news without human drama and emotions. Missing from this discussion, though, is an elaboration of the mechanism of drama—the interplay of human emotions inherent to, or surrounding, an event. Golding and Elliot emphasize the fabrication or construction of an emotional narrative as central to the production of a good news story, but they do not further examine why it is the case that *emotion* is integral to news stories.

A similar disregard for the subject of emotions in the news is presented in the work of W. Lance Bennett who argues that the personalization of news skews coverage and hinders democracy. He characterizes the personalization of news as the “focus on personal concerns” including the “human trials, tragedies, and triumphs that sit at the surface of events”²⁶. The characterization of emotions as being situated at “the surface of events” construes emotions as superficial and unsubstantial. Personalization, to Bennett, detracts from what is really important—the “big

²⁵ Golding and Elliot 406.

²⁶ Bennett 35.

social, economic, or political picture”, the “power and process”²⁷. Bennett’s criticism is less that emotions are in themselves useless, but that they are not coupled with analysis and commentary. He writes: “The tendency to personalize the news would be less worrisome if human-interest angles were used to hook audiences into more serious analysis of issues and problems”²⁸. Here we see Bennett does not totally discount the usefulness of the portrayal of emotions in the media, but he does treat emotions as inherently trivial. The only meaningfulness of emotions in news coverage, for Bennett, is in their usefulness in attracting audience to serious analysis. This treatment of emotions as primarily a selling point disregards the meaningfulness of affective discourses and narratives. This is likely because the subject of emotions in the West has a long history of being framed as the product of whimsy, and emotions are seen to be fleeting, subjective and limited in importance to the experience of individuals. However, the work in the field of affect theory has shown that the study of emotions is of particular relevance to understanding larger social, political and cultural trends.

The Work of Emotions

Sara Ahmed recalls that the division of reason and emotion in the West has resulted in an understanding of the emotions as beneath intellect, whereby emotions are situated at the bottom of a hierarchy of human faculties; “To be emotional is to have one’s judgment affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous”²⁹. Additionally, emotions are

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ahmed 3.

themselves divided in a hierarchy wherein certain emotions are elevated and act as signs of cultivation, while others are regarded as uncivilized and signs of weakness. For example, the affects of love, courage and pride are generally regarded in the West as having more integrity than the affects of fear, shame or guilt. This degradation of the subject of emotions has been problematic for understanding the role that affect plays in the cultivation of attitudes and circulation of ideas across publics. The analysis of emotions and affective discourses in public texts enables a better understanding of how individuals become differentially invested in particular structures of belief. Ahmed suggests that “[e]motions provide a script” by which people come to understand their identities, choices, societies, and possible paths of action³⁰. Her project is not interested in the inherent qualities of specific emotions, but instead, examines “what emotions do” when they are employed and circulated. She rejects the model of emotions that considers feelings as ‘things’ that can be ‘possessed’ by individual or collective bodies. Instead, she argues that “objects of emotion” circulate (“rather than emotion as such”) and that these objects “become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension”³¹. The meanings of affective objects are not fixed, though, and objects of emotions do not evoke the same responses from everyone. Lawrence Grossberg suggests this is because “[t]he same object, with the same meaning, giving the same pleasure, is very different in different affective contexts. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that different affective contexts inflect meanings and pleasures in very different ways”³². Lawrence Grossberg characterizes this process in the following way:

³⁰ Ahmed 12.

³¹ Ahmed 11.

³² Grossberg 80.

The affective plane is organized according to maps which direct people's investments in and into the world [...] They 'tell' people how to use and how to generate energy, how to navigate their way into and through various moods and passions, and how to live within emotional and ideological histories. In fact, affect is the missing term in an adequate understanding of ideology, for it offers the possibility of a 'psychology of belief' which would explain how and why ideologies are sometimes, and only sometimes, effective, and always to varying degrees [...] It is the affective investment which enables ideological relations to be internalized and, consequently, naturalized.³³

The idea here is that affect is the necessary ingredient for ideas to become personally meaningful, or for ideas to transform into belief. A powerful ideology can still be resisted if the subject does not *feel* it to be true. Even the apparent control over emotion, or “hardness,” speaks to the ways in which people become oriented toward (or away from) certain people, issues and objects.

The Politics of Metaphors

The metaphor of “hardness” is one that is associated with masculinity, while “softness” is associated with femininity. In the hierarchy of emotions, hardness is framed as superior to softness; it is a sign of strength and power for a person to be associated with hardness, while it is a sign of weakness and inferiority to be associated with softness. The metaphor of hardness is generally associated with the concepts of masculinity, maturity, wisdom, rationality, strength, domination and seriousness. Softness, on the other hand, is metaphorically associated with femininity, emotionality, naivety, children or childishness, weakness, passivity, subordination

³³ Grossberg 82-3.

and trivialities. Though the concept of hardness is often coupled with the concepts of rationality and non-emotionality, Ahmed suggests that hardness is not “the absence of emotion,” or a control over emotion, but instead is “*a different emotional orientation towards others*”³⁴. Hardness, then, may be considered a response that carries emotion, and exists in relation to other emotions. Indeed, hardness is a relational term, and as a concept cannot exist independent of softness—it must be constituted by some figure of softness.

In the dichotomy of hard and soft news, the shape of hard news is made possible by the shape of soft news. The subjects of soft news carry the same baggage as the metaphor of softness—soft news is typically narrated using dramatic, emotional language and is associated with emotional stories particularly situated in the private realm (especially stories related to the lower end of the affective hierarchy including stories of grief, jealousy, and suffering). And while soft news stories are (as suggested by MacGill Hughes) interesting to everyone, they are regarded as trivial and inconsequential. Hard news is aligned with rational pursuits and stories of “hard” power (e.g. the military, economic and governmental initiatives, the professional realms, scientific and technological discovery). The classification of something as hard news attributes an air of seriousness to the text, and this air of seriousness is made possible by pre-existing value structures that frame certain experiences and pursuits as more noble and worthwhile than others. News coverage about military and governmental affairs, for example, can be considered serious coverage because military and governmental affairs are already understood as serious realms. Thus, the deployment of the terms “hard” and “soft” in the classification of news not only echoes

³⁴ Ahmed 4.

normative orders, but indeed buttresses ideological and epistemic structures. As it stands, the terms hard and soft news are generally inadequate in the way that they order emotions. Greater attention to the work of emotions in the news can assist in richer understandings of how events, people and experiences take on the meanings that they do. The next section of the paper attempts this work by examining the role of affect in news coverage of post-earthquake Haiti.

PART TWO: News Coverage and the Differential Production of Care

The 2010 Earthquake in Haiti

The 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010 has been characterized by United Nation representative Elizabeth Byrs as an “historic disaster... like no other”³⁵ that killed up to 230,000 people, left over 1.2 million people homeless and virtually destroyed the capital city Port-au-Prince and nearby cities Léogâne and Jacmel. Pete Garratt of the Red Cross notes that the degree of damage caused by the earthquake cannot be explained by the earthquake’s magnitude alone, but must be understood through the context of failing social, political and economic infrastructure in Haiti³⁶. Unlike natural disasters that occur in more developed countries (like the 8.8 magnitude earthquake that struck Chile shortly after on February 27, 2010), the devastation in Haiti was intensified by the country’s poverty. 72.1% of Haiti’s population lives on less than \$2 a day, and major cities like Port-au-Prince are especially disaster-prone with so many people living in densely packed shantytowns and poorly-constructed

³⁵ Sonkar.

³⁶ Rodgers.

buildings³⁷. Additionally, Haiti's government has for decades been considered ineffective and unable to secure and support its own citizens, or provide proper infrastructure. Because of systemic ineffectiveness, building codes were unenforced, there was a high level of corruption in all industries (construction included) and virtually no urban planning existed³⁸. Even while funds were injected into the country by the international community (spearheaded by the UN), and though money was generated through diasporic remittances, most of Haiti's population remained destitute and the country's basic infrastructure underdeveloped. Even with over 10,000 aid agencies in Haiti prior to the earthquake, Haiti has remained one of the poorest and underdeveloped countries in the Western hemisphere³⁹. Post-earthquake reconstruction, then, will have to do more than just restore Haiti to its previous standing; it will have to build an entirely different country with viable social, economic, cultural and political structures and systems. If there is a silver lining in post-earthquake Haiti, it is perhaps in this opening to reform the country with the assistance and support of the international community. Integral to this reformation is the work of the communications industries that are instrumental to the circulation of ideas regarding rebuilding and relief.

Natural Disasters as Information Disasters

A critical problem the media faces during a natural disaster is the destruction of basic communications infrastructure. In "How the News Media Operate in Natural Disasters" Sood et

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Farnsworth.

³⁹ "Island Time."

al. note that times of disaster create sudden and important information needs, but these same moments disrupt information flows. Unlike prescheduled or anticipated events, “disasters are a time of high stress and rapid change for most media organizations, which are forced to adapt to radically changed environmental conditions[...] Thus, when information flows are needed the most, they are least able to function”⁴⁰. In Haiti, there is only one undersea fiber link cable, responsible for carrying voice and data traffic, and though the cable remained in tact after the earthquake, the base station that the cable linked up to was destroyed making the coordination of relief efforts ever more difficult⁴¹. Similarly, the radio industry was crippled by structural damage and personnel loss⁴². The early repairing of communications infrastructure was immediately seen to be of crucial importance. In the radio industry, several equipment manufacturers donated or slashed the cost of equipment for the relief effort. Broadcast Warehouse offered heavily subsidized equipment for anyone wishing to purchase items destined for Haiti, and international broadcasters reinforced their programming to Haiti in the wake of the earthquake, while other companies sent wind-up radios or raised funds to buy equipment. In terms of both circulating information within the country and to the rest of the world, it was important for journalists to quickly ready themselves with the space and resources necessary to cover events. The press-freedom organization Reporters Without Borders, in cooperation with the Canadian media group Quebecor, set up a centre of operations in Port-au-Prince on January 21, 2010 to provide a space for media operations, particularly for Haitian journalists⁴³. Evident in

⁴⁰ Sood et al. 29.

⁴¹ Rhoads.

⁴² Haiti’s main communications medium is the radio since illiteracy is at approximately 62% and poverty limits accessibility to television.

⁴³ “Reporters Without Borders to create centre of operations for Haitian Journalists.”

this international response to Haiti's broken communications infrastructure is the recognition of the importance of information flows regarding disasters, and an international commitment to the operability of information flows. The international community has an important role in assisting with the efficacy of Haiti's internal communications systems, and is also integral to connecting international audiences with the events in Haiti. News organizations abroad in particular are responsible for connecting global audiences with reconstruction efforts in Haiti. It is the press' coverage of the events that provides the necessary information for international solidarity and public sympathies, which then shape international rescue and response missions.

The International Response

So far, the damage of post-earthquake Haiti has been met with a tremendous response of good will from the international community that lent funds, professional expertise and international attention to relief and reconstruction efforts. The damage is vast and layered, but the response was swift perhaps because the need precipitated by environmental disasters differs from human-made disasters that are troubled by histories of difference, conflict and division. Natural disasters do not ask witnesses to identify singly with controversial programs, or political groups and ideological systems since innocent civilians across all lines are affected, and the unquestionable victimhood of these civilians garners a kind of international sympathy and solidarity that can be hindered in other kinds of crises that are embedded in complex political, economic, religious and cultural histories. Ulrich Beck suggests that environmental disasters produce a "solidarity of

living things that affects everyone and everything equally in the threat”⁴⁴. Because of the general faultlessness of environmental disaster victims, and the lesser degree of controversy around the basic rights to food, water, shelter and medical assistance, there can be more certainty among members of the international community to provide assistance.

In the case of Haiti, the destruction of governmental institutions and administrative centers exacerbated other kinds of damage, and the need for international intervention became unquestionable. Since the earthquake, a spirit of cooperation has been evident in spades. The government of Haiti estimated a need of \$4 billion to rebuild infrastructure over the next two years, and the UN donor conference not only met this request, it far exceeded this goal by raising \$9.9 billion for immediate and long-term aid for hospitals, schools, government buildings, job creation, and farming reform⁴⁵. The entertainment world also intervened to raise funds for various relief organizations. “Hope for Haiti Now: A Global Benefit for Earthquake Relief,” a televised concert telethon organized by George Clooney and supported by over 100 celebrity actors and musicians, raised over \$61 million from the general public⁴⁶ and continues to raise funds through the sale of the “Hope for Haiti Now” album. Non-profit organizations across the board from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, to Reporters Without Borders, along with various medical and humanitarian organizations and associations sent personnel, funds and equipment to assist with the various areas of territorial, economic, social

⁴⁴ Allan et al. 11.

⁴⁵ “UN Haiti donor pledges surpass targets at almost \$10bn.”

⁴⁶ Kaufman.

and institutional rebuilding required in Haiti. Individuals around the world concerned with the plight of Haitian children bombarded Haitian adoption agencies with phone calls asking how to adopt orphans. Even the historically antagonistic neighboring country, the Dominican Republic, opened its borders to help sick and injured Haitians who had limited access to hospitals. A crucial player in the production of international good will is the media that has the capacity to inform audiences globally about the damage of the earthquake, the needs of victims, and various methods of providing relief and assistance. The media, then, plays a crucial part in shaping how audiences care about a disaster and how audiences come to act on that sense of care.

Humanitarian News

The adequate framing of an event as a disaster requiring urgent assistance is an important preface for projects that require public sympathy, support and contribution. The articles about the earthquake in Haiti published in the *Montreal Gazette* on January 13, 2010 demonstrate how news organizations contribute to humanitarian missions by circulating knowledge about the gravity of destruction, and then juxtapose this with information on how to get involved with aid and relief projects. This discursive coupling of the disaster with an aid project or organization imbues the project/organization with the authority to speak about the disaster, and lends legitimacy to the narrative of aid that the project/organization proceeds to write. The following excerpt demonstrates how the media's discourse of tragedy and urgency precedes the possibilities of public compassion and sympathy, and the direction of humanitarian intervention:

Vast damage and overwhelming casualties were expected, but figures were unavailable last night. Electricity was out last night across Haiti's capital, phone lines were down, and the airport was shut. Screams for help seeped from felled buildings, and chaos reigned.

A team of 20 Canadian disaster relief personnel are en route to Haiti to assess the impoverished Caribbean nation in the wake of a catastrophic earthquake that has levelled much of the country and likely killed thousands, Canwest reported.⁴⁷

This excerpt foregrounds objects of fear and suffering—death, chaos, isolation and destruction—and compounds the image of destruction by highlighting the nation's poverty and broken infrastructure. The article transitions into a humanitarian text when it connects this narrative of pain with information on how to help. Even before the paper had all the necessary information required for an accurate depiction of the severity and breadth of the disaster, the *Gazette* assumed the news would produce public compassion and sympathy, and provided information on how to act on those feelings. In this particular article, donating money to the Red Cross is framed as the appropriate method of care for earthquake victims: "The Canadian Red Cross has pledged \$200,000 from its disaster relief fund to provide aid in Haiti. Donations can be made by calling 1-800-418-1111 or going to their website at www.redcross.ca"⁴⁸. The commitment of the news organization to communities of care is echoed in the following news headline: "How to help the quake victims; Several organizations involved; 'It's a priority to help those in distress,'" published January 14, 2010. The title aligns the news organization with projects committed to the amelioration of pain ("It's a priority to help those in distress"). The text of this article, too,

⁴⁷ "Montreal police in Haiti 'safe and sound'."

⁴⁸ Ibid.

juxtaposes pain (“distress”) with aid, and frames “help” in terms of monetary donations, particularly to the Red Cross.

[...] leaders of Montreal's large Haitian community expressed an emphatic preference for the freshly formed Canadian Red Cross Haiti Earthquake Fund.

"It's a priority to help those in distress," added Viau MNA Emmanuel Dubourg, originally from Haiti, after he offered tearful condolences to those who have not had word from loved ones and been left to agonize following the catastrophe.

Dubourg specifically urged that all financial help be provided through the Red Cross.

To help aid groups act quickly and efficiently, money donations are what is needed, said Chantal-Sylvie Imbeault, deputy executive director of CECI, a non-governmental organization that has worked in Haiti for nearly 40 years.⁴⁹

The use of the press by aid organizations illustrates the participation of news organizations in humanitarian missions. Indeed, this commitment to public service seems to structure the character of the contemporary press in the West.

The Media and the Public Sphere

The press in democratic countries is granted a host of rights in order to provide the public with relevant and unbiased information. These rights are often linked to notions of a public sphere, an arena of social life that is considered a necessary pillar for healthy and thriving democracies.

⁴⁹ Ravensbergen.

Jurgen Habermas conceptualized the public sphere as “a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens [...] citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; thus with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely”⁵⁰. The public sphere is not only a necessary arena for the circulation and exchange of political thoughts and ideas, but is also considered important for the cultivation of an individual’s sense of self-respect and to affirm one’s existence⁵¹. Habermas theorized that public communication and the formation of public opinion originally belonged to the domain of face-to-face communication, but with the advent of communication technologies, these practices moved to newspapers and, later, television⁵². These ideas about the relationship between the public sphere and the media continue to influence the press to this day.

The Missouri group⁵³ notes that the media is granted constitutional rights “based on a contract of trust between the public and the media. The public relies on the media to provide information, which gives the media considerable power. With this power, the media connect groups of people, and affect and shape communities”⁵⁴. The journalist’s creed, drafted by Missouri School of Journalism founder Walter Williams, avows that journalism is a public service, guided by the

⁵⁰ Habermas 92.

⁵¹ Tocqueville summarized by Pappacharissi 380.

⁵² Drache 58.

⁵³ A leading American journalist organization based out of the first journalism school the Missouri School of Journalism.

⁵⁴ Littlefield and Quenette 51.

ideals of truth, fairness, international good and the betterment of humanity⁵⁵. Allan et al. echo the belief in journalism's commitment to humanity when they suggest that "the media's role in an emergent global civil society has to be conceived not only in terms of the circulation of information and points of view, but also as providing cultural resources for non-local framings of the self as belonging to a global community of responsibility and care"⁵⁶. Allan et al. extend Williams' notion that the media connects, affects and shapes communities by suggesting that the connection of audiences to information is most important for facilitating cross-cultural identification and humanitarian care. Additionally, by calling on journalists to mitigate difference ("provide cultural resources for non-local framings"), the writers imply that journalism contributes to the production of public sympathy or compassion. Journalism meets its ethical obligation only when it fosters some sense of unity, togetherness, compassion and shared responsibility for others⁵⁷. This is evident in the aforementioned excerpts from the *Montreal Gazette*, whereby the press cultivates an image of suffering in Haiti, and this image is then supplemented with information about how to contribute to the alleviation of suffering (the "how to help" sections). While these kinds of articles demonstrate the press's ability to meet some kinds of public need, the press's commitment to care and duty to "the" public sphere is always only partially fulfilled since the needs and perspectives of people differ and compete. The press is unable to adequately serve a general public sphere because a unified public sphere simply cannot exist.

⁵⁵ Williams.

⁵⁶ Allan et al. 24.

⁵⁷ The role of newspapers in creating a shared consciousness and bound communities is theorized in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, which delineates the ways in which newspapers were instrumental in the formation of modern nations.

Problems with “A” Public Sphere

The main problem with Habermas’ conceptualization of the public sphere lies in its treatment of difference. Zizi Pappacharissi, for example, criticizes Habermas’ ideal of the public sphere, suggesting that “too many kinds of people were excluded from these forums”⁵⁸. Jean-Francois Lyotard also objected to Habermas’ rational public sphere, suggesting that difference, rather than consensus, achieved the goals of the public sphere. He wrote: “anarchy, individuality and disagreement, rather than rational accord, lead to true democratic emancipation”⁵⁹. Nancy Fraser similarly critiques the idea of a unified public sphere, suggesting that instead, “multiple public spheres exist, which are not equally powerful, articulate, or privileged, and which give voice to collective identities and interests”⁶⁰. The ambiguity in journalistic discourse regarding the press’ commitments to “the public” lends to vague notions about who the press is serving. For example, if Fraser’s theory of the existence of multiple public spheres is true, how can various press organizations meet the needs of a variety of public spheres? How can care, understanding, and cultural resources be circulated between disparate publics? What are the limits of a public and the limits of press obligations? Robert E. Park characterizes the press’ audience as fragmented publics that are differentiated by the press according to interests: “there is not, as is sometimes assumed, one public, but many. In fact, every department of a newspaper, from the society column to the sporting page, has its own public, each with its own concept of what is news and

⁵⁸ Pappacharissi 381.

⁵⁹ Pappacharissi 380-1.

⁶⁰ Pappacharissi 381.

its own definition of what is fact”⁶¹. This idea of competing public needs seems to operate in the aforementioned *Gazette* articles.

The articles privilege the method of donating funds as the most effective and desirable form of care for Haitians, and the articles also frame the Red Cross as the most credible aid organization. This work to link audiences with the Red Cross is an important service to meet certain needs in Haiti, but the privileging of this form of care (cash donations) and this organization of care demonstrates how vying interest groups and models of assistance enter into a field of communication in which some messages are made more prominent and meaningful than others. There is not a critical discussion of why the Red Cross is the privileged relief organization. Instead, the Red Cross is framed as the best relief organization through an appeal to the authority of field expert Chantal-Sylvie Imbeault. It may seem to be the most appropriate course of action for the newspaper to go to this kind of expert in a moment of urgent need. This “appropriateness” though is contingent on a normative framework that relies on a relatively modern history of the authority and responsibilities of NGOs. Similarly, the framing of “aid” in terms of monetary donations is also relatively modern, and becomes an obvious route of assistance specifically within an international terrain that is accustomed to narratives of the developmental potential of economic investment. This is not to degrade the work of NGOs or the cash donations of concerned publics. The point here is that the press is constrained by time, knowledge and space in moments of urgent need, and in this urgency, the press makes quick decisions about who is an authority, which projects will be showcased, and how audiences come to understand their roles in disaster relief efforts. These journalistic choices both naturalize the authority of certain players

⁶¹ MacGill Hughes xxiv.

and kinds of action, while obscuring alternative choices, perspectives and players. The *Gazette's* framing of the Red Cross as the primary organization to donate to in the early days of the disaster legitimizes the Red Cross' authority to speak of the destruction and set the terms of relief and reconstruction. Behind this process of selection of course are journalists whose decisions of what to emphasize are informed by their responsibilities to act as external, impartial observers, while also facilitating a community of care.

The Dilemma of News Values and the Affective Journalist

The ideal of journalist as neutral and impartial observer is in keeping with the profession's commitment to factuality. There is some sense to this. If an audience member desires commentary or interpretation of an event, there are several cultural venues to meet these desires, including the news' own editorial sections. The news though attempts to free itself of bias, and journalists too are expected to transcend their personal biases for the greater public good. In the (frequent) event that journalists encounter bias, they attempt to level out a possible interpretive imbalance by providing the opposing bias. This tactic of balance is useful for providing audiences with a variety of perspectives related to an event or issue, but there remains a problem with how the journalist's role in providing balance is understood. David Mindich questions the principle of balance, often discussed through the metaphor of a "seesaw," in the following way: "The idea here is that journalists can find truth by offering two competing truth claims. But who decides who gets to sit on the seesaw? Where does one place the fulcrum? And why a seesaw? Why is there room for only two sides? Does 'objectivity' really exist between two subjective

sound bites?”⁶² His questions suggest that rather than being external to the news event, the journalist is an active participant who shapes the field of possible truths and the audience’s fields of knowledge. While the journalist’s judgment plays a part in shaping the tone and content of news, the performance of neutrality is supposed to cloak the personal touch of the journalist on the news story.

An important method for asserting an image of externality and neutrality to an event is the performance of hardness or non-emotionality. The expectation for journalists to control or transcend their private emotional experiences is rooted in an assumption that to be emotional is to be easily persuaded, misguided, distracting or distracted, and incompetent and thus unable to present news in a clear and factual way. The belief in the integrity of emotional control belongs to a system of thought that divides the intellect from emotions. The control of emotions is considered more rational, cultivated, and authoritative. The idea of the rational journalist, though, obscures both the way that journalists’ perceptions and experiences saturate texts, and disregards the fact that journalists operate within affective environments. The image of rational journalist also confounds the possibility for journalists to facilitate care. The values of objectivity and of public service are often discussed without any recognition of the tension between the values. The performance of restraint that acts to signify impartiality and neutrality is contradictory to the active facilitation of care that is apparent in kinds of public service news. This tension between neutrality and care is apparent at times when journalists violate the norm of

⁶² Mindich 7.

neutrality. A particular story by, and regarding, Anderson Cooper in Haiti demonstrates this tension.

From “In the Midst of Looting Chaos.”

CNN presented footage of Anderson Cooper and his team reporting on a store being looted after the earthquake in Haiti. While the team was filming, a boy nearby was struck in the head with a concrete block. The video footage shows Cooper carrying the dazed boy out of harm’s way. The following is an excerpt from Cooper’s CNN blog entry written on January 18, 2010 that describes his intervention:

As things got really out of control, I saw a looter on the roof of the store they'd broken into throw what I think was part of a concrete block into the crowd. It hit a small boy in the head.

I saw him collapse [...] I was afraid he'd get killed. No one seemed to be helping him.

I ran to where he was struggling, and picked him up off the ground. I brought him to a spot about a hundred feet away. I could feel his warm blood on my arms. I stood him up, but he was clearly

unable to walk. He wiped his bloody face, and I tried to reassure him. He had no idea where he was, and he clearly couldn't walk, so I picked him up again and handed him over to someone behind that makeshift barricade. Tony, the American businessman, gave the boy a wet towel. He was then taken away by someone else. We don't know what happened to him.

I hope he's ok.⁶³

Here, Cooper narrates his intervention as necessary for the boy's survival in a life or death situation ("I was afraid he'd get killed. No one seemed to be helping him"). This is a doubly caring act as he first directly engages in an act of care by helping the boy, and also because the story contributes to public compassion and sympathy for victims of the chaos. While Cooper demonstrates some kind of public service here, he compromises the principle of neutrality when he steps out of his role as impartial observer and performs an act of compassion. The importance of the press's ideal of externality can be understood by this story. The insertion of Cooper into the news event detracts from the story of looting and instead becomes a story about Cooper's heroism and experience; "I ran to where he was struggling [...] I brought him to a spot about a hundred feet away. I could feel his warm blood on my arms. I stood him up [...] I tried to reassure him." Although this kind of journalistic intervention is more of an exception rather than the rule, the story demonstrates the tenuous boundary between observation and participation, hardness and emotionality. Even stories in Haiti that frame the journalist as a bystander to an event are caught up in structures of emotion since the decision to narrate a moment as, for example, the tragic ramification of the earthquake requires that the journalist first interpret the

⁶³ Cooper.

moment as tragic, and then secondly narrate the moment in the light of that interpretation so that the audience is affected in a similar way. My point is not necessarily to encourage journalists to create spectacles of emotion, but rather that the press's professional ideals of externality and impartiality misconstrue the affective components of journalistic work. The values of neutrality and impartiality frame the journalist as a hard authority and purveyor of facts, while the commitments to public service and the facilitation of care engages the journalist with discourses and structures of emotion. In a moment like Anderson's, the journalist must choose between journalistic commitments. Even in instances when journalists do not directly intervene in the situation, they must choose between kinds of frames that are structured by these competing commitments. Journalists operate in dynamic affective fields, and so too do the news texts themselves.

Affective Attachments and National Agendas

Like the individual journalist, an individual news text enters into affective fields and is made meaningful by pre-existing ideological and affective structures. Judith Butler's instructive *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable* delineates the productivity of affective media, specifically in the case of war. She argues that during war, the media produces a "differential grievability of lives" by providing extensive coverage of the lives and deaths of American soldiers, while it renders invisible the lives and deaths of victims in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is through the development of detailed and celebratory accounts of American soldiers, in tandem with the invisibility of Iraqi and Afghan lives fallen to the same wars, that the media humanizes American soldiers and aligns public sympathy with the mission of American soldiers, and by

extension, the mission of the American military. Butler's point of course is not that the lives of American soldiers are not worth celebrating, but instead that the work to highlight the particular dignity of the *American* life lost in combat creates a hierarchy of death in which American deaths are framed as more meaningful, more grievable, than others. This process of differential framing demonstrates the confluence of American exceptionalism, pro-militarism, and patriotism that occurs covertly in news coverage through discourses of grief. This discourse provides the affective component to the story of the military's mission, giving the mission a more "human" (private and affective) texture. Grossberg's theory that affect is the site at which ideas transform into belief operates here, as ideas of the legitimacy of the American wars are offered in the text through grief and outrage at the loss of an American soldier. The deployment of grief discourse enables an affective state of readiness to act against the source of grief.

In the context of war, it is somewhat easier to see the need for the state to align public sentiment with national agenda. War costs lives, creates grave physical and mental injuries, separates families, allocates much needed public funds to violent work, ravages cities and environments, damages cultures and societies, and these injuries to individuals, society, culture and economy last long after wars end. To most effectively engage citizens with war requires their "minds and hearts." In other contexts, this need to align public sentiments with the work of the nation may be less obvious. Moments of natural disaster are such instances in which governments require a similar kind of alignment of state agenda with public sentiments and attitudes. Similar narratives of loss, injury and the pain of the nation also saturate the news texts of post-earthquake Haiti. While the work of the nation is very different in kind during times of war versus environmental

disaster, both situations use affective news coverage and calls to nationalism to align publics with state projects.

On January 16, 2010, American President Barack Obama appeared on ABC News with former presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush to encourage public support for the Clinton-Bush Haiti Fund, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to disaster relief efforts in Haiti. President Obama's speech begins as follows:

At times of great challenge in our country and around the world, Americans have come together to lend a hand, and to serve others, and to do what's right. That's what the American people have been doing in recent days with their extraordinary generosity and contributions to the Haitian people. At this moment, we're moving forward with one of the largest relief efforts in our history, to save lives and to deliver relief that averts an even larger catastrophe. The two leaders with me today will ensure that this is matched with an historic effort that extends beyond its government, because America has no greater resource than the strength and the compassion of its people.⁶⁴

This news text is similar to Butler's example of coverage of fallen American soldiers. Rather than the, perhaps, more subtle nationalism operating in the obituary of an American soldier, the "Three Presidents Band Together for Haiti" coverage explicitly calls on and reproduces structures of public emotion to garner support for national work. Patriotic love and pride is reproduced and evoked in the President's call on, specifically, Americans to "come together to lend a hand, and to serve others, and to do what's right." The use of moralizing language and rhetoric of compassion discursively frames non-contributors as acting in the ethical wrong and as

⁶⁴ "Three Presidents Band Together for Haiti."

somewhat less than full (generous and compassionate) Americans. The model of compassion that is produced in this speech is specifically a public compassion, bound up in nationalism, capitalism and American exceptionalism. The narrative of national and economic compassion comes as a response to Haiti's narrative of pain. Obama calls Americans to ban together and witnesses Haitian pain. This witnessing is evident in Obama's statement "Every day that goes by, we learn more about the horrifying scope of this catastrophe; destruction and suffering that defies comprehension. Entire communities buried under mountains of concrete. Families sleeping in the streets, injured, desperate for care. Many thousands feared dead." By evoking this narrative of pain, American compassion is made possible.

Sara Ahmed notes that the concept of pain is often described as an isolated, private, lonely experience, but despite this general idea, pain is "continually evoked in public discourse, as that which demands a collective as well as individual response"⁶⁵. The experience of personal loss might be understood as solitary, unshared/unshareable, or ineffable, but public attention to loss (e.g. Butler's soldier obituaries, and here, the catastrophe of post-earthquake Haiti) produces what comes to be understood as a shared affective experience. I, as the audience member, have experienced the grief of loss and can identify with what must be the experience of the loss depicted in the news coverage. That history of personal grief is prompted in the audience via the news story, and that evocation comes together with the story of the grief of the nation (here, Haiti)—my grief "sticks" to the grief of Haitians, binding audience to Haiti, audience to organizations ameliorating Haitian pain. In this model of shared grief, I, as audience member, do

⁶⁵ Ahmed 20.

not actually experience the same grief as Haiti's victims. Their pain does not circulate among audience members in some coherent and fixed way, nor does my history of pain simulate Haitian pain. Instead, my understanding of my experiences of pain becomes aligned with the nation's witnessing of Haitian pain, producing an affective alignment that grants me agency to participate in the drama of public mourning and in ensuing acts of compassion. The relationship between the media, public, and the needs of the state is taken up in critical scholarship regarding the failures of the press to act as fourth estate.

The Press as Voice of the State

Sood et al. argue that the news media largely gather their disaster information from official (state) sources, and thus news coverage of disasters is skewed in favor of the perspective of the state. In one study of news media coverage, they found that official government accounts comprised 78 percent of all sources cited⁶⁶. Another survey of radio and television stations in California found that the news media preferred law enforcement and fire departments as the prime sources of information because of the perception that those fields are closer to emergency response operations and thus is more likely to be knowledgeable about a disaster event⁶⁷. Part of the reason for presenting the perspectives of the state lies in the press' obligation to minimize chaos; the reporter seeks information that supports the work of emergency response organization to ensure that (s)he does not facilitate or contribute to public panic⁶⁸. Another reason that the

⁶⁶ Sood et al. 31.

⁶⁷ Sood et al. 34.

⁶⁸ Sood et al. 35.

press covers so much of the state's perspective is that the government is one of the press' "beats," and journalists routinely turn to the government for new stories. British journalism, for example, stresses changes and sudden developments. Drastic and sudden state actions, then, are in line with the needs of journalism. The consequence of this is that the journalist relies on the state's bureaucracy for source information, thus they build complementary relationships⁶⁹. In fact, the state explicitly prepares raw material for the media. This is evident in the way that the state employs an important group of public relations officers whose work it is to provide pro-governmental work press statements to the media. Sparks notes that "[a]ccording to a recent account by Cockerell and others, the government information services issue 'over 10,000' press releases each year"⁷⁰. The problem with the reliance on official authorities, of course, is that it limits the perspectives surrounding an event. Miller and Riechert write:

Because news often comes from unexpected events, generally the first journalists who cover them have little expertise and little time to gather background information. They are, therefore, reliant on their sources to provide initial briefings and set expectations. Because reporters have the human tendency to see what they expect to see, these briefings can have a powerful effect on the frames set in early news coverage. This situation is exacerbated because later reporters use their colleagues' work as briefing materials and have their expectations reinforced.⁷¹

Journalists heavily rely on government sources because they are conceived of as the most appropriate authorities that have complete and up-to-date information over issues and public

⁶⁹ Sparks 85.

⁷⁰ Sparks 86.

⁷¹ Miller and Riechert 49-50.

dangers. What this means for disaster reporting is that coverage reflects an uncritical “command post point of view” that articulates the operations of dominant institutions⁷².

The problem with the idea that the media echoes the needs of the state is that it does not take into consideration the way in which the international terrain complicates this relationship. The Haitian government has no formal legal or funding control over, for example, American or Canadian media. The Canadian press is not in danger of being terribly reprimanded by the Haitian government if it is critical of the work of the Haitian government. Individual Canadian journalists are not required to have extensive longstanding relationships with various Haitian authorities, nor is attending the Haitian government’s press conferences a daily routine for the Canadian journalist. For these reasons, the theories on the role of the media as mouthpiece of the state do not quite hold in the context of international coverage. However, this does not mean that there is not an important relationship between authority and the press in international coverage of a disaster. Instead, the disaster comes to be framed in more local terms and connected to local interests, authorities and structures of knowledge.

The Localization of the Global

Richard C. Stanton’s book *All News is Local: the failure of the media to reflect world events in a globalized age* argues “the Western news media, far from understanding the complexity of globalization, are only able to imagine it clearly by grounding it in the local. It shows conclusively that localization of world issues and events does not assist the process of informed

⁷² Sood et al. 34.

decision making necessary for the maintenance of a dynamic political public sphere, either locally or globally”⁷³. He provides the example of CNN coverage of a conflict between Israel and Lebanon that neglected to flesh out the complexity of support for the political terrorist group Hezbollah, and instead reported the event in terms of it being “a terrifying ordeal for American citizens caught in Lebanon” and that then went on to discuss the safe evacuation of those citizens⁷⁴. Stanton’s position is that there is no real global news media organization since media organizations are embedded in circumscribed geo-political contexts, and therefore there is no possibility of adequately reporting global news. He suggests that there are events or issues that are global in nature (for example, a G8 meeting), but that the current structure of Western journalism does not have forms of presentation that transcend this practice of localizing global events. Further, the complexity of global events requires an understanding of a wide range of issues and information, and the journalist must take this vast body of knowledge and distill it into short, readable texts for audiences. This need to distill the events and present them in accessible language lends to a distortion of information and thwarts journalism’s commitments to objectivity and balance.

[...] journalists are trained to imagine news as a local commodity. This creates the possibility of an enormous margin for error when they are investigating and reporting global issues and events because they cannot always be imagined as local. Most issues and events are too big to be distilled into sound bites, vision and fifteen-paragraph front page stories. But the Western news-gathering model and its associated techniques require distillation in the partial belief that citizens

⁷³ Stanton 2.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

can only engage with issues and events that appear to effect or have an effect on their individual existences.⁷⁵

This privileging of local perspectives is evident in the news coverage regarding the earthquake in Haiti.

Localized Affects

Montreal is home to a large Haitian diaspora, a community of over 100,000 people, and is a city that belongs to a nation with long-standing development efforts and interests in Haiti (Canada is the second biggest donor to Haiti, after the U.S.)⁷⁶. The connections of the Montreal diaspora to Haiti, and Canada's involvement in humanitarian assistance to Haiti, create an affective cross-national environment whereby the lives and safety of Haitians are narrated as being especially significant to Montrealers. Several examples of news coverage from the *Gazette* in the early days after the earthquake demonstrate the foregrounding of what the earthquake means for people specifically in Montreal. In fact, a number of the stories that first appeared the day after the earthquake on January 13, 2010 about Haiti do not even mention the nation or Haitians in the article titles. Of four stories related to the events, only one of them mentions Haiti in the title. A story on page A.1 printed the day after the earthquake is entitled "'A total catastrophe'; 7.0 magnitude earthquake; Expatriates in Montreal desperate to contact loved ones." Another is entitled "Montreal Cops' Fates Unknown." A third short article is entitled "Red Cross at Work."

⁷⁵ Stanton 13.

⁷⁶ "Canada to build Haiti government base."

It is the newspapers prerogative to focus on Montreal-relevant information, but it is somewhat startling that the site of the disaster is not included in the titles of these initial reports. The disaster is juxtaposed specifically against figures from Montreal, not Haitians in Haiti, not other Canadians or non-Haitians. In this way, the newspaper shows itself as working for what might be considered a more local, circumscribed public—the public sphere of Montreal. Here, Stanton’s theory that global events diminish global stories when translated in local terms for local audience operates explicitly. The three aforementioned *Gazette* articles make an earthquake in Haiti relevant to a Montreal audience by foregrounding local players (Montreal cops and expatriates) in the stories. These articles operate in a similar way to Butler’s soldier obituaries, where Haitian lives are framed as grievable because of Haiti’s connections to people in Montreal.

The alignment of local audiences, authorities and affects is apparent further in the language of the articles. The story entitled “Montreal Cops’ Fates Unknown” states “Montreal’s mayor and the head of the city’s police force said last night they were doing everything possible to discover the fate of the approximately 50 Montreal police officers serving on a UN mission in *Haiti*.” Here, the news coverage highlights the compassion and care of Montreal’s mayor and police force. The article “‘A total catastrophe’; 7.0 magnitude earthquake” notes the work of a local Haitian community radio station (CPAM) that relayed information to listeners and “panicked callers”, and that also “put on a special broadcast last night, and invited members of the community to call in if they had any information about people back home... The special broadcast also gave out phone numbers people could call to check on their relatives, or to send money and supplies to *Haiti* to help the relief effort.” At play in these articles are international

events made locally relevant through local framing, and this local framing operates through an appeal to emotions via discourses of care and compassion. This localization of an international event happens not only at the municipal level, but also at the national level, which is evident in the national newspapers.

National News, National Affects

Similar stories to those that appear in the *Gazette* are featured in the *Globe and Mail*, but the *Globe* articles tend to present a wider scope than what appears in the *Gazette*. The reading public of the *Globe* is, like the *Gazette*, a specific public. However, as a national paper, the *Globe* speaks to national and international issues. Because Canada influences both those within the nation, and is committed to projects outside of the nation, it is appropriate for its national news agencies to speak both inward and outward, so long as it maintains a Canadian focus. In "Earthquake 'Catastrophe' hits Haiti," the article highlights the work of Canadians in national and international agencies, including the Red Cross, the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, and the Canadian Embassy in Haiti. This particular article does discuss Haitian institutions (the first paragraph notes the presidential palace and hospitals were crushed), but the events are framed affectively through the experience of Canadian David Moore. The article states:

Ottawa resident David Moore was in Port-au-Prince visiting his partner, who was at work in the Canadian embassy, when their house began shaking violently.

"I have never experienced anything like it," Mr. Moore said via e-mail. "I thought the house was going to collapse on top of me. I ran outdoors and into the clear."

Once outside, Mr. Moore could see nothing but enormous clouds of dust in most directions.⁷⁷

The earthquake is made affectively meaningful to Canadians through the depiction of a fearful and distressed Canadian in Haiti. Later, the article continues to frame the significance of the earthquake in its narration of Haitian-Canadian anxiety and fear: “The quake left hundreds of thousands of Haitian-Canadians in a state of tense confusion as calls to friends and relatives went unanswered. A local doctor told Agence France-Presse the deaths were in the hundreds, and the Red Cross said hospitals are at capacity with people desperately seeking medical attention in the under-resourced region”⁷⁸. The description of Haitian-Canadian emotions opens up the possibility for the audience’s affective identification. This affective alignment is useful for national organizations whose authorities and capacities are buttressed with increased public support.

The Port-au-Prince headquarters of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, as well as several other UN installations, were severely damaged in the quake. Canada has been an active player in continuing peacekeeping in Haiti, and as of February, 2009, the RCMP had close to 100 UNPOL officers serving with the stabilization mission.⁷⁹

The juxtaposition of Canadian experiences with Canadian missions and organizations binds the audience’s sympathies with Haitian-Canadians and Canadian organizations. Interestingly, in this last excerpt, the same RCMP officers that are referred to in the *Gazette*’s “Montreal Cops’ Fates

⁷⁷ Paperny and Ibbitson.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Unknown” are framed in this article as national figures, rather than as Montrealers. Here, there is a privileging of the national rather than the municipal, and this national framing of the RCMP officers changes the figures from local heroes that speak specifically to Montrealers, to national figures that any Canadian might identify with.

Another important figure of affective identification in Canadian news coverage of Haiti is Haitian-Canadian Governor-General Michaëlle Jean who repeatedly certifies an intimate bond between Canadians and Haitians. In one speech she states, "This natural disaster has hit a country with an extremely fragile infrastructure, where many buildings are already unstable, and where living conditions are often very difficult. I fear for its people... I would like all Haitians to know that they are not alone and that the people of Canada will respond to this emergency"⁸⁰. Like the aforementioned coverage of the three American presidents, Jean's speech operates through a confluence of nationalism, and discourses of pain and compassion. In Ahmed's characterization of the sociality of pain⁸¹, she suggests that pain necessitates a witness and that it is the role of the witness to attend to pain. Further, pain necessitates response, and in the case of ongoing public pain, this response is best when it takes the shape of publically supported solutions. The *Globe* article discursively frames Canadians as witness to the pain of Haiti ("they are not alone"), and as prepared to contribute to solutions ("the people of Canada will respond"). Unlike the story of the three American presidents, the Canadian attention to Haitian pain seems more personal because of Jean's identity as a Haitian-born, Quebec-raised Haitian-Canadian. As a Canadian,

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ahmed 29.

she is a witness to the pain, but as a member of the Haitian diaspora, she is an extension of the pain of Haiti. The depth of her understanding of both Haitian pain and Western compassion are informed by nationalistic commitments to both countries.

Jean making a statement about Haiti in Ottawa's Foreign Affairs headquarters.

<http://www.thestar.com/news/world/haiti/article/750385--governor-general-delivers-tearful-statement-on-haiti>

Many other Canadian articles highlight Jean's personal connections to Haiti and her experiences of distress, including one that appeared in the *Toronto Star* entitled "Governor General delivers tearful statement on Haiti." The first line of the article makes her personal experience of pain publicly visible; "Governor General Michaëlle Jean broke down in tears today as she spoke of the devastating earthquake that has rocked her native Haiti"⁸². She herself connects this personal experience of pain to a shared, public pain; "Like me, Haitian communities across Canada are heartbroken and overwhelmed by the magnitude of this catastrophe. The images and news

⁸² MacCharles.

reports are unbearable to watch”⁸³. Her private emotions come to stick with a more public pain of Haitian communities across Canada, and these sentiments are met with the compassion narrative of the Canadian government: “Jean had placed her hand on the arm of the prime minister and thanked him for the swift mobilization of \$5 million in Canadian aid. She also pleaded with him to send whatever means of communications could be spared to enable the government of Haiti to function during the emergency”⁸⁴. In a sense, she is the ideal witness to the pain of Haiti, as she herself is insider to the pain of Haitians, but has the context of a powerful outsider (Governor-General of Canada) to respond. The seriousness of her commitment to response is especially demonstrated in her plans after her tenure as Governor-General in the fall of 2010, at which time she will become the UNESCO Special Envoy to Haiti with a goal to raise international funds for Haiti while tackling poverty and literacy problems there⁸⁵. Jean’s work and commitment to Haiti is further connected to the work of the nation in comments like the following one made by Prime Minister Harper: “The appointment [of Jean to UNESCO Special Envoy] is also a tribute to Canada’s leadership role in rebuilding Haiti”⁸⁶. The nation comes to claim her personal grief and commitment as its own, and her work is narrated as a triumph of Canadian leadership. In this way, the nation uses the interplay of Jean’s private emotions and the success of her public work as a beacon of its own strength. The set of news texts around her relationship to Haiti demonstrates the complicity of the Canadian media in reproducing nationalist pride and an authority to develop the third world (“Canada’s leadership

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Boesveld.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

role in rebuilding Haiti”) during the earthquake in Haiti. The mechanisms integral to these ideological processes are Jean’s claim to pain and the narrative of Canadian compassion. As Grossberg suggests, it is the affective mechanism (here, the meeting of pain and compassion) that enables *belief* and investment in the Canadian government’s work. This process of affective framing is not limited to Canadian media, but can be found in press coverage within other nations.

The following titles from the British newspaper the *Telegraph* illustrate the way in which the rebuilding of post-earthquake Haiti is framed through affective terms as a Western problem. “Our Duty to Rebuild Haiti: Haiti has long been a blot on the conscience of the West”⁸⁷ discursively produces the British (and their Western allies) as the agents of reconstruction, and Haitians as the passive victims of the West’s failed development project. Through an appeal to duty and guilt (implicit in the phrase “blot[ted] conscience”), this title attempts to align a British public with the work of the nation whose present dilemma it is to complete a project it once failed to fulfill. In another *Telegraph* article entitled “Haiti earthquake: Aid worker describes search for survivors,” the following byline frames aid as the province of a non-Haitian who appears external to the chaos, while Haitians are discursively framed as the nameless, panicking victims: “Ian Rodgers, an Australian aid worker, tells of panic and search and rescue efforts in the hours after a devastating earthquake struck Haiti.” In the news discourse of both *Telegraph* articles, a civility and authority characterizes Western actors while Haitian leadership and authority is muted. Similar to Butler’s theorization that media war frames individuate the lives of

⁸⁷ “Our Duty to Rebuild Haiti.”

American soldiers in order to align publics with the policies of the American government, so to do Western media sources have interests in reproducing the authority of their respective governments and institutions. The Australian aid worker Ian Rodgers, like Butler's American soldier, is given a name and thus his identity and humanity, where the Haitians in this article are discursively framed as a panic-stricken mass. Other stories in the *Telegraph* emphasize Haitian criminality and Western civility with rhetoric like "Foreign aid is beginning to reach Haiti amid fears over riots and looting following the devastating earthquake"⁸⁸, or "Peacekeepers struggle to prevent Haiti descending into chaos" and "Peacekeepers are struggling to maintain order in Haiti amid riots and looting following Tuesday's earthquake"⁸⁹. In this framing, foreign actors are positioned as heroes and peacekeepers in Haiti, while Haitians are discursively constructed as emotional (fearful and pained), irrational, disorganized, barbaric, and at times, criminal. This kind of media discourse marginalizes the authority of Haitian citizens who are at the fore of aid and reconstruction, while buttressing an image of non-Haitian emotional control and rationality. The press's commitment to public service is thus complicated by the scope of the international terrain that caters to divided and competing publics. This is evident in the ways in which locally-bound news organizations make an international event meaningful through the framing of an event in local terms, and through the affective alignment of circumscribed audiences with local authorities and agencies.

⁸⁸ "Haiti aid arrives amid looting."

⁸⁹ "Peacekeepers struggle to prevent Haiti descending into chaos."

Conclusion

Using the case study of post-earthquake news coverage of Haiti, this paper argues that far from degrading serious news, affective commitments and discourse play an important part in making news events meaningful and in connecting audiences to events. While the press' ideal of factuality and the category of hard news attempts to suppress or transcend emotions, journalism is very much constituted by structures of emotion and affective environments. This paper has argued that the press's commitment to public service is a humanitarian commitment constituted by the affects of care and compassion. This commitment to care and the deployment of affective discourses, though, are not neutral or transparent, and instead are employed differentially across time and space. The practice of making international news intelligible to audiences through a focus on local actors and organizations produces the possibility of affective alignments specifically with local organizations and actors. In the case of Haiti, news organizations did present information that attempted to foster an international community of care that would contribute to the rebuilding of Haiti, however, the news organizations privileged the visions of care with local institutions and players.

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