



CTE

Centre for Applied Ethics
Linköping University

OBJECTIVITY BEYOND THE RED LINE: A CASE FOR BINOCULARITY IN WAR REPORTING

MAYLI MERTENS, MA

Submission for Special Paper Competition
Association for Practical and Professional Ethics
2016 APPE Annual Conference

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to my mentor Maren Behrens for her uncompromisingly forthright comments and support, thanks to Aaron Quinn for the work he has done and his enthusiasm and encouragements, and to Erik Parens for inspiring me with a theory that encompasses my concerns so beautifully.

This paper is dedicated to the people of Palestine, the soldiers of Israel, and all members of the Samidoun grassroots network in central Beirut.

ABSTRACT:

This paper analyzes specific challenges concerning “truth-telling” war reporters face when reporting on international conflict. For this purpose truth is examined in accordance with journalistic principles outlined in codes of ethics, with a focus on objectivity and fairness. The aim is to discover ways to improve the application of principles, in order to battle epistemic errors and the effects they entail: polarization, reductionism, and superficiality. The study concludes that providing context and nuance is crucial, but that codes -although essential- are insufficient in helping war reporters decide what is relevant and what is not. A novel approach to virtue ethics is recommended to support journalists in finding a balance between seemingly conflicting principles. When aspiring to a binocular view, phronesis (or practical wisdom) can inspire responsible journalists to identify people simultaneously as determined objects as well as free subjects and thus as persons who can -and can't - deserve punishment. Therefore practicing binocularity can help journalists comply with the spirit, rather than the letter of the principles. This implementation can improve the practice of war reporting to the point where news reports do not only counter further polarization, reductionism, and superficiality; they can instead inspire more understanding and compassion in their audience, which in turn can lead to a more peaceful and tolerant society.

Keywords: media ethics, responsible journalism, war reporting, truth, bias, objectivity, binocularity, virtue ethics, phronesis, epistemic injustice, polarization, reductionism

OBJECTIVITY BEYOND THE RED LINE:

A CASE FOR BINOCULARITY IN WAR REPORTING

Introduction

I begin my paper by focusing on the established ideas surrounding 'truth' in media and its relationship to the principles of 'objectivity' and 'fairness', adopting a view of journalistic objectivity that aspires to the greatest possible correspondence between its assertions and reality. I then outline the terms 'epistemic injustice', 'polarization', 'reductionism', and 'superficiality' and their relevance to the topic. Following this theoretical evaluation, I display examples of how 'truth-telling' can in practice nonetheless lead to misinformation. Although this is certainly true for other topics as well, I will solely look at examples related to reports on international conflict. I use examples from news reports and testimonies from veteran war reporters and highly acclaimed Pulitzer Prize winners. I incorporate my own experience as a reporter and witness of international conflict, but only in order to strengthen arguments that have been published by other researchers in this field. These examples will be used to show that 'responsible journalism' can nevertheless lead to epistemic injustice following the effects of polarization, reductionism, and superficiality. I conclude that providing extensive context and nuance is crucial in order to prevent two effects: the audience's reductionist and superficial understanding of international conflict, and polarization of the public and their opinions. I argue that not only these effects are not in accordance with the aim of the ethical principles; in addition they hold a risk to further fuel conflicts. I also explain that media can precisely for that reason be used strategically in war. My aim is to show that there is thus a discrepancy between the principles defined in the various codes and the actual application of those principles and that this ethical dilemma demands greater attention. Finally, I call attention to the internal struggle war reporters face when trying to avoid epistemic injustice and argue that binocularity can help balance that struggle. I discuss possible solutions and practical implementations, and suggest an approach embedded in virtue ethics that may help journalists battle further polarization, reductionism and superficiality when reporting on international conflict.

The world as a matter of fact

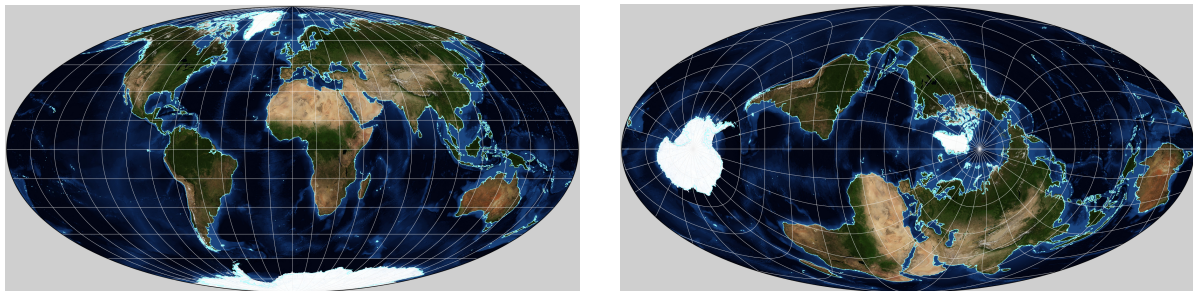
In a recent interview on Danish TV, statistician and professor Hans Rosling says that "you cannot trust media outlets if you want to understand the world". (September 2015, DR2) Yet when we look at the codes and principles that guide journalists around the world they all emphasize the importance of trust-inspiring factors such as truth, accuracy, objectivity and fairness. The argument between Rosling and his interviewer reflects this well. The Danish interviewer responds that news is merely feeding back facts, and that the current situation

undeniably consists of war, conflict, and chaos. Rosling argues that he is wrong. When media speaks of Nigeria being under constant threat from Boko Haram, they only speak of a small part of the country. "Nigeria has a fast growing economy and the country is experiencing a decline in child mortality." With nearly 180 million people (source: IMF) it's the most populated country in Africa, and "it just had a fantastic, democratic election. The very competent leader Muhammadu Buhari has replaced the country's mediocre government. And the entire population backs him." He adds that "One can choose to only show my shoe which is very ugly, but it is only a small part of me. If you choose to only show my face then that is another part of me. News outlets only care about a small part, and then call it 'the world'."

Truth

It is of course a misconception to think that fact equals truth. This has been affirmed and reaffirmed by for instance Aristotle in *Metaphysics* (1857), Spinoza in *Metaphysical Thoughts* (1985), and Heidegger in *On the Essence of Truth* (1943). Or, as BBC's Editorial Guidelines dictate: "Accuracy is not simply a matter of getting facts right." Many issues regarding truth can be analyzed through an approach grounded in hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, which is why objectivity seems to be so crucial when wanting to give a truthful representation of reality. I illustrate this point with a visual example.

These are Mollweide projections representing our planet (taken from NASA's website)



Both of these representations of our planet as a reality are equally factual, and therefore -one would think- equally truthful. But the truth each map gives us is a distinctively different one that gives us a distinctively different view on the world, and so it wouldn't be right to speak of 'the' truth, but rather 'a truth'. To give one truth and omit another is misleading, and can purposely or accidentally imply a lie. For those reasons, witnesses in court are asked to swear to not just tell the truth, but the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Yet when reporting on events that developed over continents and throughout decades (even centuries) telling the whole truth can be difficult if not impossible, especially when space for elaboration and nuance is limited. Drawing a truthful representation of the world's geographical layout when limited to a flat sheet of paper will never give a complete account of reality. Similarly, journalists who have

to translate real events into words and image, must choose a focus point, and most importantly decide what is relevant and what is not. These interpretations will inevitably distort reality. But rather than agreeing with many critics who claim that inevitable bias makes objectivity an unachievable goal (and at times even an undesirable norm), I refer to Boudana (2011), Figdor (2010), and Ryan (2001) who all (among others), while acknowledging that producing objective news is difficult, continue to defend objectivity as a worthy pursuit in responsible journalism.

Objectivity

When speaking of the principle of objectivity, I refer to "journalistic objectivity as a performance" in which "objectivity is concerned with such practices insofar as they make it possible to reach the highest degree of correspondence between journalistic assertions and reality." (Boudana, 2011, 396) The principle of objectivity can be found in virtually every code in media ethics. The Principles of the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) for instance state, "Every effort must be made to assure that the news content is accurate, free from bias and in context, and that all sides are represented fairly."

In order to be free from bias, one must first identify what one's bias is. As human beings we are all naturally biased, but the most dangerous bias is the one we're unaware of. No matter how objective one thinks one is, the only way one can look at something is from one's own point of view. Granted, one's perspective may be large and even include the ability to put oneself in the shoes of others, but ultimately it is still one's own perspective. Although different perspectives can be factual and truthful in their own regard, in combination they may result in seemingly contradictory interpretations of the same occurrence. As one can witness from the two pictures below, this so-called Rashomon-effect was beautifully demonstrated by artists Daniel Tchetchik and Oren Izre'el in their series *Divided Moment*¹ (2011), which "captures simultaneous photographs of events from two different points of view or better, two of the infinite possible points of view for observing moments in reality".



¹ The photo series *Divided Moment* can be found on <http://www.danieltchetchik.com>

Some bias is so widespread that we don't think of it as bias. We may even think of our bias as fact. The Mercator projection of Earth, originally designed in 1569 (colonial era) for nautical purposes, is known to dramatically exaggerate areas far from the equator (including Europe, the USA, and Russia) and severely diminish the size of areas around the equator (including Africa, South America, and Australasia). Greenland and Antarctica are consequently blown out of proportion as the increasing scale reaches infinity. Yet for a long time, this was how the world was depicted. As shown, different projections can significantly influence how we view the world. A projection viewed upside down may impact one's view even more, especially if one is Australian, and has believed to be living 'down under' for most of his or her life.

When one single perspective is so widely accepted as the norm that we come to think of it as a single fact, it is especially important to point out that it is only part of the whole truth. In this way, one could say that what is objective is -to a degree- dependent on the status quo. If the audience is only aware of the first Mollweide projection shown by NASA (page 4), then the principle of objectivity demands you make the second projection known to the audience. Yet when new realities (such as an ice free North Pole) call for new perspectives, one conveniently looks for the angle that seems most relevant to the issue at hand, possibly feeding into existing bias. Yet again, as Andrew Edgar says in 'Objectivity, Bias, and Truth': "to criticize a report for distorting reality is incoherent, for the best interpretation must distort reality". (2006, 89) The question then is "not whether objective news is logically possible. ... The relevant sense of possibility is what is possible for us given our cognitive capacities as they actually are." (Figdor, 2010, 23) It is therefore of utmost importance that when journalists choose a certain perspective (which they inevitably have to), they do so consciously, aware of their bias, and preferably stating explicitly that this is one particular perspective -one of many- and explain the motivation for choosing that specific perspective (following the Society of Professional Journalism's (SPJ) Code²: "be accountable and transparent").

I shall now discuss the other two requirements as outlined by ASNE above: to present the facts "in context, and [with] all sides represented fairly."³

Fairness

The principles of objectivity and fairness are closely related. Since fairness implies impartiality, when failing to be objective, one may automatically (though not necessarily) be unfair. Since one can only be objective to a degree (Figdor, 2010, 19; 23) guarding fairness becomes of

² The Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) can be found on their website <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

³ The Statement of Principles of the American Society of New Editors (ASNE) can be found on ASNE's website <http://asne.org>

utmost importance. As explained above, one way to minimize the risk of being unfair is to be aware of one's bias and acknowledge it as such in one's report. But there are other equally important factors needed for a fair representation of facts. One of them is context, since "there are no facts that are free from a particular framework or theoretical context" (Boudana, 2011, 389) To place things within context may seem self evident, but as I will show further down this paper it isn't easy to give all the necessary context and nuance needed for a fair report. Especially when one needs to talk about a single event within an international conflict that has been taking place across the globe over long periods of time. "The explanation of the event may tend to be carried out within a limited framework." (Edgar, 2006, 87) Although the single event can be discussed within the context of the whole, "the whole will in part be constituted as the journalist's perception of reality. The journalist will be aware of past, current and (anticipated) future events ... in relationship to which the given event may be placed as part of the totality." (2006, 87)

Because of the above-mentioned limitations in perception, interpretation, and framework, journalists must be extra cautious how to "represent all sides fairly". Being fair can be defined as a) agreeing with what is thought to be right or acceptable, b) treating people in a way that does not favor some over others, and c) not too harsh or critical. (Merriam-Webster, 11th ed) To realize a) one must pay attention to all criteria mentioned above. Part of b) can also be achieved by examining our bias. The Mercator projection for instance was unfairly magnifying some countries while diminishing others. But a very big part of b) which I will take a closer look at further on, is "the danger of discrimination being furthered by media" (IFJ Declaration of Principles)⁴. Stereotypes are often, if not created in media, amplified, and established as fact by media. This is a crucial dilemma, especially within war reporting, because it can help fuel an international conflict further. Definition c) however points to one of the dangers to my argument, because on the other end of the fairness-spectrum lies a journalist's 'bias towards fairness'. Although rare, it happens that a story simply only has one side to it. Or sometimes, one side of the story can be so much more relevant and impactful than the other sides that it wouldn't be fair to give all perspectives equal weight. I will discuss this important issue in detail further down, and argue that deciding whether or not other sides should receive a voice, and how loud that voice ought to be, is what makes fairness in war reporting so terribly difficult.

When it comes to reporting the truth, it is clear that journalists face many challenges. I argue that failing to meet these challenges -especially when reporting on wars- leads to epistemic injustice, which can have dangerous consequences that are morally unacceptable.

⁴ The Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists of the (IFJ) can be found on IFJ's website <http://www.ifj.org>

Epistemic Injustice

My focus is on epistemic injustice when reporting on international conflict. Generally speaking, epistemology examines knowledge and justified belief.⁵ (Steup, 2014) Thus by epistemic injustice I mean that the way knowledge is created and disseminated can lead to epistemic errors, where one adopts a false sense of reality as truth. These false truths impact one's capacity to correctly interpret or judge the reality at hand. The injustice is thus done to the people and events that are incorrectly judged or interpreted, based on the epistemic errors.

The first type of epistemic error follows a hermeneutical issue concerning the interpretation of news by a naturally biased audience. I previously stressed the inability for one to be completely objective. Even when showing multiple sides of one story -as responsible journalism requires- a report will still comprise of an interpretation of those various perspectives. I pointed out that, since an inviolable interpretation does not exist prior to the report, (Edgar, 2006, 89) and in order to minimize the damage one's bias can cause, one ought to be as aware as possible of one's own bias. As stated in SPJ's Code of Ethics "journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting". But rather than examine the way in which journalists interpret the events they must report on, I will focus on a similar problem that in my opinion has not received enough attention: the ways in which audiences interpret those reports. Just like journalists, audiences are naturally biased. I will be giving some examples of how that bias results in epistemic injustice, and how journalists can counter that effect.

The second epistemic error is that of stereotypes and more specifically -within the context of reporting on international conflict- the unintentional or accidental reinforcement of stereotypes. The general negative effects of stereotyping are mostly prejudice and discriminatory bias towards groups of people. But within the context of international conflict those effects aggravate the degree of misinterpretation of reports.

As I shall demonstrate, both these epistemic errors are based on what I call 'truthful misinformation' and ultimately they demonstrate an infringement of the principles of both objectivity and fairness. My aim is to expose the dangers of polarization, reductionism and superficiality that result from epistemic errors within the context of international conflict, and identify ways for journalists to counter these tendencies. For this purpose, I will shortly define the three terms, reflecting the meaning that I refer to in this paper. Polarization is a) division into two opposites or b) concentration about opposing extremes of groups or interests formerly

⁵ The traditional approach dictates that there are three conditions to knowledge: truth, belief, and justification.

ranged on a continuum.⁶ (Merriam-Webster, 11th ed) Reductionism, in Oxford Dictionaries (2015), is defined as “the practice of analyzing and describing a complex phenomenon in terms of its simple or fundamental constituents, especially when this is said to provide a sufficient explanation”. Superficiality means a) concerned only with the obvious or apparent, shallow b) seen on the surface, external and c) presenting only an appearance without substance or significance (Merriam-Webster, 11th ed).

Truthful Misinformation

I will now discuss specific examples of two types of ‘truthful misinformation’ found in reports on international conflict that cause epistemic errors. I will argue that journalists need to provide greater nuance and more extensive context in order to avoid these errors, and explain why it is important they do so.

Contextual bias and hermeneutics

The limitations of objectivity that concern journalists when writing news reports equally concern their audiences when they interpret said reports. Of course one can argue that media literacy is needed for an audience to correctly interpret the news, (Martens, 2010, 11) but this cannot allow for journalists to ignore the presence of certain forms of bias present in even the most educated audiences. One typical form of audience bias is sociopolitical orientation. Naturally our socio-political orientation greatly affects our interpretation of the news. However, I want to focus on another, perhaps less obvious type of bias; namely contextual bias. My argument is that the frame of reference of foreign audiences is in fact completely inadequate for correct interpretation of the reports. “In reading the report the reader does not experience the complexity or immediacy of the real event.” (Edgar, 2006, 86) The effect war has on the day-to-day reality of citizens (and actors, including the reporters) within the conflict is therefore not something that can just be omitted in a report. Providing cultural and historical background and context is thus extremely important. Yet there seem to be certain assumptions concerning war and its horrors, that are so self-evident to those who witness war first hand, that it often has professionals skip over some of this basic information. I will argue that the importance of this information may be so valuable and relevant that it could in fact humanize war (as in giving it a human character, not make it more humane) and change the entire way audiences perceive conflicts. My point is that the way citizens who live without conflict perceive war is in essence a form of bias, and it is part of a journalist’s obligation to counter this bias by educating the audience about the general reality of war and include this reality in the reports. Once more, it will become apparent that context is key.

⁶ Polarization is also used in science meaning magnetization, affecting radiation and light, or increase in resistance of an electrolytic cell.

I now present an example of how a lack of context can lead to severe misinformation of an audience that is alien to the conditions at hand. This example will also show the difference it makes when sufficient context is provided. In order to further show how easily we interpret fact as truth, I will use the medium of photography. I do so not only because image is increasingly important in the way media presents facts but also because if I were to use text, one could easily use the argument of objectivity against me and say that the statement is merely an interpretation of the facts. A picture however increases the illusion of being objective and truthful. What was recorded in that instant was factually happening. No one can deny that. Yet, I say illusion because (as illustrated at the beginning of this paper with the photo series Divided Moment) the lens of a camera records -just like the human eye- from a specific angle and thus offers one particular perspective. As Berger explains in 'Understanding a photograph' (2013), "The formal arrangement of a photograph explains nothing. The events portrayed are in themselves mysterious or explicable according to the spectator's knowledge of them prior to his seeing the photograph." Yet, it is important to note that the power of image in international conflict is much stronger in shaping opinions than that of text in part because of its perceived un-deniability. As illustrated with the example below, when visuals are concerned, it is even more important to provide the audience with sufficient background and context so as to avoid misinterpretation as much as possible.

In 2006, Spencer Platt was awarded 1st prize World Press Photo of the Year with this photo:



© Getty Images/photo by Spencer Platt

The original caption read: "Affluent Lebanese drive down the street to look at a destroyed neighborhood August 15, 2006 in southern Beirut, Lebanon." (Ghattas, 2007) A lot of controversy arose concerning this photo, because many people believed it to depict heartless voyeuristic tourists from another neighborhood gorging on devastation. Some captions reinforced that idea by explicitly stating it so. I was filming in that neighborhood that day and I

too can guarantee this picture is incredibly truthful to what life in Lebanon was like in that moment, but only given the right context. Unfortunately, when one is unfamiliar with this country, its culture and history, its people, their struggles, and their coping mechanisms; if one does not know what it is like to drive into one's own street (or what is left of it) and see one's entire apartment block down in shreds, one will not understand the true meaning of this picture. Someone will have to explain it.

As Platt later expressed in an interview with BBC "There is nowhere that fashion, carnage, war and beauty rub shoulders as they do in Beirut." He added, "A red Mini Cooper driving through the rubble with a group of glamorous youth looking perplexed and slightly indifferent...that is a picture... nothing more need be said." (Ghattas, 2007) Although even these quotes about Beirut and its people are in a way true (apart from the fact that the car turned out to be orange, not red), it is wrong to think that they are sufficient. They can easily be misunderstood. The fact that the youth look slightly indifferent for instance, has nothing to do with a lack of empathy, but rather the numbness people experience after having already been exposed to 'too much'.

Thanks to the picture winning a prestigious prize, the records were set straight. Different reporters tracked down the people portrayed in the photo and their testimonies were translated in many languages and published in many countries. For the purpose of my argument, it is important to state some of the context given by the interviewees. The report from Gert Van Langendonck, reporter for newspaper De Morgen, as quoted by the New York Times, states that

"Jad Maroun, 22, and his sisters Bissan, 29, and Tamara, 26, were not feeling all that fabulous on that sunny day in August. Despite the fact that they are Christian, they all lived in the [depicted southern and Muslim neighborhood] Dahiye. At the start of the war they had fled the bombing and settled in the Plaza Hotel in Hamra, a Sunni part of Beirut. It was there that they had met Noor Nasser, 21, a Muslim, and Liliane Nacouzi, 22, a Christian, who were working as waitresses in a sandwich shop in the hotel. They too were refugees from Beirut's Southern suburbs. It was also where they ran into Lana El Khalil, 25, the owner of the Mini Cooper in Platt's picture. ... During the first days of the war, Lana helped evacuate people who were trapped in the Dahiye ... [with her] little convertible." (Mackey, 2007)

Lana made sure to point out the sticker that can be seen on the dashboard. It's from Samidoun, a grassroots relief organization to which she belongs. Throughout my stay in Lebanon during the conflict in the summer of 2006, I've met dozens of young professionals who abandoned their lives and jobs to volunteer as part of Samidoun, and the work they did was truly admirable.

"This car has a story. ... It was used throughout the war to help deliver [food and] medication to refugees who had taken shelter in schools in central Beirut. We also took

medication to people in the southern suburbs who refused to leave their homes or simply couldn't." (Ghattas, 2007)

The driver Jad, admitted to have had second thoughts about opening up the convertible.

"I was worried that it would give people the wrong idea. But it was a hot day. There were five of us in a tiny car and we all wanted to get a good look at what had happened to the neighborhood." (Mackey, 2007) He continued; "My problem with the winning picture is that it emphasizes some of the misconceptions people have - that it would be unusual for people who look like us to be in the area, they expect the area to be full of veiled women, to be dirty and impoverished. But we live there and everybody makes us feel welcome even though we're Christian." (Ghattas, 2007 and Mackey, 2007)

His sister Bissan, a bank clerk and former model said

"Driving into our neighborhood was shocking. We had seen it on television but it wasn't the same as in real life. The smell was terrible, for weeks, there was no rain, the fumes just hovered over the area. I don't understand why Israel had to destroy so much for the sake of two soldiers. Our building escaped destruction but everything around it was flattened. After the war, we considered leaving the area because we weren't sure how quickly we would be able to live a normal life again amidst all the destruction but things improved very quickly, so we're staying. My parents live in our hometown in the north, because my father has to be near the hospital for medical treatment. During the war, we gave shelter to nine families, around 40 people, in our home. We are not rich kids, we are really middle class, so the impression the picture gives is wrong. You have to remember that in Lebanon, everyone tries to look glamorous, the poor and the rich. Appearances are very important." (Ghattas, 2007)

After the revelations Platt, who had never spoken to the people he photographed, said "the picture challenges our notion of what a victim is meant to look like" (Ghattas, 2007) and a line was added to the original caption: "As the United Nations brokered cease fire between Israel and Hezbollah enters its first day, thousands of Lebanese returned to their homes and villages." Most pictures however don't win prizes and go on living their own lives, feeding into people's subjective perceptions, creating reductionist and superficial understandings of the conflict and the people living in the midst of it.

Another limitation that is true especially for pictures but for many reports as well, is that they represent one moment in time. Without follow up, the absence of continuance causes a lack of context. Whether an audience lacks background information on what happened before, or they lack reports on what happened after, the result is the same: they don't get the full picture. For instance, in his book on war reporting in the Middle East, Thomas Friedman, multiple Pulitzer Prize winning foreign correspondent, mentions a woman whose picture had been taken right after she realized her entire family has been smothered in the rubble of the eight-story building they lived in before it was bombed by Israeli jets. The dramatic photograph shows her "being held back by one arm, as she struggled to get free. Her other arm reached out toward her

vanished family, while her face was twisted into a portrait of utter anguish.” An hour after that picture was taken though, the woman was randomly killed by a car bomb (typical weapon used Lebanese civil war) that went off nearby. (Friedman, 1998, 28) What happens after a reported event can change our perception and understanding of that event as much as what happened before it. Again, context is everything.

Reinforcing stereotypes

My second example is about reinforcing stereotypes. I want to remind the reader that my aim is to examine solely the work of journalists who, like war reporter Thomas Friedman, indeed take their responsibilities and their codes of conduct seriously. Deliberate use of stereotypes, or false generalizations that are often used by some media⁷ are problematic for obvious reasons. What I will examine here is the accidental or involuntary strengthening of stereotyping within responsible journalism, because statements that are superficially true are in fact equally, if not more, harmful. When statements aren't obviously biased, they are much more likely to be adopted as truth. As I shall illustrate, thoughtlessness or carelessness can thus contribute to polarization, reductionism, and superficiality in how we perceive international conflicts.

One of the most typical examples of polarization follows from the supposed opposition of everything that is Muslim slash Arab versus everything that is Jewish slash Israeli. Yet, in his book 'From Beirut to Jerusalem' (1998) Thomas Friedman gives an account of his decade long experience as a foreign correspondent in the Middle East. During his education in Middle Eastern studies at Oxford University he shared his time with 125 of the best students from the Arab world and Israel. He talks about the extremely bright Lebanese Chiite, Mohammed Mattar; his closest friend Yosef Sassoon, an Iraqi Jew; several Lebanese Christians and Palestinians; and many others. This is what he says about that experience: "Watching them all interact, argue, challenge each other at lectures, and snipe at one another at mealtimes taught me how much more there was to the Middle East than Arab versus Jew." (6-7)

Stereotypes are often created by continuously expressing a connection between a certain group of people and specific (supposedly corresponding) characteristics. I will analyze two examples where this happens unintentionally within reports on the Palestine-Israel conflict. One is that of the 'Palestinian suicide bomber', the other of 'the Jewish settler'. Following quotes were taken from the BBC website. (Anon, 25th of February 2005)

A Palestinian suicide bomber blows up a bus in the northern coastal city of Haifa, killing

⁷ FOX News' "O'Reilly has repeatedly called poor people lazy, and the subtext of his remarks is that many poor people are pathologically and undeservedly dependent on the government dole." http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/14/opinion/charles-blow-the-president-fox-news-the-poor.html?_r=0

15 people and wounding more than 100 others.

An Israeli security guard is killed as he confronts a *Palestinian suicide bomber* outside a railway station in the town of Kfar Saba.

A *Palestinian suicide bomber* disguised as a religious Jew kills an Israeli man and his pregnant wife in the West Bank town of Hebron.

At least four people are killed and dozens injured in two *suicide attacks by Palestinian bombers* in Israel and the West Bank.

A *Palestinian suicide bomber* kills eight people and injures dozens in an attack on an Israeli bus in Jerusalem.

Writing about 'Palestinian suicide bombers' is problematic for many reasons. One is that it shows no sign of diversity. One may be talking of teenagers; of traumatized and desperate citizens; of extremist, religious, or fanatic militants, ... They could have been trained to commit terrorist attacks by Fatah, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Movement, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, or they may have acted on their own initiative. By simply calling them Palestinian the audience lacks context to properly assess the reality of the person and the actual situation they found themselves in. Their judgment will be based on superficial and reductionist understanding. Another equally unfair problem is that most Palestinians are not suicide bombers.

Likewise, the problem created by calling the Zionist settlements in Israel 'Jewish settlements' is that most 'Jews' do not live in settlements. Most Jews don't even live in Israel actually, but from the ones that do, the majority does not live in said settlements. And when it comes to unrepresented diversity, there is a rather big difference between first-generation settlers, who claim the land and choose to live there, and second-generation settlers who were born there. Yet the following examples were taken from articles on the BBC's website. (Headlines are underlined)

Israel widens Jewish settlement subsidies: Israel has agreed to subsidise several *Jewish settlements* that it classed as illegal until recently. (Anon, August 4th, 2013)

West Bank mosque 'set alight by Jewish settlers': Israel is investigating Palestinian suspicions that a mosque in the West Bank was set alight by *Jewish settlers*. (Anon, October 4th, 2010)

Israel backs new Jewish settlement homes: The Israeli government has approved the construction of nearly 1,200 new homes in *Jewish settlements* in occupied Palestinian areas. (Anon, August 11th, 2013)

'Price-tag' tactics of West Bank Jewish settlers: ... But on the streets of Arab East Jerusalem, some young *Jewish people* are up to more than just graffiti. (Corbin, 2012)

The natural response to this argument is of course that when journalists talk of 'Palestinian suicide bombers' or 'Jewish settlements' they are not lying. The suicide bomber was Palestinian. The people living in the settlements are Jewish. What is the error in calling them that?

The use of Jewish here is an epistemic error because Jewish is not the most relevant characteristic to define this group of people. Israeli would be more accurate, but still insufficient since the settlers represent less than 10% of all Israeli.⁸ Zionist or fanatics may seem like a preferable term, but only depending on the context. Shlomo Ben-Ami for instance, who for years worked on the peace process side by side with former President Clinton, stated, "I am a Zionist and an ardent one at that. But I have fought to define the boundaries of the idea by a respect for the right of Israel's Palestinian neighbors to a life of sovereignty and dignity." (Ben-Ami, 2006, xii) This shows that not all Zionists are pro-settlements. Likewise, although it is much harder to put an exact number on how many Palestinians can fairly be defined as suicide bombers, I seriously doubt that it is a majority. Yet all other Palestinians, and all other Jews will be spoken to simply because they identify with being Palestinian, with being Jewish.

SPJ's code of ethics under 'Seek truth and report it' states that "journalists should boldly tell the story of diversity and magnitude of the human experience". By defining a minority through an adjective that covers the majority, one is doing the exact opposite of what that principle demands. One associates the majority with the actions of the minority. Granted, these errors are less often made in responsible media sources such as BBC, than they are in some other media. Yet as shown above they do still happen. It is furthermore remarkable that media -when identifying Christian groups- easily differentiate, even when these groups are committing violent acts in the name of Christianity.⁹

Whether one reports on Christians, Muslims, or Jews, both the fairness as well as the objectivity principle demand to be as specific as possible. When an unfair group label can lead to a stereotypical and polarized understanding of the conflict, then one must provide background information rather than using that group label. Acknowledging the effects of classical conditioning on stereotypes, (Macrae et al. eds, 1996, 52-53) when we make connections between Palestinians and terrorist attacks, between Jews and occupiers and repeat these associations continuously we greatly, and incorrectly affect global perception of those groups.

⁸ In January 2015 the Israeli Interior Ministry gave figures of 389,250 Israelis living in the West Bank and a further 375,000 Israelis living in East Jerusalem. There are another 20000 living in the Golan Heights. That is less than 800.000 total. The total population in Israel however is 8.345.000.

⁹ Orthodox Christian groups such as the Iron Guard and Lancieri in Romania responsible for Pogroms (Payne), Maronite Christians who massacred Palestinian and Lebanese Muslims, The Ku Klux Klan; or Anti-abortion groups such as The Covenant, The Sword, and the Arm of the Lord (CSA), Defensive Action, and the Montana Freemans. (Al Khattar, 2003)

One could argue that in some cases the characteristics used (Palestinian, Israeli, Jew, Arab, Muslim, settler, terrorist...) are the most relevant characteristics concerning the story at hand and that these simply outweigh other factors. But this is exactly what I'd like to question. Even when describing a majority of a certain group, there may be characteristics that give an audience a better understanding of that group than when given the nationality, ethnicity, or religious background of that group.

Medical physician Mads Gilbert and writer of 'Natt i Gaza' explained for instance -during a seminar at Iceland University (in Reykjavik on April 9th, 2015)- how half of the population in Gaza is under eighteen, and anyone over eight years old (who spent the last eight years) in Palestine has lived through four violent military attacks (in 2006, 2009, 2012, and 2014) in which thousands of people died, while the attackers lost only a few individuals. One would assume that this marks a person far more than their nationality, ethnicity, or religion. For this reason, that information ought to be worth mentioning each time we speak of an inhabitant of Palestine, more so than the fact that he or she is Palestinian. Likewise, Israel's greatest governmental expenditure goes to defense and military service is mandatory. Each teenager has to carry a weapon from the age of 17 or 18, for at least three years when one is boy, two when being a girl. One could argue that one can always refuse to join the army. However, one would have to stand up against both one's parents who have both fulfilled their military service, possible siblings who may have already gone, who may still be serving, or who may have died during their service. Given the support of one's immediate family one would still have to go against the entire cultural norm. This is especially difficult to do at that age, when one is fresh out of high school. Refusing military service is not without consequence either. Even if one manages to avoid being thrown in jail, it will always show on one's record and one can be questioned about it during job interviews, applications for scholarships, loans, etc. Can journalists simply assume that their audience knows this? Why instead of repeating over and over that someone is Israeli, Jewish, Palestinian, or Muslim, why not repeat that sort of historical and cultural background information instead? It seems at least equally important to continuously remind the audience of the kind of reality Israeli and Palestinian citizens grow up in.

In contrast, the example of BBC article 'Nobody is going to live forever' (Reynolds, 2004) shows an interview with Hussan Abdo, who at 15 years old got intercepted right before detonating the bomb belt strapped to his chest. His personal story and experience was reported and neither the word Palestinian, nor the words terrorist or suicide bomber was used in the

headline. In this article being Palestinian and being a suicide bomber, are just two characteristics mentioned among many, which very much decreases the risk of stereotyping.

I conclude that in both types of epistemic errors, the key solution lies in providing context and nuance. On one hand there is a lack of context, which demands more extensive background, nuance and contextualization. On the other hand the objectivity and fairness principles demand a shift in the kind of context journalists ought to focus on. I will now discuss the importance of correcting these errors.

Why battle polarization, reductionism, and superficiality?

I have pointed out that ‘truthful misinformation’ in war reporting leads to epistemic errors and is therefore not in accordance with the principles of objectivity and fairness, and although that may be reason enough to suggest improvement of the journalistic practice, I will argue that there are even greater concerns journalists should acknowledge. As I have pointed out, epistemic errors lead to polarization and a reductionist and superficial understanding of a conflict. This, in its turn, has a very negative impact on world peace in general and on the conflict specifically.

The first issue I’m addressing is the effect of polarization on an international conflict. There are two kinds of escalations one can be familiar with when it comes to the conflict in the Middle East. One springs from the polarization of Arab versus Jew. The world has witnessed in recent years how attacks on Gaza can spark manifestations in Paris that can escalate in riots and the burning of synagogues.¹⁰ One Reuters headline reads: “As Israel attacks Gaza, Jews elsewhere feel an impact”. (Lloyd, 2014) The other is closely intertwined with the polarization of Muslim versus non-Muslim. Everywhere across Europe right-wing parties have gained grounds by feeding on Islamophobia. (Connolly et al, 2015) Simultaneously, the recent Charlie Hebdo attacks are just one of many violent responses of extremist fractions to what they consider an attack on Islam. The unintended and incorrect reinforcement of stereotypes that strengthen both kinds of polarizations are fueling these tendencies and further fueling conflict across the globe. Globalization has facilitated a tidal wave between the place of war and the place where reports of war are received, and vice versa. Journalists must be careful nowadays not to spark a domino-effect within this already vicious circle.

¹⁰ I have to admit that here, I too am being reductionist. These tendencies are much more complex than how I’ve stated them here. Yet the point I am making is that no matter how complex the domino effect is, peace and war in one place of the world, has an impact on peace and war elsewhere.

The second issue I'm addressing is the one that results from an audience's reductionist and superficial insight in a conflict. History has proven that the public opinion can have a tremendous impact on political action and response. Aside from well-known examples of public influence such as during the Vietnam war, there is substantial scientific proof. In their article 'Effects of Public Opinion on Policy' Page and Shapiro present evidence that "public opinion is often proximate cause of policy, affecting policy more than policy influences opinion". (1983, 175) More recently Paul Burstein summed up some of his major findings to include: "the impact of public opinion is substantial; salience enhances the impact of public opinion; the impact of opinion remains strong even when the activities of political organizations and elites are taken into account". (2003, 29)

With their reports, journalists help shape the view and opinion of the international public. Because the parties engaged in a war can either benefit, or be disadvantaged by said opinions, they have an interest in the content of the reports. In this way, media can be used as a weapon, and affect the war through PR-strategies. To the parties involved in the conflict, journalists then lose their objective position as outsiders and are included as players, sometimes without them realizing it. Journalists can easily be played in the same way other individuals can be. Here is one of many examples given by Thomas Friedman: After Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, "the Druse and Phalangist Christian militias became locked in a bitter, no-holds-barred fight for control of the Shouf." (22) One night a group of very upset elder Druse dragged an Israeli major general to a hospital where a hundred agitated Druse men were all shouting. Three orange crates, one filled with heads, another with torsos, and the third filled with arms and legs, were on display. The corpses belonged to Druse sheiks who had been ambushed and then carved up by the Phalangist Christians. After some thorough investigation however, it turned out that these sheiks had died in a battlefield and that the Druse had "carved them up to make it look like the Maronites did it ... to stir up their own people." (1998, 22-23) These tricks and tactics are similarly used to mislead journalists and as a consequence, the public opinion. Media wars are dangerous because they can cause for losses to become beneficial to its own party. Great human suffering and death easily win the sympathy of an empathetic audience. When the lives of citizens are then being thrown in as calculated collateral damage, or serving a tactical strategy to influence reports, one ought to reconsider the true value of the reports.

For all these reasons, nuance and elaborate background information is of utmost importance. It is crucial for international audiences to get the most accurate representation of local events in international conflicts. Yet often audiences end up with reductionist and superficial accounts of

the facts, without the necessary context and background to understand the reality of the issue at hand.

Bias Towards Fairness

I've pointed out the importance of context and nuance for the sake of objectivity and fairness. However, I'm well aware one must be careful not to carry this idea to excess. One could easily risk to become biased towards fairness. The best way I can explain the concept of 'bias towards fairness' is by quoting fictional news anchor Will McAvoy: "Bias toward fairness means that if the entire Congressional Republican Caucus were to walk into the House and propose a resolution stating that the Earth was flat, the *Times* would lead with, 'Democrats and Republicans Can't Agree on Shape of Earth.'" (The Newsroom) Some sides of the story are simply incorrect or irrelevant, in which case it wouldn't be fair to give them equal weight. For instance, we should value human life equally and when thousands of Palestinians are killed in contrast with just a couple of Israelis, it is only logical that such massacre ought to be reported as such. In that instant, the tremendous injustice suffered by Palestinian citizens as a group, must be given much more weight than the losses on Israeli side, regardless of the context leading up to the conflict.¹¹ In my experience however, finding the proper balance between being fair and providing sufficient context on one hand, and not being biased towards fairness on the other can be quite a challenge for war reporters who care deeply about their moral obligations. The reason for that is that there is a thin line between understanding the motives behind an action, and excusing an action because the motives are understandable. If we assume the latter we would never be able to hold anyone accountable for anything, since there are almost always understandable motives for people to behave the way they do. However, during wars especially this thin line can easily fade, because the standard of what seems normal or 'acceptable' in that violent environment -and what is therefore understandable- is tremendously different from the norm in a peaceful environment. One way to help journalists cope with this struggle is by practicing binocularity, as I shall explain in the final part of this paper.

I have given examples of two common practices within media where a lack of context and nuance leads to epistemic errors and failure to comply with the moral obligations of a journalist, specifically regarding the principles of objectivity and fairness. One was the general lack of context needed to counter contextual bias, the other the unintended strengthening of stereotypes regarding nationality, ethnicity, and religion. I've argued that these epistemic errors lead to polarization, and a reductionist and superficial understanding of the conflict. I've

¹¹ Likewise, when hundreds of thousands of Syrians are slaughtered, this ought to receive even greater attention. However, as illustrated in the article "Mummy, why did everyone forget about Syria when Gaza started?" this doesn't happen. (Black, 2014) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/25/forget-syria-gaza-media-audience-wars>

illustrated how, aside from this being a violation of the ethical codes of the profession these errors can also further fuel conflicts. I will now elaborate on the challenge that individual journalists face when aiming to avoid this malpractice. Finally I will make a case for virtue ethics and the practice of binocularity as a way to improve the methodology of the profession.

Improving The Practice

I concluded that providing context and nuance is crucial in order to prevent two effects: the audience's reductionist and superficial understanding of international conflict, and polarization of the public and their opinions. However, the importance of context and nuance in journalism is clearly mentioned in several principles of the various codes of ethics. It is rather in the application and interpretation of the principles that ethical mistakes are being made. I will try to pinpoint why this is so, and how we can improve the application of the codes.

The War Within

As pointed out at the beginning of this paper, truth; objectivity; and fairness aren't fixed, one-dimensional concepts. Because of the dynamic character of these concepts, and the limitations in framework and perspective journalists are confronted with, choices need to be made. Journalists must establish what to tell, and what not to tell. One of the guiding forces in making these choices is a journalist's duty to report that information which is relevant. But how does one decide what is relevant and what is not? As shown, the answer isn't always self-evident. But if we reconnect to the "overarching value for the objective journalist" as described in Ryan (2001) journalists ought to collect and disseminate "information that describes reality as accurately as possible". (3) To do this is in line with Aristotle's ergon argument, also known as the function argument, which calls for a moral agent to act excellently towards the purpose of any activity. (Kraut, 2014) When trying to decide what information describes reality most accurately, responsible journalists are faced with two conflicting instincts that pull them in opposite directions. On the one hand, one has the instinct to focus on factual accounts of political and military events and dead counts. This instinct, sparked by a sense of justice, holds the danger of being too polarizing, reductionist, and superficial. On the other hand, often motivated by a sense of integrity, responsible journalists can feel the need to be fair, give more weight to the causes and effects behind these events, and report on the psychological aspects of war. That approach however holds a risk of becoming biased towards fairness. Following the ergon argument, this internal struggle cannot and should not be avoided when practicing responsible journalism; one must rather find a balance between the two.

Binocularity as defined by Erik Parens (2014, 113) can help journalists find that balance, because it allows seeing people "as both free subjects *and* determined objects". It is important however, to understand that there are factors, other than moral obligations, that influence journalists' judgment in their decision-making. Typical limitations such as available broadcasting time or publishing space, limited local technical support, and other practical issues will influence the selection process, but furthermore, it is "typical for journalists to find themselves in circumstances that disallow extensive reflection; journalism often requires rushed thinking and action, leaving little time for deep reflection." (Quinn, 2007, 169) In the context of war, journalists may furthermore be emotionally or psychologically affected by what they witness and have too little time to process trauma in order to present an objective representation. Thomas Friedman testified that five years of foreign corresponding in Beirut had left him "wearing an emotional bullet-proof vest". (1998, 22) All of these factors make it more difficult to find a balance, yet the need for truth, objectivity, and fairness must prevail over these circumstances. When foreign correspondents report on international conflict, they are aware that the stakes are high and their responsibilities may at times feel overwhelming. I will argue that adopting a binocular way of thinking can help them manage these struggles.

A Case For Binocularity

The existing codes of ethics are undeniably valuable in helping journalists with these conflicting instincts. However, when one takes a closer look at the formatting of the codes (see Appendix A, B, and C) one can distinguish two types of principles. Some can be looked at as rules that are relatively easy to apply. For example "Label advocacy and commentary", "Never plagiarize. Always attribute", "Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the line between the two. Prominently label sponsored content." (SPJ, 2014) Although there can be some practical challenges when applying these, one generally knows what is expected in order to comply with the principle. Other examples however, such as "Provide context. Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting, previewing, or summarizing a story", "Show compassion for those who may be affected by news coverage ... Consider cultural differences" "Consider the long-term implications of the extended reach and permanence of publication", or even "Avoid stereotyping. Journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting", these are not so self-evident. (SPJ, 2014) Even though it is clear what the aim of the principle is, it isn't really clear how one can achieve that goal. Moreover -as I've illustrated with the examples given- the room for interpretation allows journalists to appear ethical, when in fact they are being unjust.

The second type of principles reflects virtues and ideals rather than rules. “Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable” (SPJ, 2014) hardly tells one what to do in specific circumstances. It does however tell journalists what sort of attitude to have towards situations. So do many of these principles that start with words such as “Take responsibility”, “Show compassion”, “Be cautious”. (SPJ, 2014) These aren’t rules, but rather guidelines that will be put into practice differently by different individuals. It would for instance be hard to sanction a journalist for not complying with one of these guidelines, simply because it is difficult to firmly define what action is essentially required in order to comply. Once again, journalists are faced with the challenge of interpretation, while trying to balance their different aims. Although these non-rule based principles seem more difficult to apply, I’m arguing that these are precisely the principles that journalists need to follow in order to avoid epistemic injustice. Even if it is complicated to implement these principles, responsible journalists need to figure out a way to do this. I will propose an approach in virtue ethics as a way to implement non-rule based principles in journalistic practice. The main idea behind this suggestion is that “virtue ethics pushes to follow the spirit of a rule, not just the letter, and thus circumvents the possibility to appear ethical when in fact one is being unjust.” (Quinn, 2007, 169)

Practicing Phronesis

“Practical wisdom is the focus of much scholarly debate” (Quinn, 2007, 172; Moss, 2011; Suprenant, 2012) and I’m aware that there are some theoretical issues with the virtue ethics approach, especially when one is looking for a clear solution to a moral dilemma. However, following my arguments, *solving* the internal conflict that journalists struggle with is not the objective. Both of the conflicting instincts journalists are faced with, are legitimate concerns. What journalists need is a way to *manage* these opposing instincts, in order to acquire an ethically justifiable balance.

In 2007, Aaron Quinn published the article ‘Moral Virtues for Journalists’ in the Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality. In this article, he makes a strong case for Virtue Ethics in journalism in general, arguing that “a virtue-based moral framework is particularly suited to journalism”. (169) He focuses on the virtues justice and integrity, defining justice as “a principle of impartiality that frames our reasons and justifications in universal terms” while integrity “informs moral choice based in part on an individual’s moral point of view, integrating a degree of moral emotion into ethical deliberation.”¹² (169) That same year the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma and the Dart Society published ‘Reporting War’ (Schmickle), a collection of advice from veteran war reporters to help colleagues practice their

¹² “something that, for example, many modern moral theorists (mostly deontologists) do not allow” (Quinn, 2007, 169)

difficult profession. Among them is Hannah Allam, Chief of Knight Ridder's Bagdad Bureau in 2005, who explains how hard it is "to go back and forth between your response as a person and as a journalist". However, she says "effective journalists need the emotional and intellectual fortitude to do both". (2007, 12) As Quinn articulates, virtue ethics acknowledges and incorporates emotions in morality and that is precisely what foreign correspondents must do. Alissa Rubin, who was the Los Angeles Times co-bureau chief in Baghdad before she joined the New York Times Iraq team says "You have to get really close and feel it and have this visceral sense, and then be able to step back and say, 'OK, what does it really mean?'" (2007, 12)

Nevertheless, since virtue ethics lack a decision procedure, it seems unclear how conflicting virtues ought to be handled. The conflicts in virtues however are not unlike the conflicts that occur when applying the principles of the codes. Personally, I see it as a strength that the difficulty in "prioritizing between the plural, conflicting, and often incommensurate values" (Quinn, 2007, 178) reflects so perfectly the choices responsible journalists have to make in reality. It doesn't help a journalist in crucial situations to simplify the moral question at hand, or to be reductionist about the complexity of the situation. It does help however, when one has practiced 'goodness' and developed a virtuous character over the years. Virtue ethics in this way reflect that doing what is right and good is not always self-evident, or a matter of blind rule following. It cannot be taught overnight but instead requires constant practice, reflection, and patience. This moral knowledge and practical wisdom -required for being virtuous- is known as phronesis.

Following Aristotle, phronesis is one of the three basic ideas of virtue ethics. The other two are virtue and eudaemonia¹³. (Aristotle, 1952) The first, virtue, explains the subtlety between the 'rightness' of an ideal (for example truth telling) and the 'goodness' of a virtue (the virtue of truthfulness). As Quinn explains "truth telling and possessing the virtue of truthfulness are different. ... The person who possesses the virtue of truthfulness will know that to tell the truth [the right act] is a strong but not always overriding reason for action." [when the right act doesn't secure (or even considers) the good for instance] This is why, Quinn says, "goodness is a preferable criterion of morality to rightness." (2007, 171)

Virtuous journalists need to have their virtues internalized as part of their character. Phronesis is "what allows for such deep-seated traits." (Quinn, 2007, 172) This will make it possible for them to make the right moral decisions quickly, out of habit, even in stressful situations or when

¹³ Eudaemonia the final destination in virtue ethics, described as human flourishing. "Its ideal state involves living the best possible human life and is the ultimate conception of the good." (Quinn, 2007, 173)

confronted with limitations. Having phronesis means to have the “capacity to recognize some features of a situation as more important than others, or indeed, in that situation, as the only relevant ones” (Hursthouse as cited in Quinn, 2003, 4) This means that journalists reporting on international conflict, after having developed phronesis, can judge more easily which facts need contextualizing, what characteristics are fair to use when defining the people they report on, and what the different parties in war are regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, or religion.

It is natural to judge someone for example, for a horrible and inconceivable act when we think away the events leading up to that action. In international conflicts local populations (of all sides) suffer from a degree of pressure, trauma, and general emotional and psychological stress that the rest of the world cannot relate to. Especially in the Middle East, civilians have been subject to years and years of continuous and highly straining stress levels. Already in 1983, after eight straight years of civil wars and foreign attacks Terry Prothro, then director of the Center for Behavioral Research in Beirut, said: “What I think we are experiencing in Lebanon is something that is unlike any stress problems psychiatrists or psychologists have had to deal with anywhere in the past.” He added “I got some books out the other day on disaster relief, but they had nothing to offer.” (Friedman, 1983) Many years of violence followed that statement, with the last devastating IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) airstrike on Beirut in the summer of 2006.¹⁴ Friedman who worked as a foreign correspondent for over a decade (five years in Beirut, and five years in Jerusalem, each of which he received a Pulitzer for) explains that the region was “always much more interesting for its psychology than for its politics.” (2009, 29)

Practicing Binocularity

To fairly assess the political and military actions and dead count, virtuous journalists (with practical wisdom) ought then to incorporate at least some of the context and the psychological reality at hand, and ask the question: ‘If this person’s context were my own, would I have acted differently than I would have considering my current context?’ or ‘If I, or my nation were subject to the same context and history, would we respond differently?’ If the answer is anything but a definite yes, then the context is undeniably a part of what shaped the action, and therefore the context is relevant to understanding the action. Since it is relevant, it ought to be reported. However, as explained under ‘bias towards fairness’ this does not mean that context and background can excuse an action. Journalists with phronesis ought to be able to recognize when context is needed to help the audience understand the real cause of the action and even the motives of the action, and yet refrain from using that context as a way to justify the actions.

¹⁴ Post war battles have continued between Israel and Hezbollah till at least January 2015.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/01/israeli-soldiers-injured-shebaa-farms-missile-attack-150128100642659.html>

This balancing act is at the core of what is needed to battle epistemic injustice and the effects it entails. To help journalists perform this necessity I suggest practicing binocularity - the ability to oscillate between seeing people as free subjects on the one hand and determined objects on the other. Parens (2014) explains the need for this vision well.

"Using either lens alone can lead to pernicious mistakes. When we use only the subject lens, we are prone to a sort of inhumanity where we ignore the reality of the natural and social forces that bear down on all of us to make our choices. ... When we use only the object lens, however, we are prone to a different, but equally noxious sort of inhumanity, where we fail to appreciate the reality of the experience of making choices freely and of knowing that we can deserve punishment — or praise."

Doing this in a balanced way is not just beneficial towards the application of the non-rule based principles. Trying to uncover the true cause of actions of war can help us understand how to resolve the conflict. Superficial understandings only lead to superficial solutions that aren't sustainable on the long run. We must acknowledge the root of the problem, not just the consequential effects of the problem. War is in fact only a symptom of a much greater problem. Just as fever, extreme fatigue, and weight loss may tell doctors that their patient has cancer a journalist must look at a warzone as a symptom of a disease and analyze the true cause of the conflict. Practicing phronesis -and consequently binocularity- inspires the journalist to do precisely that.

Phronesis can also help journalists apply the non-rule based principles crucial in battling polarization. Currently, the media report wars as conflicts between opponents that are seemingly divided between nations, religions, ethnic groups, etc. Audiences are left to judge which sides are right, which sides are wrong. Guided by binocular way of thinking, journalists can adopt a distinctively different, yet much needed, approach in how we perceive international conflicts. Wars are started and further fueled by small groups of people and entities (whether political or commercial) that have something to gain from that war. No group of citizens whether Muslim, Arab, Jewish, Lebanese, Sunni, Shiite, Israeli, or Palestinian is to blame for a war. Most individual citizens are victims of war and if one wishes for peace for the sake of one group, one ought to want peace for the sake of all.

The aggressors can be terrorist group; governments, local as well as foreign; corporations and other commercial entities; industries (the weapon and oil industry, but also less obvious ones that have other, even indirect interests in the conflict); or other actors with an agenda of their own. These are the actors of war, and they need to be named accordingly. Journalists practicing with phronesis have internalized various journalistic values such as justice, honesty, impartiality, courage, fairness, and many others outlined in the codes. Their 'good character' can

enable them to rename the parties involved in international conflict and by doing so tell a more honest story. On the one hand there are those in power who can greatly affect war and peace. I shall briefly call them the 'powerful'. And then there are those who are gravely affected by war and peace, and although they are not in fact without power I will call them the 'powerless' here. An 18-year-old soldier committing acts of war, while subjected to a mandatory military service is no more guilty and no less a victim than a suicide terrorist driven to desperation by the reality of his day to day life. When a person's set of circumstances is defined simply by being born in a specific country, and drives that person to kill -whether out of duty or despair- we can conclude that individual to be very unfortunate. Yet a binocular insight would acknowledge that this predetermined object is simultaneously a free subject.

Virtuous journalists can look at war in a multidimensional way; acknowledging there are the affecters creating and fueling a war, and the affected who are subject to war, and consequentially end up playing their own part. These 'affected' can be found across nationalities, religion, and race. Even if it may superficially seem as though one set of citizens plays in favor of one side of affecters, they are not automatically part of the same side. Just because individual suicide bombers serve the interests of terrorist fractions, doesn't mean they are one and the same party. The terrorist fraction can be playing the game of war, while the suicide bomber is being played as a pawn. As I've pointed out before, it isn't always clear which is which. It is the investigative journalist's job to see through -and ignore- the reductionist and superficial appearance of the power structures and clarify which parties are the true motors behind a war. The guiding principles and codes can help professionals do this, but they need to be interpreted by virtuous journalists in order to be more successfully applied.

By no means does this mean virtuous journalists will always make the right decision. Virtue ethics will however improve the practice and following of moral standards, by forcing "an activity that promotes moral growth through reflection and experience." (Quinn, 2007, 181) I argue that aspiring to binocularity is essential in that process of moral growth.

"Our conceptual lives would be tidier if we could see ourselves only as subjects or only as objects, but our understanding would be shallower. If we want to understand persons in deeper ways than either lens alone can offer, we need to practice a more binocular habit of thinking. Such a way of thinking would accept the necessity of oscillating between seeing ourselves as beings who can — and can't — deserve punishment."

I made clear in the beginning of this thesis that 'responsible journalists' are those who aspire to the traditional goals of journalism, and who believe that it is their job to be the watchdog of society, to point out injustice, and fuel democracy by informing citizens so that they can make educated decisions in the voting booth. By promoting moral growth more journalists will be

encouraged to become 'responsible journalists' and adopt the ideals listed in the professional codes.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated how a lack of context and nuance can cause for epistemic injustice. I have given examples of two instances where this happens in war reporting. One is when war reporters fail to counter the contextual bias of international audiences; the other is when war reporters unintentionally strengthen stereotypes. I made it clear that these practices are not in accordance with the codes in general, and the principles regarding truth, objectivity, and fairness specifically. Moreover, failure to comply with the codes and principles causes audiences to have a reductionist and superficial understanding of conflicts, and it increases polarization of the audience and its opinion. (Arab/Jew and Muslim/Non-Muslim) Although this may be reason enough to improve the application of the code, I have pointed out the danger of how polarization, reductionism, and superficiality can further fuel international conflicts. In contrast, a deeper understanding of a conflict and its causes based on binocularity can help us pinpoint the underlying problems that need resolving in order to end the conflict on the long term.

I explained how war reporters, when trying to comply with the various moral obligations - especially concerning truth, objectivity, and fairness- are faced with an internal struggle. In order to improve the practice and help journalists manage conflicting instincts, I suggest an approach in virtue ethics, promoting phronesis. I conclude that developing a strong moral compass and 'good character' based on practical wisdom, and a binocular way of thinking, will help foreign correspondents make virtuous decisions without having to reduce the complexity of the situation at hand. By incorporating virtues as part of their identity they will be better equipped to respond out of habit, even when difficult decisions need to be made quickly, under challenging circumstances.

Practicing binocularity and an improved application of the principles of truth, objectivity, and fairness will help battle polarization, reductionism, and superficiality, causing for a better informed audience, and a more objective and fair public opinion. Instead of fueling conflicts further, virtuous journalists who take their moral obligations seriously may in fact contribute towards a more understanding and compassionate international audience, which in turn will hopefully lead to a more peaceful and tolerant society.

This paper is dedicated to the people of Palestine, the soldiers of Israel, and all members of the Samidoun grassroots network in central Beirut... both the living, and the dead.

REFERENCE LIST

Books & Academic Articles

AL-KHATTAR, A. M. (2003). *Religion and terrorism: an interfaith perspective*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

ARISTOTLE. (1952) *Nicomachean ethics*. W. D. Ross ed. & trans. London: Oxford University Press.

ARISTOTLE. (1857) *The Metaphysics*. London: Henry G. Bohn.

BELSEY, A. & CHADWICK, R. ed. (2006) *Ethical Issues in Journalism and the Media*. [e-book] London; New York: Routledge. [April 4th, 2015]

BEN-AMI, S. (2006) *Scars of War Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab tragedy*. London: Orion Books.

BERGER, J. (2013) *Understanding a Photograph*. New York, NY: Aperture.

BOUDANA, S. (2011) A definition of journalistic objectivity as a performance. *Media, Culture & Society* 33 (3): 385-398. doi: 10.1177/0163443710394899 [October 28th, 2015]

BURSTEIN, P. (2003) The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy: A Review and an Agenda. *Political Research Quarterly* March 56 (1): 29-40. Abstract only. doi: 10.1177/106591290305600103 [April 30th, 2015]

EDGAR, A. (2006) Objectivity, bias and truth. In Belsey & Chadwick ed. 2006. *Ethical Issues in Journalism and the Media*. London; New York: Routledge. Ch. 8.

FIGDOR, C. (2010) Objectivity in the news: Finding a way forward. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 25: 19-33. doi: 10.1080/08900521003638383 [October 28th, 2015]

FRIEDMAN, T. (1998) *From Beirut to Jerusalem*. London: Harper Collins Publishers.

HEIDEGGER, M. (1943) *On the essence of truth: On Plato's cave Allegory and Theaetetus*. London: Athlone Press.

HURSTHOUSE, R. (2013) Virtue Ethics in E. N. Zalta ed. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2013 Edition.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/ethics-virtue/> [May 6th, 2015]

KEEBLE, R. (2009) *Ethics for Journalists*. New York, NY: Routledge.

KRAUT, R. (2014) Aristotle's Ethics in E.N. Zalta ed. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2014 Edition.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/aristotle-ethics/> [October 14th, 2015]

MACRAE N.C., STANGOR, C., and HEWSTONE, M. eds. (1996) *Stereotypes and Stereotyping*. New York: Guilford Press.

MARR, A. (2004) *My Trade: A short history of British journalism*. London: Macmillan

MARTENS, H. (2010) Evaluating Media Literacy Education: Concepts, Theories and Future Directions, *Journal of Media Literacy Education* 2 (1): 1-22.

<http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jmle/vol2/iss1/1/> [May 17th, 2015]

MOSS, J. (2011) Virtue Makes the Goal Right: Virtue and Phronesis in Aristotles Ethics. *Phronesis* 56 (3): 204-261.

SPINOZA, B. (1985) *Metaphysical Thoughts*. In: *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, edited and translated by Curley E. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

PAGE, B. I. & SHAPIRO, R. Y. (1983) Effects of Public Opinion on Policy. *The American Political Science Review* 77 (1): 175-190

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1956018> [April 5th, 2015]

PARENS, E. (2014) *Shaping Our Selves*. New York: Oxford University Press.

PAYNE, S. G. (1995). *A History of Fascism 1914–1945*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

QUINN, A. (2007) Moral Virtues for Journalists. *Journal Of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality* 22(2/3): 168-186. doi:10.1080/08900520701315764 [May 6th, 2015]

RYAN, M. (2001) Journalistic Ethics, Objectivity, Existential Journalism, Standpoint Epistemology, and Public Journalism. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 16 (1): 3-22. doi: 10.1207/S15327728JMME1601_2 [October 28th, 2015]

SCHMINKLE, S. (2007) *Reporting War*. Seattle, WA: Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma

STEUP, M. (2014) Epistemology in Edward N. Zalta ed. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2014 Edition.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/epistemology/> [May 17th, 2015]

SURPRENANT, C.W. (2012). Politics and Practical Wisdom: Rethinking Aristotle's Account of Phronesis. *Topoi* 31 (2): 221-227.

Newspaper Articles

ANON (2005) 'Israel's history of bomb blasts' *BBC News*, February 25th.
(http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1197051.stm) [May 12th, 2015]

ANON (2013) 'Israel widens Jewish settlement subsidies' *BBC News*, August 4th.
(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23569537>) [May 12th, 2015]

ANON (2010) 'West Bank mosque 'set alight by Jewish settlers'' *BBC News*, October 4th.
(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11464621>) [May 12th, 2015]

ANON (2013) 'Israel backs new Jewish settlement homes' *BBC News*, August 11th. (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23655661>) [May 12th, 2015]

BLACK, I. (2014) 'Mummy, why did everyone forget about Syria when Gaza started?' *The Guardian*, July 25th. (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/25/forget-syria-gaza-media-audience-wars>) [May 17th, 2015]

CORBIN, J. (2012) 'Price-tag' tactics of West Bank Jewish settlers' *BBC News*, September, 17th. (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19601311>) [May 12th, 2015]

CONNOLLY, K., CHRISAFIS, A., and KIRCHGAESSNER, S. (2015) 'Muslims in Europe fear anti-Islamic mood will intensify after Paris attacks' *The Guardian*, Jan 9th. (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/09/muslims-europe-fear-escalation-anti-islamism-paris-attacks>) [May 17th, 2015]

FRIEDMAN, T. (1983) 'Living With The Violence Of Beirut' *The New York Times*, July, 17th. (<http://www.nytimes.com/1983/07/17/magazine/living-with-the-violence-of-beirut.html>) [May 17th, 2015]

GHATTAS, K. (2007) 'Lebanon war image causes controversy' *BBC News*, March 8th. (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6385969.stm) [May 12th, 2015]

LLOYD, J. (2014) 'As Israel attacks Gaza, Jews elsewhere feel an impact' *Reuters*, July 16th. (<http://blogs.reuters.com/john-lloyd/2014/07/16/as-israel-attacks-gaza-jews-elsewhere-feel-an-impact/>)[May 12th, 2015]

PARENS, E. (2014) The benefits of 'Binocularity' *The New York Times*, September 28th. (http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/28/the-benefits-of-binocularity/?_r=0) [October 28th, 2015]

MACKEY, R. (2007) 'War Tourists or Refugees?' *The New York Times*, March 9th. (http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/03/09/war-tourists-or-refugees/?_r=2) [May, 12th, 2015]

REYNOLDS, J. 'Nobody is going to live forever' *BBC News*, July 16th.

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3899015.stm) [May 12th, 2015]

Other

Merriam-Webster (11th ed) *Fair*. Merriam-Webster's online dictionary [online]

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fair> [May 17th, 2015]

Merriam-Webster (11th ed) *Polarization*. Merriam-Webster's online dictionary [online]

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/polarization> [May 17th, 2015]

Merriam-Webster (11th ed) *Superficial*. Merriam-Webster's online dictionary [online]

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/superficial> [May 17th, 2015]

Oxford Dictionaries (2015) *Reductionism*. Oxford University Press. [online]

<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/reductionism> [May 17th, 2015]