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Crisis: Mediatization of Disaster in the Nordic Media Sphere

Mediatization and Crisis

In recent years there has been a growing awareness across a range of social sciences of the value of exploring social and cultural implications of the new communication technologies. There is a fast growing number of studies that analyse digitalized communication networks, new forms of social media and the mobility of contemporary life (see e.g., Castells, 2009; Urry, 2007). Another trend we find, also interconnected with the first orientation is the shift in interest from studying media institutions to studying mediated/mediatized communication. There is a heated debate going on in the field attached to the use of concepts explaining the processes of media-related communication. More or less informal schools around mediation vs. mediatization have been established to promote distinct views about the terms (see e.g., Couldry, 2008; Livingstone, 2009; Hjarvard, 2008, 2009; Lundby, 2009a; Krotz, 2009). Behind these hegemonic struggles there seems to be a commonly shared, genuine interest in trying to develop better conceptual tools to understand transformations in the contemporary world and the role of media-related communication in it.

The third academic trend we want to highlight on is the increasing interest in studying crises, catastrophes and disasters and their roles in forming social life (see e.g., Zelizer & Allan, 2002; McQual, 2006; Cottle, 2009; Altheide, 2009; Chouliaraki, 2006; Katz & Liebes, 2007; Rodríguez, Quarantelli & Dynes, 2007). Like many cultural and social analysts, we believe it is not exaggeration to say that we live in a post-9/11 era, in which common worlds are organized not only around positive imaginations based on the mutual benefit of equal participants, but also – and even more so – around mediated and/or mediatized stories and imaginaries of violence, fear, destruction and uncertainty (see also, Appadurai, 2006; Bauman, 2006; Furedi, 2006; Sumiala, 2009). Under these conditions, the symbolic matrix within which people imagine their collective life, has become increasingly violent (see e.g., Žižek,

2008; Butler, 2003). This challenges media and communication theory to take destructive and disruptive potentials embedded in media-related communication even more seriously (Cottle, 2006a, 2006b).

In this article our aim is to bring these three contemporary orientations of research: transformations in formation of social life through new communication technologies, an approach to communication as a heavily mediated/mediatized process, and the study of communication in crises, catastrophes and disasters into interplay with each other. More specifically, we focus our discussion on the *mediatization of crisis* in the media. In line with Schulz (2004), Hjarvard (2008), Krotz (2009) and Lundby (2009a) and many other scholars, we undertake the concept of mediatization as a key for analysing media-related communication in disaster conditions. As Lundby (2009b, 298) argues:

Although not the source, the way war and other serious global crises are reported and shaped through mediatizing techniques (Cottle, 2008a) may make a significant difference to the outcome and change the course of the event.

Six cases

In this article we discuss mediatization of crisis by looking specifically at three aspects connected with mediatization. Our first category is mediatization of social performance in the time of crisis, that is “*mediatization of media*” as Krotz (2009: 22) formulates it; secondly, we turn to *mediatization of the victimizer*, and the third aspect of discussion concerns the *mediatization of the victim*. This article is based upon our previous empirical case studies on crisis, communication and the media. Our work consists of several independent studies and projects that analyse different types of crises ranging from the MV Estonia passenger vessel disaster and the Asian Tsunami to the Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings in Finland (Sumiala-Seppänen & Stocchetti, 2005; Huhtala & Hakala, 2007; Hakala & Seeck, 2009; Pantti & Sumiala, 2009; Sumiala & Tikka, 2009; Sumiala, 2009; Hakala & Pedak, 2010). In this article we emphasise the discussion on mediatization through the analysis of six different crises. Our cases include:

1) The MV Estonia passenger vessel disaster on 28.9.1994. It resulted in the greatest toll of human life in the Baltic Sea in times of peace: 989 passengers, from 17 countries. Total 852 victims died: Missing 737 and Identified

bodies 95; Rescued 137. Death victims from Sweden 501; from Estonia 284 and from Finland 10.

2) Murder of Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Anna Lindh. Minister Anna Lindh was stabbed to death on 10.9.2003 in the department store NK where she was shopping with her friend. The killer was caught on September 24 and a court condemned him to a life sentence.

3) The Tsunami Indian Ocean earthquake and subsequent tsunami on 26.12. 2004. In total 286 000 people were killed in one of the worst natural disasters in history, mainly in Aceh province in Indonesia, although Sri Lanka, India and Thailand also suffered heavy losses in human lives due to the disaster. Thousands of tourists were killed from Western Countries; death victims from Finland 178, from Sweden 543, and from Norway 84.

4) The water crisis in the town of Nokia in south-western Finland from 28.11.2007-16.3.2008. An exceptionally long time, a period of three months, 8 000 people were taken ill and the everyday life of thousands of residents was made difficult due to contaminated water.

5) The Jokela school shooting on 7.11. 2007. At a high school where there were 500 students mostly between the ages of 13-18 students and staff. An 18 year old gunman killed 9 people: the head master and the official nurse of the school, one adult student and five school mates who were 16-18 years old and himself.

6) The Kauhajoki school shooting on 23.9. 2008. The University of Applied Sciences where there were 250 students mostly from 20-30 years old and staff members. A 22-year old gunman killed 11 people: eight students, one teacher and himself.

The six crises can be categorized distinctively according to: i) the level of the crisis (local, national, global or even glocal); ii) the cause of the crisis (nature, accident, human caused), and iii) the type of crisis (environmental, political, social, economical or cultural). In many cases the categories overlap. We acknowledge that there is a slight "Finnish bias" in the material. The disasters analysed in this context have taken place in Finland in four cases out of six; also a large amount of the empirical material (media material and interviews) have been gathered from the Finnish media (electronic, print, web) and from Finnish officials (police, non-governmental organizations, state and communal officials). However, we have also included cases that have had a large social impact in other Nordic countries as well. The murder of Anna

Lindh was characteristically a Swedish national tragedy, although it was also covered widely in other neighbouring countries like Finland (see e.g., Sumiala-Seppänen & Stocchetti, 2005). The MV Estonia passenger vessel disaster and the Asian Tsunami were disasters that affected several countries (see e.g., MV Estonia, Final Report, 1997; Raittila, 1996; Hillve & Weibull, 1996; Kivikuru & Nord, 2009). In the Estonia disaster the majority of victims were Swedish, Estonian and Finnish, and in the Tsunami there were also hundreds of victims from the Nordic countries. The reason to choose namely these crises is that they represent different types of catastrophes; there is a murder of the politician, two hate crimes, a natural catastrophe and a ship accident. We have also included the Nokia water crisis, because even though it was considered a serious disaster, it was never transformed into a mediatized crisis in the same way as the other cases (Seeck, Lavento & Hakala, 2008). In the conclusion we will discuss the Nokia case as an exception to the mediatization rule and consider what we can learn from it. By looking for variety in the material we hope to find richer empirical evidence for understanding the workings of mediatization in the time of crisis. We ask: how do these empirical cases help us to understand the workings of mediatization in today's media saturated world?

Mediatization: A definition

Before getting into detailed analysis on the processes and techniques of mediatization in the time of crisis we need to define more specifically what is meant here by the concept of mediatization. We begin with Friedrich Krotz's (2009: 24) definition:

Mediatization thus should be defined as a historical, ongoing, long-term process in which more and more media emerge and are institutionalized. *Mediatization* describes the process whereby communication refers to media and uses media so that media in the long run increasingly become relevant for the social construction of everyday life, society and culture as a whole. (Emphasis original.)

According to Krotz (2009: 27) mediatization is a process that has several preconditions. The processes of mediatization require other meta- (or should we say mega!) processes such as globalization, individualization, urbanization and commercialization (see also, Giddens, 1990; Beck, 1997). So it is

a historical concept, relevant specifically for the analysis of contemporary media-related social and cultural practices. In today's world mediatization means that our social and cultural life has become heavily influenced and shaped by the media on all levels: private, social and public. The media impacts our everyday life, it shapes our work and leisure, it affects how we form and maintain our social relations, how we establish groups and construct individual and social identities, and how our organizations and institutions function in private as well as on the public level in politics and the economy (see also, Krotz, 2009: 24).

Furthermore, Schulz (2004) proposes four different aspects of mediatization we find useful for our analysis here (cf. Schofield Clark, 2009: 87):

- 1) Media extend the natural limits of human communication capacities;
- 2) the media provide a substitute for social activities and social institutions;
- 3) media amalgamate with various non-media activities in social life, and
- 4) actors and organizations of all sectors of society accommodate to the media logic.

In this article mediatization refers to the idea that we experience conflicts, crises and disasters more and more through and in the media. The logic of mediatized communication – media logic – also has the power to influence us as individuals communicating about the crisis and experiencing the crisis as victimizers, victims, witnesses or bystanders (see e.g., Lundby, 2009b). Mediatization also shapes social and cultural practices activated in the crisis condition such as rituals of mourning (see e.g., Pantti & Sumiala, 2009).

Finally, mediatization has the power to make official institutions and non-governmental organizations adjust and accommodate to the media logic as these organizations try to manage the crisis (see e.g., McQuail, 2006; Cottle, 2005, 2006b, 2009). In this sense mediatization can make a significant difference to the outcome and change the course of the crisis (Lundby, 2009b: 298). To simplify, when discussing mediatization we have to take into account at least following variables:

- a) The type of the news event that thrusts mediatization process on move (accident, natural catastrophe, violent attack);
- b) the source that begins to mediatize the message (institutional media organization, officials, social media, people), and
- c) the type of the audience that is affected by a mediatized crisis (local, national, global, glocal).

Mediatization of media

If we want to understand the processes and techniques of mediatization in times of crises we need to begin with an analysis of media logic (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Altheide, 2004; Asp, 1990; Lundby, 2009c). Media logic in the mediatization of the crisis has several characteristics. First, when a crisis hits the society in today's world the media adopts a specific logic of communication – we call it a *crisis mode of communication*. This means that the media organizations re-organize themselves to full alert mode. On the news desks everyday media routines are displaced with the disaster mode of reporting. Teams are re-organized; extra staff is recruited; special issues and extra newscasts are published and broadcast as the story develops with new details (see also Liebes & Blonheim, 2005).

There are also different levels to the disaster mode of reporting. To give an example, when the 9/11 terrorist attack happened in 2001, the Finnish broadcaster, YLE turned to a full disaster mode of reporting with continuous news flow, but for the Tsunami and for the Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings there were “only” extra news casts aired (see e.g., Huhtala & Hakala, 2007; Hakala, 2009). In these cases the audience was invited into the marathon mode of disaster coverage; only the level of the disaster mode reporting was adjusted differently (see e.g., Liebes & Blondheim, 2005; Katz & Liebes, 2007; Sumiala & Tikka, 2009).

Previous studies on mediatized crises have underlined the role and importance of television as the key medium for the disaster marathon (see e.g., Liebes & Blonheim, 2005). With recent developments in digital communication technology, the role of the Internet and social media has become more central. We argue that the web has shaped mediatization of crises in at least three different ways: firstly, the web has challenged the role of time and space in communication of the crisis; secondly the web has challenged the role of mass communication as *the centre* of communication of the crisis, and thirdly the web has questioned the profound cultural and social dualisms structuring the communication of crisis such as the real and the virtual, truth and fiction, the authentic and the fabricated, technology and nature, and representation and reality (see e.g., Hine, 2003: 5).

Our empirical studies show that especially in the Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings, the web turned out to be the medium of most significance in the process of mediatization. The web-based social media such as

YouTube, MuroBBS, IRC Gallery, and the media house websites played a key role in communicating the crises (Hakala, 2009; Sumiala, Hakala & Tikka, 2010). In the Asian Tsunami disaster *sukellus.fi* was a site of significant importance in disseminating information about the crisis long before the official society and the mainstream media woke up to the scale and seriousness of the tragic event (Huhtala, Hakala, Laakso & Falck, 2005; Hakala & Seeck, 2009).

Mediatization in the digital era also demands re-evaluation of the relationships between different media. The school shootings represent a shift from deadline to online mediatization. Among the distinctive features of this type of mediatization online are continuous updating and a blurring of the boundaries between the different media covering the crisis. In Asian tsunami, Jokela and Kauhajoki, the role of the audience was highlighted, as “grassroots journalists” produced online material on the disasters and non-professional images taken by camera phones were widely published in different media as evidence of the crisis (see e.g., Gillmor, 2006). The boundaries between producer, message and receiver were reshaped and redefined in the process of mediatization of these crises (Hakala, 2009; Raittila et al., 2008, 2009; Sumiala, Hakala & Tikka, 2010).

Yet another aspect in the mediatization of the crisis is the rise in the mediatization of mourning and grief (see e.g., Pantti & Sumiala, 2009). It is not only information flows that matter in the mediatization of the social performance of the crisis, but the role of emotions is also important. Following both the Jokela and Kauhajoki shootings, various mourning groups were activated on the Internet. Groups commemorating the victims were established after both incidents in IRC Gallery and Facebook. In the Kauhajoki case, the first Facebook group was founded on the day of the shooting. Our interpretation is that it was compassion for the victims of the school shootings and their families that served as a social adhesive in the mediatization of the mourning communities (Sumiala, Hakala & Tikka, 2010).

The Internet provides numerous opportunities for people to share emotions stirred by the crisis. A number of different virtual pilgrimage sites were created in both the Jokela and Kauhajoki cases. Anyone with Internet access could leave their condolences, light a candle or sign a condolence letter on these virtual sites of pilgrimage. (Sumiala, Hakala & Tikka, 2010). In the mediatization of the crisis the rituals of mourning are transferred and dispersed from one medium to another containing and following a logic that

is very consistent with, for example, that observed in the murder of Anna Lindh (Sumiala-Seppänen & Stocchetti, 2005).

Users of the Internet have a need to share their thoughts and discuss feelings provoked by an incident. Various online discussion forums, such as Suomi24, offered room and a space for these expressions in the school shootings. This type of mediatized communication in crisis could be characterized as therapeutic (Sumiala, Hakala & Tikka, 2010). In the Tsunami case the virtual site for therapeutic discussion, the *Thairy.net* discussion forum, was organized in Finland by the *Friends of Thailand* organization. After the Tsunami other new sites for discussion and peer support were also organized on the Internet to help people who had suffered from the crisis. One example was the *Tisei.org* forum, which was organized by the psychiatric research group at the University of Utrecht in Holland (Huhtala & Hakala, 2007). These sites can be considered as examples of innovative uses of the social media as well as examples of the media's ability to amalgamate with various non-media activities (rituals of mourning, virtual therapy) in the time of crisis.

Mediatization of the victimizer

One of the most important aspects to be considered in the analysis of the mediatization of the crisis is the actions of actors and organizations (see also Schofield Clark, 2009: 87). The crucial figure in the crisis is *the victimizer*, that is, if there is one to be pointed out. Our six cases vary in this sense. Especially in accidents such as the case of the sinking of the MV Estonia passenger vessel, the question of "the cause" is a very complex issue.

According to the official explanation given by the Joint Accident Investigation Commission of Estonia, Finland and Sweden, the disaster was caused by a technical failure. The visor forced the ramp partly open due to mechanical interference between the visor and the ramp, inherent in the design, and the visor fell into the sea, pulling the ramp fully open (MV Estonia, Final Report, 1997). The official report was published as late as in 1997. Speculations around the accident, the cause and rumors around "who to blame" began immediately after the sinking. The instant reaction was confusion. At first there was no visual evidence of the sinking vessel; neither were there proper lists of passengers, even though 1500 people were on the vessel. The accident took place in the outer territorial waters of Finland, yet it was under the Finnish local authority for rescue. The confusion about responsibility

over the territory resulted in problems in communication. Finnish officials (namely the Prime Minister) could not (or did not want to) take an active role in the international media, because it was thought in Finland that political and administrative responsibility did not belong to the Finnish authorities, but to the Estonian or even to the Swedish authorities as the passenger vessel was under Estonian flag, but the most of the victims were Swedish (Toivonen, 2003; Huhtala & Hakala, 2007). In this kind of a sensitive political situation, press conferences were organized in Finland (in Turku) but without any political elite on the scene, with only the Finnish sea rescue forces present.

After the acute rescue operation was finished, a heated media debate about the responsibility took place in the Nordic and Baltic media. Various conspiracy theories were expounded. The MV Estonia disaster was considered to be sabotage. There were also rumors about gun smuggling and a political conspiracy between Russia and Estonia. A German film was made of the post-mortem of the disaster (see e.g. Hakala & Pedak, 2010). This is to say that in the case of MV Estonia the mediatization of the crisis was shaped heavily by the debates over the cause of the catastrophe (see e.g. Raittila 1996; Hillve & Weibull, 1996).

In the case of the murder of Anna Lindh or the Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings there was one person who could be identified as the killer. Anna Lindh was stabbed to death by a young Swedish man, who had an immigrant background. The stabbing took place in the middle of the day when Lindh was shopping with a friend in the Stockholm department store NK. The perpetrator was first sentenced to psychiatric care, but then put in prison to serve a life sentence for Ms. Lindh's murder.

The mediatization of the violent attack was not so much centered around the victimizer but rather the victim – Anna Lindh. Lindh's death was soon sacralized in the Swedish and Finnish media. In the visual narratives that were constructed out of her life she became the sacred victim who had given her life on behalf of the core values of Swedish society – freedom, human rights, gender equality and the idea of "*folkhem*" (Sumiala-Seppänen & Stochetti, 2005). The symbolic value of Lindh's death was underlined by the negative reaction to the publication of the image of Lindh lying on a stretcher, dead or dying.

The case of the Jokela and Kauhajoki shooters was totally the opposite. The gunmen turned out to be the most important sources of mediatization

of the crises (Hakala, 2009). The shooters planned and prepared their acts in a way that was easily mediatized in the media (Sumiala, Hakala & Tikka, 2010). It was powerful national and international media (YLE, MTV3, CNN, newspapers) that first confirmed the messages of the school shooting and created an impression of importance of the events with extra newscasts. Some users of social media already had given this information to reporters, but it was only after the mainstream media had confirmed the news that the messages began to disseminate on a new level confirming the mediatization effect. This is how the school shooting crises became mediatized not only on a national, but also on an international level. (Hakala, 2009; Sumiala & Tikka, 2009).

Mediatization of the victim

In the mediatization of the victim the demand for visual, personalized stories of the victims is explicit. In every disaster that has victims, there is a great thirst for survival stories and for greater meaning. This is a peculiar dimension of the mediatization of the crisis (see e.g., Chouliaraki, 2006; Pantti & Sumiala, 2009; Hakala & Pedak, 2010). In the case of the Estonia, the Tsunami, and the school shootings, the mainstream media circulated an explicit number of images and interviews of the victims that had survived the attack. Plenty of visual material was also recycled on families and friends shocked by the tragic events (Sumiala, 2009). The role of the victims and witnesses in the crisis is to present opportunities for the public to identify with the suffering and loss. The stories and images of survivors aim at helping the audience to establish an attachment to the crisis on an emotional level. In other words, mediatization of the crisis helps bystanders to make sense of the tragedy and participate in collective mourning (see e.g., Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006). This too, is an important function of mediatization.

One of the most famous survival stories circulating in the Swedish media after the MV Estonia disaster was the story of Sara and Kent. It was written by reporters and it spread all over the world. Many international media organizations wanted to buy the story for film (see e.g., Nordström, 1996; Raittila, 1996; Huhtala & Hakala, 2007: 36-37). The MV Estonia accident provides another illustration of the symbolic dimension of the collective loss. The MV Estonia disaster occurred at the same time when crews were filming *Titanic*. We believe it is not exaggeration to say that the film *Titanic*

sublimated the suffering of the Estonian people. The accident of the MV Estonia vessel was embedded with deep symbolic value. There is an old Estonian story in which a white ship is told to come and carry the Estonian people to freedom. The accident occurred only three years after the Estonian re-independence from the Soviet Union. The white ship, MV Estonia was for many the symbol of the whole nation and its freedom. From this perspective it is no surprise that the MV Estonia accident became a national catastrophe in a deeply traumatic manner (Hakala & Pedak, 2010).

Among the crucial questions in the analysis of the mediatization of the victim is to whom the media gives a voice, who is represented as an active agent, whose pictures are put in the story, and whose actions are followed? An analysis (Hakala, 2009) of the printed media on the Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings shows that the shooters rose as the absolute primary actors in the media coverage of the crises. A thorough analysis of the Jokela media material reveals that the Jokela shooter was the most important source, as well as the actor, for media material. After him came the victims, students and teachers of the Jokela high school (Hakala, 2009: 70). The strong role given to the victimizer in the media also had consequences for the victims. The ones who had survived had to face the shooter repeatedly, in the images circulating in the media. The Kauhajoki case differs from the Jokela in this matter. On the Kauhajoki reporting, the authorities were given more visibility in the media. It was the official society that was contrasted to the shooter, not the victims. The most important official actors and sources, during the ten days following the attack in the Kauhajoki case, were the Interior Minister, the Chief of Investigation from the National Bureau of Investigation, and the Chief of Police (Hakala, 2009).

The question of representation in the mediatization of the victim also raises up the issue of the ethics. In the case of the Tsunami, there was an army of journalists at Helsinki airport hunting for interviews from the people who had survived the disaster and had been evacuated from Thailand. In the MV Estonia vessel disaster, journalists tried to get into hospitals to interview survivors. In cases such as Estonia, Tsunami and Jokela severe criticism was levelled against the way the media had attempted to mediatize the victims (Raittila, 1996; Huhtala & Hakala, 2007). According to the critiques there was not enough respect for individual suffering and need for intimacy in the time of personal tragedy. The most explicit criticism concerned unethical ways of gathering information, publishing of images that

had been perceived as humiliating and interviewing of underage informants who had been in shock and who had not been given permission to give interviews by their guardians.

Conditions for mediatization

In contemporary media society, public crises are indeed always constructed by and through the media, which is why they are called *mediatized crises*. In a crisis mediatization affects all the key actors and parties involved. In this article we have focused namely on the media, the victimizer (or the cause) and the victim. Our six cases illustrate that mediatization of the crisis depends on several factors. First, mediatization takes slightly different forms depending on the type of the crisis. In the natural disaster, such as in the Tsunami, the number of the victims was great, but there was no individual cause for the catastrophe, but the nature. In the case of the sinking of the MV Estonia passenger vessel the question of the cause was more complex issue. Different types of explanations, accusations and speculations affected mediatization process. In the murder of Anna Lindh and in the Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings there was an individual perpetrator who had committed a crime. In the cases of the school shootings, the media gave a large amount of visibility to the killer. The both killers were competent users of the social media. They also used their skills to disseminate their messages of hate and destruction before committing the crimes. In the case of the murder of Anna Lindh, the most explicit media visibility was given to the tragic fate of the minister. Lindh, not the perpetrator, was given the central role in the process of mediatization of her death. She became the sacred victim of the tragic event.

Hence, we argue that there is a relationship between the category of the victim and mediatization of a crisis. The general rule can be formulated in a following manner: the more the victims, the stronger the media's interest. The seriousness of the crisis is thus dependent on the number of deaths. Thousands of people were killed in the Tsunami, hundreds were drowned as the MV Estonia sank. But the numbers are not enough. Also important is the possibility to establish an attachment to the crisis, to identify with the suffering and loss. The history, place and context shape the process of identification (see e.g., Butler 2003). The unexpected death of the young person or the violent death of the political leader is considered to be a highly

tragic event in the logic of the media disaster (see e.g. Katz & Liebes, 2007). Among other victims, the Tsunami and the MV Estonia killed together thousands of tourists. Many in the Nordic countries can easily relate to the position of the tourist. Especially dramatic for a society is a crisis caused by the youth. The school shootings are sad examples of the crimes committed by young people. Also worth notifying is the physical context of these disasters; the school. The school carries deep symbolic meanings in a welfare society. The school has a crucial role in socializing young people to the core values of the Finnish society. The Jokela and Kauhajoki rampage shootings cost twenty lives, but they also violated the idea of the school as a safe place and the ideal of equal opportunities for all. From the symbolic perspective the rampage shootings revealed vulnerability of the society (Hakala, 2009; Sumiala & Tikka, 2009).

In the process of mediatization the role of the media (as a context, sphere and technology) is manifold. The media transforms a tragic news event into a crisis through a certain logic the catastrophe mode of reporting, a specific media logic that is activated in crisis situations (Liebes & Blondheim, 2005). The mediatized crisis demands personal, dramatic and shocking stories. New angles, images and people are required to keep the disaster mode alive. Also the technology matters as a context and a means of crisis communication. Our six empirical cases illustrate that especially in the crises of the new millennium the role of the Internet and social media has become more crucial. In the most recent crises: Tsunami, Jokela and Kauhajoki school shootings, the media logic has been shaped by digital communication technology and the Internet (Huhtala et al., 2005; Mörä, 2005). Alongside media professionals from large media houses, the users of the Internet also took an active role in communicating about the crisis.

The Internet in this sense extended the natural limits of mainstream media communication capacities, an important aspect of mediatization. From the perspective of the victims the media also provided a substitute for social activities and social institutions and amalgamated with certain traditionally non-media activities in social life by offering a space to establish sites of mourning and grief as well as peer-support. In other words, the media offered people a ritual time and space to express emotions of grief, sorrow and shock in the time of crisis. This is a dimension we could name mediatization of emotions (see also Schofield Clark, 2009: 87).

However, it should be recognized that not all catastrophes and disasters transform into mediatized crises. We have argued in this article that to qualify as a mediatized crisis the news event has to have strong visual, affective and dramatic implications. The role of the victim as a visible and a visual evidence and a reference point to identification is crucial in this sense. The role of the victimizer is also important, if only there is one. The disaster mode of reporting demands dramatic details as material for mediatization. This is why the MV Estonia ship accident, the murder of Anna Lindh, the Asian Tsunami, and the Jokela and Kauhajoki shootings all qualify as mediatized crises. They all had victims to show to make out of the disaster story; in many of them there was also a perpetrator or speculation about the cause.

The question of the Nokia water crisis is more complicated issue. It was not that the accident was a minor incident. Fresh water is fundamental for human well-being. Contamination of the water can have serious consequences; it can even cause deaths. The number of people who became ill because of the contaminated water was fairly high, nearly 10 000 people; some people even died because of the contaminated water. The crisis turned catastrophic because the local people did not know for five days that the water was so contaminated and contagious that only one glass of water could induce a diarrhoea and other stomach aches. The authorities were slow in distributing information and taking political responsibility over the crisis. Thousands of suffering children, adults and aged women/men were sick, some of them for many months. Finally, it was discovered that the contamination was caused by technical and human error. Someone had made a mistake at the waterworks. Nevertheless the media interest, especially on the national level, was noticeably weak (Seeck, Lavento & Hakala, 2008). Why?

In order to explain the lack of mediatization in the Nokia case we have to go back to “the cause”, responsibility and to the victims. Firstly, visual, personalized stories with high dramatic value were mostly absent in the media coverage of the crisis. The victims of the Nokia water crisis, sick people vomiting and suffering from diarrhoea in their homes were mostly invisible on the news. (Seeck, Lavento & Hakala, 2008). There were only two dramatic peaks in the national news media. The first example of the dramatic moment took place on Finnish Independence Day, December 6th. The political, economic and cultural elite was celebrating the 90th anniversary of Finland. This media event was dramatized in the news against the Nokia town hospital crowded with sick people suffering from diarrhoea. The dramatic

conflict with ideals and the reality of the welfare state was communicated by contrasting the sick citizens against the elites celebrating the Nation. The other dramatic moment was reached when the armed forces joined the town rescue forces to deliver clean water to inhabitants. It was as if civil society could not manage on its own to deliver clean water. The army with water tanks also offered visual material for the media to illustrate the crisis (Seeck, Lavento & Hakala 2008). Secondly, the media had difficulties in handling the issue of responsibility. There was no sole individual or institution to blame for the accident – no face for the victimizer or for “the cause”. An illegal pipe connecting the water supply and the waste water system had been in place for 20 years. However, even after careful police examination no one could tell who had built this pipe and made the mistake at the first place during the time of the reconstruction of the waterworks. So, the crisis was a result of technical and human error. The bureaucrats and the political leaders on the local level were unprepared or unwilling to take political responsibility over the catastrophe. As a result the national media lost its interest and the catastrophe was soon converted into a local problem and an information crisis (Seeck, Lavento & Hakala 2008).

Finally, from the point of view of the audience, it is difficult to escape mediatized crises in the media society, but it is only so much humiliation, blood and flesh we can take as we read and watch the disaster news while sitting at our breakfast tables or watching the evening news or surfing on the Internet. One of the crucial dilemmas for the media and other parties involved in the mediatization of the crisis is the following: how to mediatize a crisis in case there are no dead or visibly wounded victims available, or in case the ones available are the kinds we do not want to see or hear about? In the end the mediatization as a media-related cultural and social practice is always dependent on the fact that the crisis does not appear too disgusting to us. Otherwise there is a danger that we will just close our eyes from it. And that for the media society would be the crisis of the worst kind. Non-mediatizable.

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