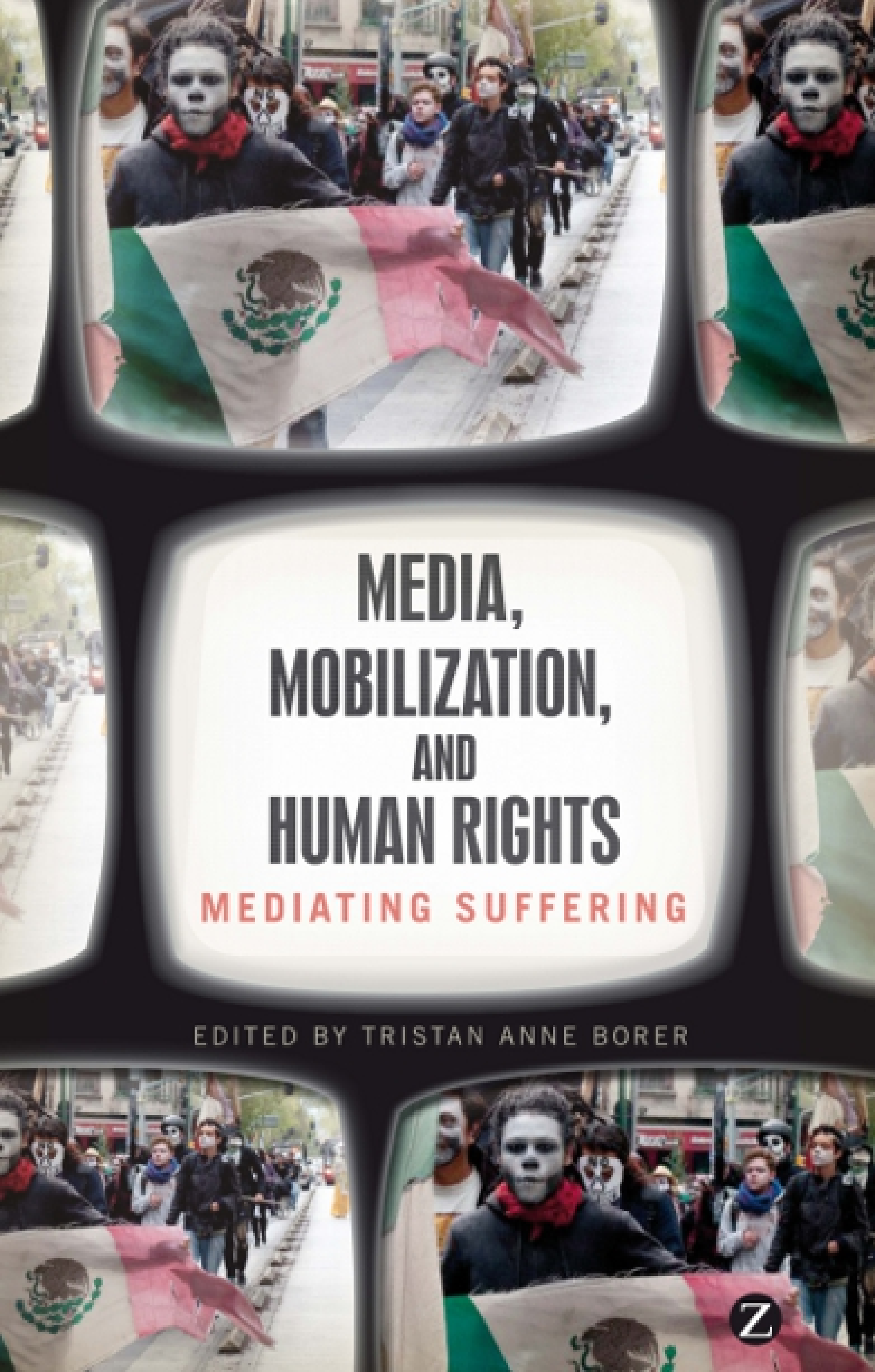

MEDIA, MOBILIZATION, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

MEDIATING SUFFERING

EDITED BY TRISTAN ANNE BORER

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Media, mobilization, and human rights: mediating suffering

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Acknowledgments

In 2005, Nicholas Kristof published an op-ed about American apathy toward ongoing human rights violations in Darfur, Sudan. Trying to shock his readers into caring, he published pictures of dead and mutilated bodies. On a whim, I cut that op-ed out of the *New York Times* and brought it to class to discuss with my students. I did not know at the time that the ensuing, rather heated, conversation would light the first spark of an idea that would eventually become this edited book on human rights and the media. In the years since, I have had countless stimulating conversations with hundreds of students in my human rights courses at Connecticut College about a myriad of issues surrounding this topic. First and foremost, therefore, I wish to thank my students. Their intellectual engagement with the issues in this book has continually pushed me to hone and refine my ideas. Being their teacher has made me a better scholar.

As my interest in this topic grew, I issued a call for papers for a panel on human rights and the media for the 2010 annual International Studies Association (ISA) conference. The response was overwhelming, and I ended up organizing two linked panels. Some of the chapters in this book began as papers given at those panels; others were commissioned specifically for this book. I am profoundly grateful to the panelists and to the contributors to this book, all of whom responded promptly and graciously to my requests for revision after revision. I appreciate their willingness to be open to my many comments and suggestions. I hope I have done their work justice. On a more personal level, it has been deeply rewarding to come to know such a distinguished group of scholars, all of whom I respect immensely.

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For John, for his unwavering support

Introduction: willful ignorance – news production, audience reception, and responses to suffering

TRISTAN ANNE BORER

> An ample reservoir of stoicism is needed to get through the great newspaper of record each morning, given the likelihood of seeing photographs that could make you cry. (Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*)

> Most media consumers eventually get to the point where they turn the page. (Susan Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue*)

Twenty years in Somalia

On 20 July 2011 the United Nations (UN) declared a famine in southern Somalia, which was experiencing the worst drought in more than half a century. It was the first time that the organization had invoked the word famine in relation to Somalia since 1992, when its use, and the death of an estimated 200,000 people, resulted in armed humanitarian intervention to deliver food aid. Today, that intervention is best known for the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu and in particular the 'Black Hawk Down' incident that ended with the deaths of eighteen US Rangers and public outcry to end the intervention. Nineteen years later, famine again loomed large, causing massive displacement, starvation, and death. On the day of the declaration, Bloomberg news reported that almost 800,000 refugees had been forced to flee to neighboring countries (Richardson 2011), and Reuters (2011) reported that the UN estimated that 3.7 million people faced starvation inside Somalia, with 8 million more facing starvation in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti (Levitz and Abbany 2011). More than 30 percent of children in the famine-struck areas suffered acute malnourishment, with four of every 10,000 dying daily, Bloomberg further reported (Richardson 2011). Quite simply, the World Food Programme said, the crisis in the region 'ranks as the highest global humanitarian priority' (ibid.).

Two days after the UN sounded the alarm, the *Los Angeles Times* published an op-ed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who pleaded with the international community to intervene – if only by donating money and aid – to prevent the famine's spread and to help those already suffering. In his appeal, Ban described the shocking reality faced by Somalis: 'Every day I hear the harrowing reports from our UN teams on the ground. Somali refugees, their cattle and goats dead from thirst, walking for weeks to find help in Kenya and Ethiopia. Children who arrive alone, terrified and malnourished, their parents dead in a foreign land' (Ban 2011). Ban directed his entreaty to both states ('This means everyone. I appeal to all nations – both those that fund our work year in and year out, and those that do not traditionally give through the multinational system – to step up to the challenge') and individuals ('We must all ask ourselves, as individual citizens, how we can help. This might mean private donations ... or it could mean pushing elected representatives toward a more robust response'). In total, Ban said, 'we need about $1.6 billion in aid' (ibid.). The op-ed was accompanied by a photograph of hundreds of internally displaced Somalis, with the image's focal point being a severely emaciated man lying prone with a cloth over his head to ward off the sun. Other newspapers also resorted to the use of shock media – in their choice of both words and images – to describe the crisis. A BBC News reporter, for example, described a woman he met at a camp for internally displaced Somalis: 'Her five children were with her, but the youngest ones – aged two and five years – died on the way. She said she abandoned their bodies along the roadside because she was too weak to dig graves ... She said some of the mothers had walked up to six days without food to try to find help' (BBC News 2011). One of the most shocking images in the mainstream media was a photograph run by the *New York Times* on its 2 August front cover, depicting a severely malnourished child, with the caption 'More than 500,000 Somali children are verging on starvation.'

Celebrity activists soon entered the picture, often using social media to appeal for help. For example, several celebrities, including George Clooney, Bono, Clive Owen, Jessica Alba, Colin Farrell, and Ewan McGregor, joined the anti-poverty advocacy group ONE to launch a public service announcement (PSA) campaign to end the famine. In an online video entitled 'The F-Word: Famine is the real Obscenity,' the celebrities urged viewers to sign a petition, among other things (ONE 2011). On 15 August, Stephen Colbert, during an interview with US ambassador to the UN Susan Rice on his show *The Colbert Report*, urged his viewers to text the word 'AID' to a particular number, which would allow them to donate $10 directly to the World Food Programme.

Despite these frantic appeals by both the UN and celebrity activists, and despite increasing coverage in the news, the response by both states and individuals was tepid, prompting the United Kingdom's Secretary of State for International Development Andrew Mitchell to label the response by many European and developed countries 'derisory and dangerously inadequate' (BBC News 2011). The British charity Oxfam was equally condemnatory, accusing several European governments of 'willful neglect' in their response to the crisis (Reuters 2011). The mainstream media's coverage of the famine did not escape criticism either, when, in an op-ed in the *Guardian*, former British politician and UN diplomat Paddy Ashdown accused the media of ignoring the political and economic early warning signs of famine for years, 'reduced in a footnote in the media's eyes by more sensational events' (Ashdown 2011). On 28 July, the UN announced an $800 million shortfall in donations needed to respond to the crisis (Rhoads and Abdi 2011), and, on 5 September, the UN reported that the famine, which had originally affected only two regions in Somalia, had spread to six, and warned that 750,000 people could die within months if aid efforts were not scaled up (Gettleman 2011). Almost twenty years after the last famine, Ban Ki-moon summed up the frustrations of many in the humanitarian relief field when he asked, 'How is this happening again?' (Ban 2011).

Mediating suffering

How indeed? Today there is hardly a conflict – especially a large-scale one or a particularly violent one – that is not captured by photojournalists or television news journalists. In addition, anyone can witness atrocities by viewing amateur videos posted on online sites such as YouTube (see Jardin 2011, for example). We know and we see more than ever before. One of the central tenets of the human rights advocacy movement is the belief that information about human rights abuses leads to action to halt them. This conviction – that awareness of human rights atrocities has a mobilizing effect on an audience – seems so common-sensical ('of course people can't help but be moved to action by pictures of starving children') that it has taken on the quality of a truism whose factual basis is deemed almost too obvious to examine. And yet, as the 2011 Somalia famine, along with any number of other mass atrocities – the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the 1999 civil war in Sierra Leone, whose hallmark atrocity was the hacking off of limbs, and the epidemic levels of rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo, to name a few – make clear, this cause and effect relationship does not always exist. Indeed, one can easily imagine other responses to viewing and reading about human rights-related violence. For instance, it is possible that rather than spurring readers to action, media coverage instead desensitizes them to suffering, as Susan Moeller says in the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter. Another effect might be to overwhelm the audience with the magnitude of violence – so many atrocities in so many places – and make them feel helpless about what they deem to be hopeless. In this case, they may simply do nothing. Images and descriptions of atrocities may also elicit a different response: rather than evoking sympathy, they may result in the opposite – cries for revenge. Perhaps, most disturbingly, showing images of atrocities may hurt rather than help the victims of violence, turning the viewers into voyeurs of exoticized and objectified victims in an almost pornographic way. In other words, despite the repeated presentation of it as a simple causal relationship (exposure to images and stories of violence leads to action to prevent it), in reality the relationship between media portrayals of atrocities and individual responses to the portraits is anything but simple.

It is this complexity with which the authors of the chapters in this book grapple. Each chapter furthers our understanding of the multiple and varied ways in which viewing and reading about human rights atrocities can impact an audience. In other words, all of the authors are concerned with understanding how knowledge about human rights violations is mediated – what variables are at play between violence and its viewers? Thomas Keenan poses the question best when he asks: 'What links what we so loosely call "the media" and its images with action or inaction?' Furthermore, he asks: 'When something happens "in full view," why do we expect that action will be taken commensurate with what (we have seen) is happening?' (Keenan 2002, 548). Each chapter adds a piece to the puzzle of why news texts and images sometimes mobilize people but at other times are met with indifference. The book, then, sheds new theoretical insight into the complexity of the relationship between news and its reception – i.e. the process of news mediation. Indeed, the assumption of many human rights advocates that raising awareness of human rights violations is a precursor to political action is revealed to be anything but simple, clear, or direct. This is especially the case, some argue, when the suffering one sees or reads about is happening to people living far away and with whom the audience is likely never to come into contact. When this is the case, all of our knowledge of their suffering is mediated in some form. As Birgitta Höijer notes, 'it seems quite obvious that it is primarily through the media that we, citizens and politicians alike, meet depictions of the suffering of distant strangers' (Höijer 2004, 515). Luc Boltanski (1999) is also interested in the varying responses to distant suffering, asking: 'What form can this commitment take when those called up to act are thousands of miles away from the person suffering, comfortably installed in front of the television set in the shelter of the family living room?' (xv). Is there something in particular about both the distance of human rights violations and the reality that any awareness of those atrocities has by definition been mediated in some form that impacts whether people are more or less likely to act to stop them? When individuals personally suffer or witness abuses, violence or suffering, the reflexive response to resist, strike back, bear witness, or respond in any other way seems to make intuitive sense. But when knowledge is secondhand, it is much less clear what can and should be expected in terms of a response, despite the apparent certainty by many – or perhaps it is fervent hope – that 'if only people knew about what was happening, surely they would act.' This book deals primarily with responses (or lack thereof) to reports of violence and suffering that people do not personally witness or experience firsthand, but rather learn about through mediated accounts in newspapers, on television, through the Internet, through advertisements, or even through popular culture such as movies, books, or art.

The 2011–12 Somali famine and the world's underwhelming response is an obvious – albeit tragic – contemporary example of the reality that widespread coverage of suffering does not automatically translate into action to alleviate it. The Somalia case also features many elements covered in this book, including newspapers resorting to the use of shock (shocking images, shocking numbers, and shocking descriptions) to try to force a reaction from their readers; celebrities exhorting their fans to respond, often through new social media; the fact that these pleas often fall on deaf ears; and the responsibility of the media themselves, in part, for the tepid response because of their framing of crises. In sum, the chapters of this book help us understand why knowledge of human rights disasters sometimes moves an audience to action while at other times awareness of suffering barely registers. What follows is an overview of each chapter, embedded in a review of the theoretical literature, that illustrates how each advances our understanding of why and under what conditions exposure to the suffering of others sometimes leads to action to end it, while at other times ordinary people remain unmoved, complacent, and politically disengaged.

States, the media, and humanitarian intervention

Both states and individuals have responded unevenly to human rights atrocities. The question of why states respond to some crises but not others has received much attention, especially in the aftermath of the Cold War. Between the end of the Cold War and the 11 September 2001 attacks, political space opened up for a debate about state intervention specifically to protect human rights. Regarding what has come to be known generally as humanitarian intervention, the initial question was whether the international community has the legal right and/or moral obligation to intervene militarily in the domestic sphere of another state to protect citizens whose rights are being violated by their government. Adam Roberts defines humanitarian intervention as 'coercive action by one or more states involving the use of armed force in another state without the consent of its authorities, and with the purpose of preventing widespread suffering or death among inhabitants' (cited in Weiss 2007, 5; see also Hoffmann et al. 1996 and Lang, Jr. 2003 for further theoretical review). The debate has now moved beyond this question, largely as a result of the emergence in the early 2000s of the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which attempts to 'square the circle of state sovereignty and human rights' (Weiss 2007, 88). The core principle of R2P provides for military intervention for human protection purposes only when states do not, or cannot, act to protect their own citizens (for an overview of R2P see Weiss 2007 and International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2001). While R2P remains highly contested, most scholars no longer question *whether* a state has the right to intervene; rather, the question has increasingly become *why* they choose to intervene to stop abuses in some places but not others (see, for example, Power 2007). Various explanations for discrepant responses have been offered, including the strategic importance of the state in question, which includes the impact of a potential mass refugee influx; the amount of acceptable risk (how many deaths a state is willing to tolerate, for example); whether the conflict is perceived as intractable versus whether states perceive that intervention will help; and whether there is strong support from regional organizations, the UN Security Council, or both (Winter 2000). For the purposes of this book, the most interesting factor is the role of the media (see, for example, Soderlund et al. 2008; Allen and Seaton 1999).

As the concept of humanitarian intervention took root, scholars began looking at the role of the media in state-level policymaking. Scholars have analyzed how photographs and television news footage have impacted public opinion and how this opinion has in turn influenced foreign policy, a concept referred to as the CNN Effect. The 1992 Somali famine described earlier made this concept almost a household term. Operation Restore Hope, a US-led humanitarian initiative between December 1992 and October 1993, was the first large-scale post-Cold War humanitarian intervention. It was also the first intervention mediated live. In an analysis of just how hypermediated the event was, Thomas Keenan describes CNN's Christiane Amanpour reporting on the supposedly stealth landing of a joint Navy SEALS/ Marine Reconnaissance unit. He quotes the *New York Times* as reporting that 'reporters were told when the landing would take place, and some network correspondents were quietly advised where the Marines would arrive so that they could set up their cameras' (Keenan 2004, 441). On 3 October, the 'Black Hawk Down' incident – in which two US Black Hawk helicopters were shot down, eighteen US soldiers were killed, and the bodies of several US casualties were dragged through the streets – was likewise reported live by CNN and beamed into television sets around the world. The images resulted in thousands of phone calls to US congressional representatives, many of whom themselves 'exhorted President Clinton to bring the troops home immediately' (Sharkey 1993). It was this sequence of events – media images captured as a result of twenty-four-hour news coverage leading to public cries for state action (first to intervene and later to withdraw), the resulting impact of public opinion on state policies, and a change in policy course – that has come to be known as the CNN Effect. Stephen Hess of the Brookings Institution defines it as 'the effect that continuous and instantaneous television may have on foreign policy, in the making of foreign policy, and the conduct of war' (Brookings Institution 2002), while Virgil Hawkins refers to it somewhat more facetiously as 'the do something syndrome' (Hawkins 2001). In terms of Somalia, Thomas Keenan asserts that the CNN Effect looked something like this: television pictures – in this case of starving children – brought US troops into Somalia, and television pictures – of dead US soldiers – pulled them out (Keenan 2004, 442).

Belief in a CNN Effect appears to have been at an apex in the aftermath of the Somalia intervention. Although the concept has subsequently been applied to other conflicts (see Bahador 2007) it remains most closely associated with 1992–93 Somalia and it has since lost some of its explanatory power. After all, for every 1992 Somalia, there was a 1994 Rwanda; for every 1999 Kosovo, there was a 1993 Sarajevo; for every 2011 Libya, there was a 2011 Syria. In other words, scholars and activists have discovered that media exposure of human rights atrocities does not necessarily lead the public to pressure governments to act (see Robinson 2002, Livingston 1997, and Strobel 1996 for critiques of the concept). Still, no one seems prepared to say that media coverage is irrelevant. Rather, the more complex argument made by most current scholars of the CNN Effect is that the media are a necessary but not sufficient variable for explaining state responses to other states' gross violations of human rights. Keenan sums up the sentiment best: 'Images, information, and knowledge will never guarantee any outcome, nor will they force or drive any action. They are, in that sense, like weapons or words: a condition, but not a sufficient one. Still the only thing more unwise than attributing the power of causation or of paralysis to images is to ignore them altogether' (Keenan 2002, 560). A direct causal effect, it turns out, is much too simple.

Part of the complexity is illustrated by David Kieran in his chapter 'Humanitarian intervention in the 1990s: cultural remembrance and the reading of Somalia as Vietnam' in which he argues that Americans' remembrance of Vietnam during the 1990s shaped the emerging legacy of the 1993 Somalia intervention. Specifically, while it has become common wisdom that the 'Somalia debacle' is a prime reason the US has been reticent about subsequent humanitarian forays in Africa, Kieran shows that it was in fact the way in which Americans were remembering Vietnam (not Somalia) in the 1990s, through recently published popular literature including memoirs of that war, that molded the Somalia legacy and defined that mission's place within broader debates about future US military commitments to humanitarian intervention. In other words, while the CNN Effect refers to some loose and ill-defined 'public opinion,' Kieran demonstrates that public opinion is not formed in a vacuum. It is, in part, filtered through cultural remembrances of other events. The cultural remembrances of Vietnam were again surfacing in contemporary bestselling popular literature at precisely the moment when Americans were beginning to doubt the Somalia intervention. Memories of a past conflict, in other words, can become culturally significant and reproduced in a current one. The deaths of American soldiers in Somalia were mediated by CNN but also by and through popular literature on Vietnam, with all of the painful cultural memories this brought back to life. Kieran argues that popular literature – both the literature on Vietnam and the emerging literature on Somalia – did more than simply compare the two conflicts (a trope the media were already employing). In addition, they contributed to the realist critiques of all future humanitarian interventions by explicitly representing Somalia *as* Vietnam. In other words, fresh memories of Vietnam happened to intersect with Americans' anxieties about humanitarian intervention as a result of Somalia. A memorial discourse was created that blended the memories of Vietnam with those of Somalia, which then served to legitimize the critiques offered by opponents of humanitarian intervention in general. We can extrapolate from Kieran's conclusions that both the media and public opinion about future humanitarian interventions will be mediated through cultural remembrances, which are only now being created, of conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq in the first decade of the twenty-first century – both of which were in part sold to the public as humanitarian missions. In sum, Kieran illustrates that the CNN Effect is far more complex than early theorizing of it held. In Somalia, media images played into a cultural memory that was inclined to push for withdrawal in the first place; the cultural memory of Vietnam made the images coming out of Somalia ripe for looking like a CNN Effect.

Ordinary people, the media, and distant suffering

While David Kieran's chapter reminds us that much more theorizing about the role of the media in state-level humanitarian interventions is warranted, we also need to look at how individuals respond to mediated atrocities. As Paul Slovic notes, 'behind every president who ignored mass murder were millions of citizens whose indifference allowed them to get away with it' (Slovic 2007, 80). Why are some individuals indifferent to mass suffering, turning the page on shocking images in the morning newspaper? Or, as Susan Moeller eloquently asks: 'Why, despite the haunting nature of many images – narrative images, photographic images, video images – do we seem to care less and less about the world around us?' (Moeller 1999, 4). Why do people respond emotionally to some images and with a shrug to others? Why do they act on that emotion in some cases and not in others? Individuals' psycho-emotional reactions to stimuli are, of course, highly complex, and all of the questions above are likely to have multiple and interrelated answers. At the same time, scholars have tried to theorize why individuals respond differently to information, either images or texts, about gross violations of human rights, and what role the media play in their varied responses. Three of the most common explanations will be examined here: psycho-physical numbing that makes it difficult to care about large-scale, distant suffering; the difficulty of effecting a cosmopolitan citizenry; and compassion fatigue. A brief overview of each of the three explanations is provided below, followed by a summary of the core contribution of the book – how each of the remaining chapters responds to, interacts with, clarifies, and expounds upon some or all of the theories, and, most importantly, how each chapter contributes to a better understanding of the varying responses to media portrayals of human rights violations.

Psychic numbing Psychologist Paul Slovic examines why most people, despite the fact that they are caring and would make a great effort to help an individual in need, appear to be indifferent – indeed numb – when the number of those suffering is much larger. In bringing the question from the level of the state to that of the individual, Slovic asks: 'Why, over the past century, have good people repeatedly ignored mass murder and genocide?' (Slovic 2007, 79). He argues that at a psycho-physical level, people are unable to experience affect – the positive and negative feelings that combine with reasoned analysis to guide judgments, decisions, and actions – for large-scale suffering. Affect, he says, is the most basic form of feeling – the sense (not necessarily conscious) that something is good or bad, without which information lacks meaning and cannot be used in judgment (ibid., 82). Images are particularly important in affect. Affect is supplemented by other feelings such as empathy, sympathy, compassion, sadness, pity, and distress. Together, these feelings are critical for motivating people to help others. Quite simply, according to Slovic, people help others when they 'feel' for them, and humans are unable to fathom, to 'wrap our minds around,' or to feel for large-scale suffering. The incapacity to feel for large groups of people suffering far away is an evolutionary trait; humans evolved to protect their families or small communities from immediate danger, not to respond to distant mass murder. We are not hardwired to care about, to feel for, people suffering en masse far away: 'the circuitry of our brain is not up to this task' (ibid., 84).

Slovic's argument is one of both distance and scale. In terms of distance, the closer the victims are to us, the more we are likely to feel for them. This obviously has consequences for the types of mediated atrocities discussed in this book, such as the East African famine declared in 2011. In terms of scale, the larger the number of sufferers, the harder it is for us to care about them. Slovic argues that the sentiment of Nobel Prize-winning biochemist Albert Szent-Györgyi, who struggled with the probable outcome of nuclear war, sums up his theory nearly perfectly. Szent-Györgyi said, 'I am deeply moved if

I see one man suffering and would risk my life for him. Then I talk impersonally about the possible pulverization of our big cities, with a hundred million dead. I am unable to multiply one man's suffering by a hundred million' (ibid.). Others have confirmed this inability. Slovic quotes Mother Teresa, who said, 'If I look at the mass I will never act. If I look at the one, I will' (ibid., 80). More notoriously, from her moral opposite, Josef Stalin once said, 'One death is a tragedy. One million deaths is a statistic' (Moeller 1999, 36).

The difficulty of comprehending large-scale deaths has consequences for how human rights advocates and news producers – editors and reporters – frame foreign crises to maximize audience reception of their message, an issue dealt with in Tristan Anne Borer's chapter, as will be described below. Before delving into that, however, two other explanations for what Slovic calls 'mass murder and genocide neglect' will be reviewed.

Impediments to cosmopolitanism As noted earlier, most encounters with human rights-related suffering by Western audiences occur through reading about them in newspapers or watching them on television or the Internet. The victims are mostly strangers, living far away. Unfortunately, argue several scholars (Kleinman and Kleinman 1996; Boltanski 1999; Chouliaraki 2006; Kyriakidou 2009), it has proven very difficult to create a global citizenry or a sense of cosmopolitan solidarity, despite popular-culture references to global villages and 'we are the world' pronouncements. Even in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, Kyriakidou argues, the expected deterritorializing that would come with fading or erased borders has not yet happened. Indeed, nationalism is as strong an identifying force as ever, and it has proven quite difficult to 'imagine ourselves beyond the nation' (Kyriakidou 2009, 481). Even the mediated connections facilitated by twenty-four-hour, instantaneous news coverage – the same connections allegedly responsible for a CNN Effect – have been unable to negate other forms of identity and belonging, keeping nationalism as the focal point of community (ibid., 482). It is, in other words, very difficult to sustain commitment to humanity as a whole. Theorists of cosmopolitanism, which Kyriakidou defines as 'a sense of global belonging and commitment to distant others' (ibid., 487), naturally study the role of media, given their centrality in global interconnectedness. As Kyriakidou notes, 'for most people most of the time, "cosmopolitan" experience is restricted to media images and news; it is mostly through the media that they are confronted with and experience "otherness"' (ibid., 484). Lilie Chouliaraki is similarly interested in determining whether the media are able to create a global public – which she calls an ethically engaged cosmopolitan citizenry – with a sense of social responsibility toward the distant sufferer. She concludes that 'despite the instantaneous and global reach of visibility that [media] technologies have achieved, the optimistic celebration of our planet as a global village or the [audience] as a new cosmopolitan should be held in check' (Chouliaraki 2006, 4). While the media could theoretically 'cultivate a "beyond the nation" cultural resonance among Western audiences,' more often than not they simply reproduce a dichotomous 'us' versus 'them' sentiment (ibid., 12). Finally, a cosmopolitan ethic of care and action is difficult to achieve – despite instantaneous and continuous news of human rights violations around the world – because, Kyriakidou points out, 'the national, as collective history and memories, culture and political identities, forms the lens and the interpretative framework through which audiences around the world make sense of global events and distant suffering' (Kyriakidou 2009, 493). In sum, theorists of media and cosmopolitanism question the creation of global solidarities and subsequent mobilization; at the very least, they argue, nationalism remains a strong pull on peoples' identities, making it difficult to overcome apathy toward distant suffering.

It is precisely this question – what role the media can play in 'infiltrating people's everyday lives with emotionally engaging values that orient them toward geographically distant others,' as Kyriakidou puts it (ibid., 484), that Michael Galchinsky addresses in his chapter 'Framing a rights ethos: artistic media and the dream of a culture without borders.' In particular, Galchinsky is interested in how a universal human rights culture might be created, and how the media might help in its creation. After all, the idea of the existence of human rights needs to be firmly entrenched in people's minds before they can be receptive to the messages of the media. As Galchinsky states: 'Culture helps construct the civil society in which human rights can be meaningful ... Neither the UN nor a national government can simply compel people to respect each other's rights: people have to *want* to.' His chapter is about artistic media in general – with a specific focus on graphic novels – and how they produce and reflect that desire. Can artistic media ground the formal rights system in an informal rights ethos, and can they do it transnationally, helping audiences recognize 'those aspects of experience that ... transcend nationality, race, and ethnicity; gender and sexuality; religion and class'? What scholars of cosmopolitanism refer to as a global ethic of care, Galchinsky calls a universal structure of feeling – a ‘socially constructed and sanctioned sympathy with others across identity differences’ – and his chapter investigates whether human rights-related art, such as novels, biographies, films, and graphic novels, can cultivate rights-oriented ‘habits of the heart’ so that, when exposed to atrocities, audiences will take a stand against them. To make his case, he examines four artistic ‘modes’: protest (such as the film *Cry Freedom*), testimony (such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*), lament (such as the novel *Beloved*), and laughter (such as Kafka’s *The Trial*). Galchinsky’s most important contribution, however, is his case-study analysis of graphic novels and graphic reportage that explores how artistic media can foster cosmopolitanism, and the problems they encounter. Some obstacles are operational, such as figuring out how to translate idiomatic works into universally acceptable language and how to market them without potentially endangering the artists. Other problems stem from the lack of a borderless global citizenry. As he notes, artists are ‘severely hampered by the absence of any global public to which they could appeal ... There really aren’t any citizens of the world.’ Like other cosmopolitanists, then, Galchinsky argues, drawing on the work of John Tomlinson, that the biggest obstacle facing artists is conceptual:

> The symbolic, emotional, and ideational links that make people everywhere feel they share a common destiny are thinner than the thinnest nationalism. Unlike national citizens, ‘citizens of the world’ lack common territory, ethnicity, language, ideology, and history – all the horizontal ties that bind imagined communities. In the absence of such ties, works of human rights culture could theoretically construct a system of shared symbols that might serve to form some bonds of common passion and understanding. To function in this way, however, such works would have to be taken out of their national habitat. To be globalized, they would have to become nomads, bound not to territory or local lore, but to shared values.

Galchinsky is not entirely pessimistic, however, concluding that artistic media can at times succeed in crafting and promoting a global ethos. While they may not result in immediate action in any given situation, in the long run they can produce ‘a sense of sympathetic identification for the victims of abuse’; they ‘fend off the numbness, voyeurism, and distance that are all too often the psychological effects of other mediated relations.’

Compassion fatigue A third, arguably best known, explanation for apathetic responses to news of atrocities is the phenomenon of compassion fatigue, a counterintuitive phenomenon that states that the more suffering we see, the less we feel. Keith Tester (2001, 13) defines compassion fatigue as:

> becoming so used to the spectacle of dreadful events, misery or suffering that we stop noticing them. We are bored when we see one more tortured corpse on the television screen and we are left unmoved ... Compassion fatigue means being left exhausted and tired by those reports and ceasing to think that anything at all can be done to help ... Compassion fatigue means a certain fatalism. It leads to the conclusion that this is just the way things are and nothing can be done that will make a difference.

Kinnick et al. similarly describe the phenomenon as pertaining to a public that has ‘grown weary of unrelenting media coverage of human tragedy and ubiquitous fund-raising appeals’ (Kinnick et al. 1996, 687). Unlike Slovic’s argument above, in which psychic numbness results from an inability to process the sheer number of victims, here people become numb to remote human suffering as a result of overexposure to it, a concept that Birgitta Höijer describes as ‘distantiation from compassion’ (Höijer 2004, 524). Some scholars are skeptical that compassion fatigue even exists. Tester argues, for example, that ‘the whole debate about compassion fatigue has a number of significant logical problems,’ and that theorists of compassion fatigue ‘make a number of assumptions which are questionable at best and untenable at worst’ (Tester 2001, 2 and 15). Tester makes an argument similar to Slovic’s claim that humans are not naturally – in Slovic’s argument not hardwired – to feel compassion; he rejects the implicit normative assumption of compassion fatigue that people are and will be compassionate toward one another. Rather, he says, ‘compassion is not a natural, innate or inevitable ethic’ (ibid., 20). Others see it as an inevitable, unavoidable – and very real – consequence of the way in which news is covered, which results in the repetitive use of language and images. Susan Moeller, for example, argues that the media, afraid to stray from what they think will ‘sell,’ cover what they think the audience wants, which results in repetition, which breeds indifference: ‘Compassion fatigue is a consequence of rote journalism, and looking-over-your-shoulder reporting ... Newspapers, news magazines and television don’t want to get beat by the competition – either in the stories they cover or in the packaging they come in. As a result, much of the media looks alike. The same news, the same pictures.

What's the inevitable result much of the time? Compassion fatigue' (Moeller 1999, 32). Still others, like Höijer, aver that the process is more complex than either Tester or Moeller claim. Her findings indicate that there is a gendered dimension to compassion, and that distantiation (i.e. compassion fatigue) is more prevalent among men than women (Höijer 2004, 525).

These three explanations for uneven responses or non-reaction to news reports about distant suffering – psychological numbness, the lack of a cosmopolitan citizenry, and compassion fatigue – are not unrelated; indeed, they are quite interactive. Many scholars argue that both compassion fatigue and the difficulty of fostering a cosmopolitan ethos result in part from the process of news production. And, if people are increasingly numb to distant suffering – because of either psychological barriers or compassion fatigue – then news producers and human rights activists alike need to work harder and more creatively to grab their audiences' attention, which is an audience reception issue. The remaining chapters of this book examine either news production-related issues or audience reception issues, and how they help make sense of why knowledge does not always result in action.

News production – the first half of the equation

Scholars of both cosmopolitanism and compassion fatigue argue that there is something about the way in which faraway atrocities are covered in the news that makes it less likely that people will act to end them; i.e. that the problem is, in part, a news production one. As noted above, cosmopolitanism competes with nationalism as a pull on individual identity. As Simon Cottle points out, news producers – both editors and reporters – tend to reinforce the primacy of the national over the global, especially through the framing of global crises 'in ways consonant to national interests and identities' (Cottle 2009, 509). For example, he notes, 'wars continue to be reported through blood-tinted glasses colored by national interests and/or returning coffins draped in the national flag. When reporting on distant disasters and humanitarian emergencies, national news media continue to seek out and populate stories with their own "nationals" – whether embodied as victims, survivors, heroes, or concerned celebrities' (ibid.). As a result, he argues, 'global news stagings are not destined to necessarily serve processes of "enforced enlightenment," much less promote cosmopolitan solidarity' (ibid.).

Tester likewise argues that the *way* in which distant crises, specifically those in Africa, are covered by the media makes the emergence of a cosmopolitan citizenry less likely: ‘Africa is invariably presented as a place of endemic and persistent pain and suffering. Therefore … the message is that it is simply the way that things are. It becomes their unalterable fate’ (Tester 2001, 7). This results in what historian Michael Ignatieff calls ‘one of the dangerous cultural moods of our time, the belief that the world is so out of control and so terrible that all we can do is disengage from it’ (Ignatieff 1998, 25).

While Cottle, Tester, and Ignatieff all argue that the process of news production impedes the creation of a cosmopolitan ethic, Moeller focuses on how the business of news production inevitably results in compassion fatigue. She argues that editors and producers do not assign stories and that correspondents do not cover events they believe will not appeal to their readers or viewers. As a result, the media present simplistic, formulaic coverage of international events; moreover, the coverage is highly repetitive, under the assumption that if it sold last time, it will sell this time. Thus, as Moeller states: ‘If images of starving babies worked in the past to capture attention for a complex crisis of war, refugees and famine, then starving babies will headline the next difficult crisis’ (Moeller 1999, 2). However, this constant repetition contributes to the result Tester and Ignatieff noted above – that Africa is hopeless and there is nothing that can be done. So, when the 1991 East African famine worsened into one of the most severe in recent memory, Moeller quotes a non-governmental organization (NGO) worker as saying, ‘people worldwide must have the feeling of “African famine again?”’ Another NGO worker agreed: ‘Donors are tired of repetitious events, and Sudan and Ethiopia are repetitious. Every time there’s a famine in Africa … you can always count on somebody asking, “Hey didn’t they just do that last year?”’ (ibid., 8). News of African famine, in 1991 and twenty years later in 2011, evokes a ‘been there, done that’ attitude among Westerners, she argues. The result is that news consumers, ‘weary of pouring money into crises that never seem to go away,’ fall into ‘a discouragingly contagious compassion fatigue’ (ibid., 9). And the cause of this is the way in which the media cover crises.

Experiencing compassion fatigue despite viewing images of suffering seems particularly disconcerting to some. It is one thing to turn the page when reading about atrocities, the argument goes, but how can you see pictures of starving children or mutilated bodies and still not care? Moeller’s explanation for the persistence of compassion fatigue in the face of horrifying images is remarkably similar to Slovic’s argument about scale. ‘Didactic images can overload the senses,’ she argues. ‘A