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## Moral economies

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# Moral Economies:
# Interrogating the Interactions of Nongovernmental Organizations, Journalists, and Freelancers

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Using Sayer's ideas about the moral economy, this article generates a new theoretical model for interrogating complex relations between journalists and their sources, especially nongovernmental organizations. It tests this framework using a case study about the production of a TV report about a Congolese rebel commander wanted for war crimes. This news story involved exchanges between Human Rights Watch, the United Kingdom's *Channel 4 News*, and several freelancers and was indirectly shaped by Amnesty International and Invisible Children Inc., the creators of *Kony2012.* In analyzing these exchanges and their mixed effects, this article refines notions of trust, news cloning, and information subsidies.

*Keywords: source, NGO, journalism, news, human rights, information subsidies, Kony, Africa*

## Introduction

The financial crisis in the news industry has been widely regarded as enhancing journalists' receptivity to the "information subsidies" provided by public relations specialists, which help them work faster and more cheaply (Gandy, 1982, discussed in Franklin, 2011). The relative wealth of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) as well as their cross-border networks and willingness to recruit former journalists as press officers make them particularly well placed to step in, providing news outlets with detailed background briefings and their own video and photos as well as verifying and curating images produced by others (Fenton, 2010; McPherson, 2015). Some have seen this trend as having potentially progressive effects, increasing the social engagement and diversity of international news while compensating for reductions in the numbers of foreign bureaus and correspondents and cuts to newsroom and travel budgets (Beckett, 2008; Sambrook, 2010). Others have raised concerns about how this may undermine the critical independence of journalism (Davies, 2008; Franks, 2008) and the alterity of INGO work (Cottle & Nolan, 2007; Fenton, 2010).

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More recent work on journalist–INGO relations stresses the need to attend to their potential complexity, heterogeneity, and mixed effects (Powers, 2014; Waisbord, 2011). This research involves attending to the wide range of actors now involved in these forms of news making, including loose coalitions of INGOs, NGOs, and activists (Sireau & Davis, 2008); social media participants (McPherson, 2015); commercial businesses (Wright, in press); and freelancers and their agents (Wright, 2015b). It also involves attending to the different ways INGOs and journalists interact with one another. For instance, aid agencies tend to target popular news outlets in order to engage in mass awareness and fund-raising campaigns, while major human rights organizations, which enjoy generous foundation funding, tend to prioritize attempting to influence policy makers by targeting the elite news outlets they consume (Powers, 2014). Thus, we have already started to move toward more nuanced understandings of how and why different INGO–journalist coalitions shape, and are shaped by, broader fields of activity, which are themselves in flux (Powers, 2014; Waisbord, 2011).

But we are still left with three key theoretical problems. First, much research in this area still conceptualizes interactions between NGOs and journalists as involving binary sets of relations, and this seriously hampers our ability to interrogate the roles of other kinds of actors. Second, it is unclear how warm, interpersonal, and relatively enduring forms of trust come to exist between INGOs, news outlets, and others (Franks, 2008) when actors' values and objectives may be in tension with one another as well as when they are contested internally (Orgad, 2013). Practitioners' forums indicate that new forms of boundary renegotiation are in operation (Frontline Club, 2015), but these are as yet poorly theorized (Powers, 2015). Finally, although we are aware of the potentially mixed effects of these forms of news making, it remains difficult to ground any normative evaluation of them.

This article argues that these critical problems can be addressed using the model of the moral economy provided by social theorist Andrew Sayer (2000, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2011). Because moral economy theory is rarely used in communication studies, the first section will discuss Sayer's work in detail. This involves explaining his ideas about how and why exchange relations between two or more parties tend to generate complex forms of trust that are shaped by their mutual deployment of resources in the context of multiple notions of rights, responsibilities, and obligations. It will then explore Sayer's underpinning of these moral economies via capabilities theory to generate new approaches to evaluation and critique. However, this article goes on to argue that Sayer's work benefits from being blended with Waisbord's (2011) more detailed attention to "journalistic logic" and framing theory (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1986; Stones, 2014). Such a hybrid theoretical framework enables us to assesses why and how those who are positioned in different organizations and fields, with partially competing values and aims, collaborate to collectively reshape meanings about events within news texts while renegotiating the nature, purpose(s), and boundaries of journalism and NGO work.

This study tests the utility of this new critical model by applying it to a particularly complex case study. The case involves the production of a TV news report that campaigned for the arrest of Bosco Ntaganda, a military general who was then leading the M23 rebellion in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), although he was wanted for war crimes and crimes against humanity (*Channel 4 News*, 2012b). The report involved a British public-service broadcaster using video, curated and verified by Human Rights Watch (HRW) that placed Bosco at the scene of a massacre he had denied any involvement in—always

claiming to be elsewhere at the time. The reporting also involved three freelancers, Amnesty International's award-giving practices, and Invisible Children Inc., whose video about a Ugandan warlord, *Kony2012*, went viral in the same year—encouraging journalists at *Channel 4 News* to personalize their coverage of African conflicts to make it more appealing to audiences.

Given the complexity of this case, it is explained in more detail in the next section. Then, after a discussion of the methods employed, the final two sections present the findings of the case study, focusing initially on *Channel 4 News* and then on HRW, in ways that draw on the roles played by other actors. This approach facilitates a discussion of the ways in which the capabilities of the INGO, the news outlet, and, to some extent, freelancers were enhanced by their involvement with one another. The approach also raises concerns about how HRW communications managers legitimized their dominance in terms of "proper reporting," concentrating interpretative power in the hands of journalists and ex-journalists in London and New York. In addition, criticisms are made of the ways in which Channel 4 journalists' dependence on trusted freelancers prevented them from considering the M23 rebellion as an act of political agency; making the contributions made by the INGO clear to news audiences; and confronting the contradictions inherent in their reconstruction of objective public service journalism as elite-focused human rights advocacy. Nevertheless, this article concludes by pointing out the limitations of even sophisticated adaptations of moral economy theory in normative evaluation, given the extreme difficulty of establishing the effects of such news coverage on the capabilities of distant others.

## Why Moral Economy?

Sayer's (2000, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2011) model of the moral economy is designed to exchange relations between two or more actors, which have economic dimensions. He draws from Booth (1994) and Thompson (1971) as well as from Polanyi (2001), Granovetter (1992), and Callon (1998) to argue that all exchange relations are embedded within a complex web of normatively laden rights and responsibilities, including legal, organizational, and other social obligations. So moral economies underpin political economies, constituting the trust necessary to form and sustain exchange relations by shaping collective ideas about good practice, including the appropriate division of labor (Sayer, 2007). Such moral economies are not fixed, but dynamic; they continually shape, and are shaped by, political economies, precisely because exchange relations bring about the interaction of economic and normative values.

Such recursive processes are emotionally charged because they involve (re)assessments "of behaviors and situations in relation to well-being" (Sayer, 2007, p. 267). Sometimes, actors' normative values may modify the economic values involved in exchange relations, causing them to behave in ways that are not always in their self-interest (Sayer, 2001, 2007). But normative values may also be "influenced, modified or overridden by economic forces" (Sayer, 2003, p. 1). Sometimes, this means that actors' normative values change to justify their economic interests and/or to legitimize "entrenched power relations" (Sayer, 2000, p. 80). For these reasons, Sayer sees such exchange relations as having the potential to develop a momentum and characteristics of their own in ways that cause them to become partially disembodied from the institutions and lifeworlds in which they originated (Sayer, 2000).

Sayer's work on moral economy theory is rarely used in communications studies, although it has been employed to examine shifts in creative labor (Banks, 2006; Hesmondhalgh, 2011); to interrogate the performance of personhood in reality TV (Skeggs, 2009); and to protest against the "selfishness" of austerity policies (Biressi & Nunn, 2014). It has yet to be applied to journalism, despite the centrality of normative and economic values in news making and its regulation. Moral economy theory lends itself particularly well to an analysis of journalist–source relations, because these cut across organizations and involve forms of trust that can easily lead to new forms of embedding and partial disembedding. The United Kingdom's Leveson Inquiry provided a prime example of this, demonstrating the existence of powerful, recursive links between commercial competitiveness; the emergence of tight exchange networks of journalists, politicians, and police; and the legitimization of phone hacking in ways that exhibited a striking disregard for the rest of British society (Leveson, 2012, discussed in Davis, 2015).

However, moral economy theory is perhaps most useful when analyzing news production processes in which INGOs and journalists are mutually engaged, because those involved in such exchanges often justify their interactions in explicitly normative terms. To be more specific, such actors usually describe their roles in the production, circulation, or adoption of such material in terms of their efforts to meet multiple, value-laden commitments to their organizations; to regulatory bodies; to their understandings of "good" work in their area; to those represented; and to their personal consciences (Wright, 2015a). Moral economy theory helps us by enabling an interrogation of the ways in which exchange relations enable actors to respond to a range of formal and informal responsibilities, thus hybridizing normative and economic values.

Sayer's work can be used to develop Gandy's (1982) oft-employed notion of "information subsidies." This involves news outlets' use of ready-to-use newsworthy information and material provided by public relations specialists, which helps journalists work faster and more cheaply. But more nuanced understandings can be arrived at by examining how and why journalists use such material to meet a range of obligations more cheaply and faster than they could have done otherwise, actively negotiating what we might call "obligation subsidies." This explains why journalists may choose to expend some time or financial expense to produce news that they (and others) value for normative and market-related reasons. For example, it is relatively unusual in the United Kingdom for even the most resource-poor broadsheets to print a full article and photographic spread provided by an INGO. It is much more common for reporters to flesh out the material INGOs provide using one or more of their own interviews (Wright, 2015a). The narrative frame may not change from the one originally provided by the INGO, but reporters are able to satisfy their sense of political/professional responsibility vis-à-vis editorial independence as well as fulfill their organizational obligations to avoid reputational risk, which has implications for the branding and market positioning of their outlet. Nevertheless, what such reporters may not realize is that such exchanges not only become more reliant on INGOs but are liable to alter their sense of what constitutes "good journalism."

Reconceptualizing information subsidies as obligation subsidies therefore forces us to acknowledge that interpretative influence is not exerted only via journalists' rapid, uncritical, and "churnalistic" reversioning of large amounts of contributed material (Davies, 2008). Scholars need to avoid overreliance on quantitative approaches, including content analysis, when seeking to establish the

extent of sources' influence. Thinking more carefully about journalists' agentive negotiation of obligation subsidies also helps us to understand how journalists (re)negotiate their boundaries with INGOs and other sources in ways that make the tensions between them manageable (Powers, 2015). But even this reworked concept is not sufficiently detailed to address how such boundary renegotiations might take place between other actors involved in such moral economies. Blending Sayer's work with that of Waisbord can help here, because Waisbord (2011) argues that different and often tension-ridden NGO–journalist coalitions are formed through recursive links between different "news values, media formats, labor conditions and editorial positions" (p. 149). Waisbord's work encourages us examine how tensions within complex exchange relations might be contained, managed, or otherwise negotiated via the value-laden structuring of multiple position practices, both within and outside of journalistic and nongovernmental organizations.

Waisbord's work also compensates for some of the weaknesses in Sayer's work. Sayer tends to only associate moral economies with relatively long-lasting "thick" exchange relations rather than "thin" or "fleeting exchanges," which he claims have "few ethical associations and expectations" (Sayer, 2010, p. 88). Instead, Waisbord's work enables us to consider the ways in which even one-off exchanges may be value laden and/or have important recursive relationships with relatively enduring political, economic, and organizational structures.

But what Sayer's moral economy theory work adds to Waisbord's model are ways of exploring the relationship of normative values to power in a manner that is unburdened by the homogenizing and negative connotations of "ideology" (Waisbord, 2011). This can be developed further by adding framing theory, which indicates the centrality of normative values in the interpretative schema employed by media producers (Entman, 1993; Stones, 2014) as well as in the ways they conceptualize their relationships with one another (Goffman, 1986). In this way, framing theory helps to link the study of actors' legitimating rationales to the study of how they renegotiate the boundaries of their respective fields of activity while reshaping the meanings of events within news texts.

Such an approach creates a coherent critical/political thrust, leading toward scholars' own normative evaluations, which, Sayer argues, is one of the primary purposes of moral economy theory (2007). However, the problem of how to ground normative evaluation is notoriously thorny, given the ways in which geographic, linguistic, and other forms of socioeconomic positioning constrain scholarly discourse about normative evaluation (Wright, 2015a). Sayer (2007) suggests that one way forward is to "turn questions of economic behaviour back into questions of validity" (p. 268): analyzing which and whose values are used to legitimate what happens and which and whose capabilities are enhanced (or constrained) as a result.

Yet to construct this evaluative model, Sayer leans more on Nussbaum's work about the interrelated capabilities that she claims all humans must have if they are to attain well-being (2001, 2003, discussed in Sayer, 2011) than on Sen's (1999) nonessentialist approach (discussed in Sayer, 2011). This is problematic, for although humans cannot survive without basic capabilities, such as enough food and water, there is no universal agreement about how those goods are to be distributed or the relationship

they should have to more complex social goods. This somewhat vague universalism also seems to undermine a critical alertness to the specific structuring of media practices (Waisbord, 2011).

For these reasons, I prefer to draw exclusively on Sen's (2010) nonessentialist approach to capabilities theory, which involves several suggestions for how mainstream journalism may support the aims of global justice by facilitating collective reasoning. These include its dissemination of knowledge that enables critical scrutiny, although this does not preclude the expression of vested interests or emotionality. They also include news "giving voice" to the neglected and disadvantaged—aiding more inclusive debates, including those that pertain to the (re)formation of values. Thus, Sen's work addresses the impossibility of abstracting both journalism and journalism studies from unequal geopolitical structures while still articulating potentially valuable roles for both within reasoning processes.

## Case Study and Method

This case study formed part of a broader study about journalists' use of NGO-provided multimedia in the news about Africa readily available to UK audiences (Wright, 2015a). The six cases in the broader study were chosen to contrast with one another in terms of the places and topics covered as well as the organizations and media involved. The sampling period contrasted with previous studies about INGO–journalist relations, which tended to focus on major disasters and humanitarian crises. Instead, a relatively quiet news period was selected (August 13–19, 2012), which fell between the London Olympic and the Paralympic Games and fell outside of any parliamentary sessions. Print, online, and broadcast news were sampled, and checks were carried out to identify material that did not attribute NGOs clearly.

Strap lines and the on-air attribution of journalists were then used to trace back and conduct semistructured interviews with those who made key decisions shaping the production of these news items. These interviews focused on key decisions participants made in the production process to analyze the interaction of their agency with various structures underpinning these forms of news production. For example, questions were asked about actors' socioeconomic positioning, organizational hierarchies, budgets and policies, journalistic norms, regulatory structures, and external structures, such as those involving travel, security, governance, and other political/military groups. Internal documents, such as contracts, briefs, and e-mail correspondence, were also examined to triangulate accounts and clarify causality.

The TV report discussed here (*Channel 4 News*, 2012b) contained a 20-second video clip, which was collected and redistributed by Human Rights Watch after buying the rebroadcasting rights from the two freelancers (A and B) who originally filmed it. The clip shows a man who appears to be giving orders on a walkie-talkie while walking down a street in Kiwanja with a large group of armed men on November 5, 2008—the same day that a massacre of nearly 200 civilians took place there. The man was identified as Bosco by HRW's in-country researcher using a data base of images, some of which were sourced using social media (personal communication, May 2, 2013). Although the clip formed a relatively small proportion of the 7-minute package, it played a pivotal role structurally, tying together the program's archive coverage of the Kiwanja massacre (which had won an award from Amnesty International) and new wire agency footage of civilians fleeing fighting triggered by the Bosco-led M23 rebellion.

Thus, although the report mentions allegations that Rwanda was backing the M23 rebellion, the clip frames the causes of conflict largely in terms of Bosco's otherness—not just as a war criminal but as a bringer of "chaos" and an inhuman assassin whose nickname among locals was "the Terminator" (*Channel 4 News,* 2012b). Yet the M23 rebellion, which lasted nearly two years and displaced more than 100,000 people, had complex political causes. It was called the M23 rebellion because members of the National Congress for the Defence of the People believed that the DRC's president, Joseph Kabila, had broken the terms of a peace treaty signed on March 23, 2009, because of his mishandling of elections held in 2011 (International Peace Information Service, 2012; United Nations News Service, 2013). This treaty is only mentioned in the report in terms of how it enabled Bosco to get a "plum job" in the Congolese army, which he was mutinying against as a "turncoat general." No mention is made of allegations of electoral fraud; instead, President Kabila is portrayed as being on the side of right, backing "the International Criminal Court [by] saying [that] Bosco should be tried for war crimes."

This prosecutory focus was strongly influenced by a film made by HRW about Bosco earlier that year, which included the same clip (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Yet HRW did not approach *Channel 4 News* with this material. Instead, a third freelancer (C) pitched it to the program after completing a commission for the INGO in which she edited the material INGO workers had already collected, attempted to get an undercover interview with Bosco herself, and conducted other interviews with Bosco's alleged victims, which were set up by HRW. Clips of the latter, together with the clip of Bosco at Kiwanja, had appeared in an earlier report in the spring (*Channel 4 News*, 2012a), which participants described as being part of the same 10-month production process.

Here again, the HRW-provided footage was used to lobby for Bosco's arrest by tying together wire agency material and the program's own material, including an interview with the new prosecutor-general at the International Criminal Court and its award-winning archive footage of the Kiwanja massacre. Although in this case, the HRW-provided material comprised a much larger proportion of the report (90 seconds of a 7-minute package) and was broadcast just before the M23 rebellion began. It was also explicitly framed in terms of the parallels between Bosco and "another indicted war criminal," Joseph Kony, made infamous by the viral video, *Kony2012* (*Channel 4 News*, 2015a). Why and how did Channel 4 journalists try to meet their moral, political, financial, and organizational responsibilities by using HRW-provided material to "tell the Bosco story" in such a "persistent" way (correspondent, personal communication, November 29, 2012)?

### *Channel 4 News* and Freelancers

Channel 4 is a public corporation that uses cross-subsidization to fund public-service output, including *Channel 4 News*. Much like the BBC, the program has a legal obligation to provide high-quality, independent, and impartial news, including a high proportion of international coverage (Ofcom, 2013). But Channel 4 was set up to provide an alternative to the BBC and ITV, so *Channel 4 News* is also obligated to provide distinctive content, demonstrate innovation, and attract more diverse and difficult-to-reach audiences (Communications Act, 2003) despite having a relatively low budget. Reductions in staffing, necessitated by falling advertising revenue at Channel 4, exacerbated the challenges already facing the program, particularly since these occurred at the same time the program was obliged to increase its online

output (Digital Economy Act, 2010). The channel's financial crisis also meant that it started coming under greater political scrutiny, with annual meetings being instituted between channel executives and the UK's parliamentary Culture, Media and Sport Committee. These committee members repeatedly raised concerns about the program's falling audience ratings, arguing that this undermined the program's ability to provide a public service (UK House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2013).

So, as a senior editor explained, Channel 4 journalists had to "box clever" to meet their multiple responsibilities (personal communication, November 23, 2012; Sayer, 2000, 2007). The first strategy that Channel 4 journalists employed involved covering less-frequently covered places or topics, often with longer reports. Although this approach involved significant time and financial costs, the editor explained that it was still cheaper than airing many short, live two-ways with reporters in different locations. This approach also shaped the division of labor in ways that had strong emotive/normative dimensions (Sayer, 2007; Waisbord, 2011). This was because the senior editor tended to allocate international news stories to correspondents with previous connections to particular places, reasoning that they would have not only "greater knowledge" of the issues involved but a greater "emotional attachment" to those who lived there. This, he reasoned, was far more appealing and "convincing" to viewers, and was therefore "gold" for the program (personal communication, November 23, 2012).

This approach was influenced by the BBC's former correspondent, Martin Bell, whose experiences of covering the Bosnian civil war led him to advocate for a "journalism of attachment" (Bell, 1997, p. 7): a strong, normative stance that was widely discussed in the news industry when journalists witnessed at the Bosnian war crimes tribunals (Tumber, 2008). Thus, both the senior editor and the correspondent at *Channel 4 News* proposed that the pursuit of "objective" fact could and should be separated from political or emotional neutrality. Although how to square this with their legal obligations vis-à-vis editorial independence and political impartiality was something that both struggled to articulate.

The second coping strategy used by Channel 4 journalists involved developing relatively long-term, trusting relationships with freelancers who specialized in geographic areas (Sayer, 2001, 2007). The editor explained that this approach had been shaped by the former Blair-led government, which had explicitly linked freelancing with creative risk taking, prompting the program to set up its Independents Fund in 2008. Finally, journalists at *Channel 4 News* relied on a third strategy, which involved demonstrating the program's public-service value by citing the journalistic awards it had won, including those given by Amnesty International.

All these coping strategies came together in this case study, which hinged upon the agency of a freelance filmmaker, C, who had just finished a commission to make the Bosco film for HRW (Human Rights Watch, 2012). She knew both the senior editor and the correspondent at *Channel 4 News* because she had previously been commissioned by the program and had a personal friendship with the correspondent. She had written them a personal e-mail about the clip of Bosco in Kiwanja, pitching the interpretative frame generated by HRW in ways she thought they would find appealing. As she put it,

> I knew that [the senior editor] had been producing [the correspondent] when they did
> the Kiwanja film in 2008. . . .

> So when I sent the proposal saying "Here is the man responsible for the Kiwanja massacre" for them, I was pretty sure it would be like, "Oh my *God*, we've got to do this. We have the footage, we were *there.*" (personal communication, C, October 26, 2012)

C used her knowledge of the program's privileging of persistent, correspondent-led reporting as well as the knowledge she had gained through personal contact with these journalists to appeal to their strong sense of moral responsibility for those who had been killed at Kiwanja. For example, the correspondent reflected on his experience of reporting on the massacre:

> You just got the sense that a terrible, terrible thing had happened and that you were . . . you were just *there* and you had to . . . the . . . the public-service journalist instinct just cuts in and you think . . . this is something I *have* to be here to report. This is really *important*.

> And so there was almost a sense of sort of evidence gathering on a crime scene; there was never going to be any police doing that.
> We . . . we were there as witnesses. . . . In a sense, we still *are.* (personal communication, correspondent, November 29, 2012)

Yet the kind of public-service journalism the correspondent described here relies far less on official rationales about the program's enablement of national democratic practice than on informal ideas about the normative purposes of enabling the prosecution of crime in relation to an imagined global public. Thus, exchanges between HRW and *Channel 4* News, carried out indirectly via C, enabled *Channel 4 News* to benefit from a range of obligation subsidies, the acceptance of which partially disembedded Channel 4 journalists from national publics and related legal obligations regarding independence and impartiality (Sayer, 2000).

But, in some ways, Amnesty International had already predisposed Channel 4 journalists to frame the Kiwanja massacre primarily in terms of human rights by giving the program an award for its coverage of the killings (personal communication, correspondent, November 29, 2012). Rebroadcasting this award-winning footage also enabled the program to accrue additional cultural capital (personal communication, senior editor, November 23, 2012). So C was able to import the interpretative frame established by HRW without encountering any significant challenges. This frame contained several moral/political claims. First, it conceptualized justice in terms of individual human rights, but it also defined the problem of the M23 rebellion in terms of crimes committed against civilians; the cause as Bosco Ntaganda and his government backers in Rwanda; and the proposed solution as Bosco's swift arrest and transportation to face trial at the Hague (Stones, 2014). Moreover, *Channel 4 News* agreed to C's proposal that she carry out for the program what she had previously attempted for HRW—an "exclusive" undercover interview with Bosco himself.[2] Unfortunately, despite extensive security precautions, a violent attack by Congolese militia forced C, her fixer, and the Channel 4 staff traveling to join them to withdraw

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[2] On that occasion, the camera had not worked (personal communication, A, October 26, 2012).

completely from the DRC (personal communication, C, October 26, 2012; personal communication, correspondent, November 29, 2012; personal communication, senior editor, November 23, 2012).[3]

Like other freelancers who work for news organizations and INGOs (Wright, 2015b), C justified repurposing her work and related material by arguing that she felt a personal responsibility to continue to specialize in this geographic area and that she could no longer survive financially by acquiring commissions relating to it from news organizations alone (personal communication, October 26, 2012). She argued that working for INGOs and news organizations enabled her to produce the kinds of knowledge she valued, allowing her to spend extended periods of time seeking out and giving voice to those who were suffering (personal communication, C, October 26, 2012; Sen 2010). Channel 4 journalists' trust in C was therefore also shaped by a belief that they shared similar normative goals. As the correspondent put it, "we trusted her integrity" (personal communication, November 29, 2012).

However, Channel 4 journalists' framing of their indirect interactions with HRW in terms of their trust in C (Franks, 2008; Goffman, 1986) meant that they did not see a need to indicate to media audiences that HRW had commissioned, set up, and overseen the editing of C's interviews with Bosco's alleged victims (*Channel 4 News*, 2012a). As the correspondent explained,

> I would not ordinarily [omit NGO attribution] other than for the fact that [C] was a trusted friend and colleague.
>
> So I trusted her journalism . . . and had no reason to disbelieve that the interviews she had done were not genuine. (personal communication, November 29, 2012)

Likewise, the senior editor said that he had not carried out any independent checks of the footage of Bosco at Kiwanja because he trusted A and B, the two freelancers who had shot it (personal communication, November 23, 2012). In the same interview, he went on to frame the program's use of this material as a "direct deal" with those freelancers, insisting on paying them even though he knew that HRW had already purchased the rebroadcasting rights (Goffman, 1986).[4] So in both instances, the program's relationship with freelancers was used to mask the multiple obligation subsidies it received from HRW. In this way, the program coped with organizational cost cutting while minimizing the risk of being criticized by the select committee or regulatory body for failing to meet its legal obligations to provide original, independent, and impartial news (Sayer, 2000, 2007). As the senior editor put it, "Attributing footage to other people weakens the journalism—always. Because people think 'Oh right, so it isn't your story; it's their story.' So it is something you try and avoid doing" (personal communication, November 23, 2012).

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[3] The program also commissioned a Ugandan stringer to conduct new interviews with M23 rebels, but the correspondent explained that he and the senior editor decided not to use that material because it was poorly shot and the questions "were not hard enough" (2012).

[4] HRW paid the freelancers £800 for four minutes of footage. B said that *Channel 4 News* knew which 20 seconds it wanted because of HRW's prior investment and only paid them £400. Although he had wanted more, they "bartered him down" (personal communication, A and B, October 19, 2012).

Although Channel 4 journalists' avoidance of attribution is understandable given the high and perhaps irreconcilable demands placed on the program, such practices are questionable. By failing to acknowledge the ways in which HRW's influence was mediated via freelance work, they became partially disembedded from trusting relations with domestic news audiences that are structured by traditional understandings about audiences' right to know where material has come from and related journalistic responsibilities regarding attribution. At the same time, journalists became re-embedded in exchange relations with HRW, which were characterized by other kinds of trust, interdependence, and commitment to different, internationally oriented kinds of rights and obligations (Sayer, 2000). Therefore, although Channel 4 journalists' capacity to fulfill their institutional and moral/political responsibilities were enhanced through this moral economy, their audiences' ability to scrutinize the claims made in news output was undermined.

### Human Rights Watch and Invisible Children Inc.

Journalists' nonattribution of HRW's work presented the INGO's communications managers with a serious dilemma regarding their mixed responsibilities. These communications managers did not see the primary purpose of their engagement with journalism as being fund-raising, so they were less concerned about the lack of organizational branding than aid workers might have been (Powers, 2014). But these former correspondents and senior producers were troubled by their sense of residual responsibility to uphold "high standards" in news production (communications director, personal communication, February 28, 2013; Sayer, 2001, 2007). However, after some internal debate, they decided not to do anything about this, because they were worried that if they did confront journalists about nonattribution, this might damage HRW's relations with them, which would prevent them from carrying out their greater obligation to advocate effectively on behalf of victims via the media.

The existence of this debate indicates that these communications managers did not just have a journalistic identity (Fenton, 2010). Rather, they can be seen to have become partially disembedded from the news industry (Sayer, 2003, 2007), because they repeatedly described feeling dislocated from, and alienated by, the increasingly commercially driven values shaping newsroom meetings during their final years of working in journalism. This was particularly noticeable when they returned from prolonged postings abroad, which involved covering violent and unequal forms of oppression, because these postings involved the emergence of new forms of value-laden embedding, triggered by physical closeness to those suffering (Sayer, 2007). The Bosnian war was frequently mentioned in such reflections. For example, HRW's communications director stated,

> In Vietnam, you know people were going out to the front and then coming back and, yes, Saigon got attacked and I guess Phnom Penh as well. But it wasn't the same [as Bosnia]. . . .
>
> There wasn't the same proximity, I think, where you were *living* with people who were under attack all the time . . . you *felt* . . . more of a sense of duty to the people you were reporting on. (personal communication, February 28, 2013)

The media director  also described the Bosnian war as a significant turning point for him, discussing the ways in which its longevity and dangerous nature had led to trusting, mutually dependent exchange networks being formed between the journalists serving there, who sought out and recruited one another to HRW afterward (personal communication, February 15, 2013; Sayer, 2001, 2007). Both he and the communications director spoke about the ways they had formed similar kinds of trusting relationships with human rights workers during the war, so that when they were approached about vacancies at HRW, moving seemed to "make perfect sense . . . [because] we had *already* done a lot of work together on the ground" (personal communication, HRW communications director, February 28, 2013; personal communication, HRW media director, February 15, 2013).

Thus HRW's communications managers conceptualized their work not as "news cloning" (Fenton, 2010) but as "proper reporting" (personal communication, HRW media director, February 15, 2013; see also personal communication, HRW communications director, February 28, 2013). The purpose of this, they argued, was to resist commercially driven, speeded-up, and populist forms of journalistic production, which undermined the ability of journalism to highlight, and so protect, the world's most vulnerable people (Sen, 2010). This approach focused on fierce critiques of the ways that contemporary journalism constrained its ability to disseminate knowledge (Sen, 2010). For example, the media director criticized CNN, the satellite TV news channel where he had worked for many years, saying,

> The problem with all this live, live, live business . . . is that most of the time what you watch on these news networks you know beforehand. . . .

> They don't pick up the phone and actually *talk* to somebody, or find something *out*. They just, like, rehash something that you already know by looking at the Internet. It's so *lame*. But they don't have time for anything else. . . .

> *All* that effort, *all* that stress, for *what*? What *exactly* do we *learn*? (personal communication, February 15, 2013)

Yet despite the media director's criticisms of news outlets' hurried and uncritical reversioning of others' material, the media director explained that the Bosco project had provided the material for the first of the INGO's electronic distribution lists, which were designed to mimic wire agency feeds of unedited material (personal communication, February 15, 2013; Fenton, 2010). In the same interview,  he went on to explain that this meant they included "shot lists," the relatively "exclusive" material preferred by elite TV news programs, and the "cutaway" shots needed to edit together TV news packages (. He said the purpose of these lists was not just to enable journalists to reversion HRW's material relatively easily but to enhance journalists' uncritical trust in its credibility (Sayer, 2001, 2007). As he put it, "The more 'finished' it looks, the more contrived and controlled, the less [broadcast journalists] [will] trust what they see as raw and direct."  But, he stressed, these "raw" clips had been carefully selected to prevent journalists from telling stories other than "the one that we want telling." So HRW communications workers sought to exploit precisely the kinds of uncritical reversioning they decried.

In addition, despite the media director's criticism of populist "personality-driven" journalism (personal communication, February 15, 2013), he personalized problems himself—focusing on Bosco and his lavish lifestyle rather than disseminating multimedia that explained the M23 rebellion in terms of political resistance to President Kabila, whose election was widely seen as lacking credibility (International Peace Information Service, 2012). Furthermore, framing HRW's mediated advocacy as "proper reporting" meant that editorial labor was not structured to give interpretative power to others. Instead, it was concentrated in the hands of European former reporters, located in the INGO's New York head offices. This caused significant intraorganizational tensions (Fenton, 2010) because, as the deputy executive director explained, many in-country researchers rejected the semijournalistic identities, priorities, and practices they felt were being foisted upon them (personal communication, April 28, 2013).

Their lack of organizational embedding meant that freelancers were unaware of this controversy or of their significance in the INGO's communications strategy (personal communication, A and B, October 19, 2012; personal communication, C, October 26, 2012). Indeed, the deputy executive director argued that freelancers "pretty much *are* the communications strategy," for although HRW enjoys generous grants from foundations, this is usually restricted project funding, so they are not able to hire more media staff (personal communication, April 28, 2013). Nevertheless, she regarded the ability to "leverage the social networks" of freelancers to smooth the acceptance of the INGO's material as "a nice side effect." She was also much less concerned than other HRW staff about the ways in which using freelancers enabled news outlets to justify nonattribution. Indeed, she argued that nonattribution could be a very useful tool in mediated advocacy, because then "not everything appears to be coming from HRW, do you know what I mean? So it's just . . . a broader *chorus* of voices kind of saying the same thing."

Indeed, one of the most distinctive characteristics of the moral economy shaping exchanges between HRW and *Channel 4 News* was the way in which those involved sought to use broadcast journalism to pressure policy makers at the United Kingdom's Department for International Development to cease aid to the Rwandan government—which was alleged to be backing the Bosco-led rebellion (personal communication, correspondent, November 29, 2012; personal communication, HRW communications director, February 28, 2013). There is some evidence to suggest that "naming and shaming" via the mainstream media can reduce the worst kinds of human rights abuses in some situations (Krain, 2012). But given that these strategies involved communicating with named officials who were known to watch the show, this involved using mediation as a site of interelite pressure, with mainstream news becoming, at best, a simulation of public opinion (Miller, 2013).

This interelite insularity was exacerbated by the fact that actors involved in the production of this TV report only ever viewed subsequent events, including Bosco's surrender in March 2013, as positive evidence of the efficacy and normative value of their respective approaches. Yet none reflected upon how earlier news coverage might have contributed to Bosco's decision to rebel in the first place. This seems remarkable given that the broadcast by *Channel 4 News* immediately before the fighting began in March 2012 contained clips from the newly appointed prosecutor-general saying that she was going to travel to eastern DRC to press for Bosco's arrest (*Channel 4 News,* 2012a).

The only person who reflected on the possibility that news coverage might have unintended, and potentially harmful, consequences was the freelance filmmaker, C, who had filmed in the DRC for many years. As she put it,

> The militias have publicly said that if they are unhappy with their situation once they have been absorbed into the Congolese military—they still haven't been paid or they don't have any food or they haven't got the responsibility they wanted or whatever— then they go and rape women, because it is reported.
>
> Then there is an international outcry, and the Congolese government, instead of saying "We must stop this to prevent them from doing it again," says, "We must hush it up and ask them what they want." . . .
>
> So, one becomes kind of strangely complicit in a way. But I don't want to stop reporting things because that's important too. . . .
>
> You know, [Channel 4 journalists] call it the "journalism of attachment" or something. But I don't know; I don't have the answers. (personal communication, C, October 26, 2012)

Unfortunately, C's positioning as a freelancer meant that she did not feel able to voice her ambivalence about mediation to anyone else in the production process lest she undermine her relationships with those who could offer her commissions in future.

However, even if C had voiced her concerns to the program, she might not have had a receptive audience, because the journalists there were preoccupied with the efforts of another INGO, Invisible Children Inc., to use mediation to bring about the prosecution of another man wanted for war crimes—the Ugandan former general, Joseph Kony. Like many other journalists, the senior editor at *Channel 4 News* said that he and the correspondent had been "deeply annoyed" about the popularity of the video produced by Invisible Children, *Kony2012*, given its "inaccuracy" and "oversimplification" of conflict in Uganda (personal communication, November 23, 2012; Nothias, 2013). They therefore wanted to remedy some of its weaknesses, making sure that their account of conflict in the DRC was factually correct and included more contextualization, including the nature of M23's alleged alliances and the relevance of this to the country's lucrative mining industry. But at the same time, pressure from the parliamentary select committee regarding the program's falling audience ratings (UK House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2013)[5] made them keen to try representing African conflict in a more personalized manner.

In particular, the senior editor—whose background at Sky News made him value what he called "strong, simple storytelling"—was convinced that Bosco "could be our own Kony" (personal

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[5] This report related to discussions of Channel 4's annual report in 2011.

communication, November 23, 2012). But by framing their reports in terms of continuity with Kony and the fictional character of "the Terminator," *Channel 4 News* risked portraying Bosco as an archetypal villain or, as the correspondent put it, a "badass" (personal communication, November 29, 2012). There is no intention here to imply that Bosco is a misunderstood innocent who does not deserve to stand trial for his alleged crimes. Yet in othering Bosco as yet "another African general wanted for war crimes" (personal communication, senior editor, November 23, 2012) who brought "chaos," rather than engaging in acts of political resistance (*Channel 4 News,* 2012a, 2012b), the program risked overpersonalizing and oversimplifying the M23 rebellion in ways that might constrain collective reasoning about how to address and resolve the broader causes of conflict (Sen, 2010).

## Conclusion

This article explores the uses of Sayer's moral economy theory (2000, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2011) in analyzing and evaluating exchanges between INGOs, journalists, and others in news production. First, it blended Sayer's work with Gandy's (1982) ideas about "information subsidies" to generate a more nuanced analytical tool, "obligation subsidies," which better addresses how journalists use INGO-provided material to meet their multiple, formal, and informal responsibilities. Such forms of production, it was stressed, do not necessarily involve "churnalism" (Davies, 2008) but may still involve sources exerting significant interpretative influence. Next, it drew upon Waisbord's (2011) more detailed attention to "journalistic logic" and framing theory (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1986; Stones, 2014) to construct an analytical framework capable of interrogating how multiple actors, including INGOs and journalists, collectively renegotiate the practices, purposes, and boundaries of their respective fields while reshaping the meanings of events in news texts.

I tested the utility of this model by applying it to a particularly complex case study about the production of a TV news report that campaigned for the arrest of Congolese general Bosco Ntaganda (*Channel 4 News*, 2012b). This reporting was found to have been shaped by not only HRW and *Channel 4 News* but Amnesty International, Invisible Children Inc., and three freelancers. This article's three goals were to, first, establish new ways of addressing the multiplicity of actors, structures, and media strategies involved in shaping INGO–journalist interactions in the production of news items. Second, it aimed to illuminate why and how warm forms of interpersonal trust can be sustained between actors (Franks, 2008) despite considerable ambivalence or tensions between their values, goals, and perceived responsibilities. Third, it used the critical model outlined to tackle the knotty problem of how to critique the mixed effects of INGO–journalist exchanges by asking which and whose capabilities were enhanced or constrained, and how this was legitimized.

This article focused on the pivotal roles played by casual labor in legitimizing INGO–journalist relations, controlling tensions, and (re)negotiating boundaries between them (Powers, 2015; Wright, 2015b). Freelancers not only legitimized the importation of INGO materials and related interpretative frames into news outlets; they also enabled such exchanges to be hidden from audiences and disavowed by staff journalists. Thus, the capabilities of the INGO and news outlet to respond to their multiple responsibilities were enhanced at the expense of media audiences' capability to scrutinize claims made in

news reports (Sen, 2010). Collective reasoning was also found to be potentially undermined by an overpersonalized focus on Bosco himself rather than the political causes of the M23 rebellion.

Nevertheless, actors were engaged in detailed reflections about the protective function of mainstream news, including its ability to give voice to the disempowered and to disseminate knowledge that disproved a lie—that is, Bosco's whereabouts on the day of the Kiwanja massacre (Sen, 2010). But these reflections were constrained by the structure of editorial labor, whereby interpretative power was concentrated in the hands of a few elite journalists or former journalists in London and New York. In addition, actors tended to view evidence selectively in order to further justify activities in which they were heavily invested. This entrenched changes already under way at both the INGO and news outlet, with the former remodeling itself as a kind of wire agency while journalists at the latter reconceptualized public-service journalism as elite-focused "human rights" reporting.

Any doubts or ambivalence about the potential effects of such news coverage were not discussed within collective production processes because of the insecure nature of casual labor. This not only flags a problem with this particular moral economy, it also highlights problems with the ability of moral economy theory itself to enable normative evaluation. For although the model outlined here can be used to assess the mixed effects of exchange relations on media producers' capabilities, and although it is possible to make some basic judgments about the attribution and/or framing of news texts, it remains extremely difficult to establish the effects of news coverage on others. In particular, without further evidence, it remains impossible to judge whether these particular news reports helped to pressure policy makers to pursue the arrest of Bosco Ntaganda and, if so, to what degree this enhanced the well-being of Congolese civilians or the well-being of others through upholding an international moral/legal order. Thus, although moral economy theory has significant critical strengths in interrogating INGO–journalist relations, scholars should be aware that its ability to inform normative evaluation is limited.

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