

## **“We Are One”: Mediatized Death Rituals and the Recognition of Marginalized Others**

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Drawing on the analytics of grievability, an analytical framework for the study of mediatized death, this article analyzes the media coverage of the massacres at Pulse LGBT+ nightclub (Orlando, Florida, 2016) and Al-Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre (Christchurch, New Zealand, 2019). These were two moments of crisis—when violence was directed toward marginalized Others (in terms of sexual orientation, ethnic background, or religion)—that were followed by public, collective mourning rituals performed synergically by the state and the media. These mediatized mourning rituals advocated for recognizing marginalized Others as belonging to broader communities and as worthy of security and solidarity, despite the differences that regularly outcast these Others. The mediatized death rituals following these attacks facilitated what I call Benevolent Grief—the utilization of grief for reintegration and recognition of “the Other” as “part of us.”

*Keywords: mediatized rituals, mourning rituals, rites of passage, Pulse shooting, Christchurch attacks*

On June 12, 2016, a man opened fire inside Pulse, a LGBT+ nightclub in Orlando, Florida, killing 49 people and injuring 53 others. This was the deadliest shooting incident in U.S. history until that day. On March 15, 2019, a gunman killed 51 and injured 49 others in two mosques in Christchurch, NZ. This was the deadliest shooting incident in modern New Zealand history. These two attacks were aimed against marginalized subcommunities whose members have long struggled to blend in and get recognized as equal members of their national communities. The aim of these attacks was to threaten, injure, and outcast members of these two subcultures. In return, these two attacks resulted in national rituals and tributes that recognized and affirmed the belonging of these subcommunities to larger, consolidated national communities. Thus, a violent lethal act of exclusion triggered the opposite result—rejection of the separatist stance and endorsement of an inclusionary stance of unity despite diversity. In both cases, this was facilitated by mediatized mourning rituals.

The study of mourning rituals points to their consolidating function to bring survivors together and to reunite despite the loss the community suffered (Hertz, 1960; Huntington & Metcalf, 1991). Mourning rituals have become mediatized, and in contemporary societies, they are performed, inter alia, in and by

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the media (Morse, 2017; Pantti & Sumiala, 2009; Sumiala, 2012, 2017). However, studies about the function of mediatized mourning rituals in the aftermath of violent death have shown that these rituals are not always cohesive and harmonious. Violent death events expose schisms in society. They reveal tensions between rival parties and invite moral judgement with regards to the various protagonists, whether they have been complicit, negligent, wrongful, or benevolent. Accordingly, mediatized mourning rituals, sometimes, not always, establish and reaffirm hierarchies of life and death, as they use death and mourning to construct what counts as grievable life (Chouliaraki, 2006; Morse, 2017, 2018). Furthermore, such rituals sometime result in a division between “us” and “them” (Sumiala & Räisä, 2020).

The very fact that a mediatized mourning ritual is performed is a statement in itself, conveying the message that the dead are grievable, and that they belong to an (imagined) community that stands together and shares values, narrative, and history. When such rituals are not performed, the message is one of exclusion, namely, that this death does not matter and that the dead are not grievable. Disregarding death marks the dead as the Other whose death—and arguably whose humanness—is not recognized (Morse, 2018).

This article studies the media coverage of two mass violent deadly attacks against marginalized groups and explores the possibilities proposed by mediatized mourning rituals to integrate the spectators and the victims as a united—yet diversified—community. Looking at the media coverage of the massacres at Pulse LGBT+ nightclub (henceforth: the Pulse shooting) and at Al-Noor and Linwood Mosques (henceforth: Christchurch attacks), I argue that these moments of crisis—when violence was directed toward marginalized Others (in terms of sexual orientation, ethnic background, or religion) and schisms in society were exposed—served as an opportunity to reflect on questions of identity and mutual commitment. The media events (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Katz & Liebes, 2007) in the aftermath of these attacks were mediatized mourning rituals that facilitated the recognition of the marginalized Others as belonging to their broader communities, and as worthy of security and solidarity, despite the differences that regularly outcast these Others. These were hybrid media events (Sumiala, Tikka, Huhtamäki & Valaskivi, 2016; Sumiala & Valaskivi, 2018; Sumiala, Valaskivi, Tikka, & Huhtamäki, 2018) not only in terms of the performing actors—a synergy between the state and various media outlets—but also in terms of its message that celebrated cultural hybridity and recognized diversity as a welcomed tenet of society (Kraidy, 2006).

In what follows, I discuss the function of mourning rituals as rites of passage (Turner, 1969; Van Gennep, 1960) and their appropriation by the media (Sumiala, 2012; Sumiala & Räisä, 2020). I then introduce the analytics of grievability, an analytical framework developed for the study of television coverage of mass violent death (Morse, 2017, 2018). This analytical framework informs the analysis of the media coverage of the Pulse shooting and the Christchurch attacks. In the discussion, I argue that the mediatized mourning rituals in their aftermath of these deadly attacks function as initiation rites that trigger the manifestation of benevolent grief that recognizes marginalized Other as “part of us.”

### **Mourning Rituals**

Rituals are a mechanism of social cohesion. They construct what is perceived to be the commonality of a group of individuals and so inform their imagination as belonging to a unified whole. Rituals operate in two intertwined fashions—performance and symbolic system: (1) their performance organizes space and time and

assembles (all) members of the community in a shared location at the same time and (2) rituals facilitate the distribution of a shared symbolic system that constructs shared narratives and myths and reinforce shared values (Lule, 2001; Sumiala, 2012). Together, these two aspects present the community with an image of itself (Couldry, 2002; Rothenbuhler, 1998). Studies of rituals point to their function to preserve the social order, as they reaffirm the collective identity of the community. However, some rituals are performed to facilitate social change (Sumiala, 2012). Such are rites of passage that were described by Turner (1969) and Van Gennep (1960) as “rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age” (as cited in Turner, 1969, p. 94). Rites of passage comprise three phases: (1) separation—a detachment from the prevailing social order and suspension of the daily routine; (2) liminal phase—when transition takes place and shape; and (3) reintegration—the completion of the transition and a return to a (new) social order. In these rituals, individuals, or a group of individuals, undergo a social transition from one status to another. As this article studies the integration of marginalized groups, this theoretical framework is fundamental for this study.

Death-related rituals are rites of passage. However, unlike other rites of passage such as those that mark the coming of age, weddings and births, in which the ritual-subjects return to their original community in a different status, the ritual-subjects in death-related rituals—the dead—depart from their original community and the community re-integrates without them. The new social order acknowledged by these rituals is the eternal void the dead leave in their departure. In this regard, death-related rituals are for the living survivors and not for the ritual-subjects (Van Gennep, 1960).

The article argues that the mediatized mourning rituals performed in the aftermath of the Pulse shooting and the Christchurch attacks functioned as initiation rituals in which the ritual-subjects are integrated into the greater collective of the community, sometimes by making a painful sacrifice or undergoing a sore experience.

### **Mediatized Mourning Rituals Following Terrorism**

In a modern society, the media are the institution that has obtained the prerogative to perform large-scale rituals, a role that was previously assigned to religious or state institutions (Hjarvard, 2008). The media have the authority to summon all members of the community together in a shared experience, and the media are the objects individuals gather around to participate in mass rituals (Sumiala, 2012). Hjarvard (2008) describes the emergence of the media as a prominent social institution as a process of mediatization.

In media and communications theory, Dayan and Katz (1992) famously coined the term media events to capture these exceptional events, usually of ceremonial nature, that take place outside the media and are ritualized by the media. Media events summon vast audiences. The television broadcast serves “as an invitation—even a command—to stop their [the audience’s] daily routines and join in a holiday experience” (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p. 1). The function of this television genre is demarcating the transition from ordinary to extraordinary, from the profane to the sacred. As such, this television genre corresponds with the function of traditional rituals to “integrate societies in a collective heartbeat and evoke a renewal of loyalty to the society and its legitimate authority” (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p. 9).

While the term media event originally theorized festive events like coronation and other celebrations, other scholars of media events studied their performance in the light of tragic events like assassinations and collective mourning (Katz & Liebes, 2007; Morse, 2017; Zelizer, 1992). These death-related media events function as modern rites of passage performed in and by the media (Sumiala & Räisä, 2020). Such events command the audience to suspend the daily routine, to reiterate the community's grand myths, to reflect on shared values, and to reaffirm commitment of the community to one another (Lule, 2001; Morse, 2017; Pantti & Sumiala, 2009).

This proposition assumes positive outcomes to mediatized death rituals. Despite the negative rupture associated with this kind of events, and regardless of their negative consequences, acts of terrorism can be leveraged to function positively. And yet, the study of death-related media rituals has shown that this is not always the case. Even when the whole world comes together in a shared act of viewing, media events in the aftermath of disastrous events can function as disjunctive mechanism rather than a uniting one. Sometimes, media events in the aftermath of such terror attacks can reinforce a hierarchy between groups and mark a distinction between "us" and "them." For example, the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, were followed by global mourning, but Chouliaraki (2006) argues that the Western media coverage of the events created a distinction between the affluent safe West and the rest. More recent terror attacks, like the one on the headquarters of the Charlie Hebdo in Paris (2015), marked a division between the French cartoonists and the other victims in this series of attacks (Sumiala, 2017). Furthermore, the lack of media attention to deadly attacks that took place in Nigeria simultaneously with the Charlie Hebdo attack further established hierarchies of life and death, as it constructed only some lives as grievable (Morse, 2018).

Sumiala and Räisä (2020) point to the three phases proposed by Van Gennep and Turner and their implementation by the media in the aftermath of terror attacks. The separation is enacted at the rupture of the attack. This act proclaims the break from the ordinary and coerces the media to announce the move to the extraordinary. When news media switch to disaster marathon mode (Liebes, 1998)—a live, on-going, open-ended broadcasting from the scene of the attack—they signal the switch to the liminal phase. The liminal phase fades out as reports turn to public mourning, funerals, and memorial services. This is the third and final phase, when (new) order is restored. Throughout these phases, the media serve as a modern, collective shaman (Chouliaraki, 2006), whose role is to sooth the trauma triggered by the attack.

In what follows, I analyze the news coverage of the Pulse shooting and the Christchurch attacks, by combining Sumiala and Räisä's (2020) analysis of the trajectory of mediatized terrorism as a rite of passage with the analytics of grievability (Morse, 2017).

### **Methodology**

The current study is based on a selection of case studies. A case study approach is useful when we want to better understand a phenomenon by thoroughly investigating a small number of cases (Gerring, 2006). The strategy for case selection is criterion sampling, which advises to select the cases according to a predetermined criterion, based on the theory that informs and motivates the research (Patton, 1990). The

selected cases are typical cases, as each case “exemplifies what is considered to be a typical set of values, given some general understanding of a phenomenon” (Gerring, 2006, p. 91).

The two case studies selected for this article are the Pulse shooting and the Christchurch attacks. Both attacks took place in Western countries, by a single gunman, and did not rely on an organizational infrastructure. The single perpetrator targeted marginalized subcommunities in a venue perceived as safe for members of these communities—a place perceived as a space where they could exercise their faith and realize their identities. And, both these attacks were followed by mediatized mourning rituals that were produced in and by the media in a synergy with the state. However, unlike many mediatized terror attacks that took place in Western countries, the common perception of exchangeability of spectators and sufferers was not applied, since the targeted victims were members of marginalized subcommunities. Contrary to attacks against the general public, when the perpetrators wish to spread anxiety among wide circles, in these two attacks, the notion that “the victim could have been anyone” (Lule, 2002, p. 282) was diminished. Spectators, members of the majority group, knew from the very beginning that they, unlike the victims, were safe and that the vulnerability of the victims did not fully apply to them.

Materials for this study were collected from online archives during July 2020, that is, not in real time. I used Google and YouTube search engines to trace reports about the two attacks, from the beginning of each attack, shortly after the moments of rupture, when early reports about the shootings started to emerge, until the gradual return to the new normal, a week or two after the attacks befell. For the Pulse attack, I used keywords such as “Pulse attack,” “Orlando Shooting,” and “Orlando massacre.” For the Christchurch attack, I used keywords such as “Christchurch attack” and “Christchurch massacre.” From the retrieved results, 20 items were sampled for the Pulse shooting and 28 items for the Christchurch attacks. These were narrowed down to 19 items, until saturation, matching the phases of the news coverage as a rite of passage, as explained earlier—breaking news, manifestations of mourning, solidarity or reflection and the leaders’ statements, prioritizing video reports that correspond with television genres, to which the analytics of grievability pertains.

The study of rituals requires analysis of both content and conduct, of text and context, since rituals are not only how language and text represent concepts but also the setting in which such representations appear; it is not only about what is being communicated, but also about the situation and atmosphere in which things are being communicated. Elsewhere, I developed the analytics of grievability to study the meaning embedded in collective mourning rituals performed in and by the media (Morse, 2017, 2018). Developed for televisual texts from the start, the analytics of grievability draws on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA; Chouliaraki, 2006; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2006) that incorporates analysis of text, discursive practices, and social practices. It studies both verbal and visual texts (what appears on screen) and performance in terms of the format and genres employed to explicate how televisual news-media responses to mass violent death position sufferers vis-à-vis spectators. Thus, the analysis does not incorporate a strict discourse analysis as such, but rather it analyzes all these elements as they function together to position the spectators vis-à-vis the sufferers.

The analytics of grievability addresses three dimensions whose intertwinement constructs death as grievable. (1) The construction of the dead as human: the representations of the dead and the informational

and emotional tropes that allow the spectators to know them and mourn their death. Do the media provide information like names, pictures and personal stories of the dead that invite the spectators to mourn them? (2) Facilitating spatiotemporal commonality: the formats of broadcasting and the extent to which they construct shared (or separate) time and space. What is the symbolic distance between spectators and sufferers the media ritual facilitates? And (3) the production of a witnessable account: the journalistic practices that position the spectators as eyewitnesses who can engage with the scene of suffering and morally respond to it (if at all). What are the feelings and emotions elicited by the language, images, and sound and what is the normative position proposed by the reports?

Breaking mediatized mourning rituals into separate phases is a bit stilted. There is no clear cut between these phases, and their functions sometimes overlap, so it will be wrong to argue that each phase hosts a defined function. However, the analysis divides the various media performances according to the different properties that characterize each phase of these rites of passage in an instrumental manner. Since this article is interested in how mediatized mourning rituals function as rite of passage in the service of social change, the analysis reorganizes the analytics of grievability in line with the three phases of rites of passage: the moment of rupture and the invitation to gather around the media and engage with the scene of suffering; the liminal phase and the allocation of symbolic resources to mourn the dead and reflect on shared values; and reintegration as the culmination of self-reflection when the proposition to witness the event and engage with the sufferers is elevated to a normative position about the interactions between spectator and sufferers.

### **The Rupture—Facilitating Spatiotemporal Commonality**

As scholars of terrorism and media have noted, terrorism is a coerced collaboration between the perpetrators and the media (Weimann & Winn, 1993). The perpetrators choose the time and location of the attack, and the media are coerced to respond. The attacks, thus, are the moment of rupture. They mark the beginning of the ritual process (Sumiala & Räisä, 2020). As the analysis shows, in the two cases, the attacks were followed by mediatized mourning rituals.

One of the tenets of rituals is the break away from the ordinary daily routine and the gathering in a shared space. In the analytics of grievability, the facilitation of a spatiotemporal commonality pertains to the television formats that proclaim the irregularity of the moment and suspend the daily routine. The media summon the spectators to gather around the devices and facilitate the constitution of a shared time. In terms of news production, the moment of rupture is associated with the format of breaking news and the switch to the disaster marathon mode of reporting (Liebes, 1998). Breaking news invites the public to gather around the media and insinuates that everybody does the same (Sumiala, 2012). The deaths of the victims of the Pulse shooting and the Christchurch attacks, like many other Western mass violent deaths, were acknowledged by the media—and by the political leaderships—in real time, soon after they happened.

### ***The Pulse Shooting***

As the news about the shooting in Orlando broke, they immediately became “breaking news” on American news media. We can see it in MSNBC report (MSNBC, 2016), from June 12, 2016, in Figures 1–4.

A “Breaking News” banner filled the screen, as a symbolic break from the preplanned broadcasting schedule (Figure 1). The anchor addressed the audience to report on the emerging event: “Good morning, I’m Dara Brown. There is breaking news at this hour from Orlando, where there were reports of a shooting in a nightclub in that city” (MSNBC, 2016, 0:04; see Figure 2). A satellite imagery pointed to the location (Figure 3). At the bottom of the frame, there was a red strip, with succinct information about the nature of the breaking news, and a “Live” caption to indicate that the event unfolded in real time (Figures 2–4). The satellite imagery was later replaced by footage from the streets of Orlando, outside the nightclub (Figure 4). The anchor then turned, live, to the reporter at the scene: “NBC’s Sara Dallof is on the phone near the scene. Good morning to you, Sara. What are you seeing in Orlando?” (MSNBC, 2016, 0:10)



*Figure 1. The moment of rupture (MSNBC, 2016, 0:03).*



*Figure 2. Breaking news (MSNBC, 2016, 0:04).*



**Figure 3. Satellite imagery (MSNBC, 2016, 0:14).**



**Figure 4. Live report from the scene as events unfold (MSNBC, 2016, 0:29).**

This performance marks the beginning of the attack as a disaster marathon. The media establish a communication channel that allows the spectators to engage directly with the scene of the attack.

The next day (June 13, 2016), news teams settled outside Pulse nightclub, as we can see in David Muir's report for ABC (ABC News, 2016c; Figure 5): The reporter was located at the scene and delivered his report in real time, while "choppers are still in the air," in his words (ABC News, 2016c, 0:53). Muir's report further constructed a sense of spatiotemporal commonality by stressing that "America is, *just now*, coming to grips with what unfolded *here*. . . *just over my shoulder here* [pointing at the nightclub]" (ABC News, 2016c, 0:03; emphasis added).

Later, testimonies of eyewitnesses were collected and distributed (Figure 6). The survivors recounted their experience and enabled the spectators to imagine what was it like to be "there," in the midst of the horror (see also ABC News, 2016b).





**Figure 5. Live report from the scene (ABC, 2016c, 0:00).**



**Figure 6. Eyewitness testimony (ABC, 2016c, 1:39).**

### ***The Christchurch Attacks***

The same format of reporting was used in the coverage of the Christchurch attacks (March 15, 2019). On TV 3 (CBS News, 2019), the news anchor, Mitch McCann, disrupted the broadcasting routine to report live about the unfolding events. A “Live” banner popped up (Figure 8), and a “Breaking News” banner appeared on the screen (Figures 7–10). McCann addressed the audience:

Welcome back to this Newshub breaking news special. A gunman with an automatic weapon has opened fire on a mosque in central Christchurch. We are on standby for a statement from the Prime Minister at four o’clock. . . . Newshub reporter, Erin Speedy, is at Christchurch hospital right now. I’m going to go live to her. Erin, what is the latest you’re hearing?” (CBS News, 2019, 0:01–0:55)



**Figure 7. Breaking news (CBS News, 2019, 0:05).**



**Figure 8. Live reporting on unfolding events (CBS News, 2019, 0:53).**



**Figure 9. Live report from the scenes of happening (CBS News, 2019, 0:56).**



**Figure 10. Eyewitness testimony (CBS News, 2019, 4:37).**

Later the anchor read the police's statement, "that has come out in the last couple of minutes," in his words (CBS News, 2019, 13:25). The anchor then turned to a reporter on location to learn more from eyewitnesses, who described what had happened (Figure 10). By attuning to the media, spectators could connect directly to the events that took place on the multiple scenes, in real time, as they unfolded.

As the news broadcasts continued, more testimonies poured in. This time these were testimonies of direct victims who survived the attacks. On Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC News, 2019), the news anchor interviewed one of the survivors, Mr. Shoaib Gani, who described how he crawled to the corner of the mosque to hide, and how he called for help:

It was the staring to the prayer when I heard gunshot from outside the mosque . . . I saw people die, falling on the floor, with blood in their head. . . . And everybody then fell to the ground, starting to crawl, and I could see people getting shot in the head, legs, body, shoulders . . . (CBC News, 2019, 2:50–3:53)

Under the framework of the analytics of grievability, personal testimonies offered by the survivors, like the one delivered by Shoaib Gani, correspond with the notion of witnessing text, that is, a text that "creates presence at the event, which produces experience out of discourse" (Frosh, 2006, p. 274). These testimonies enable the audience to imagine themselves as if they undergo the same experience. These personal accounts provide the point of view of people who were there at the scene and experienced the horror first handedly. By engaging with the survivors' testimonies, the audience can imagine the experience of impending death. Such testimonies "proclaim experiences that cannot be share[d] . . . [and] immortalize events that are uniquely tied to the mortal bodies of those who went through them" (Peters, 2001, p. 713).

To sum up, all these journalistic practices give a sense of spatiotemporal commonality. The switch to disaster marathon mode of reporting shortly after the attacks began served as an invitation to connect to the media, follow the events in real time, and get a sense of "being there." The detailed testimonies of eyewitnesses informed the spectators how it felt to undergo the experience on the ground.

### **Liminal Phase—Hiatus, Reflection, and Moral Lesson**

In mourning rituals, the liminal phase is the stage when the dead depart from the community. This is the stage of farewell gestures like eulogies and obituaries that recognize the departing individuals as belonging to their community. A stage for the survivors to collectively reflect on communal values. Accordingly, the analysis contains two elements: (1) mourning gestures, which correspond with the construction of the dead as human, and (2) the beginning of collective reflection, which culminated in the leaders' address in the third phase of reintegration.

Central to the analytics of grievability is the construction of the dead as human. Grievable death is a death recognized as a loss and entails ritualistic performances that acknowledge the humanness of the person who died (Butler, 2004; Morse, 2017). To consider death as grievable, we need to look into the tropes that portray the dead person as someone whose life mattered, as someone who lead meaningful life.

Regularly, outside the news, the collective invitation to grieve for the dead is fulfilled by obituaries. Obituaries offer a succinct description of a person's life and create the informational infrastructure for mourning. Obituaries contain names and faces of the dead and other information about their personal history. Accordingly, the analysis examines whether the journalistic coverage fulfills this function and provides the informational infrastructure to acknowledge the humanness of the dead and mourn them. When the media allocate time and symbolic resources to put forward an invitation to know the dead as a person, and to grieve for them, they produce, what I call, obituarial news.

#### *The Pulse Shooting*

The ultimate manifestation of obituarial news is the unusual gesture of CNN's correspondent, Anderson Cooper (CNN, 2016). In this report, Cooper stood nearby the Pulse nightclub and addressed the audience:

In the next two hours, we want to try to keep the focus where we think it belongs, on the people whose lives were cut short. I'm going to start tonight by honoring them. They are more than a list of names. They are people who loved and were loved. They are people with family and friends, and dreams. The truth is we don't know much about some of them, but we want you to hear their names and a little bit about who they were. (CNN, 2016, 0:00–0:15)

Cooper then read the names of the 49 victims, followed by a short informative comment about each of them. Pictures of some of the victims appeared on screen (Figures 11–12).



**Figure 11.** *Anderson Cooper reads names of the victims (CNN, 2016, 0:02).*



**Figure 12.** *Victims' names and images on screen (CNN, 2016, 0:28).*

#### *The Christchurch Attacks*

My search in the online archives did not retrieve similar television gestures of naming all the victims of the Christchurch attack. The New Zealand Herald report focused on selected victims and accounted for their lost lives: "Sayyad Milne, a 14-year-old boy, is one of the victims. His father described him as 'brave little soldier.' He was a football lover who can no longer fulfil any of his dreams" (NZ Herald, 2019, 0:47–1:00; Figure 13).



**Figure 13. Victims personal story and image (NZ Herald, 0:47).**

As these examples show, the news media retreated momentarily from the constant updating on latest developments and devoted airtime to inform about the people who were killed, encouraging the spectators “to locate the victims as a real person in a specific time and place” (Lule, 1988, p. 12) and thus claiming their grievability.

### **Collective Mourning and Reflection**

In the liminal phase, the community self-reflects on the shared values that hold its members together and performs the boundary work of recognizing its members. In the two cases analyzed here, shortly after the moment of rupture, the leaders of both nations gave public announcements via the media that commenced collective reflection. Concurrently, there were institutional and sporadic manifestations of public mourning and solidarity, in addition to the commemoration of the individuals who lost their lives. The mourning manifestations and acts of reflection were sometimes bundled together. I begin with collective mourning manifestations and then move to the acts of reflection.

#### ***Collective Mourning***

##### ***The Pulse Shooting***

The Tony Awards ceremony is, in itself, a classic media event—a public ceremony that takes place outside the media but is staged for the media and is promoted by them. The Tony Awards ceremony that was conducted a day after the Pulse shooting deviated from the protocolled ceremony and paid tribute to the victims. This deviation renders the essence of the liminal phase, when the structured order is suspended and reflection moves in. As we can see in the ABC report, James Corden, the ceremony’s host, opened it with the following statement (ABC News, 2016d; Figure 14):



All we can say is you are not on your own right now. Your tragedy is our tragedy. Theatre is a place where every race, creed, sexuality and gender is equal, is embraced and is loved. Hate will never win. Together, we have to make sure of that. Tonight's show stands as a symbol and a celebration of that principle. This is the Tony Awards. (ABC News, 2016d, 0:33–1:01)

Some of the award winners, like Lin-Manuel Miranda, dedicated their screen time to pay tribute to the victims (Figure 15). This pause and break from the scripted ceremony were acts of recognition. They acknowledged the victims as "part of us," as worthy of solidarity whose death was a break of the order. Furthermore, these gestures made a moral-political statement, namely, that assault on people because their sexual orientation cannot be tolerated.



**Figure 14. Tribute at the Tony Awards ceremony (ABC News 2016d, 0:33).**



**Figure 15. Tribute at the Tony Awards ceremony (ABC News 2016d, 1:30).**

*The Christchurch Attacks*

In New Zealand, mourning gestures following the Christchurch attacks included laying flowers in street corners as acts of collective mourning and solidarity (NZ Herald, 2019). In addition, the local gestures included a public performances of Haka ceremonial dances. These folk Māori dances are local acts of solidarity and respect that were appropriated to honor and acknowledge the victims. Such improvised gestures took place on various public places in New Zealand in the days following the Christchurch attacks and were picked up by the media, as we can see in BBC report from March 17, 2019 (BBC News, 2019a; Figures 16–17).

In addition to the sporadic gestures, a more institutional manifestation of collective mourning and solidarity took place. A week after the attacks, a mass prayer was held in Hagley Park in Christchurch. In this public Muslim prayer, the Imam conducted the ceremony that was broadcast live, as it was held on national television (TVNZ) and on global news outlets like the BBC and CNN. A red, heart-shaped sign appeared at the upper right corner of the screen with the caption “A nation reflects” (BBC News, 2019b; Figure 18).



**Figure 16. Haka ceremony (BBC News, 2019a, 0:16).**



**Figure 17. Flowers and candles (BBC News, 2019a, 0:03).**





**Figure 18. Live streaming of public Muslim prayer (BBC News, 2019b, 0:14).**

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, wearing a black Muslim head scarf, addressed the masses, as we can see in TVNZ broadcast (Moore, 2019; Figure 19):

According to Muslim faith, The Prophet Muhammad, ṣallā -llāhu 'alayhī wa-'ālihī wa-sallam, said: the belief is in a mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy are just like one body. When any part of the body suffers, the whole body feels pain. New Zealand mourns with you. We are one. (Moore, 2019, 0:00-0:30)

By stating a tenet of the Muslim faith, and by using the Arabic praise for The Prophet Muhammad, Ardern embraced the Muslim community and the Muslim culture. The latter clauses of her address enhanced this message: "We are one."



**Figure 19. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, wearing a black Muslim head scarf (Moore, 2019, 0:04).**

### **Reflection**

#### *The Pulse Shooting*

Shortly after the attacks in Orlando and in Christchurch, the leaders of the two countries gave public announcements and addressed their citizens, via the media. These addresses signaled the stage of reflection, a time off, to reaffirm the bonds that bind members of the community together and reiterate the core values of society.

In a press conference shortly after the Pulse shooting, U.S. President Barack Obama gave the following statement (Brady, 2016; Figure 20):

. . . We stand with the people of Orlando, who have endured a terrible attack on their city. This is an especially heartbreaking day for all our friends—our fellow Americans—who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. So this is a sobering reminder that attacks on *any American*—regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation—*is an attack on all of us* and on the fundamental values of equality and dignity that define us as a country. And no act of hate or terror will ever change who we are or the values that make *us* Americans. . . . We will stand united, as Americans, to protect our people, and defend our nation, and to take action against those who threaten us. (Brady, 2016, paras. 1–8; emphasis added)



**Figure 20. President Barack Obama's statement (ABC News, 2016a, 0:12).**

While Obama's statement began with words of solidarity with the people of Orlando, a message of sympathy addressed to residents of a specific location, it then focused on the people who were the direct target of the attack—the LGBT+ community. And while at first the statement mentioned them in the second person form—"our friends"—it later clarifies that this is "an attack on all of us and on the fundamental values of equality and dignity that define us as a country." The closing sentence reiterated the commitment to protect all American—as individuals and as a nation.

Suspending the daily routine and devoting time for reflection was also manifested in the American late-night shows in the following days. Jimmy Fallon (NBC, 2016) and Conan O'Brien (TBS, 2016) explicitly explained why they needed to take some time off from what they usually do and invited their audiences to reflect on the core values of American culture—the right to bear weapons.



**Figure 21. Conan O'Brien's moment of reflection (TBS, 0:11).**

Conan O'Brien (Figure 21):

Sometimes, events are so horrifying and bleak, that to come out here and tell jokes—it's just. . . it's not really possible. I wanted to take just a moment here tonight, to agree with a rapidly growing sentiment in America, that it's time to grow up, and figure this out. . . . And here is what we are going to do. We're going to take a break, and then go back to doing whatever it is we do here. . . . We'll be right back. (TBS, 2016, 0:11–2:40)

#### *The Christchurch Attacks*

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern gave a statement in a press conference shortly after the Christchurch attacks on March 15, 2019 (Figure 22; Reuters, 2019):



**Figure 22. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's statement (Reuters, 2019, 3:09).**

. . . Our thought and our prayers are with those who have been impacted today. Christchurch was the home of these victims. For many, this may have not been the place they were born. In fact, for many, New Zealand was their choice. The place they actively came to, and committed themselves to. . . . We, New Zealand, were chosen because we represent diversity, kindness, compassion, a home for those that share our values, a refuge for those who need it. We are a proud nation of more than 200 ethnicities, 160 languages, and amongst that diversity we share common values . . . and secondly, the strongest possible condemnation of the ideology of the people that did this. You may have chosen us, but we utterly reject and condemn you. (Reuters, 2019, 3:09–5:12)

Ardern, like Obama, opened her statement with a message of sympathy and solidarity. She then made an inclusionary statement and asserted that New Zealand is the home of those who were affected by the attack, even if they were not born in New Zealand. The statement then proceeded to remind New Zealanders of the values they commit to—"diversity, kindness, compassion" (Reuters, 2019, 4:18). The closing sentence was one of excommunication and rejection of the people who committed the attack and their worldview.

These two statements are clear examples of collective reflection on identity and values and how rituals serve as a vehicle of social cohesion. They exemplify how symbolic gestures and statements in times of crises serve as a mechanism to reflect and reinforce perceptions of collective identity and mutual commitment. These statements do a boundary work that proclaims who belongs and who does not.

### **Reintegration**

The third and last phase of rites of passage is reintegration. This is the closing segment before the return to the (new) social order. According to Sumiala and Räisä (2020), "During this phase, public mourning in reporting plays a significant role, as it creates a sense of togetherness, a feeling of belonging and a

consciousness of societal continuity" (p. 9). This is also the time when the boundary work is most potent. This is the time when the community reaffirms who belongs with "us," and who does not. We could notice boundary work during the liminal phase; yet during the reintegration, these are manifested more explicitly.

My analysis of the reintegration phase focuses on the speeches of the two national leaders a week or two after the attacks. These statements mark the completion of the liminal phase and the restoration of the (new) order.

### *The Pulse Shooting*

On June 16, 2016, U.S. President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden visited Orlando and met with victims of the attacks and their families. In his statement to the media, Obama said the following (Figure 23; Phillips, 2016):

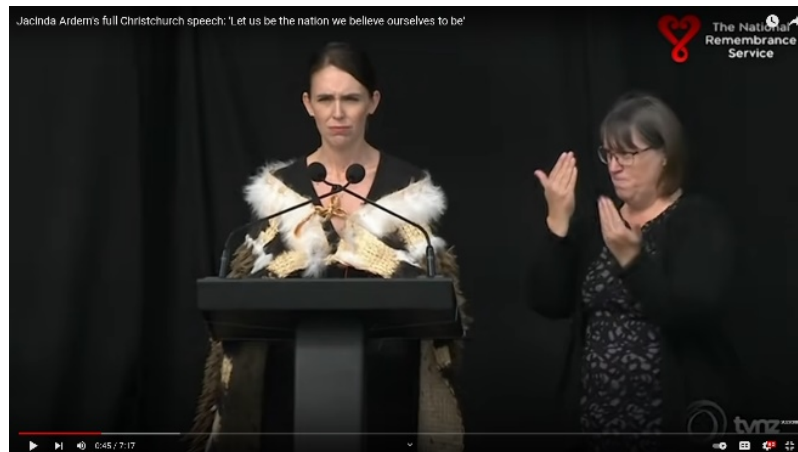


**Figure 23. President Obama and Vice President Biden's visit to Orlando (Phillips, 2016, 0:49).**

. . . These families could be our families. In fact, they are our family—they're part of the American family. . . . Here in Orlando, we are reminded . . . of what unites us as Americans, and that what unites us is far stronger than the hate and the terror of those who target us. . . . This was an attack on the LGBT community. Americans were targeted because we're a country that has learned to welcome everyone, no matter who you are or who you love. And hatred toward people because of sexual orientation, regardless of where it comes from, is a betrayal of what's best in us. . . . So if there was ever a moment for all of us to reflect and reaffirm our most basic beliefs that everybody counts and everybody has dignity, now is the time. . . . There's only "us"—Americans. . . . It's our unity—the outpouring of love that so many across our country have shown to our fellow Americans who are LGBT, a display of solidarity that might have been unimaginable even a few years ago." (Phillips, 2016, paras. 3–20)

Similar to the immediate response Obama gave on the day of the attack, this statement, too, worked to unite Americans under the same values; to embrace the LGBT+ community; demarginalize them; and to recognize them as equal citizens, whose lives worth living, whose protection ought to be guaranteed, and whose death is grievable.

### *The Christchurch Attacks*



**Figure 24. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern at Christchurch memorial (Guardian, 2019, 0:49).**

Two weeks after the Christchurch attack, on March 29, 2019, New Zealand held an official memorial service that was broadcast live on national television. This was a “media event” par excellence. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern was wearing a traditional Māori cloak (Figure 24), and there were various other components of Māori culture that were embedded in the ceremony. This official ceremony yearns for a separate analysis, as it was lengthy and rich with symbolism. Here, I focus solely on Ardern’s speech (Guardian, 2019, paras. 1–24):

. . . Ngāi Tahu Whānui, tēnā koutou.

(My greetings to the whole of Ngāi Tahu.)

. . . Haere mai tātou me te aroha, me te rangimārie, ki te whānau nei, e ora mārire ai anō rātau, e ora mārire ai anō, tātou katoa.

(So let us gather with love, in peace, for this family, so that they may truly live again, so that we all may truly live again.)

Over the past two weeks we have heard the stories of those impacted by this terrorist attack. They were stories of bravery. They were stories of those who were born here, grew up here, or who had made New Zealand their home . . .

These stories, they now form part of our collective memories. They will remain with us forever. They are us.

But with that memory comes a responsibility. A responsibility to be the place that we wish to be. A place that is diverse, that is welcoming, that is kind and compassionate. Those values represent the very best of us.

And we remember, that ours is a home that does not and cannot claim perfection. But we can strive to be true to the words embedded in our national anthem

Men of every creed and race,  
Gather here before Thy face,  
Asking Thee to bless this place  
God defend our free land

From dissension, envy, hate  
And corruption, guard our state  
Make our country good and great  
God defend New Zealand

Ko tātou tātou  
As-salaam Alaikum.

The speech opened with greetings in Māori language, before turning to English, and it ends with an Arabic blessing. This multilingual move, in itself, conveys a message of hybridity and multiculturalism, regardless of the content of the messages delivered in these languages. It weaves together three distinct cultures and, despite the hierarchy between them, honors them all. Moreover, Ardern embraced the Arabic blessing, *As-salaam Alaikum* (peace be upon you), as the ultimate verbal gesture to cope with the loss and pain caused by the attacks. In so doing, Ardern acknowledged the imperfection of English language and recognized the contribution of Arabic to the local, already diverse, New Zealand vocabulary. This attention to wording signals the benefits of unifying various cultural backgrounds. The message of diversity and inclusion was further enhanced by the content of the speech, which repeated the same messages she made on the day of the attacks—a welcoming message to new residents of New Zealand who made it their home and now paid the price for their alleged “otherness.”

### Discussion and Conclusions

The literature on terrorism and other types of shooting events in Western countries focuses on the perspective of the vulnerable Western (often White, well-to-do, middle class, cis-heterosexual) citizen. Accordingly, mediatized rituals in the aftermath of such events accommodate the fears and pain of the Western citizen. The media coverage of events like the 9/11 attacks, the Utoya shooting, Virginia Tech shooting, and Paris attacks (to name just few) often renders the sense of “this could have been me” and thus encourages the audience at home to identify with the victim at the scene of death (Chouliaraki, 2006; Lule, 2001; Morse, 2017).

The two cases analyzed here differ from most cases documented and analyzed in the literature. Indeed, these were attacks in major Western cities, but from the outset, the attacks targeted “the Other”—members of the LGBT+ community or the Muslim community. Therefore, members of nonmarginalized groups—Whites, Christian, heterosexuals—knew from the very beginning that, even though the attacks took place in their own countries, they, as members of nonmarginalized groups, were not threatened. This was



not a direct attack on them, or on their cultures and lifestyles. It was the marginalized Others whose “otherness” made them vulnerable.

Grief sometimes serves as a political resource and as a disposition for (re)arranging communal ties and relations with the Other (Morse, 2017). Manifestations of public grief, like mediatized mourning rituals, engage us in boundary work and encourage reflection on collective identity—who belongs with “us” and who does not. Elsewhere (2017) I proposed a typology of mediatized grief that showcases possibilities for engaging with distant others in the aftermath of mass violent death events. This typology suggests that the promise of cosmopolitan solidarity on the basis of shared vulnerability is rarely realized. Instead, death-related media rituals often reinforce a division between “us” and “them” (see also Chouliaraki, 2006; Sumiala, 2017).

The analysis of the two cases—the Pulse shooting and the Christchurch attacks—supplements that typology. The mediatized mourning rituals in the aftermath of these attacks elicited what we can call *benevolent grief*—expressions of public grief as act of solidarity with vulnerable Others from the secure position of the nonmarginalized mainstream groups. The two mediatized mourning rituals analyzed here recognized the vulnerability of the Other and advocated for securing these Others, despite their marginalized position. Furthermore, these rituals rejected the otherness of the marginalized Others. They embraced and contained the thus far marginalized Others and proclaimed their belonging. The slogan—“We are one”—that was reiterated, one way or the other, throughout the liminal phase and toward the reintegration, extinguished the otherness of the attacked marginalized groups and recognized their belonging as an integral part of a diverse community.

In a way, these mediatized mourning rituals operated as initiation rites for the marginalized Other. Like in other initiation rites, individuals or a group need to undergo a (painful) experience that affirms their affiliation to the greater community. Initiation rite is a symbolic process during which individuals or group claim their status as worthy members of the community. And, in return, the community recognizes these individuals or groups as integral to the community. This process took place in the cases analyzed here. The LGBT+ community in Orlando (and in the United States, in general) and the Muslim community in Christchurch (and in New Zealand in general) underwent painful, devastating experience, but this very experience functioned as a trigger for the larger community to recognize them as grievable, as worthy of protection, and as belonging. The attempt to terrorize and injure these two marginalized subcommunities resulted in mourning rituals—in and by the media and outside the media—whose aim was to reaffirm the belonging of these subcommunities and to remind all members of the community of the values, narrative, and collective identity of the larger community. The distressing experience these two subcommunities underwent was leveraged to solidify the community and commit its members to one another. Thus, despite the unfortunate circumstances that triggered these mediatized mourning rituals, they resulted in declarations of unity and mutual commitment.

These two cases provide yet another example for the applicability of institutional mediatization (Hjarvard, 2008). The media assume their role as providers of moral orientation and exercise self-proclaimed authority to perform collective mourning rituals. In so doing, they annex a role previously performed by the church and the state. In both cases, the state was an active player who used the media



to welcome cultural hybridity, and in the case of the Christchurch attacks, the mourning rituals were performed in collaboration with religious institutions. Yet, the media played a leading role in orchestrating these rituals. In these two cases, the mediatization of mourning rituals facilitated political—positive—processes of tolerance and inclusion that were advocated by the state and religious institution. Future studies should consider focusing on cases when mediatized mourning rituals are not harmonious and there is, ostensibly, a clash between the media and other social institutions.

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