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SOLIDARITY TRUMPS CATASTROPHE?
AN EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL ANALYSIS
OF POST-TSUNAMI MEDIA IN
TWO WESTERN NATIONS

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Solidarity Trumps Catastrophe?

An Empirical and Theoretical Analysis of Post-Tsunami Media in Two Western Nations

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Abstract

This paper explores how newspaper accounts in Sweden and the United States, two geographically non-impacted nations, frame the short term response and recovery phase of the Indian Ocean tsunami. Utilizing 594 newspaper articles from four of the largest print media sources in Sweden (n= 370) and the United States (n= 224) we code for social solidarity, donor relief, geographic location as well as emergent themes salient in explaining how social solidarity is fostered and maintained. We find that social solidarity in geographically non-impacted nations was fostered through an intensively narrow and nativist focus and maintained through a collective response of assistance. Findings support Durkheim's ([1893] 1997) theory of social solidarity but go beyond prior descriptive theoretical accounts by offering a predictive theory of social solidarity.

Introduction

On December 26, 2004, an earthquake measuring 9.0 on the Richter Scale ripped open the ocean floor 150 miles off the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia resulting in a release of energy equivalent to 23,000 Hiroshima atomic bombs, powerful enough to tilt the earth's axis and change the planet's shape (Gross 2005; United States Geological Survey (USGS) 2007). This earthquake triggered the largest and most destructive tsunami in recorded history, spanning more than 3,000 miles and resulting in the death of an estimated 225,000 people, the loss of more than 1,000,000 jobs and the displacement of more than 1,600,000 people (Government Accountability Office (GAO) 2007; Inderfurth, Fabrycky and Cohen 2005; Lambourne 2005; National Geographic News 2005; Quarantelli 2005; United Nations Office of the Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery 2005; USGS 2007).

Following the catastrophe, immediate assistance in the form of search and rescue efforts came from survivors, as those in the most heavily impacted regions were largely without any assistance from nearby communities due to the substantial loss of professional responders and critical infrastructure (Cosgrave 2007; Fritz Institute 2005). However, in the hours and days that followed and as the devastation and destruction became more apparent, newspaper, television and Internet media became increasingly influential in raising awareness

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and influencing public opinion (Quarantelli 2005). In response to this intensive media coverage, particularly in Western nations, unprecedented amounts of material and financial assistance arrived from individuals, organizations and governments in geographically non-impacted nations across Europe and North America (Clark 2005; Cosgrave 2007; Inderfurth et al. 2005; Red Cross 2007).

The aim of this paper is to explore how mass media construct the short term response and recovery phase and to investigate how and why geographically non-impacted countries provided unprecedented amounts of material and financial assistance. Specifically, we explore what themes emerge as salient in explaining and predicting how and why such relatively high levels of social solidarity was fostered and maintained in geographically non-impacted Western countries following the Indian Ocean tsunami. This research integrates theoretical and empirical analyses to develop a predictive model of social solidarity. Since prior research has focused on Scandinavian media coverage of the tsunami, it is both empirically and theoretically substantive to offer comparison to another, Western non-impacted nation. The United States was chosen because of its greater experience with disasters in general, despite experiencing actual and proportionally fewer deaths and citizens trapped from the tsunami than Sweden. In addition, previous research has found differences in newspaper coverage and content between the United States and European, media providing an additional point of comparison between the two nations (Bantimaroudis and Ban 2001; Hopple 1982; Washburn 2002). Despite these differences, both Sweden and the United States media were influential in raising public awareness, reporting on relief and recovery efforts and fostering community solidarity.

Social solidarity is an important sociological concept dating back to Tonnies ([1887] 1965) and perhaps most systematically articulated by Durkheim ([1893] 1997; [1912] 1995) in his attempts to understand how individuals are able to remain integrated into a society that is increasingly individualistic and increasingly technologically complex. Social solidarity is also an important concept in the study of disasters as research has consistently found that following a disaster impact, community members come together to share resources and work to solve common problems, sometimes even among groups where collaboration did not previously exist (Barton 1969; Dynes 1970; Fischer 1998; Fritz 1961; Mileti, Drabek and Haas 1975; Prince 1920; Siegel, Bourque and Shoaf 1999; Tierney, Lindell and Perry 2001). Despite this considerable literature on social solidarity in the aftermath of disaster, almost all of the extant research has focused on solidarity produced by those who experienced the disaster first hand (cf. Fritz and Mathewson 1957; Raker et al. 1956). This paper breaks from this research tradition by exploring how social solidarity is fostered within geographically non-impacted

nations. Specifically, we find that social solidarity is fostered through an intensively narrow and nativist focus and is maintained through a collective response of assistance. However, a more detailed analysis of the extant literature is necessary before proceeding to our model of social solidarity.

Literature Review

Social solidarity was an important sociological concept for many classical sociologists including Comte, Spencer, Tonnies, Simmel and Durkheim as it was often closely associated with community. Of the classical sociologists, perhaps Durkheim's concern with social solidarity is of greatest importance today. Durkheim ([1893] 1997) conceptualized modern social solidarity as fostered not through kinship based upon lineage as found in earlier mechanical forms but in more organic forms based upon a system of differentiated and special functions united by definite relationships to one another. Under this contemporary or organic solidarity, individuals find solidarity from acceptance of a common set of beliefs and sentiments within a context of functional differentiation. For example, a laborer or an owner may come together to worship together or two parties of opposing political viewpoints may unite to vote in support of a broader principle of democracy. For Durkheim ([1912] 1995), the height of this manifestation of solidarity is found in the collective consciousness, which represents a unifying process of symbolic action that strengthens both the individual and the community. Thus, for Durkheim ([1912] 1995:379), a community is often at its strongest when a substantial portion of the community engages the "collective consciousness" of symbolic acts of collective response.

Since Durkheim, many other scholars have studied social solidarity in a variety of theoretical frameworks and contexts (cf. Bay and Pedersen 2006; Parsons 1951; Perry 1986; Sobieraj 2006; Turkel 2002). Although scholars have been studying social solidarity for more than a century, we could not find any instances of a predictive theory of social solidarity. Each theoretical analysis of social solidarity we encountered offered either a meta-theoretical or an analytical scheme for *describing* or *explaining* social solidarity (Turner 2003). Although descriptive or explanatory theory is useful in understanding what social solidarity is and why it occurs, these types of theory are not particularly useful in *predicting* conditions under which social solidarity is likely to emerge and how it is maintained over time. A predictive theory of social solidarity enables researchers to not have to wait for social solidarity to serendipitously occur while in the field, or to study social solidarity post-factum. By knowing under what conditions social solidarity is likely to occur, researchers could engage in more *en vivo* social

solidarity research which would allow for more comparative theoretical analyses and a better understanding of what conceptualizations best explain social solidarity, rather than the conventional post-factum analyses which often focus on one theoretical perspective of social solidarity.

As noted previously, disaster research has consistently found that following a disaster, community members come together to share resources and work to solve common problems, sometimes even among groups where collaboration had not previously existed (Barton 1969; Dynes 1970; Fischer 1998; Fritz 1961; Mileti, Drabek and Haas 1975; Prince 1920; Siegel, Bourque and Shoaf 1999; Tierney, Lindell and Perry 2001). In addition to the extant research on disasters and social solidarity, some research has also focused on the role of media following a catastrophe (Jarlbro 2004; Quarantelli 2005; Strömbäck and Nord 2006). Quarantelli (2005) found that following a catastrophe, the media takes on increasing importance in the construction of the occasion. Beyond disaster research, media and communication studies offer insights into the construction of news and public responses. Generally, the closer to the audience is, both geographically and culturally, to an impacted area, the greater chance the occasion will be covered by media (McQuail 2005). Prior communications research (Hammock and Charny 1996; Jarlbro 2004; Livingstone 1996; Moeller 1999) has found that when disasters and humanitarian catastrophes occur, national and international media in geographically non-impacted regions play an important role in drawing larger audiences to the occasion, thereby initiating donor aid and relief action beyond the impacted and surrounding communities. Frequently, attention is given to relief assistance of the donor nation, as information about the impacted area is often limited, which increases the likelihood of rumor distortion, *simplification* and *personalization* (Allport and Postman 1947; Hernes 1995; Nord, Shehata and Strömbäck 2003; Özden and Bjerre-Andersen 2005; Shibutani 1966; Strömbäck, 2000;). *Simplification* refers to the media utilization of simple structured stories that are often decontextualized and lacking in substance or complexity (Dickerson 2001). *Personalization* refers to the media utilization of human interest narratives to promote similarity between the audience and the media construction (Dickerson 2001).

For example, the Indian Ocean tsunami received more media coverage in Swedish media than any other disaster occasion in the past few decades (Andersson Odén, Ghersetti and Wallin 2005). Since the tsunami occurred on a Swedish public holiday it was covered first by direct media such as television, teletext and Internet (Grandien, Nord and Strömbäck 2005). The Swedish media played an important role in framing both public discourse and governmental policy as mass media was the primary source of information about the

catastrophe for the public as well as Prime Minister, Göran Persson, and Secretary of Defense, Leni Björklund (Daleús 2005). Following the tsunami, the Swedish public reported relatively high trust in media reporting, particularly during the initial short term response and recovery phase (Grandien, Nord and Strömbäck 2005, Strömbäck and Nord 2006). During this period, the only major critique was the one-sided reporting of Sweden and Swedish victims, which was relatively similar to media reporting in Finland (Kivikuru 2006), Norway (Eide 2005) and Denmark (Özden and Bjerre-Andersen 2005). Thus, similar levels of nativist interests were overrepresented by media reporting in all Scandinavian countries.

In contrast to Sweden, relatively little scholarly research has examined the United States media response to the Indian Ocean tsunami (cf. Brown and Minty 2006; Byron 2005; Cosgrave 2005; Kadrich and Laituri; Letukas 2006; 2008; Ngo 2005). It is important to note that in contrast to Sweden, which has had a number of official investigations and scientific studies that have examined media coverage of the catastrophe (Andersson et. al 2005; Daleús 2005; Grandien, Nord and Strömbäck 2005; Jonsson 2005; Olofsson 2007a), no official inquiries by the United States government have been opened, and United States media coverage has fostered relatively little social scientific coverage. Some of these national differences in media coverage and policy response may have to do with the number of Swedes impacted relative to Americans, the class and political capital of Swedes impacted and differences in the perception of assistance provided to impacted nations by private citizens and governments. However, such differences lie largely beyond the scope of this chapter as their effects are best evidenced in the longer term recovery phase. As noted previously, the goal of this research is to explain and predict how social solidarity is fostered and maintained through media in geographically non-impacted Western countries following the Indian Ocean tsunami.

Data and Methods

A content analysis was performed to explore the emergence of social solidarity within the geographically non-impacted nations of Sweden and the United States, following the Indian Ocean tsunami (Krippendorff 1980; Neuman 2003). First, two of the most widely circulated national newspapers in Sweden were selected for analysis. *Dagens Nyheter* is Sweden's second largest daily newspaper, the largest morning newspaper and the third largest daily newspaper in Scandinavia, with an average daily circulation of 350,000 and a total daily readership of 800,000 (Tidingsutgivarna 2007). *Dagens Nyheter* is considered by many as the opinion-leading newspaper in Sweden (Lindström 1996; Nord 1997; Strömbäck 2000). *Svenska Dagbladet* is Sweden's fifth largest daily newspaper, and third largest morning newspaper with

a daily circulation of 200,000 and a total daily readership of nearly 500,000 (Tidingsutgivarna 2007). Next, two of the most widely circulated national newspapers in the United States were selected for analysis. The *New York Times* is the largest metropolitan newspaper in the United States with an average daily circulation of 1,120,420, and is known for its international reporting and general news coverage. The *Washington Post* is one of the top seven daily newspapers in the United States, with an average daily circulation of 699,130, and is known for intensive coverage of the United States government (Burrelles-Luce 2007). The time period of study includes eight days following initial impact, December 26, 2004 to January 3, 2005, which was chosen because it allowed for detailed analyses of the immediate post-impact period and short term rescue and recovery phase (Andersson et al. 2005; Tierney, Lindell and Perry 2001).

It is important to note some minor difficulties comparing media in different countries. In the case of the United States and Sweden the media systems are not entirely similar (Dunutrova and Strömbäck 2005). For example, Sweden has high readership of newspapers but a comparably low level of television viewing, in the United States on the other hand, the pattern is reversed. Further, Sweden still has a strong public service broadcast sector and state subsidies of newspapers, while the United States has a strongly competitive media sector dominated by commercial broadcasting and newspaper business. Journalistic norms and values differ to some extent as well. Earlier research has shown that American journalists view objectivity as being impartial and relying on official sources, whereas Swedish journalists see it as their role to find out the ‘truth’ independently of official sources (Dunutrova and Strömbäck 2005; Patterson 1998). Also, it is important to note that symbolic differences, both linguistic and cultural, influence the media construction of any occasion. Since these symbolic differences are rooted in language, culture, geography, and identity, it is difficult to adequately convey such differences in the reporting and construction of claimsmaking activity for both Sweden and United States media. Therefore, this research, wherever possible, sought to standardize and control linguistic and cultural differences by focusing on commonalities between the two nations. For example, we standardized all newspaper accounts to the English language rather than utilize each newspaper’s native language. Although this process introduced some bias toward the English language in symbolic constructions, the effect of such bias is limited due to controls that fix the variability of interpretation. For example, we utilized three search terms in each country, “tsunami,” “catastrophe,” and “flood wave” for Sweden and “tsunami,” “catastrophe” and “disaster” for the United States. In addition to the first two terms (“tsunami,” “catastrophe”) being the most frequently used words to describe the tsunami for

both countries (cf. Andersson et al. 2005; Letukas 2006; 2008 Olofsson 2007a), utilizing identical search terms allowed for a standardization process in understanding how each country's media constructed claims around those terms. To allow for some variability in linguistic difference and cultural understanding "flood wave" and "disaster" were also selected. The term "flood wave" was frequently used in Sweden to explain the tsunami while "disaster" was more frequently used in the United States. Thus, by controlling for some difference and the variable effects at other points, we were able to produce a methodology that was both sufficiently replicable while maintaining a level of linguistic and cultural variability that was measurable.

Data was analyzed using a deductive approach (Berg 2007; Neuman 2003) involving the development of coding around themes of donor relief, social solidarity, and location emphasized within the article. Additionally, an emergent thematic code was utilized for data that did not fit within these codes. After preliminary analysis for substantive content a combined total of 594 articles remained, 224 from the United States and 370 Sweden³. Notes and memos were also used in the process of coding to capture emergent themes, such as issues related to the disaster like death toll, emergency management and warning systems. The software program ATLAS.ti 5.2 was used for the coding and analysis of these articles. After the initial coding, all codes, notes and memos were read through and analyzed. Representative quotations were then selected, some of which some have been used in presentation of our findings.

Findings

Although it may seem counterintuitive that media would focus more attention on promoting social solidarity than devastation, destruction and death, this is the case. Consistent with prior literature (Entman 1989), we find that both Sweden and United States media use strategies of simplification and personalization to create an intensively narrow and nativist frame that ultimately promotes social solidarity in readers beyond those directly impacted by the Indian Ocean tsunami. Taken together, simplification and personalization provide mechanisms for understanding how a narrow and nativist context is developed in an effort to reinforce social solidarity among geographically distant and non-impacted nations.

³ A preliminary analysis for substantive content was conducted to remove superfluous articles which used "tsunami" as a metaphor to convey an overwhelming amount for a variety of topics ranging from business to sports. Since these articles had little or nothing to do with any issue related to the Indian Ocean tsunami, they were dropped from our analysis in both Sweden and the United States. The total number of these articles was small enough to have little to no effect on the overall substantive content or generalizability of our findings.

Solidarity Fostered through Simplification and Personalization

In Sweden, a number of official investigations and scientific studies have found that following the Indian Ocean tsunami, Swedish media concentrated on Swedish tourists in Thailand (Andersson et al. 2005; Daléus 2005; Grandien, Nord and Strömbäck 2005; Olofsson 2007a). Similarly, we find that although *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) and *Svenska Dagbladet* (SD) cover the devastation in all tsunami impacted countries, Thailand is mentioned twice as much as any other country. By providing a dominant frame focusing on Swedish tourists trapped in Thailand, the Swedish media substantially narrow the scope of the catastrophe from thirteen nations to mainly one. In addition, the Swedish media further simplify accounts with simple structured stories such as “*A Paradise Smashed to Pieces* (DN 050103:A07)” and “*The Tourists’ Paradise Island Wiped Out* (SD 050103:A08).”

Consistent with simplification, we observed several examples of Swedish media attempting to decontextualize Thailand from the tsunami. In Swedish, the prefix “swed-“ [svensk-] is used to highlight nativist or national interests in an effort to bring the catastrophe figuratively closer to the Swedish readers. For example, an article in DN (041228:A11) notes that it was a Swedish paradise destroyed, despite being geographically located in Thailand: “*The hotel was in the Swede-paradise in Pong Suk, at the beach of the wonderful bay that once again lays calm and glittery.*” Similarly, in SD (050102:12) an area of Thailand is referred to as being a Swedish tourist area and is coupled with a personalized message of loss: “*05.42: Tourists missing in Thailand. Already there is information about fatalities in the area of the Swede-hotels.*” In the United States media, social solidarity is also fostered through simplification although the frame takes on a different form.

In contrast to Swedish media, which focused largely on the nativist interests of Swedish nationals in Thailand, media accounts in the *New York Times* (NY) and *Washington Post* (WP) simplify stories for the United States audience by consistently referring to the catastrophe as impacting “South Asia.” By adopting a “South Asian” frame, the United States media is able to decontextualize and simplify accounts as part of a homogenous catastrophe impacting a geographically distant region of the world, ignoring the complex religious, cultural and ethnic differences between Indonesians, Indians, Sri Lankans and Thais, among others. This use of simplification is exemplified in headlines such as “*A Tragedy Affects All Corners of the World*” (NY: 041229) and “*One Face of Relief*” (NY: 041230: A1). The “South Asian” frame is a simple and familiar one for the American audience as it is largely consistent with

contemporary racial dynamics and how most white Americans think about Indonesians, Indians, Sri Lankans and Thais.

In the United States racial classification system, immigrants and nationals of tsunami impacted South Asian countries have been classified in a “pan-ethnic” racial classification of “Asian,” rather than by their nationality or ethnic origin (Boheme 1989; Espiritu 1992; Feagin 2000; Omi and Winant 1994; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Takaki 1993). This “Asian” frame decontextualizes cultural differences between groups and emphasizes physical similarities between members in an effort to simplify the cultural and historical differences as homogenous to the dominant white majority in the United States (Espiritu 1992; Feagin 2000; Halter 2006; Omi and Winant 1994; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Of course, South Asians or Asians are not fully integrated into the dominant white racial hierarchy. This is often explained through the myth of the “melting pot” where the United States is portrayed as a diverse collection of traditions and cultures that, over time, assimilate or “melt” into a single culture, mirroring the dominant white group in language, culture, education and income. (McKee 1993; Park 1914; Steinberg [1981] 2001). Despite voluminous research refuting the notion of the melting pot from a variety of perspectives (Glazer and Moynihan 1963; Novak 1971; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Takaki 1993; Waters 1990), the United States media is acutely aware of the power of the “melting pot” myth in fostering social solidarity. For many, assimilation remains the process through which one becomes “American.” We find the construction of the “melting pot” myth in both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, but is perhaps best exemplified through this article in the *New York Times*:

For every disaster and killer wave in the world, there are ripples in New York. So while it may be too soon to measure the economic and social impact of the South Asian tsunami on the city, it is not too soon to predict that the city will feel repercussions. A century ago, New York neighborhoods were defined by the traditional ethnic cocktail of Irish, Italians and Jews, and to some degree, those groups still define the city. But their dominance is receding as fast as the floods on beaches half a world away....The waves were also felt among the 43,000 Bangladeshis concentrated in Astoria, Woodside and Elmhurst; the 68,300 Indians in places like Richmond Hill; the 4,000 Burmese in Elmhurst, Bensonhurst and Midwood; the 4,200 Thais in Astoria and Elmhurst; the 7,600 Malaysians centered in Flushing; and the 2,800 Indonesians found mainly across Queens (NY 050102).

By highlighting the ethnic assimilation of a century ago with more recent immigrant groups, the United States media masterfully personalizes this catastrophe to their audiences own immigrant experiences as more recent immigrants experience loss from afar. Although

there are no eyewitness accounts in this passage, the effect of personalization is achieved through the identification of ethnic groups who experience a collective loss of identity. However, the collective frame of ‘immigrants in America experience loss in their homeland’ is not sustainable without action. Thus, the United States, according to the “American Dream,” is a nation of doers, and although solidarity may be fostered through similar traditions and the personalization of loss, solidarity is maintained through action, in this case through a collective response of assistance in the form of donations.

The Swedish newspapers also use decontextualization as a way of personalization since decontextualization signals to the reader that the catastrophe has drastically impacted not only Thai, but Swedish cultural traditions and institutions of tourism, recreation and leisure. As such, Swedes must come together to repair what was lost. Equally important and often mutually reinforcing is the simplification and personalization of eyewitness accounts of loss and destruction. Such stories often promote the similarities between survivor and reader and foster a shared sense of loss, which reinforces solidarity. Eyewitness accounts appearing in the Swedish media were more often from Swedes in Thailand rather than native Thais, as exemplified from this article in SD (041230:8): *The situation is still very chaotic says Thorleif Håwi, a Swede living in Phuket, who as many other Thaiswedes, has made voluntary contributions.*

The historical, racial and ethnic differences between Sweden and the United States are reflected in the ways the mass media personalize catastrophe. Contrary to United States media, the Swedish coverage was so narrowly focused on native interests that neither DN nor SD published any human interest stories with people from the impacted area living in Sweden, and only two interviews of people with foreign backgrounds in the tsunami impacted area were interviewed during the first eight days. Thus, experiences of Swedes with foreign background are not accounted for, on the contrary, the coverage focuses only on native Swedes experiences and characteristics. Thus, media construct Sweden as a country without prior experience of natural disasters. The scientific reporter Karin Boys writes in DN (050102:A33):

For the first time we Swedes have been forced to understand what a tsunami is. The phenomenon does not exist in our own calm waters. But it is well known in other parts of the world.

However, the intensively narrow and nativist focus was not lost on the Swedish readership as evidenced by Sophia Müller, who wrote a letter to the editor of SD (041231:31) highlighting who was not accounted for by Swedish media reporting, while generalizing about the treatment of foreigners in Sweden:

When I visited the largest Pressbyrå [newsstand] in town today I noticed through a simple look that the newspapers of the world all wrote about the catastrophe and all the

misery it causes for the people living in these regions, who have lost everything, if still alive. But no country – except Sweden – only mention (or mainly) their own fatalities and victims. The other victims are therewith discriminated – which is in line with the prevailing way of handling Non-Swedes in Sweden.

Although Sophia Müller offers an interesting perspective on Swedish media coverage, the dominant institutional perspective is one of narrow national interests which sought to foster social solidarity among native Swedes. The traditional view of Sweden as an ethnically homogeneous country prevails as representatives of other ethnic groups are ignored or marginalized through simplification (Olofsson 2007b; Petersson and Hellström 2004). Perhaps these sentiments are best expressed by an editorial in DN (041230:A02), which emphasizes the “natural” personalization of Swedish loss and the solidarity of response in Sweden:

To focus so much on the Swedish victims is sound and natural. It is in our country, in our fellowship, that we have to deal the incomprehensible tragedy that neighbors, friends, relatives and colleagues have experienced. It is the strength of the national state to feel solidarity and empathy outside of the immediate circle, to participate in the larger community that is made up by our fellow citizens.

In both countries the newspapers simplify and personalize the Indian Ocean tsunami through decontextualization and referring to cultural myths and symbols.

Solidarity Maintained through Collective Response

As noted previously, for Durkheim ([1912] 1995:379), the highest form of social solidarity in an increasingly individualistic and technologically complex society was found in the “collective consciousness” of unified symbolic action. Through such action, Durkheim ([1912] 1995:379) noted that *the group periodically revitalizes the sense it has of itself and its unity; the nature of the individuals as social beings is strengthened at the same time*. Thus, according to Durkheim ([1912] 1995) social solidarity is maintained through symbolic acts of collective response. Similarly, we find that in Sweden and the United States, social solidarity is maintained through a collective response of providing assistance to those impacted by the Indian Ocean tsunami.

In the United States, social solidarity was maintained through persistent news articles detailing the collective response of financial and material assistance provided by the government, military, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), corporations and individuals. So prominent were articles of collective response of assistance in the United States that our manifest coding revealed 179 references in an eight day period. Frequently, articles exploring

the collective federal response source a senior level official of the United States government, mention the amount or type of assistance provided, and highlight the superiority of United States contributions compared to other Western nations.

The United States has raised its commitment from an initial figure of \$15 million to \$350 million, and Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said Friday that it was likely to go higher still. "The United States, the wealthiest nation in the world, is doing a phenomenal job in this unprecedented challenge, not only with a very large cash donation but also bringing in military and civil defense assets that is precisely what we need," he said....Secretary of State Colin L. Powell's response yesterday was partly reassuring: He said that "clearly the United States will be a major contributor to this international effort. And, yes, it will run into the billions of dollars. (NY 050102:1)

President Bush made similar public statements captured in NY (050101: A6) about the federal collective response of assistance. His comments underlie the centrality of American assistance in the international community while linking the collective response of assistance from United States citizens:

Mr. Bush noted that the United States had created and coordinated a "core group" with Australia, India and Japan. "I am confident many more nations will join this core group in short order," Mr. Bush said in his statement. "Reports of strong charitable donations are also very encouraging and reflect the true generosity and compassion of the American people."

The notion that United States citizens are exceedingly generous in their collective action of providing assistance emerged as a predominant theme in the United States media. Continuous media coverage about United States donations generated a level of social solidarity as some stories documented how much more assistance the United States was providing than other nations. Such media coverage of the collective response of assistance maintained social solidarity, while providing an expression for action. Similar to Durkheim ([1912] 1995) who found that the highest forms of social solidarity are expressed through the collective conscience of religious ritual, we find that the apex of the collective response of assistance was embedded in the religious institutions and rituals in the United States as evidenced by this article in WP (050103: B01):

A week after the tsunami hit, its victims were uppermost in the minds of many worshipers in the Washington area. Catholic parishes in the Archdiocese of Washington set up special collections in response to the devastation, said Susan Gibbs, an archdiocese spokeswoman. Clergy from many denominations spoke of the disaster from the pulpit. Church and synagogue bulletins and Web sites were updated hastily to include information on how to donate. Among those who heard the call was National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, who regularly attends National Presbyterian and was at yesterday's 10 AM service.

This is the way that Americans respond. They respond through their churches and through their communities," Rice, whom President Bush has nominated to succeed Colin L. Powell as Secretary of State, said in a brief interview. "What the government does is important, but what each individual American does is even more important." Micah King, 29, a law student who also attended the service, said he took comfort in the outpouring of generosity in response to such an epic act of nature. "It's so nice to see how people come together," he said. "People don't even think twice about it. They just dig in their pockets."

Similar to the United States, Sweden also developed and maintained social solidarity through the collective response of providing assistance through the generosity of Swedes to promote the unprecedented level of solidarity in providing assistance to a foreign disaster while simultaneously acknowledging the shared sacrifice of Swedes in foregoing traditional New Year's rituals. SD (041231:12) writes:

The phones go red-hot at Sweden's NGO's and millions of krona to the impacted areas are coming in. At the same time, many traditional New Years Eve's fireworks will not come off. The Swedes donate the money to the impacted areas instead for buying New Years Eve's fireworks.

In maintaining social solidarity, Swedish media framed the catastrophe as a local, domestic occasion rather than the distant, international occasion. Swedish media coverage consistently portrayed the effect of the tsunami as if Sweden was impacted. This kind of personalization is similar to how the American media focused on domestic relief assistance and shifted the focus from the impacted area to the United States.

In sharp contrast to the United States media which emphasized government officials as agents in providing commentary and maintaining the collective response of assistance, significant media coverage in Sweden focused on slow and ineffective leadership on behalf of the Swedish government.⁴ Interestingly, instead of disrupting the social solidarity of Swedes, the slow collective response of the government appears to have increased social solidarity as thousands came together to write about the ineffective relief and rescue efforts.

The anger over how the government has handled the relief aid is growing among the Swedish citizens. The Prime Minister's Office receives more than a 1 000 e-mails this week. And the Foreign Office receives three times as many. The message in the letters is tough and clear and the angry mail continues to pour in with an increasing speed. Some want the Prime Minister to resign. Most demand that [Minister of Foreign Affairs] Laila Freivalds be fired. (SD (050102:12):

This unexpected collective response of anger and frustration at the slow pace of government response is indicative of a deeply embedded social solidarity fostered in Swedish

⁴ Although Prime Minister Göran Persson and other representatives of the government were frequent commentators in Swedish news media, they were often questioned and criticized for their perceived lack of action (Andersson et al. 2005).

media and maintained through the collective response of thousands of Swedes demanding that more should be done for those trapped in distant lands. The Swedish media localized the issue and framed it as a domestic rather than global catastrophe which explains the generosity and anger among many Swedes. Such a collective response is unprecedented among Swedes, especially because the catastrophe did not geographically impact Sweden. However, our analyses conclude that such social solidarity does not appear aberrant as similar behavior is observed in the United States.

Explaining and Predicting Social Solidarity

Our model (Figure 1) for explaining and predicting social solidarity demonstrates that print media is influential in fostering social solidarity through simplification and personalization and that once solidarity is fostered, the audience maintains social solidarity through collective action of providing assistance, which in turn, the media report on, which reifies the previous collective action of assistance.

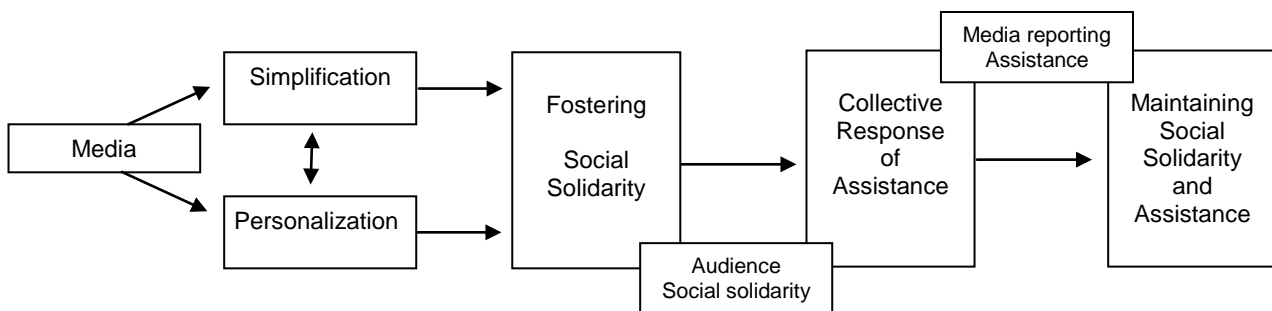


Figure 1 – Explanatory and Predictive Model of Social Solidarity

Thus, the media are active in fostering and maintaining social solidarity by focusing audience attention through the social solidarity process.

Discussion

This chapter explored how newspaper accounts frame the short term response and recovery phase. Our research found that print media were able to foster and maintain social solidarity throughout Sweden and the United States, two geographically non-impacted nations. Solidarity was fostered through an intensively narrow and nativist focus and a collective response of

assistance. This chapter makes at least three contributions to the extant literature on media and disaster. First, we offer a cross-national comparison of Sweden and United States print media coverage, an area that until now has been grossly understudied. Second, we link the theoretical literature of social solidarity with disaster and media research and demonstrate that social solidarity can be fostered in geographic locales that have not even experienced a disaster impact, an area, which until now has been seldom investigated. Finally, we offer a model (Figure 1) for understanding how social solidarity may be fostered and maintained. In almost all of the prior theoretical literature dating back to Durkheim ([1893] 1997) theorists have *described* what is social solidarity, but few have provided a *predictive* model for understanding how social solidarity occurs as we have done.

It is important to note that given the brief duration of our research and the narrow national sample (Sweden and United States) we are tentative about our ability to generalize about the development of a theoretical model based on a post-factum analysis. It is possible, that subsequent analyses may not support our findings which conclude that all or even most Western print media are able to foster social solidarity following a catastrophe and are able to maintain such efforts through reporting collective response. We view this as both a theoretical and methodological concern requiring further research. For example, a stronger methodology of diverse donor nations from Western Europe and developed nations such as Japan could provide greater confidence and theoretical unity to how widespread solidarity is fostered in geographically non-impacted nations. Similarly, conducting subsequent research over a longer duration would greatly enhance our ability to predict how long social solidarity can be maintained following a catastrophe in donor countries. Further, the use of print media as the only source of information is problematic since electronic and broadcasted media were the first to cover the catastrophe (cf. Grandien, Nord and Strömbäck 2005). The initial reporting from the occasion is therefore not complete and further research is needed to investigate possible divergence between print and other mass media. Also, by broadening our methodology to include additional media sources such as television, radio and internet coverage, we may gain additional theoretical insight into how similar or competing messages of social solidarity may amplify or reduce social solidarity follow catastrophe. The notion that similar or competing messages in the media may influence social solidarity is a potentially important aspect of media construction that went largely unexplored in this chapter. Apart from this, the investigation of print media, particularly elite newspapers as in this case, has advantages as well. For example, stories printed in newspapers such as New York Times are often agenda setting for other national and international news (cf. Dimitrova and Strömbäck 2005). Future

research on the variability of news cycles within Sweden and the United States or between countries across content, geographic distance and time may significantly influence the explanatory or prediction capabilities of our theory of social solidarity. Nonetheless, despite these considerable shortcomings this research has sought to go beyond descriptions of social solidarity in the past century and make tangible progress toward a more predictive theory of social solidarity.

Finally, it must be noted that this research represents one theoretical perspective on the Indian Ocean tsunami. Focusing on theories of social solidarity at the expense of other theoretical insights may have led us to emphasize certain aspects of print media coverage following this catastrophe, while limiting other theoretical insights due to a lack of overwhelming support or coding biases. Just as this chapter offered cross-national comparisons of print media coverage, subsequent analyses should offer cross-comparisons between theories. Media and sociological theories of globalization, symbolic interactionism and theories of public and private communicative action offer excellent sources for testing alternative explanations to social solidarity, or offer potential bridges to a broader context of social solidarity than conceptualized in this chapter. Despite these issues, this chapter does offer insight into how social solidarity emerged and what effect it had in providing tremendous amounts of material and financial assistance in the aftermath of one of the greatest catastrophes of this century.

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