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2023

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py Valaskivi, K & Sumiala, J 2023, ' You Will Never Hear Me Mention His Name : The  
(Im)possibility of the Politics of Recognition in Disruptive Hybrid Media Events ',  
py International Journal of Communication, vol. 17, pp. 1330-1347.

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/356363>

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## **“You Will Never Hear Me Mention His Name”: The (Im)possibility of the Politics of Recognition in Disruptive Hybrid Media Events**

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This article explores how the present-day disruptive hybrid media events shape the conditions for the politics of recognition in political communication. The article sets off with the premise that disruptive hybrid media events provide a substantial context for the activation of the politics of recognition as a communicative response to violations of the value of human life enforced by terrorist mass violence. The article uses the media coverage and the communication of New Zealand’s prime minister Jacinda Ardern in the aftermath of the Christchurch terrorist attacks as an empirical case study and examines, in particular, how Ardern’s political communication is intertwined with the attention economy and the related communicative capitalism, and how these essentials of hybrid media events weakened her possibilities for the realization of the politics of recognition as a communicative response to the violence, and threatened to reduce her political communication to a battle over attention, reputation, and identity politics with the perpetrator.

*Keywords: politics of recognition, Jacinda Ardern, hybrid media events, attention apparatus, attention economy, Christchurch attacks*

The attack by a White-supremacist terrorist on two mosques in Christchurch in March 2019, which killed over 50 people and injured many others, became a global hybrid media event. As a hybrid episode, the digitally immersed act of violence was carefully scripted by the perpetrator, and his activities were immediately followed by social media users on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube as well as on various imageboards, such as 4chan. Mainstream media outlets, such as the *Daily Mail*, were only seconds behind. Considerable media attention was given to the different political, social, and celebrity responses to the attacks and to the police and the criminal investigations. What was at stake in this event was the denial (through the brutal act of killing) of the value of human life of people practicing Islam. The attack was perpetrated against New Zealand Muslims who had gathered for the Friday prayer ritual, a practice of their religion. The terror event demanded an immediate response from the nation’s political authority, and the response of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern played a key role in the narrative of this violent media event and, consequently, in the arena where the struggle for recognition played out. Ardern took an unusually

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Date submitted: 2020-06-27

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categorical stance in giving public recognition to the suffering of the victims and the lives lost in the attack. She stated that she would never say the name of the perpetrator and urged other decision makers, the news media, and social media users to do the same (Hansard Report, 2019).

Ardern's speech was reported in all major news outlets and gained attention all around the world (see, e.g., "Ardern Says She Will Never," 2019; "Christchurch Shootings," 2019; NBC News, 2019; "New Zealand PM," 2019; O'Malley, 2019), as did her consistent performance of the politics of recognition.



**Figure 1. This picture of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern wearing a veil when meeting with the Muslim community was seen by the international press as symbolizing grief and hope after the terror attack (Christchurch City Council Newslines/Kirk Hargreaves, 2019; also see, e.g., Wahlquist, 2019).**

Ardern wore a black headscarf when she met the Muslim families who were grieving for their loved ones and emphasized that the perpetrator of the attacks did not belong to New Zealand but that the victims, the Muslim community, were a part of "us." In her speeches and interviews, she emphasized that New Zealand was a nation with an identity of tolerance and inclusion, a country that would not succumb to the collective fear and hatred that the racist and fascist terrorist sought to induce. Thus, her politics of recognition played out at the level of identity politics.

For some time, many New Zealand news outlets, including the national broadcaster, followed her lead and did not mention the name of the perpetrator. Most other hybrid media actors did not. Despite Ardern's wishes, most news outlets and social media users directed their attention to the motives of the

perpetrator, discussing his manifesto and the livestream of his shooting spree. Both the manifesto and the video kept appearing on different platforms despite the efforts of social media giants, such as Facebook and Twitter, to delete it (e.g., Ibrahim, 2020).

In this article, we analyze how the present-day disruptive hybrid media events shape the conditions for the politics of recognition as a communicative response to spectacular violence, using Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's reported communicative actions as a case in point. We investigate how Ardern's political communication is intertwined with and conditioned by the attention economy and the related communicative capitalism and how these essentials of hybrid media events weakened her possibilities for the realization of the politics of recognition and threatened to reduce her political communication to a battle over attention, reputation, and identity politics with the perpetrator.

We provide a theoretically inspired reading of our data and focus on the political communication strategy and the related media coverage of Ardern's response in the framework of the politics of recognition. Theoretically, the article draws on two main disciplinary traditions. The first is that of the politics of recognition in political science and philosophy (e.g., Fraser, 2000; Honneth, 1992; Taylor, 1994; Thompson, 2006). The second is that of media and communication studies, with a special focus on the theory of disruptive media events (Cottle, 2006; Dayan & Katz, 1992; Katz & Liebes, 2007) and the hybrid media environment immersed in communicative capitalism (Chadwick, 2013; Dean, 2005).

We argue that the current hybrid media environment and the attention economy profoundly shape the politics of recognition in the present-day hybrid media events of violent nature and tend to trivialize political activity triggered by such spectacular violence, turning political activity into maneuvers to manage the direction and volume of attention. We claim that in this environment, battles for attention and issues of fame, reputation, and visibility during hybrid media events tend to reduce the politics of recognition to plain identity politics via the platform logic of clicking, rating, and trolling for attention. This highlights the need for more analytical scholarship on the structural and institutional contexts of hybrid media events in which the politics of recognition are currently carried out and a critical examination of their societal and political consequences in contemporary media-saturated societies.

The empirical data we use to illustrate our theoretical argument are from the Hybrid Terrorizing (HYTE) research project's extensive media data bank, which comprises articles from international news media, such as the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, and the *New York Times*, as well as 10 million Twitter posts and material from YouTube, Instagram, and 4chan. The data bank on the Christchurch attacks was collected using a three-phase multi-method approach for hybrid media events (Harju & Huhtamäki, 2021; Sumiala, Tikka, Huhtamäki, & Valaskivi, 2016). First we conducted a preliminary digital media ethnography to construct the digital field for research. Then in the second phase both quantitative methods (e.g., a streaming Application Programming Interface [API] to collect Twitter data and the web-based tool 4cat [Peeters & Hagen, 2018] to capture data from 4chan) and qualitative methods (e.g., digital media ethnographic analysis of Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram following the event; see Pink et al., 2016; Sumiala & Tikka, 2020; Sumiala, Valaskivi, & Tikka, 2020) were used. This article uses the findings and data of the third phase, where digital ethnography and data analyses were linked to interpret which actors and what kind of communicative actions became particularly significant in the event.

One of the key observations was Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's prominent visibility in the data. In this article, we provide a theoretically inspired reading of her political communication and related media coverage in the immediate aftermath of this hybrid media event against theories of politics of recognition.

This article is structured as follows. First, we explain what is meant by the politics of recognition in this research context. Second, we outline what violent and disruptive hybrid media events are like as the setting for the politics of recognition. In this framework, we place special emphasis on the commodification of attention and on the workings of different parts of the media environment: Journalism, which functions as an "attention apparatus" (Uusitalo & Valaskivi, 2020) that drives such events and the "hype machine" (Aral, 2020) formed by the algorithmic social media and their users. Third, we discuss the issue of the politics of recognition in the case of the Christchurch attacks, particularly in relation to the coverage of the politics performed by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in this disruptive hybrid media event. A note of clarification is in place here. In this article we do not take a normative position on Ardern's actions as politically successful, desirable, or unsuccessful. Rather, we seek to analyze the complexities and challenges related to the possibilities of her political communication conditioned by the commodified communication environment and the workings of hybrid media events. We emphasize the need to better understand these structural and institutional levels that shape political communication.

We conclude with the argument that the commodified media and communication environment driven by the attention economy has a strong impact in the powerplay always present in politics of recognition and activated in disruptive media events. Consequently, we argue that in hybrid disruptive media events, the politics of recognition is at a risk of being reduced to a spectacle where struggles over attention and reputation are at the forefront. In the Christchurch case it is possible to argue also that politics of recognition was necessarily conditioned by the perpetrator's agenda, which consciously essentialized and purposefully distorted ideas and practices of "identity politics."

### **Politics of Recognition**

In the field of modern political theory, much academic work has been published on theorizing recognition (Thompson, 2006). William Davies (2021) claimed that "the politics of recognition has acquired more momentum than anyone could have foreseen in the 1990s" (para. 5). According to Hirvonen and Pennanen (2019), "The key idea behind recognition theories is that there are certain social and psychological mechanisms that underpin political struggles" (p. 28). Philosopher and political theorist Charles Taylor (1994), who famously coined the term "the politics of recognition," claimed that the demand for recognition is connected to modern notions of identity, that is, how a person understands who they are. Thus, recognition, as an attribution of social status made by others, is a "vital human need" (Taylor, 1994, p. 26). This makes recognition an important political concept. Axel Honneth (1992) explicitly combines recognition with political struggle and considers struggle arising from a sense of indignation toward injustice and inequality as constitutive of the politics of recognition. Following Simon Thompson (2006), it could be argued that it is precisely recognition that holds the key to determining what is just in society and what constitutes a good society (see also Fraser, 2000, 2005). Furthermore, Paddy McQueen (2015) argues that recognition must be perceived as a constant process that is conditioned by relations of power and authority in society. Lois McNay (2008) links power and language (in the

present context, communication) as coeval in the struggle for recognition by different parties. Following Honneth (1992), McQueen (2015), and McNay (2008), we adhere to the understanding that there cannot be any recognition through a process of self-expression or communication outside of power relations. In hybrid media events the attention economy takes part in shaping the socio-technical affordances for the politics of recognition. That said, we define the politics of recognition as a constant and continuous process of struggle, where marginalized individuals and groups strive to negotiate the difference between their own perception of their subjectivity and identity and the ways it is recognized by others (McQueen, 2015). This process requires a level of reciprocity. To cite Hirvonen and Pennanen (2019), "in order to get recognition, one must also give it willingly" (p. 29). In the very experience of getting recognition from someone, one at the same time acknowledges that person as a recognizer. In other words, it is impossible to get recognition from the other unless one grants them the status of a recognizer (Hirvonen & Pennanen, 2019)

In recent years, with the increasing significance of digital platforms, fragmentation, and the globalization of the public sphere, political scientists working on the politics of recognition have raised concerns about the politics of recognition in relation to allegations of deliberate misrecognition, the denial of recognition, and even pathologies of recognition (Hirvonen & Pennanen, 2019). William Davies (2021) formulated the current condition as follows:

The key condition for this is the digital platform, which has ushered in a new era of public participation in which recognition of status is never adequately achieved by anyone, so injustice feels ubiquitous. In the attention economy of social media, public actors may long for recognition, but have to settle instead for varying quantities of "reputation", or simply the "reaction" of immediate feedback. (para. 7)

This concern among political scientists regarding the impact of social media and the realization of the current politics of recognition highlights the need for further analysis of the workings of the politics of recognition in disruptive hybrid media events, which we discuss next.

### **Theorizing Disruptive Hybrid Media Events**

Events in human life have been theorized by philosophers, historians, sociologists, and social theorists alike (see, e.g., Abbott, 2001; Badiou, 2015; Sewell, 1990; Wagner-Pacifi, 2017). With the advent of modern society and mass media, the significance of media in making and shaping such social events has increased. The first *theory* of media events was developed by communication scholars Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, who wrote about media events throughout the 1980s and published *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* in 1992. Their book on the interplay between media and public events in contemporary society was a groundbreaking contribution not only to media and communication studies but also, more generally, to social science. The authors' original idea was that a media event is a special genre that is powerful enough to interrupt the everyday media flow, bring the viewer in touch with society's central (sacred) values, and invite the audience to participate in the event (Dayan & Katz, 1992, pp. 5–9). Dayan and Katz (1992) show that the significance of media events lies in their ability to reach a larger audience than events that require physical presence. In so doing, they take the issue of a media event pointing beyond itself to a new societal and political level.

As part of what Julia Sonnevend (2018) calls a “critical turn” in media event research, a shift has taken place in how media events are theorized. Instead of mainly focusing on theoretical and empirical analyses of media events as broadcast, ceremonial, and cohesive occasions, as Dayan and Katz (1992) did, scholars have paid more attention to the disruptive character of media events (Cottle, 2006; Liebes, 1998) and analyzed them within a framework of terror, disaster, and war (Katz & Liebes, 2007). Following this trend in research, we highlight two particularly relevant concepts, *affect* and *hybridity*, and connect them to the politics of recognition. The work of Sara Ahmed (2004) is particularly useful for understanding affective communication in disruptive media events. Ahmed views affect (and emotions) as social and cultural practices rather than as individual psychological states. She points out that affects—here, we refer particularly to *hate*—are not properties of signs or commodities but are produced in the circulation of signs or commodities during the actualization of the politics of recognition and can be characterized as “sticky” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 46). Affect, in this framework, is a means of gaining attention, accumulating attention, and managing meanings in the politics of recognition that play out in today’s disruptive media events.

The second aspect of the “critical turn” in media event research that is relevant for our purposes is the hybrid character of media events. Emphasizing the hybrid nature of today’s disruptive media events broadens the object of analysis from mainstream broadcast media to social media and other digital platforms and highlights the role of diverse actors and platforms and the connections between them in making and shaping disruptive media events as global and digital incidents with unexpected social and political outcomes (see also Couldry, Hepp, & Krotz, 2010; Sumiala, Valaskivi, Tikka, & Huhtamäki, 2018; Valaskivi, Rantasila, Tanaka, & Kunelius, 2019). Within this framework we define the disruptive media events of today as widespread phenomena characterized by the connectivity of different actors, platforms, and communication processes embedded in the attention economy. This circumstance of communication in violent hybrid media events also shapes the conditions in which the politics of recognition can be realized. Furthermore, the conceptualization of violent and disruptive media events as hybrid acknowledges the difficulty of controlling them and emphasizes their contingent and profoundly commodified nature (Sumiala et al., 2018). In the next section, we broaden the analysis of hybrid media events as disruptive and examine the ways in which such events form a part of current communicative capitalism (Dean, 2009), which shapes the modes of communication and, by extension, the possibilities for the politics of recognition.

### **The Attention Apparatus and the Hype Machine**

Today’s hybrid media events are shaped by the commodified communication environment or communicative capitalism (Dean, 2009), which tends to mask power in society. Dean (2005) points out that in the circumstances of commodification of communication most domains of life are being reformatted in market terms and for a spectacle (see, e.g., Debord, 1967; Kellner, 2003). In this environment “communicative exchanges, rather than being fundamental to democratic politics, are the basic elements of capitalist production” (Dean, 2005, p. 58). We argue, that in the hybrid media events this basic logic of digital media environment functions through managing attention. Chris Rojek (2013), who cautions against taking events at face value, also sees today’s global events as manufactured happenings that mainly serve as commodities in the global attention economy.

In other words, a key element in the commodification of communication is the marketization of *attention*, which is managed by *the attention apparatus* that consists of the media industries, including journalism (Uusitalo & Valaskivi, 2020). Attention is a scarce resource in disruptive hybrid media events (Franck, 1999; Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012; van Krieken, 2019) because of the unlimited supply of circulating media content across platforms and genres. Human attention is necessarily limited in supply, although, in principle, it is possible for anyone to engage in media production and participate in the public performance of the politics of recognition. This situation, we argue, generates the marketplace of attention (Webster, 2014), or the attention economy (Davenport & Beck, 2001), in which social and political capital are created but at the same time communication over issues becomes elusive, as (political) reactions take place to address the communication rather than the issues, arguments, or meanings (Dean, 2009).

The ways in which human attention is directed, managed, and manipulated for profit in and through our communication systems and the media environment have profound consequences for the social construction of our collective perceptions of reality and the world (Citton, 2017; Couldry & Hepp 2016; Davenport & Beck, 2001; Goldhaber, 1997). Consequently, we argue, attention can be perceived as constitutive also of the actualization of the politics of recognition in the aftermath of violent attacks and the performances of identity politics that follow. However, it is important to acknowledge that recognition, in this environment, does not necessarily follow attention. In the contemporary hybrid media environment, the role of algorithmic social media in directing and accumulating attention is intertwined with professional media content production, human action, and the socio-technical environment, which also direct the attention of different actors in the hybrid media event. The commodified socio-technical environment incites and directs attention based on revenue and data creation and accentuates affective content and content that generates the most reactions. Politics of recognition can incite feelings and draw reactions but often not enough to generate wide circulation in algorithmically guided curation systems of social media platforms or the interest of journalistic organizations that are more and more concerned about revenues. We also claim that when politics of recognition does draw intense media attention, it tends to lose touch with underrepresented groups seeking recognition, which makes misrecognition more likely and more common than recognition (see Davies, 2021).

Furthermore, we argue that in hybrid, disruptive, and violent media events, the workings of the attention economy can be fickle because of the fluid and fragmented nature of content circulation and participants reacting to the circulating contents rather than to the arguments made. Violent, hybrid events typically involve different actors with multiple roles and technological communication platforms with different operating logics that contribute to the management of attention. This does not mean that the workings and outcomes of diverse actors are arbitrary. Despite the apparently weakened role of journalistic media in agenda setting for the politics of recognition in violent hybrid media events, journalism is still central in directing the attention of wide audiences at the same time while the social media audiences are in general more fragmented. Uusitalo and Valaskivi (2020) observe that journalistic practice acts as an *attention apparatus* that aims to scale the breadth and width of audience attention. We wish to add that the attention apparatus works together with the *hype machine*, which Aral (2020) calls the feedback loop between artificial intelligence and human behavior, which escalates the accumulation of attention in algorithmic social media. The attention apparatus and the hype machine are intertwined and dependent on each other and, to some extent, operate according to similar techniques and logics. Together, different social media platforms,



discussion boards, media organizations, and other modes of content production all contribute to managing, enhancing, and controlling attention while aiming for maximum revenue and data collection.

Consequently, the politics of recognition plays out as a vast socio-technical mechanism that includes both human and nonhuman actors. Attention management takes place within this environment, where, in principle, anyone with a mobile phone or a laptop, Internet access, and a Twitter, Instagram, TikTok or Facebook account can seek attention, air their voice publicly, try to enhance their reputation, and seek recognition. As a whole, however, the attention apparatus and the hype machine function in a highly unequal manner. With biases enhanced by both human action and technological affordances, both the attention apparatus of journalism and the hype machine of social media favor those who already have attention capital and those who adapt most efficiently to the communicative capitalism inherent in events that provoke strong emotions and, by extension, public attention.

Attention depends on the unequal power relationships among the actors (professionals, nonprofessionals, politicians, lay people, perpetrators, victims) involved in the politics of recognition and on the unequal distribution of resources and abilities to use technological and social affordances to manage and direct attention in media events. For instance, in the attention economy, prior reputation is significant for gaining attention (Davies, 2021). Hence, we argue that although attention does not equal recognition, recognition does require a public voice and attention to what is being said. In the attention economy, competition for recognition takes place in an environment in which those with social and cultural capital—to use Bourdieu's vocabulary—have the strongest voice in terms of social media circulation and attention in hybrid media events. Those who have such capital typically include not only celebrities, politicians—Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern is a case in point—and professional media creators (Sumiala et al., 2018) but also others who provoke strong emotions, such as the perpetrator of the Christchurch attacks.

The centrality of emotions has a significant impact on *where* and to *whom* the public's collective attention is directed. In other words, in disruptive hybrid media events, the direction of attention is profoundly embedded in the circulation of emotional content, because emotional content is likely to incite measurable reactions in users (Valaskivi, 2022). Emotions and affects are the core means of gaining and accumulating attention and managing the meanings associated with a media event. Sticky emotions, to borrow from Ahmed's (2004) vocabulary, have the power to shape circulation and garner attention (and to draw attention away from other matters). Although expressions of solidarity, grief, and compassion are abundant in hybrid media events (Nikunen, 2019), outrage, fear, and hate are known to be the most effective emotions for attracting attention as they provoke both reactions and counterreactions (Knuutila, 2019). As noted above, it is the volume of reaction that indicates to algorithms what type of content is most attractive to users. This is why the hype machine especially and, to some extent, the attention apparatus, prioritize affective content, bringing it to wider audiences who go on to share it, perpetuating the feedback loop.

For the politics of recognition, the kinds of affects that are provoked, who provokes them, and the type of affective responses to which that collective attention is directed matter (Ahmed, 2004). In an environment in which strong emotional content tends to garner more attention than neutral content (see Papacharissi, 2015), provocative content is prioritized. These properties of the commodified communication environment are accentuated and intensified in disruptive hybrid media events. The logic of commodified

communication, which is based on attention seeking, attention management, and attention accumulation rooted in provocation, can be articulated as follows: More emotion equals more attention, and more attention equals more revenue and more data but not necessarily greater recognition. This logic is embedded in present-day disruptive hybrid media events, where questions of recognition are often actualized in response to violations of human life. The problem with the politics of recognition playing out in the contemporary media environment is accentuated in the case of the Christchurch attacks.

### **Ardern and the Problem With the Politics of Recognition**

Prime Minister Ardern applied politics of recognition as a communicative response and a strategy as she was trying to tackle the hybrid media event of massive violence. Ardern attempted to direct attention toward and circulate emotions of solidarity and empathy for the victims of the massacre: The Muslim community in New Zealand and elsewhere in the world. She expressed in actions, words, and images her will to identify with the suffering and loss of the Muslim victims. On the day of the attacks, March 15, 2019, she tweeted the following: "What has happened in Christchurch is an extraordinary act of unprecedented violence. It has no place in New Zealand. Many of those affected will be members of our migrant communities. New Zealand is their home; they are us" (Ardern, 2019).

Ardern's statements and her use of religious and cultural symbols such as a headscarf were widely covered by the media. She was pictured hugging people and walking with those who were mourning their loss. Her use of symbols and her vocabulary were also highly inclusive in the national context. She invited all of New Zealand, including religious and ethnic majorities and minorities, to join her community of mourners (Sumiala et al., 2020).

Ardern's other communication strategy in her politics of recognition was to emphasize exclusion in her public refusal to identify the perpetrator. Ardern was explicit in her message; she refused to recognize the perpetrator by deliberately not saying his name in public. Instead, Ardern emphasized his exclusion by publicly stating "he is not one of us" (Sumiala et al., 2020). In her first speech in the New Zealand parliament after the attack, Ardern stated,

He sought many things from his act of terror, but one is notoriety. And that is why you will never hear me mention his name. He is a terrorist. He is a criminal. He is an extremist. But he will, when I speak, be nameless. And to others, I implore you: speak the names of those who were lost, rather than the name of the man who took them. He may have sought notoriety, but we in New Zealand will give him nothing. Not even his name. (Hansard Report, 2019)

The mainstream news media repeated Ardern's message but did not fully follow her wish. Her demand was even less respected on social media platforms where users openly circulated material offered by the perpetrator.

To further problematize the actualization of the politics of recognition in the aftermath of the attacks, we need to look at the actions of the perpetrator, and his use of identity politics for his own cause.

The perpetrator's strategy was clearly to gain, direct, and manipulate attention. He had written a manifesto, which he circulated globally just before embarking on the massacre. One of the receivers of the manifesto was Ardern. In the manifesto, the perpetrator circulated the narrative of the transnational White-supremacist movement, which claims that White Christian nations and identities are under threat from a Muslim invasion because of elites who—out of naivete or sheer evilness—contribute to the mixing of races and religions by too-lenient immigration policies. This ideology is also highly misogynistic, making Ardern all the more unreliable in the eyes of its proponents.

To ensure maximum attention, the executor livestreamed his attack on Facebook. While only approximately 200 people followed the stream in real time, the video immediately went viral on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (Sumiala et al., 2020). Judging by his actions, it is no exaggeration to claim that the aim of the perpetrator was to gain maximum visibility. His provocation resulted in intense emotional reactions and triggered heated debates among the global public. Another aspect of the politics of recognition concerns those who celebrated his action and glorified his impudence.

After the attack, there was a clear surge in different types of hate speech on the imageboard 4chan, and even now, it is easy to find links to the video of the attack on different discussion boards and social media platforms (Zelenkauskaitė, Toivanen, Huhtamäki, & Valaskivi, 2021). One of the ways in which the event was framed on imageboards was the same White-supremacist narrative of a "cultural war" between White (male) Christian identities on the one side and the Muslim "invaders" and the "elites" supporting them on the other. We interpret these communicative actions triggered by the hybrid media event and circulated on imageboards as extreme attempts to gain attention by a certain sector of the public and to seek social recognition for an identity that purposefully misrecognizes the public solidarity with the victims and their lost lives. At the same time these supremacist narratives use the practices of identity politics used by underrepresented and discriminated minority groups and attempt to claim violent reactions that are justified because of an identity under threat.

This basic setting of the Christchurch hybrid media event unfolding in the commodified communication environment conditioned and complicated the politics of recognition by Prime Minister Ardern. While Ardern aimed explicitly to direct collective attention toward the victims and claim them as New Zealanders, by vocally denying the perpetrator's actions and belonging, the perpetrator sought maximum attention for himself and his terrorist, White-supremacist, and anti-Muslim ideology. Meanwhile, the attention apparatus of journalistic media institutions competed for the attention of the global audience and produced news stories accordingly, often also reporting the perpetrator's views and actions with much detail. Social media platform users (individual and institutional) fought for attention through their tweets, comments, shares, and posts, which were often sparked by emotions of outrage, shock, excitement, or resentment (Sumiala et al., 2020) surging in visibility supported by the logic of the hype machine. In this complex trans-platform dispersion of the hybrid media event, an underlying identity struggle was taking place. While much of the mainstream journalism reported Ardern neutrally and sometimes took a stance with her against the perpetrator, in the White-supremacist discussion board communities Ardern's politics of recognition, interpreted as supporting "the replacement," was likely to strengthen the sense of victimhood and threat toward White-supremacist identities. This is how both Ardern and the international mainstream journalism became parties in a cultural war they did not choose to fight.

The role of the Muslim victims in this battle was not simple either. Their identity was reduced to their religion by the terrorist, who used the perceived war between this religious identity and his own as a reason for the attack. And unwittingly, Ardern's politics of recognition continued to do the same, collapsing religion and the identity of the Muslim victims into each other. This demonstrates how an act of recognition is always an act of power. The idea can be formulated as follows: During a disruptive hybrid media event, to bestow recognition is to gain power. The relationship between the recognizer and the recognized is, thus, fully embedded in power. If those recognized—for example, the Muslim victims of the attacks—do not see those who bestow the recognition as legitimate, then the recognition has no meaning for them (McQueen, 2015), but underline the minority status of the group perceived first and foremost through their religious identity as a unitary group.

In these circumstances, there is no neutral position. Everyone who takes part in this type of hybrid media event, including political actors such as Ardern, the perpetrator, professional news organizations, and ordinary social media users on imageboards—and researchers—become parties to the struggle for attention, recognition, and, consequently, power. This, we argue, was the problem Ardern faced. Although her politics of recognition was praised in the global news media, she was also criticized and accused of cultural appropriation when she, as a non-Muslim female, wore a veil during her public performance. It is then not only possible but also probable that political gestures of recognition for underrepresented or misrecognized groups can result in the essentialization of those groups instead of opening up space for greater equality. McNay (2008) argues that instead of well-meaning but misguided normative claims that the politics of recognition leads to a more equal society, it is necessary to understand that inequality resides deep in the structures and processes of the communication used for bestowing recognition.

We should also acknowledge another type of power imbalance, one realized in the case of the terrorist and those who not only recognized but also legitimized his actions. The power in this case lay with the hybrid media actors and users who—regardless of their motivation for doing so—circulated the perpetrator's highly affective and misanthropic content. The attention given to the terrorist by diverse actors in this hybrid and violent media event further essentialized his identity and status and gave him and his actions symbolic power beyond that of an ordinary killer identity, strengthening the circulation of the White-supremacist narratives. The dynamics here closely resemble those of the hybrid media performances resulting from school shootings, such as those that occurred in Jokela and Kauhajoki in Finland, and the postmortem recognition bestowed on the perpetrators by hybrid media actors (see Sumiala & Tikka, 2011). In this perception, the Christchurch perpetrator is already a hero in the violent White supremacist right that in its' extreme seeks to abolish non-White people (Belew, 2019). What is more, he is likely to be referred to in further hybrid media events of terrorist violence by both the supporters of his ideology and the journalists who analyze the causes, history, and contexts of terrorism in their columns.

This takes us back to the impact of emotions in hybrid media events. Power and emotion are inseparable in this type of politics of recognition. Resentment, outrage, and indignation are the very emotions that are most likely to spread and stick during a hybrid media event as they incite reactions from users of various political stances and opinions. As these emotions garner attention and, thus, also reactions, those who have the means to catch the eye of the attention apparatus and keep the hype machine running are

most likely to shape the outcome of the politics of recognition. Prominent political actors, such as Prime Minister Ardern, are natural candidates for this role, but so too are the algorithmic systems of media platforms and the actors who deliberately spread misinformation and disinformation related to such attacks. This argument is supported by the fact that political actors receive attention in the hybrid media through their public roles. They are expected to make statements in traumatic situations such as aftermaths of violent events. The catchier and more emotionally savvy the style of political response, the more likely it will circulate in the hybrid media event. Consequently, the circulation of attention climaxes during a hybrid media event due to the dissemination of emotional content. In this way, the contemporary media environment commodifies not only the processes of making meaning and sense of disruptive hybrid media events but also their politics of recognition. Therefore, we maintain that the politics of recognition, as a struggle to recognize one's identity and have it recognized by others (McQueen, 2015), is in danger of being simplified into an empty spectacle (Kellner, 2003), which may well, at some point, be reduced to mere competition for reputation (Davies, 2021). Consequently, the question of recognition in a hybrid media event characterized by disruptive and—particularly in this case—terrorist violence can be reduced to a commodified spectacle.

The Christchurch case, however, demonstrates also how a terrorist perpetrator manages to draw politicians (and the journalist media) into polarized identity politics. This power play strengthens the in-group dynamics of the proponents of the perpetrator's agenda while locking the politics of recognition of political actors into representing an opposing identity and thus reaffirming the contradiction of identity positions and perceptions of a cultural war.

In sum, Prime Minister Ardern's public appearances can be interpreted as attempts to manage the attention apparatus and, perhaps to some degree, to contain the hype machine. The perpetrator's goal was not only to inflame both to draw maximum attention but also to strengthen the polarization between identity positions of "Christian Whites" and "Muslims" with their "elite" proponents, and to take part in the "cultural war" he was levying. Nevertheless, both Ardern and the perpetrator were acting in full consciousness of the media mechanisms and with the goal of managing public attention. At the level of media actions, attention in disruptive hybrid media events is a double-edged sword, which may turn out to be counterproductive for achieving its original purpose of publicly recognizing the vulnerable and marginalized in society and giving such people identity, subjectivity, and a political voice. Despite Ardern's attempt to avoid recognizing him, the perpetrator was given an identity, and his White-supremacist, extreme political ideology received considerable public attention although with highly mixed responses. The success of the terrorist's communication strategy demonstrates how easily hybrid media events can be manipulated in the service of an ideology. From this perspective, it can be argued that the politics of recognition, when actualized in the studied context, is likely to be reduced to not only a spectacle of commodified attention and a game to win reputation and visibility but also an identity political power-play that is impossible to avoid in the setting played by a perpetrator in the commodified communication environment. This is a development which, we fear, seems to weaken rather than strengthen the possibility of public recognition of the value of lives lost due to terrorist violence.

The commodified modes of communication afforded by the contemporary media environment peak during hybrid media events, where the everyday is interrupted and actors are spurred to immediate action,

striving for—and generating—live information and commentary on what has taken place. This setting creates serious challenges for both media and communication scholars and policy makers addressing the contemporary media environment. In the concluding part of this article, we address some of these concerns.

**“They Are the Publisher, Not Just the Postman.”**

In this article, we approach the politics of recognition in the context of hybrid media events as a continuous process of struggle in which diverse actors strive for recognition of their subjectivity and their identity by others (McQueen, 2015) in various, even violent, and malevolent ways. We adhere to the understanding that there cannot be any recognition in disruptive hybrid media events that lies outside the power relations of the current attention economy and the commodification of affect. What is more, attention and reputation gained in this context do not necessarily lead to a successful politics of recognition, as in the case of Ardern, and the actors involved in the politics of recognition necessarily adjust to the commodified communication environment that conditions possible avenues of action and may lead to unintended outcomes. Our argumentation is based on the proposition that political and cultural lives are always reconfigured around new technologies and economic relations beyond their own immediate application (Davies, 2021). In other words, the technologies we use and the socio-technical affordances available for communicating and making sense of disruptive hybrid media events have an impact on the ways in which communication takes place and the social consequences on such communication.

The celebrated promise of digital communication technology has been the democratization of voice and the potential for recognition, which, in fact, is never actualized because of the current business logics based on provocation and more generally commodification of the same technology in ways that reduce acts of recognition into spectacles and accelerate circulation of affective and provocative contents (Aral, 2020). In hybrid media events of a disruptive nature, an additional promise of technology has been imagined: The possibility to broaden the category of the recognizer from prominent political figures to all “ordinary people” with an Internet connection (see Hirvonen & Pennanen, 2019). In the contemporary media environment, anyone can, in principle, claim the status of the recognizer and identify the victims to be recognized. The algorithmic logic of social media platforms, however, relies on reputation and network social capital to grant visibility to users, potentially generating resentment rather than solidarity (Davies, 2021). And at the same time, it is as easy to challenge the legitimacy of recognition and wage identity and cultural wars in hybrid media events. In short, in the attention economy inherent in present-day disruptive hybrid media events, attention is hard to come by, but it is even harder to gain the kind of concentrated, long-term attention that the politics of recognition would require. Attention, reaction, and reputation do not equal social and political recognition.

This leads to our final point and invites us to consider the challenge Ardern posed to the social media corporations to take better responsibility when she stated, “They are the publisher, not just the postman” (Hansard Report, 2019). She voiced the public concern regarding the moral responsibility of global social media platforms that allowed the circulation of livestreamed terrorist violence and emphasized that these platforms should be seen as publishers. The challenge is, thus, an institutional and (infra)structural one. As Honneth (2011) argued, “the main burden of securing justice does not lie with individuals, but with the institutionalised practices and norms” (p. 395). Although each individual social media user can have an impact on what they react and give attention to, and although individual politicians—in the case of the

Christchurch attacks, in particular, Prime Minister Ardern—can stage impressive performances in response to such violations of human life and dignity, it is up to media corporations and institutional decision makers at the national and global levels to seriously consider the consequences, intended or unintended, of the contemporary commodified media environment and related events and their significance in sustaining the attention economy of communicative capitalism. The task for media and communication scholars is to advance analytical and critical research to better explain the institutional and structural logics, the workings of the current hybrid media environment and the liabilities hybrid media events impose on the future politics of recognition in justifying the right to live as an unquestioned value of human life.

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