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2009

Pantti , M & Sumiala , J 2009 , ' Till death do us join : media, mourning rituals and the sacred
centre of society ' , Media, Culture & Society , vol. 31 , no. 1 , pp. 119-135 . <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443708098251>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/230086>

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443708098251>

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Till death do us join: media, mourning rituals and the sacred centre of the society

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On the night of 19 March 2004, in Konginkangas, Central Finland, a bus carrying passengers on a skiing vacation from Helsinki to Lapland crashed into a tractor-trailer loaded with paper rolls on an icy highway. The heavy rolls ejected into the bus immediately killed most of the passengers, mainly teenagers and young adults. With 23 dead, the Konginkangas bus accident represented the worst traffic accident in Finnish history. The death of young people is not expected in a modern society and perhaps because of that the expressions of public grief and ritualizing were unprecedented: people laid flowers and lighted candles at the snowy road site, placed virtual condolences and attended memorial services. A sense of national tragedy was heightened by intense media coverage that focused on mourning rituals and the youngest of the victims.

Recently, a discussion within media research on the notion of ritual and the relationship between ritual and mass media has intensified (e.g. Becker, 1995; Coman, 2005; Cottle, 2006; Couldry, 2003; Dayan and Katz, 1992; Ehrlich, 1996; Ettema, 1990; Kitch, 2003; Liebes, 1998; Rothenbuhler, 1998). Our contribution to this debate is to offer a historical perspective on mourning ritual in news media. What has been lacking thus far within media literature is a discussion on the kind of changes that have taken place in the relationship between ritual and media. In fact, the idea that public mourning, and the rituals it entails, has a history in which the development of media plays a role (for example, the

internet has created new possibilities for virtual mourning rituals) has only recently emerged as worthy of study, mainly triggered by the 'Diana event' (e.g. Kear and Steinberg, 1999; Walter, 1999). In order to see how the media treatment of mourning rituals has changed, we look at the reporting of 'national tragedies' – such as the Konginkangas bus accident – within movie newsreels and public broadcast news from the 1950s to the 2000s.

In particular, we want to address two questions that are based on our understanding of the notion of ritual. In this article, the concept of ritual is founded on exceptionality; ritual refers to a form of action that includes dramatic symbolism and arouses emotions through which individuals might think, feel and act as members of a community (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Rothenbuhler, 1998). Additionally, we assume that rituals point to the sacred, beyond everyday life routines. Following Edward Shils' (1975) insight on society, we adopt a notion of the 'sacred centre', which deals with fundamental values, beliefs and meanings of life that bind individuals together. The questions we explore are: how have the mourning rituals in the media been involved in joining us together, and what kind of sacred centres of society have been constructed through the reporting of mourning rituals?

Catherine Bell, a leading scholar of ritual studies, has acknowledged that in intensely mediated contemporary societies, ritual is deeply affected by the media. The media alter how the ritual is performed and how it is experienced (Bell, 1997: 242). Similarly, in the field of media studies, the role of the media is observed to be more complex than just as mediator of non-media rituals. Instead, the media have been seen to interpret and transform public rituals and manage public emotion related to them (Kitch, 2000, 2003; Pantti and Wieten, 2005; Sumiala-Seppänen and Stocchetti, 2005; Walter et al., 1995). In a recent article, Simon Cottle (2006) uses the concept of 'mediatized rituals' to stress that the media are doing something more than simply reporting rituals; that media are 'performatively enacting' them (for a critique of Cottle see Couldry and Rothenbuhler, 2007). While adopting the concept of mediatization, we will give it a firmer definition, which emphasizes the role of the media in changing the character of mourning rituals. According to Stig Hjarvard, mediatization designates the process through which social or cultural activities are 'to a greater or lesser degree performed through interaction with a medium, and the symbolic content and the structure of the social and cultural activity are influenced by media environments which they gradually become more dependent upon' (2006: 5). Ultimately, we ask what the mediatization might mean in relation to mourning rituals.

We begin with a reflection of the mourning rituals' relation to social solidarity and sacred centres based on the literature from anthropological and communication studies. We also discuss here the context of our study, the nature of national tragedies. In the second section, we provide an analysis of the media coverage of mourning rituals following national tragedies. Our

focus is on how rituals might mobilize collective sentiments and construct the idea of social centre. In order to do so, we have divided rituals under the headings of *religious*, *civic* and *national*, understanding that these categories are often intertwined. Finally, we wish to offer some reflections on the mediation of rituals: how has the relationship between the media and mourning rituals changed during the past 50 years in Finland?

Death joins together

Anthropologist Robert Hertz (1960 [1907]) believed that death deeply disturbs the social order by destroying the faith society has in itself. He argued that bereavement rituals serve to repair the damaged social fabric (1960 [1907]: 78). Similarly, for Arnold van Gennep (1960: 147), mourning is a transitional healing period for survivors; passing through the ritual process reunites the surviving members of the group. A traditional approach to mass-mediated rituals has been that they promote a sense of social collectivism that legitimizes the existing social order and affirms common sacred values. Media scholars drawing on Van Gennep have shown that the coverage of a traumatic event in the media evolves in stages over time, mirroring social stages of meaning-making, from dealing with the loss to the assessment of cultural values and, finally, to the reaffirmation of group values (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Kitch, 2003).

A great deal of the contemporary research on ritual in different disciplines is indebted to Émile Durkheim's approach to religion as a social phenomenon (see Alexander, 1988: 1–23). Basic to Durkheim's study was a sacred–profane dichotomy. The primary characteristic of religion is that it divides the world into the two opposed domains of sacred (the realm of the extraordinary and the transcendent, of which religious beliefs, supported by ritual, are an expression) and profane (the realm of everyday activities). In his seminal work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim (1995 [1912]: 212) claimed that rituals embedded in ceremonial gatherings are central to social integration. Moments of 'collective effervescence' serve as the basis of social life as they create a more intimate relationship between those who share them and allow individuals to experience something larger than themselves.

Durkheim drew his social analysis from native peoples, but rituals have not lost their importance in contemporary societies. On the contrary, ritual activities remain critical, not despite but because of increasing social disintegration. While moments of joining together have become more difficult to achieve in complex societies, rituals are critically important for sustaining and reinvigorating collective sentiments (Alexander, 2004). However, contemporary scholars of ritual have also warned against a too simplistic reading of the effects of public ritual as fostering a we-feeling. On the one hand, rituals alone cannot create unity if there is no other basis for it, and, on the other hand, rituals can

also foster social strife by building solidarity within the various conflicting segments of society (Bell, 1992: 216; Kertzer, 1988: 75–6).

The function of ritual in Durkheim's theory is in maintaining and restoring social unity through certain core symbols and the generation of collective sentiments, the channelling of social conflict and persuading members of a society to conform to the common values and norms. This functionalist model of rituals has been challenged by scholars who have addressed questions concerning how rituals can change over time, and how they can be involved in social change (e.g. Turner, 1969). Moreover, the focus in the study of ritual has shifted from how the symbolic activity of ritual reflects and maintains a pre-existing social order to what ritual means and does within the context of certain cultural and social systems. Particularly, scholars from the critical tradition have looked at the ways ritual constructs and shapes power and authority, instead of viewing ritual only as reflecting existing power relationships (Bell, 1992: 216, 1997: 82–3; Couldry, 2003; Kertzer, 1988; Moore and Myerhoff, 1977: 4; Rappaport, 1999: 34–5; Rothenbuhler, 1998: 55). Mourning rituals, like other secular or religious rituals, can thus be defined as a context for affirmation, negotiation and contestation of social bonds and authority, and they can be seen as a vehicle for social groups, ideas and values to gain legitimacy.

National tragedies and sacred centres of the society

We are studying events that belong to the 'canon' of national tragedies in Finnish history. National tragedies exhibit high levels of media performativity and are frequently commemorated in the media when journalists try to make sense of a new traumatic event (e.g. Koljonen and Kunelius, 2005: 34–59). Thus, our work follows Dayan and Katz's pioneering study *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (1992) in examining ritual in the context of exceptional news events. Like media events, mediated national tragedies can be defined as interruptions of everyday life and broadcasting. However, unlike scheduled media events such as Olympic Games or royal weddings, national tragedies are unexpected and unwelcome. Recently, Katz and Liebes (2007: 157–8) have made a new distinction between two types of major news events: 'ceremonial' and 'traumatic'. This new distinction is founded on the idea that the genre of media events need not be seen exclusively as legitimating the status quo and consensus. Several scholars of media ritual have suggested that whereas some rituals work to strengthen the social order, others may have the potential to open up social critique, challenge established institutions and give weight to the voices of oppositional groups (Blondheim and Liebes, 2002; Cottle, 2006; Couldry, 2003; Liebes, 1998).

Reflecting on a Durkheimian model of social solidarity, Dayan and Katz's insight into media events emphasizes the maintenance of the community of

people. It is because of their exceptional nature that media events work to reaffirm the established order and unite individuals into communities. They write: 'We think of media events as holidays that spotlight some central value or some aspect of collective memory. Often such events portray an idealized version of society, reminding society what it aspires to be rather than what it is' (1992: ix). This kind of consensus-oriented reading of media events and the rituals they entail is also offered by Shils and Young (1975: 151–2), who argue that the coronation of Queen Elizabeth was a moment of national communion, which provided for everybody an intense contact with the moral centre of society through the television broadcast.

According to Edward Shils (1975), 'centre' refers first to the central value system and second to the authoritative institutions and persons who often express or embody the central value system. These symbolic centres are 'sacred' in the sense that they deal with core values or beliefs. It is important to note that Shils makes a distinction between the symbolic centres and institutions, and secular roles such as president, parliament or police. However, he sees that the authoritative institutions and persons can express or embody the central value system and thus become sacred too; the institutional centre finds legitimacy in the symbolic centre. It is also possible that other groups or institutions can challenge the established institutions by claiming to represent the symbolic centre. Couldry (2003) offers an important insight here. Unlike Dayan and Katz, who see extraordinary news events as an access point to the moral centre, he suggests that the function of ritual-laden media events is to construct the idea that society in fact has a moral centre, and the media have a natural access point to that centre: '[T]here is no such social centre that acts as a moral or cognitive foundation of society and its values, and therefore no natural role for the media as that "centre's" interpreter, but there is enormous pressure to believe in each' (2003: 45).

In the same way as ceremonial media events, national tragedies work to enhance the importance of the media. We believe that the media, having a privileged position in relation to tragic events and audiences, have gained a 'ritual mastery' (Bell, 1992: 116) of mourning. The media's treatment of mourning rituals offers important discursive resources for 'doing' ritual and expressing emotions related to it. In his study on the television coverage and public mourning of the death of Princess Diana, Turnock (2000: 70) accurately states that any cultural and social changes in mourning practices are due to both cumulative practical experience and media discourses. Journalists have the power to attribute meanings to the events, to dramatize the event as out of ordinary – as something that speaks about symbolic values – and to select the emphasis by focusing on specific acts and specific actors that mould the social experience of ritual. According to Mihai Coman (2005: 50), what is at stake in ritual mastery is that journalists succeed in 'shifting the focus from re-presentation of the events to the re-presentation of the media class and system as the leading actor of the respective events'.

Study: national tragedies

Our seven cases, chosen from both the era prior to mainstreaming of television and television-saturated times, are:

Children's home fire (1954). Nine orphaned children under the age of 7 died in the fire in Kangasala. Data: Finlandia newsfilm 252, produced by Suomi-Filmi Oy.

Train wreck (1957). The collision of two passenger trains in Kuurila was the worst train accident in post-war Finland: it left 26 passengers dead and another 48 injured. Data: Newsfilm, produced by Suomi-Filmi Oy.

Police murder (1958). A newsreel about the murder of Constable Kautto in the line of duty. Data: Finlandia newsfilm 389, produced by Suomi-Filmi Oy.

Plane crash in Koivulahti (1960). First major disaster in Finnish aviation history, killing 25 people. Data: Finlandia newsfilm 498, produced by Suomi-Filmi Oy.

Explosion of State Cartridge Factory (1976). The worst industrial disaster in Finland. The explosion in Lapua claimed 40 lives and injured 60. Data: Main television news broadcasts of Finnish public broadcaster (YLE) from the day of the accident (13 April 1976) until the day of the memorial service (24 April 1976).

Police murders (1997). Danish fugitive Steen Christensen killed two police officers in the line of duty, execution style. Data: Main television news broadcasts of YLE from the day of the murders (22 October 1997) until the day of the memorial service (3 November 1997).

Konginkangas bus accident (2004). Finland's worst traffic accident in which 23 people were killed. Data: Main television news broadcasts of YLE from the day of the accident (20 March 2004) until the day of the memorial service (28 March 2004).

The essence of tragedy is human loss. To qualify as a national tragedy, a media event needs victims in substantial numbers or victims with exceptional symbolic value to the community. The tragedies we are looking at, apart from the police murders, all represent significant numbers of fatalities within the Finnish context. However, in almost all cases the importance of these tragedies can be understood not only through the number of victims but also through the symbolic value of these victims. In the children's home fire, all the victims were young children, while in the bus accident they were mainly young people, all of whom represent the future of society. The death of young people is not expected in a modern society, and therefore it is usually ritualized more than other deaths (Walter, 1991). In the Lapua explosion, most of the 40 victims were young mothers who left 76 orphans behind. Two of our cases are police murders, which generate, to some extent, a different media discourse than accidents. In some countries the police force is a controversial

institution, and thus police murders may not easily fit into the category of national tragedies. However, in the Finnish media they were represented as national tragedies. This can be explained partly by the fact that public confidence in the police has always been exceptionally high in Finland.

Media events have most often been characterized by live television broadcasting (Blondheim and Liebes, 2002; Couldry, 2003: 90; Dayan and Katz, 1992). Compared to print media, television (and other audiovisual media) has also been understood as more emotionally arousing: its formal features are claimed to lead to collective emotional experiences that are uniquely different from the experiences transmitted through print media (Cho et al., 2003). It is clear that only since the mainstreaming of television, which occurred in the late 1960s in Finland, has it become technologically possible for people to observe and participate simultaneously in rituals taking place at a distance. Here we are also concerned with the earlier period, during which people were dependent on newspapers, radio news and movie newsreels, which could only circulate after the news event. The public showing of the movie newsreels, however, did not usually take a long time; for example, the newsreels of the train crash in 1957 were shown the following day in Helsinki. We believe that, while the performance and experience of mourning ritual in television may be different from earlier forms of media, all media contribute to the interpretation and development of ritual and negotiating views of reality through ritual (e.g. Schwartz, 1991).

We have chosen the newsfilms produced by Suomi-Filmi, which was the biggest producer of documentaries and newsfilms before the television era. We have analysed television news from the public broadcaster, the Finnish broadcasting corporation (YLE), which had a monopoly on the broadcasting of news and current affairs until the early 1980s when a commercial broadcaster was given its own operating licence and a channel.

Mourning rituals as rituals of inclusion

Religious rituals

In this context, religion refers to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, the main religion practised in the country. There is a historically established relationship between the church and the state. Approximately 84 percent of the population are members of the Lutheran state church. When it comes to religiosity, Finland is in line with the other Nordic countries; even though high in terms of membership numbers, church-going activity among Finns is very low.

Religious mourning rituals in our material are formal by nature. The religiousness of these rituals is communicated explicitly through religious symbols and practices in funerals, processions and memorial ceremonies. In the reporting of the children's home fire (1954), the explosion of State Cartridge

Factory (1976), the police murders (1997) and the bus accident (2004), there were clergymen conducting the burial ceremony, funeral processions and images of churches and graveyards, as well as shots of church interiors.

As a carrier of ritual tradition, religion can be argued to play an important role in establishing bonds between the audience and the community members performing the ritual, thus the imagined community of the nation is established through the ritual which incorporates the nation's religious history. That is to say that the presence of religion in the news reconstructs religion as one of the social centres of the society. However, we noticed changes in the representation of religious mourning rituals. In the older tragedies, up to the explosion in Lapua in 1976, the media narrate the funeral ritual and ceremonies related to it by playing the role of a witness. The media produce visual evidence of the event, but do not actively take part in it, nor do they address the audience to participate directly. The distance between the audience and the ritual performance in the media is produced notably through the use of steady camera angles – partly, of course, due to the technological limitations of the era – and the use of a narrator functioning as a key mediator of the event. Since the Helsinki police murders in late 1990s the media have taken a much more active role in reporting mourning rituals and addressing the audience more directly. The sense of audience participation is produced especially through the active use of close-ups. Also important is the role of interviews, which give a voice and a face to the witnesses of the event. One example of a direct address is an interview with two young teenagers who attended the public memorial ceremony for the two murdered policemen. They express their fear raised by the tragedy: 'If it is like this now, what it is going to be like, when we are adults?'

In relation to representations of religious mourning rituals an explicit intimization is evident. A more personal approach to religious rituals is manifested in the emotionally laden reporting of the Konginkangas accident. In the news report of the memorial ceremony in the Lutheran Cathedral in Helsinki, the intimacy is established both in the narrative content and in the close-up driven form. A nationwide public sphere of mourning and intimacy is constructed through such elements as the Finnish sacred song 'Guardian Angel', performed by a youth choir, which communicates the theme of unfinished childhood. Also important are the bishop's community-affirming words included in the news report: 'Mourning is hard but we can't help mourning, we can't help crying.' This is followed by the lighting of 23 candles in memory of the dead and close-ups of an angel statue, white lilies and candles. The sense of nationwide mourning is furthermore strengthened by the reporting of a local memorial ceremony in Saarijärvi, not far from the site of the Konginkangas accident. The change of geographical location in broadcasting builds up the network of mourning sites, which are connected to each other through the media. In the Saarijärvi news item, the strong focus on the intimate atmosphere of a small wooden chapel is also complemented by a female pastor's comforting presence and words.

Civic rituals

The second category of mourning rituals, civic rituals, differs from religious mourning rituals in one crucial aspect: civic mourning rituals are established by spontaneous individual action rather than through transcripts of rituals of established institutions, such as the church. These rituals are most explicitly present in the reporting on the police murders in 1997 and on the Konginkangas bus accident in 2004. The news reports of both tragedies include a great number of images of public mourning – people visiting the accident and murder sites, bringing candles, flowers and toys. By reporting on the gathering of people around shrines or symbolic places of collective loss, the media open up new possibilities for the audience to feel compassion, and thus allow them to participate in the construction of a sense of togetherness and solidarity. In the reporting of civic rituals, images of the candle shrines are cut in between the reporting on the official investigation in both cases. Furthermore, the visual image of the location of the murder, the street corner in southern Helsinki covered with candles, becomes the logo of the news. In the Konginkangas bus accident news report, a photograph of a candle and flowers in the snow behind the news anchor functions in a similar manner. In both cases, the logos accentuate a ‘transcendental’ tone of reporting on these tragedies.

National rituals

In the news reporting of mourning rituals, grief becomes a major form of nation-building. Strong elements of the national imaginary, such as images of the Finnish flag and of presidents and ministers participating in the public mourning, are an important part of the coverage. The news of the memorial ceremony at Lapua in 1976 offered images of President Urho Kekkonen arriving at the funeral. In the news report on the Helsinki police murders in 1997, President Martti Ahtisaari gives his condolences to the families of the murdered police officers. The political elite is strongly visible in the news reporting of the Konginkangas bus accident as well: the news camera focuses on the visibly emotional President Tarja Halonen and Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen taking part at the memorial service (televised live) for the Konginkangas victims. Also symbolically important is the televised moment of silence in the Parliament for these victims.

The role of the flag as a national symbol is also crucial. The coffins of the murdered policemen are covered with Finnish flags. Furthermore, the voiceover of the reporter describes that flags are being spontaneously put up at half mast by Helsinki citizens. The report on the first major aviation disaster in Finnish history, which killed 25 people, also ends with images of Finnish flags at half-mast in Helsinki. The voiceover affirms the unity of the

nation through describing the collective experience of shock and grief: 'The accident shocked the whole nation of Finland and people mourned by setting national flags at half mast all over the country.'

Agency and the idea of the centre

As argued by Couldry (2003), one of the central functions of rituals is to construct the idea of the social centre as an access point to the most important values of the society. Therefore, it is important to look at rituals from the point of view of what kind of social centres they construct and what kind of social order they naturalize. We have here approached the idea of the centre by focusing on the representations of agency. We suggest that it is through agency and, even more concretely, through actors, that the core values of the society are played out in the media.

Official society

The first category of agency consists of official society. Policemen, military personnel, government officials and clergymen are all given active roles in the reporting of national disasters. In all our cases, the official society is represented fulfilling its duties by investigating crimes and accidents, chasing criminals or taking care of the victims and comforting mourners, the general tone being very positive towards the official society. The only case that challenges the ability of the official society to carry out its responsibilities is the Lapua explosion. The news broadcast starts by reporting on the accident and showing images of the factory ruins, but soon the focus shifts towards the hospital and how it has managed the emergency. The voiceover of the reporter points out that the personnel at the hospital have done their job well, and that the cooperation between Lapua and Seinäjoki (main city in the area) has been successful. However, there is a change in tone later in this report when a journalist interviews the Secretary of Defence and asks explicitly about the responsibilities of his office before and after the accident. The critical tone of the journalist opens up the possibility for criticism of the official society and thus challenges its legitimacy as the centre of society.

The news reports on the Konginkangas accident also give special attention to the official society by interviewing police and hospital personnel concerning the management of the investigation and crises. However, the question of accountability or negligence is altogether dismissed by the positive statement of the police authority: 'We have learned from past disasters and this time everything has been absolutely in control.' Also affirmative is the role given to the church leader, Bishop Huovinen, giving a memorial ceremony for the Konginkangas victims in Helsinki.

It is through these representational practices that the media reproduce the idea of the active and powerful centre established around institutionalized profane and religious powers of society. In the news reporting, the linkage between actors and social centres is further strengthened by the emotional tone of storytelling. For example, in the police murders in 1958 and 1997, the news reporting affirms the sympathy offered by the people to the police force. The newsreel of the 1958 police murder includes images of a large crowd gathering in the centre of Helsinki to pay respects to the murdered policeman and his family. In the news item on the 1997 police murders, the news reporter interviews a police officer, who expresses gratitude to the public for their empathetic and active efforts in helping catch the murderer. In both cases, the positive attitude towards the police force, as a crucial part of the official society, is taken as a non-questioned starting point for reporting. In the reporting of mourning rituals, the official society has a role to communicate the idea of the centre (whether political, juridical or religious) through managing emotions by creating a sense of security. Certainly, reporting on mourning rituals functions also to build boundaries. People included in the collective mourning in the reporting are those affirming the rules of the society, while those (if there indeed are any) questioning them are left out in silence.

The people

The role of ordinary people has at least two functions. In the reporting of older tragedies, the people are represented as a passive mass. The only exception is the children's home fire in Kangasala in 1954. In the newsreel, people gathered to participate in the memorial ceremony for the seven children are represented as members of the local community, Kangasala. There are images of local people mourning by the grave, and the voiceover names the victims by giving condolences. Other members of the community are also given active roles, such as children singing in a choir during the memorial ceremony. In the newsreels on the police murder in 1958 and the plane crash in 1960, ordinary people take part in the mourning ritual by following it as a 'spectator'. The mass stands in street corners and squares, watching the mourning ritual acted out by the official society.

However, there is a change in the representation of ordinary people in more recent news items. In the news reporting of the police murders (1997) and the bus accident (2004), people are denoted as gathering spontaneously and showing compassion by bringing flowers and candles to the sites. In these reports, the role of key actor is given to the ordinary people. It is their role to offer a model and a code for the appropriate public display of emotions, whether it is discreet grief and respect for the victims and their close ones, or more active mourning, such as bringing flowers and candles to accident sites or weeping and crying. Here the public display of emotions functions as

means of constructing a sense of togetherness and the idea of the centre is constituted around the people as members of the society.

Media professionals

The third category of agency consists of the media professionals who play a special role in offering access to both official society and the people. The role of narrators, journalists and cameramen is to tell the tragic story to viewers and get them to participate in the mourning ritual represented in the media. In the historical material, there are, however, some differences to be pointed out in the narrative strategies used by the media. In the newsreels (the children's house fire in 1954, the police murder in 1958, and the plane crash in 1960) there are no active journalistic interventions, such as interviews used to tell the story. In contrast, the news on the police murders (1997) and the Konginkangas bus accident (2004) are strongly dramatized. In the case of Helsinki police murders, especially touching are interviews with colleagues of the murdered policemen that are done in a car passing by the candle-covered murder site. Another example is an interview with the parents who have lost their child in the bus accident, as well as an interview with a headmaster whose school has lost several of its students in the same accident. In both cases, the memorial ceremony is where the emotional narratives climax. In the Konginkangas bus accident, the news broadcast also has a strongly emotive graphic design. The candle and flower shrine remained the logo of the accident reporting until the day of the memorial service, when the symbol of 'civil religion' was changed into a religious image of an angel statue, which carried high emotional value because of the young victims. Through these emotional narratives and symbols, the news media orchestrate the dramaturgy of the 'grief work'. At the same time, the media represent themselves as the centre of the event and transmitters of 'our' core values, such as defending the life of youth, protecting law and order and securing the life of the members of the society.

Mourning rituals over time

We have argued that mourning rituals have played an important role in reporting of national tragedies throughout the historical material. In this last part of the article, we want to go back to our questions about how the mourning rituals have been involved in joining us together, and what kind of sacred centres have been constructed through them. First, our historical material suggests that mourning rituals in the media are constructed as inclusive and affirmative. This is to say that there is an explicit linkage established between mourning rituals and the construction of social solidarity. In all of our seven cases, the news media have been eager to frame public displays of mourning

rituals, whether religious, civic or political by nature, as shared by the whole nation. Our second observation has to do with categories of mourning rituals. While religious mourning rituals, with strong emotional potential, have an important role in the reporting of national tragedies throughout the period we studied, they are particularly emphasized in the most recent reporting. This is quite contrary to the classical theory of secularization, which suggests that religion becomes less and less important in modern societies. The public display of religion in times of crises has to be discussed in the context of social change. Our cases suggest that institutionalized religion has had and still has a special role in times of crises as one of the key centres of society. Moreover, the active use of religious symbols in the reporting of mourning rituals makes it clear that there is an established linkage between media, religion and the nation in constituting the sense of community in times of national tragedies. This makes it possible for the media to use religious symbols and narratives in their reporting to communicate the collective loss and grief related to it.

In addition to religion, the reporting of older tragedies underlines the role of national mourning rituals. This emphasizes the idea of the essential role of the state as a centre holding the nation together, with the aid of the other official institutions such as the church. However, the pattern is interestingly challenged in the news reporting of the Lapua explosion in 1976. Unlike in all the other material, in the Lapua explosion news reporting takes a critical position towards official society and criticizes the political elite's ability to carry out its responsibilities before and after the accident. This non-consensual approach can be at least partly explained by analysing it against the era. The 1970s is characterized by a strong welfare state ideology, including the idea of the media as a fourth estate defending democratic discourses of the modern society. From the perspective of emotional involvement, the reporting opens up new possibilities for attachment as well. There is a possibility for the public spirit to turn into anger (against the state-owned company and the government) instead of moving into a collective mourning and affirmation of values promoted by the official society.

Our third point concerns differences in the level and tone of emotionality and intimacy in the news reporting over time. In the news reports of the Konginkangas accident and the police murders in Helsinki, the focus is on emotions that bind people together, whereas the newsfilms on the train crash in Kuurila in 1950s and explosion in Lapua 1976 clearly emphasize the material damage and destruction. In Kuurila, the train wreck was caused by the collision of two passenger trains and the reporting gave detailed explanations of the technical facts concerning the accident. Also in Lapua, the television news report starts with in-depth reporting of the material damage to the factory. In Kuurila, we have only the picture of a sole cap of a railway worker in the snow referring to the individual human suffering. In the Kuurila case, as in earlier cases, the victims are not identified nor are they the focus of the narrative, with the obvious exception of the police murder in 1958. In the Lapua

news, the voiceover does speak about the reactions of wounded people; there are pictures shown from the hospital with patients lying injured in their beds, but no individual victims or family members are interviewed.

In the Konginkangas case, in contrast, the victims and the collective feelings their fate generated are the central focus of the reporting. Technical details of the accident and questions of responsibility do not compare to the human suffering and compassion represented. The news spoke of the continuous stream of people travelling to the accident site, to the point of causing traffic problems. This is not interpreted as morbid curiosity, however, but as a sign of compassion and grieving. Another new way of affirming community for the media is to take on a psychological role by providing a forum for the audience in which to process the tragic event. The news media's role as a 'therapist' is also seen in an interview with a psychologist specialized in coping with trauma.

Also worth pointing out is that there are differences in emotions and affective tones found in the historical material. Grief, compassion and fear are the most prominent emotions throughout the historical material. Interestingly enough, in the older material, especially in the newsreel of the murder of Constable Kautto (in 1958), the fear communicated in the news reports is explicitly connected to anxiety about the collapse of the social order. The murder of the policeman is represented as a major threat to social order, and the role given to the official society is to guarantee that order can be restored through the effective action of officials and the obedience of the people. Whereas, in the most recent material, such as with the police murders in 1997 and in the Konginkangas bus accident in 2004, the fear expressed in the reporting is essentially connected to the anxiety related to society being able to survive the tragedy in psychological terms. The role given to the official society here is to guarantee that this tragedy can be worked through by facing emotional loss with the guidance of psychological and spiritual crisis management offered by society.

Our fourth point is about changes in the construction of the social centre. Especially in newsfilms from the 1950s and 1960s, the news reporting supported the idea of the state and church as the sacred centres. In Lapua, on the other hand, the emphasis is placed on the *idea* of the welfare state as a sacred centre, offering the media the possibility to criticize official society even during the times of crises. This shift makes it possible for the news media to take a more ambiguous position towards the political centre and to emphasize their own role as mediators of society's core values, such as democracy and freedom of expression. However, in our two latest cases, from the late 1990s and 2000s, the media shift again to take a more affirming role, particularly through intimization and emotionalization. This once again brings religion (institutional or civil) into the centre of the society as it offers a space for public display of emotions, mourning and grief.

Mourning rituals in the media age are terrain for competing sources of symbolic power: religion, the political elite and the media – on which the

former two are increasingly dependent – compete for authority to speak on behalf of the social ‘centre’ (see Couldry, 2003). The mediatization of mourning rituals involves the media’s power to frame the meaning of different ritual activities and manage public emotions related to these rituals. In our historical material, mediatization can be seen especially in the media’s role in framing the inclusiveness of mourning rituals. By doing this, the media also shape how the ritual is connected to the social centre(s) of society. The media do so through an intimate reporting style that emphasizes emotions. It is evident that this tendency has become more explicit in the 1990s and 2000s. Mediatized shared emotion that is able to produce collective action is a powerful means to constitute the idea that there is a social centre, indeed, and it is possible to become part of it. The hegemonic discourse of the society we are living in now is late capitalism, which puts emphasis on competition, individualism and market values. The impulses of fragmentation and multiple public spheres challenge the sense of togetherness, important for social cohesion. Thus, in the news media, the need to create belonging has clearly increased. It becomes clear in the reporting of the Konginkangas bus accident that the news media do not see their main task as scrutinizing the reasons for the accident, but rather to strengthen the collective feeling and promote the ideal of working through emotions together and in public. The reporting of mourning rituals plays a crucial role in this task. The focus of reporting of the Helsinki police murders and the Konginkangas accident is heavily on public grief, represented through religious and civil mourning rituals. This development supports the idea of the emotionalization of public life, which includes a more expressive emotional style and giving increasing attention to individual and collective emotion. It seems as if the news is constructing the centre of the society around mediatized shared feelings.

To sum up, when analysing changes in the interplay between the media and rituals through the reporting of mourning rituals, there is one common theme to be found and that is inclusiveness. In that sense, our historical material supports ritual theories that emphasize the cohesive function of ritual. But at the same time, it is crucial to point out that this inclusiveness is constructed in and through the media by the practices of reporting. This means that rituals of inclusion and affirmation can and should also be analysed as sites of negotiation and contestation of social bonds and authority.

Acknowledgements

This research has been supported by a Marie Curie Fellowship of the European Community’s Sixth Framework Programme under contract number MEIF-CT-2006-025726 and by a research grant from the Academy of Finland. The authors wish to thank both above-mentioned institutions for their support.

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