

The goal of journalism – the student view

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Time for another guest-blog from a POLIS Summer School student. This time Amanda Bao outlines the ideal balance between emotion and objectivity in journalism.

Many vessels of journalism have succumbed to emotional reactions of reporters, and consequently, to bias. Especially when reporting suffering, there is an immediate and overpowering emotive response, and the human instinct is to help and/or move others to help. But, is the goal of journalism to provoke action? What then separates a journalist from a campaigner?

I believe there to be a single, universal goal of journalism, and that is to report the factual account of the *whole* story. More easily said than done. When reporting suffering, there is a tendency for aggressive reporting that pushes for action and aid. Although the intentions are noble, the effects of such colored journalism can be detrimental. With too much pushing and shoving from mainstream journalism, trust will decline among the media-literate population. For most of us, journalism is the only liaison between the devastating misery of third world countries, and by polluting this connection between the worlds, journalists are in the long run, exacerbating and prolonging the suffering. As the former editor-in-chief of the New York Times puts it, “Good Journalism tells it how it is and leaves the reform to the reformers.” Journalists must trust that the humanitarian organizations, social workers, and the government will do its job. And, vice versa, we must trust that journalists do their job – and strictly their job.

Good Journalism is by no means an easy task for reporters who broadcast suffering, as objectivity clashes with instinct and oftentimes morals. But in order to keep Good Journalism good, there cannot be a social agenda or a personal agenda behind the story.

By Amanda Bao

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