Encounters Between Violence and Media

Introduction

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This Special Section on *Encounters Between Violence and Media* examines how these encounters are circulated, negotiated or contested, or altogether rejected. Violence enters our everyday life in various and unexpected forms from live-streamed mass shootings to news about sexual abuse. This thematic issue brings together scholars from media and communication studies, social sciences, and the humanities with contributions ranging from interrogations of the more visible and often spectacularized violence to the more invisible violence, gendered violence and violence against marginalized groups. Drawing on the philosophical and political science concept of *recognition* and problematizing regimes of visibility as regimes of power, the articles in this collection examine in what ways the different forms of violence are (in)visible in the media and what implications (in)visibility has for recognition, on the one hand, and marginalization on the other. The empirical contexts range from terrorist violence against marginalized groups to gendered violence and human trafficking. The collection highlights the need to recognize the violence and suffering experienced by those often existing on the social margins.

Keywords: violence, media, recognition, visibility, marginalization, hybrid media event, remembering

Today, as both life and death are increasingly experienced in and through the media, not only do we witness moments of living and dying, but we also encounter violence in various and unexpected mediated forms. In the current hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013), terrorist violence in the West quickly develops into a disruptive media event (Sumiala, Valaskivi, Tikka, & Huhtamäki, 2018) whose live coverage and visibility on social media seems ubiquitous until it wanes; yet, we might encounter violence in the media in more insidious ways, accidentally viewing witness accounts and videos of violent encounters, or more glaringly when violence is abruptly live streamed in front of our eyes on social media platforms, like with the Christchurch mosque attacks (Ibrahim, 2020; Morse, 2020). Yet, we also encounter violence in the media more implicitly; shows of solidarity and vernacular forms of remembering the victims of violence (Jiwani, 2022) expose and underline violence by bestowing visibility on the victims, and to those standing

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Date submitted: 11-28-2022

outside these events, these practices hint at violence that has been inflicted. Sometimes violence seeps through from a small news article most of us pay hardly any attention to.

As violence continues to attract media attention and invite participation, it is clear that some violence has become spectacularized and increasingly complex in its circulation, not least due to new media technologies themselves but also due to the underpinning capitalist logic of operation that, in terms of content, favors the spectacular and the engaging; yet, it is important to note that, at the same time, some other kinds of violence still remain more everyday, even banal. Some violence never even makes the headlines. The interrelatedness of acts of violence, its representations and, in particular, the visibility of violence in the media, nevertheless continues to be a topic of academic discussion (Austin, 2022; Chouliaraki, 2006; Duncombe, 2020) and whether making violence visible would result in increased recognition of suffering, and of those suffering. Yet, as Barbie Zelizer (this Special Section) notes, visibility of violence does not causally lead to recognition of its harms or to action, but rather, the violence we all continue to witness only underlines how "never again" has become "time and again."

Drawing on the philosophical and political science notion of *recognition* (Fraser, 2000; Honneth, 1995; Ricoeur, 2007; Taylor, 1994; Thompson, 2006; see also Hirvonen & Koskinen, 2022), this Special Section on *Encounters Between Violence and Media* offers new approaches to how encounters between violence and media are mediated, circulated, negotiated, or contested, or altogether rejected. In media and communication studies, recognition is often discussed in terms of acknowledgement, inclusion, and visibility. This collection brings together current research exploring the intersections of violence, the media and the complex phenomenon of recognition in its various permutations, provoking questions about the interrelatedness of these encounters with media coverage and (in)visibility, as well as the constructed hierarchies of life and solidarity (Rousiley, 2014; Siapera, 2019).

As this Special Section illustrates, hierarchical and normative regimes of visibility and recognition exist in a complicated relationship, shaping what kinds of violence are recognized *as* violence (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Kotilainen & Pellander, 2021). Those violent events and injured bodies that go unmentioned often remain unrecognized, ultimately as lives denied of value and grievability (Butler, 2004, 2009; Morse, 2018), yet (media) visibility does not in itself equal recognition: Recognition may fail, or it can be rejected. With this collection, we ask what happens to conditions for recognition in the context of violence, suffering, and death when recognition's mutuality and relationality are altered through mediation and distance. Or indeed what potential for recognition might lie in our collective existence when faced with violence given that the roots of recognition are social and embedded in communal life. With this thematic issue, we bring into the discussion of recognition real-life perspectives on violence in contemporary media contexts.

Recognition in Encounters Between Violence and Media

Theories of recognition (Honneth, 1995; Ricoeur, 2007; Taylor, 1994) are regularly associated with interaction, with relationality and mutuality, yet in the contemporary global world, struggles (if also claims) for recognition have become increasingly mediated. Forms of visibility are tightly interwoven with media coverage, journalistic practices (Zelizer, 2017), as well as the perceived "newsworthiness" (Nikunen, 2011), but also the sociocultural and historical context where violence occurs, what shape it takes and against who (Jiwani, 2006).

As Taylor (1994) famously noted, recognition is a vital human need. Recognition, then, is fundamentally social, and nonrecognition may be considered social nonexistence (Hallamaa, 2022).

Today's technologically complex and interconnected media landscape plays a crucial role in shaping public debates concerning politics of recognition (Rousiley, 2014). Media are thus crucial in mediating the social and political struggles of distressed, marginalized, and exploited groups. Therefore, the ways in which conflicts, political or social struggles gain attention in and by the media are central not only to the mediation of these struggles and the dissemination of knowledge thereof, but the media also play a role in the construction of the frames of recognition of these issues. Recognition, however, as the contributions illustrate, always carries with it the possibility for misrecognition, or even nonrecognition "due to a failure—or refusal—to identify relevant features upon which to base acknowledgement and recognition" (Hallamaa, 2022, p. 183). In the context of mediated violence, framing and the selection of cases covered ultimately contribute to the construction of hierarchies where some lives are seen as more worthy of rights, or even as having the right to live (Butler, 2008; Butler, Gambetti, & Sabsay, 2016; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017). Norms, sociopolitical factors, and geological contexts all figure in framing practices, adding to or detracting from seeing life as grievable (Butler, 2008; Morse, 2018): recognition, then, as a form of acknowledgment of life and personhood, is an act of assigning value. Yet, despite the proliferation of circulated images and narratives of violence, the landscape of visibility and recognition nevertheless remains uneven and contested.

Thus, while in the Western mediascape, terrorist violence that takes place in the West typically gains high visibility, terrorist violence elsewhere tends not to become spectacularized (and might not even make the news in the West). However, violence against the marginalized and the othered, and other structural forms of violence—for example the gendered system of (non)recognition—often remain nonrecognized as violence, with victims not recognized as victims, or even misrecognized in death. Recognition and (in)visibility of violence are thus tightly interwoven yet appear to have an ambivalent relation; visibility itself presents as a double-edged sword as it is not a guarantee of increased justice, equality, or recognition, yet potentially bringing with it more harm (Herzog, 2020).

However, media coverage of violent death and suffering (Chouliaraki, 2006) does have a significant impact on cultural regimes of recognition and how we approach lives not recognized in and by the media, placing challenges on how to make the unacknowledged, invisible suffering visible. Here, the new vernacular practices of remembering not only have the capacity to critique the dominant politics of memory (Jiwani, 2022) and invoke state recognition, but mediated rituals of mourning also feed into and shape which representations of violence are shown and publicly shared, who is remembered and how; in this way, these vernacular forms can also be seen as resistant acts. Importantly, as hegemonic emotions in the context of violence often produce "affect aliens" (Ahmed, 2010), it can also lead to purposeful affective alienation (Payne, 2016), that is, affective distancing as a way of critique of the dominant emotional landscape (Harju, 2019), telling of marginalized existence. Thus, not only ethnic, gendered, or geopolitical boundaries and alignments, emotions also produce and shape bodies and objects (Ahmed, 2004), affecting how people relate; mediated violence aligns individuals emotionally, with some more than others, contributing simultaneously to both solidarity and distancing (Harju & Huhtamäki, 2021).

While the ways in which technologies and social media logics direct, enhance, or impede the circulation of violent material continue to shape the kinds of representations of injury and suffering we encounter, impacting the very conditions for recognition to take place, the potential for claims for recognition nevertheless remains embedded in how new media technologies are harnessed and utilized. Producing and circulating amateur content (from vernacular practices of remembering to eyewitness accounts of suffering and injustice) have the potential to alter cosmopolitan solidarities (Horsti, 2019) and the aesthetics of violence and injury. Content produced by individuals affected by violence, personal stories and testimonial participation, as well as artistic interventions, all seek to challenge and diversify the dominant narratives of violence and injury, bringing to the fore fundamental questions of personhood and the need of being recognized. At the same time, these interventions question the role of traditional media as the gatekeeper of visibility and recognition (Couldry, 2012) as well as the simplifying media representations they produce. With the obvious drawbacks and limitations of capitalist platforms as arenas for struggles of recognition, the role of new media technologies in evoking alternative imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1994; Taylor, 2002) and in facilitating media solidarities (Nikunen, 2019) is nevertheless crucial.

Thus, from encounters between acts of violence, representations of violence, and media visibility emerges the question of recognition, and of the value of human life and death. Who is seen, and who is recognized, but also how, when, where, and by whom? The question of recognition goes beyond the apparent dichotomy of institutionalized media and citizen media as well as the range and focus of media visibility, implicating also the geopolitical and sociohistorical politics of recognition. Recognition is tied with the politics of remembering, so we need to ask who, in the context of violence, is remembered and seen, but also how is this remembering and "seeing" framed? What are the sociopolitical, cultural, and even economic factors influencing recognition that shape things such as grievability, dignity, and notions of vulnerability? This thematic issue highlights the need to critically assess and examine the constitutive limits of violence and its representations, from forms of symbolic erasure and violence to issues of representation and emotional encounters with different bodies and vulnerable others.

Overview of Articles: On Mediations of Violence and Recognition

The Special Section brings together scholars from media and communication studies, social sciences, and the humanities, and the contributions range from interrogations of the more visible and often spectacularized violence to more invisible violence, including gendered violence and violence against marginalized groups. Where normalized forms of violence tend to erase victimhood and suffering, the more spectacular forms of violence, such as acts of terrorism, often attract continued and heightened attention in and by the various media (Uusitalo & Valaskivi, 2020). Problematizing regimes of visibility as regimes of power, and drawing on Western contexts of mediated violence, the authors ask in what ways the different forms of violence are obscured or absent from the media, but also which types of violence gain hyper visibility and what implications this has for recognition, on the one hand, and marginalization on the other.

The empirical contexts in this collection highlight the need to focus on the suffering and violence experienced by those often existing on the social margins. The contributions offer new avenues to examine, in the context of violence, the significant role of media in shaping how the social world is represented and which narratives are told, and which narratives become the dominant ones. The contexts in which violence

occurs come with (media) framing where some aspects are highlighted and others are obscured; for example, the formulaic representation of terror determines how, and in which settings, we see violence as terror (Zelizer, 2018). In this vein, the articles in this collection examine what kinds of frames of recognition are assigned to victims of violent acts, on the one hand, and perpetrators, on the other, or indeed to different types of violence and injury.

The contributions in this collection showcase the breadth of the research field and use a diverse and topical set of empirical material collected from social media sites, broadcast news sites as well as print media. The topics include discussions of terrorist violence against marginalized groups and collective grief; vernacular memory practices and state recognition, and violence and political leadership at times of crisis, as well as in the context of sexual violence and crime, affective narratives of sexual violence and solidarity as well as victimhood and agency in the context of human trafficking.

Yasmin Jiwani and Marie Bernard-Brind'Amour open this Special Section with an investigation of the media coverage of the 2017 Quebec mosque shooting with focus on Muslim communities' call for the recognition of the escalating violence of Islamophobia. Titled "Remembering January 29: The Québec City Mosque Shootings and the Struggle for Recognition," the study highlights the tension that exists, on the one hand, between the Muslim communities' struggles to make visible continued state violence and the prevalence of Islamophobia and its effects, and on the other the heightened visibility of the performances of solidarity toward the community after the violent attack. The collective grieving channeled through mediatized death rituals strengthened a sense of collective identity for Quebecers; at the same, it cohered a stronger Muslim identity that offered an opportunity for resistance against the systematic erasure of Islamophobia. The study shows how in addition to commemorating the victims, the community's practices of vernacular remembering functioned to remind people of Islamophobia by making visible its effects. The authors critically explore the ways in which visibility and invisibility can operate as a call and a claim for recognition with respect to citizenship and belonging and note how the digital campaigns and online memorials, in the end, contributed to the recognition of Islamophobia by the state and the recognition of January 29 as a day of commemoration.

Continuing with the theme of terrorist violence in "'We Are One': Mediatized Death Rituals and the Recognition of Marginalized Others," Tal Morse adopts a different approach and examines the media coverage of the 2016 *Pulse* LGBTQ+ nightclub shooting in Orlando and the 2019 Christchurch mosque attack from the perspective of mediatized mourning rituals. Drawing on the framework of the analytics of grievability (Morse, 2018), the author analyzes violence against marginalized others as presenting a moment of crisis; these moments of crisis can be seen to function as a rite of passage in the service of social change. Morse argues how, when violence ruptures the social order of exclusion, mediatized mourning rituals and collective grief can function as a unifying force. Although death rituals and mediated practices of remembering can in some contexts enhance hierarchies of grievability—particularly when the perceived exchangeability of spectators and sufferers is not applied—and in this way shape modes of recognition, the study reveals how these moments of crisis nevertheless have the potential to serve as an opportunity for reflection and a renewed sense of responsibility and unity. In these two empirical cases, public mourning rituals were performed synergically by the state and the media, an important factor in the production of

what the author calls Benevolent Grief. The study elaborates on how Benevolent Grief works to recognize and include the marginalized other as "part of us," worthy of solidarity and protection.

Similarly set in the context of the Christchurch mosque attacks, Katja Valaskivi and Johanna Sumiala, in their article, "'You Will Never Hear Me Mention His Name': The (Im)possibility of the Politics of Recognition in Disruptive Hybrid Media Events," shift the focus from terrorist violence *per se* to the ways in which disruptive hybrid media events shape the conditions of politics of recognition. Hybrid media events consist of a myriad of actors; here, the authors focus on the political communication of Prime Minister Ardern and analyze how a communicative response to violence, as an act of recognition, is fundamentally conditioned by various tensions, including in this case the simultaneous nonrecognition of the perpetrator. The authors examine how PM Ardern's response not only played a key role in the narrative of the violent media event but also shaped the arena where the struggles of recognition played out. Valaskivi and Sumiala go on to discuss how, from the beginning, Ardern's political communication was intrinsically intertwined with today's attention economy as well as communicative capitalism that weakened the possibilities for the realization of recognition. The authors argue that this also threatened to reduce her communicative actions and aims of recognition to a battle over attention, reputation, and identity politics.

Staying with hybrid media events, in "Echo of Experience: A Feminist Response to Racialization of Sexual Crime in the Hybrid Media Event," Kaarina Nikunen examines the public responses to the 2019 Oulu sexual crime case in Finland where underaged girls were groomed by adult men, mainly of asylum-seeker background. In public, the case was dominantly discussed through narratives of racialized sexual violence and became a national scandal, connected to political and historical narratives that shaped the public discourse on the politics of immigration. Inspired by the work of Joan Scott (1991, 2001), Nikunen mobilizes the concept of *echo* and argues how in the digital environment, evidence from experience, the temporal reminders or historical bearings of sexual abuse, can function as an (unessentializing) echo that can be used as a feminist strategy to produce a reflexive space to discuss sexual abuse. On social media, different views on sexual abuse were expressed as well as testimonies of past experiences of sexual abuse in Finland, unconnected to immigration or racialized perpetrators. Such evidence, or *echoes of experience*, Nikunen argues, help widen the picture offered by dominant narratives and expand the discursive space for politically sensitive topics that and involve multiple vulnerabilities but are often difficult to discuss.

The article "Trafficked Women in Press Journalism: Politics and Ambivalence in the Quest for Visibility" continues with the topic of sexual crime, where Tijana Stolic applies the framework of politics of pity to explore the discursive constructions of trafficked women in newspapers. The author examines the ways in which media representations contribute to the construction of hierarchies of victimhood and differential regimes of recognition by the media. The author argues that (neo)abolitionist discourses on sex work and trafficking prevail, leaving discourses on decriminalization of (migrant) sex work in the margins. While this influences how the media approaches and covers trafficked women, the study finds that media representations exhibit complex interrelations of varying degrees of agency and victimhood, resulting in a differential positioning of trafficked women along a hierarchy of victimhood. Thus, not all trafficked women are constructed in the media as subjects of pity and deserving of public care; typically, innocence, virtue, and powerfulness characterize the ideal victim whereas those whose experiences fall outside the dominant narrative produce conflicting, ambivalent emotions, leaving these women's identities in ambivalent position.

To expand the remit of care to include these marginalized identities, the article suggests that the political potential of ambivalence could be productively used to contextualize oppression in media representations of human trafficking and in this way give political voice to the marginalized.

The Special Section concludes with an Afterword by Barbie Zelizer, aptly titled "Sticky Violence." Zelizer ties together the themes in this collection and discusses the complex and uneven relationship between violence and its visibility, on the one hand, and visibility and responsiveness on the other. Zelizer thus takes a critical stance toward the often-reiterated assumption—or perhaps an optimistic hope—that visibility of violence inevitably leads to recognition of its harms, pointing out how, despite increasing violent encounters, our understanding of the processes by which violence is made visible is still lacking. Visibility of violence may also work the other way around, and instead of having a lessening effect, promote more violence. Yet, the belief in causal progression from seeing violence to its denunciation and reaction against it is, if not openly articulated, often shrouded in struggles for (media) recognition. Visibility and recognition thus exist on a spectrum that makes violence's visibility unpredictable and unstable in its effect. As visibility is largely granted through the media, media's role in guarding democratic values and in articulating the fragility of democracy by enunciating its "dark corners" remains pivotal. Following Sara Ahmed (2004), Zelizer underlines *the stickiness of violence*: Regardless of whether we perceive the relationship between violence and visibility hopefully or critically, violence hangs around and inhabits democracies, demanding attention. Zelizer concludes by reiterating the importance of continuing to make violence visible and the collective effort of demanding we pay attention to the suffering, inequality, and marginalization it incurs.

With this collection, we hope to highlight how in the context of violence, the issue of visibility and recognition become even more complex with far-reaching consequences that go beyond the individual. Visibility, even hyper visibility, of some types of violence and therefore of some bodies with simultaneous invisibility of some others result from complex and intermingling intersectional conditions of citizenship, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, class, and power (Ahmed, 2004; Caspers & Moore, 2009; Fraser, 2000). In the context of violence where the effects never remain individual or local but rather are felt throughout the society, the issue of recognition becomes ever more pertinent, as it carries with it the political and ethical demand for unity despite difference and for an unquestioned regard for the value of human life.

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