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The Mourning News : Reporting Violent Death in a Global Age [Book review]

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Tal Morse. *The Mourning News: Reporting Violent Death in a Global Age*. New York: Peter Lang, 2018, 268 pp, ISBN 978-1433144646 (hardcover).

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Tal Morse's new book, *The Mourning News: Reporting Violent Death in a Global Age*, offers a welcome contribution to the research field of media and death. This field consists of a relatively mixed group of scholars who share an interest in the research on the intersection of media and death, and who typically carry out their work drawing on the theories of media and communication, anthropology and philosophy. By investigating death in today's media-saturated society, scholars in this research domain are trying to better understand how death affects the organising of one's social life in a contemporary globally mediated condition, what kind of power dynamics and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion are embedded in these death events and how to address the ethical concerns related to the mediatisation of death in the present age.

Morse focuses his analysis in particular on the interplay between global journalism and mass-death events. In his take on the subject matter, he builds on the anthropological and sociological theories of ritual, social cohesion, solidarity and belonging and media: He affiliates his research with the work of Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (media events), Tamar Liebes (disaster marathon), Nick Couldry (media rituals) and Simon Cottle (mediatised rituals), among many others. In addition, Morse applies certain cosmopolitan theories of the moral and ethical dilemmas associated with mediated and distant suffering. The works of Lilie Chouliaraki and Judith Butler have been proven to have special relevance in this discussion of Morse's analysis.

The book is divided into a theoretical outline and an empirical application of what Morse calls the analytics of grievability. The empirical analysis is carried out in accordance with three separate case studies: the Norway attacks in 2011, the Gaza war between 2008 and 2009, and the Haiti earthquake in 2010. The first four chapters (1–4) sketch out Morse’s main argument and explain how media and the ritualisation of death are connected through public mourning and, furthermore, how the cosmopolitan community is (potentially) created around such mediatised performative practices.

In chapters five to seven, Morse empirically demonstrates how the news media (BBC World and Aljazeera English) ritually perform *death-related media rituals* and examines what kinds of examples of solidarity, belonging and exclusion are created in those media-related ritual performances. The last chapter (8) and the following concluding section summarises the main argument of the book and provides some ideas in terms of directing possible future research on this topic.

Morse’s empirical input lies in the analytical explorations of the *conditions of public mourning* in death-related media rituals. His approach is a critical and analytical one. In Morse’s work, the issue of grief becomes of central relevance. Morse asks, in line with Judith Butler, *whose death is worth public mourning?* Morse also shows interest in critically addressing the inequalities associated with public representations of human suffering in the studied news media. Morse’s analysis thus calls for an ethical orientation beyond the national boundaries of solidarity as he explores the possibility of creating what can be called a ‘cosmopolitan community’, resulting from this conception of public mourning.

The empirical analysis helps to illustrate the theoretical argumentation: Morse’s typology of *empathising grief, moving grief, judicial grief* and *condemnatory grief* offers a unique contribution to the research field of media and death and, no doubt, will help future generations of scholars who will build their empirical work upon this typology.

In summation, Morse's book offers an interesting theoretical and empirical reading of the politics of public mourning and its cosmopolitan implications. The book builds on a variety of well-established theories in the field. The richness of different intellectual sources applied within the book could be considered as both the book's strength and its weakness. While an interested reader will indeed have plenty of theoretical material to digest, there is a possibility of getting lost in the abyss of concepts and neologisms; namely, those which surround the interplay between media and death rituals – e.g. mediatised death rituals or death-related media rituals.

After a theoretically multifaceted introduction, the book becomes more focused towards the end and the empirical typology presented by Morse provides a unique contribution to, and thus advances, the research field of public mourning, prompting the reader to think of public mourning in a more nuanced and empirically operationalised manner. The book ends with a well-written summary that crystallises Morse's argument. As acknowledged in his conclusion, in the future, more focus should be directed towards the study of death on various digital media platforms – a possible topic for another book.