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## Covering Death in Conflicts: Coverage of the Second Intifada on Israeli and Palestinian Television\*

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This exploratory study attempts to explain how journalistic routines for covering violent conflict lead to the construction of ethnocentric news. A distinction is made between two sets of routines. One set is permanent and ensures ethnocentric control over the flow of information, while a second set varies as journalists construct coherent narratives for particular events. This latter set of routines is further broken down into what are labeled the 'Victims Mode' and 'Defensive Mode' of reporting. The Victims Mode is used when one's own citizens have suffered an especially tragic loss of life, while the Defensive Mode is employed when one's forces have carried out an attack that has inflicted a similar loss on the enemy. It is argued that each of these modes of reporting parallels psychological reactions that have been found in individuals. The ideas raised in the theoretical discussion are investigated by comparing coverage of two events by Israeli and Palestinian television. Two events were chosen for analysis: a Palestinian suicide bombing that killed 19 Israelis, and the killing of Hamas leader Sheik Salah Shehadeh in which 16 Palestinians were killed. An in-depth reading of the six news broadcasts provides important insights into how journalists' routines ensure a steady flow of culturally acceptable news stories that reinforce hatred between enemies.

### Introduction

There has always been a great deal of interest in the field of political communication about the role of the news media in wars.<sup>1</sup> One of the most persistent themes in this literature is that the news media often become important tools for governments to mobilize public support in conflicts. This argument became especially pronounced in the research carried out about the role of the media in the 1991 Gulf War (Bennett & Paletz, 1994), and it

would be extremely surprising if scholars came to any different conclusions concerning the role of the US media in the more recent conflicts in Afghanistan and the initial stages of the Iraqi war (Bennett, 2003). The working assumption is that, for both cultural and commercial reasons, domestic news media tend to 'rally round the flag' during times of crisis.

This does not suggest that news media always provide blind support for governments in all wars. The role of the news media does vary over time and according to circumstances (Entman, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 1997). Nevertheless, a common reaction to the outbreak of hostilities is to construct

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the more important works include Bennett & Paletz (1994), Entman (2004), Hallin (1986), Knightley (2002), and Mermin (1999).

news stories that reflect both a sense of patriotism and feelings of belligerence towards a country's enemies. Knightley's (2002) historical survey of this topic demonstrates that there is nothing new about this phenomenon. Thus, the modern press's role in the demonization of the enemy can be traced as far back as the Crimean War in the mid-19th century, during which the British press constructed graphic stories of Russians firing on Turkish wounded lying in the water. A more recent example was the willingness of the US media in 1991 to enthusiastically disseminate the (apparently false) story of Iraqi troops throwing babies out of Kuwaiti incubators (Dorman & Livingston, 1994).

The goal of this study is to look more closely at journalistic mechanisms for covering violent conflicts and how they ensure a steady stream of culturally acceptable news stories that reinforce hatred between enemies.

### Theoretical Framework

The ways in which the media construct news frames about war and peace are important, because most members of the public depend on the news as their major source of information about conflicts (Berinsky & Kinder, 2006; Gamson, 1992; Graber, 2001, 2004; Glynn et al., 1999; Lee, 2002; Page, 1996; Zaller, 1992). This helps explain why political leaders invest a great deal of time and resources attempting to promote official frames to media. The ways in which the news media cover such conflicts are also likely to have a significant influence on any subsequent attempts at conflict resolution (Galtung, 1998; Manoff, 1998; Wolfsfeld, 2004).

The news media employ a number of routines that facilitate the mobilization of the public in wartime. The first set of mechanisms is rooted in the fact that news tends to be culturally ethnocentric. We are using the term ethnocentric to suggest not only an

exaggerated self-interest but also a culturally narrow perspective on political events and processes. Here, 'ethnocentrism' is employed in its accepted sense as a psycho-social construct relevant to both individuals and social groups. It designates the tendency to view the world and other populations through the perspective of one's own ethnic group, and even to reject others who are culturally different while accepting those perceived to be similar (Levine & Campbell, 1972).<sup>2</sup>

These routines are mostly constant and are employed in almost all forms of news. They ensure that virtually everyone involved in collecting and distributing information comes from the local population or from allies. This includes reporters, photographers, cameramen/women, graphics personnel, and editors. Most *sources* for news about a war also originate in the local population, especially from military and political leaders.

The use of one's own language also ensures a good deal of ethnocentric control over the flow of information. We are referring to the notion of language in its broadest sense. A native language always includes concepts, myths, symbols, and cultural assumptions, many of which transmit a sense of national pride (Bar-Tal, 2005). Such elements become especially important when people tell any tale, and this certainly includes news stories about conflicts.

Our emphasis on these permanent ethnocentric mechanisms, and their difference from the more dynamic journalistic narratives outlined below, to a certain extent parallels the distinction between 'implicit' and 'explicit' ethnocentrism (Cunningham, Nezlek & Banaji, 2004). The permanent mechanisms, such as the fact that all journalists and sources are members of the same ethnic group and use the group language, and the concomitant assumption that the

<sup>2</sup> We are not, however, using the term ethnocentric in the narrower sense of the word that implies a sense of cultural superiority, although this may also take place.

audience is ethnically similar, all contribute to forms of reporting whose 'implicit' ethnocentric character is neither consciously formulated nor intended (see also Erjavec, 2001; Mastro, 2003; Quist-Adade, 2005; Rivenburgh, 2000).

The second set of mechanisms for the construction of journalistic narratives varies over time and circumstance as reporters react to different types of events. While there are certainly many possible variations here, we wish to focus on two that seem especially appropriate in conflicts involving terrorism. The 'Victims Mode' of reporting is likely to be applied to those situations in which the major event concerns one's own victims, especially civilian casualties. This mode of reporting can also come into play when military losses are especially severe or when soldiers/fighters are taken prisoner. The 'Defensive Mode' of reporting, on the other hand, is employed in those situations in which the leadership in question is forced to rationalize its own actions, usually because of civilian casualties on the other side.

A theoretical model that details the differences between the two modes of reporting can be found in Figure 1.

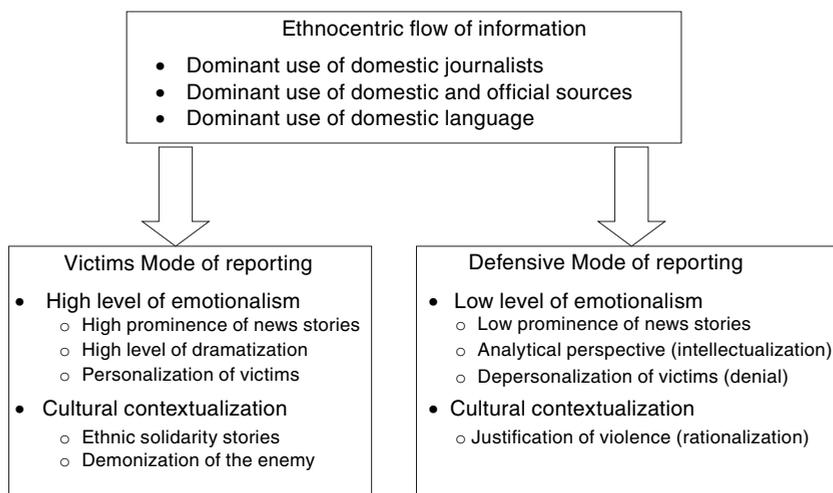
### *The Victims Mode of Reporting*

In the Victims Mode of reporting, journalists raise the level of emotionalism associated with the event. In doing so, the press is giving vent to the shock, grief, and anger that accompany such experiences. Three devices are especially prevalent in this type of reporting. The first is to raise the level of prominence of the story. When it comes to television news – which is the focus of this particular study – this involves placing the item on the top of the lineup and granting it a significant amount of air time. Journalists will also employ a high level of dramatization when covering these types of stories. This can include such techniques as extensive coverage of hysterical reactions of bystanders or close-ups of the wounded or dead. The final routine has to do with the personalization of the victims, whereby the media provides names, ages, and even pictures of the victims. It is reasonable to assume that the more viewers get to 'know' the victims, the greater the emotional impact of the story.

### *Placing the Events in Context*

The other category of journalistic routines allows the news media to place the events

Figure 1. Journalistic Mechanisms for Constructing News Stories About Violent Conflicts



within an appropriate cultural context. Journalists construct news frames that resonate with public assumptions and sentiments (Gamson, 1992; Wolfsfeld, 1997, 2004). There are two types of framing techniques that are thought to be especially common in the Victims Mode of reporting: ethnic solidarity stories and those that demonize the enemy. Ethnic solidarity stories center on narratives that have to do with the leaders and the public demonstrating their sympathy and solidarity with the dead and wounded. This can include stories of leaders visiting the hospitals, citizens' initiatives that express support (e.g. flying flags, writing letters), and special ceremonies designed to express and enhance ethnic/national pride. Patriotism is often an underlying theme for many of these stories, and such feelings are critical for maintaining public support during protracted conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2005).

News stories that demonize the enemy are also very common in such conflict. The truth is that, when one's people have been killed, the images and sounds coming from the scene provide graphic 'proof' of the enemy's evil. However, one will also find stories that vilify the other side more directly. The political leadership acts as the most prominent source for such messages, employing dramatic terminology (e.g. 'cold blooded murder') to describe the attack and the perpetrators. Weaker antagonists who have been victimized will talk about 'massacres' and 'war crimes', and this theme will be amplified in their own communication channels.

The ways in which journalists construct such stories have a number of parallels to the ways in which individuals react to similar situations. The proponents of terror management theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski & Solomon, 1986; Solomon, Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 2003) argue that, when people are exposed to death, they employ a number of psychological mechanisms in order to avoid the terror associated with thinking of

their own mortality. Among the most relevant responses are the rise in in-group identity and an increase in hostility and aggression towards outsiders who threaten one's cultural worldview. The emphases on ethnic solidarity and the demonization of the enemy in such news stories are precisely the types of responses such theorists would anticipate.

We are making no claims about the individual psychological processes of journalists who cover such events, nor about any underlying 'collective' psychology. Journalists create news stories that are both professionally useful and culturally acceptable. The reasons for constructing stories that resonate with cultural sentiments are probably both social (they live among their own people) and commercial (it is good for business). In addition, journalists also have professional interests that lead them in rather different directions from individuals when they cover death. Individuals who do not want to be exposed to images of death, for example, are likely to avoid the news. This, too, would be a form of terror management. Journalists, however, not only conduct an active search for scenes of death and destruction but also tend to dramatize them. While this routine certainly increases hatred for the enemy, it is certainly not the most efficient means of 'death-denial'.

### *The Defensive Mode of Reporting*

Journalists employ an alternative set of mechanisms when dealing with civilian deaths on the other side. The Defensive Mode of reporting is employed to cover those events that are potentially embarrassing and inconsistent with patriotic frames of the conflict. When one's own combatants are involved in killing civilians, journalists usually adopt techniques that lower the emotional impact of such stories and attempt to rationalize what happened. These routines can be seen as *journalistic defense mechanisms* in that they parallel

what individuals do in order to cope with similar situations.<sup>3</sup>

It is argued that, in such situations, journalists adopt a number of routines that serve to reduce the level of emotionalism associated with the story – especially when compared to the way they cover their own victims. First, they are likely to lower the level of prominence or even ignore such events. This could be considered a form of collective denial: if it's on the back pages (or not mentioned at all), then nothing important happened. The second routine is to use an analytical perspective, which can be considered a form of intellectualization. In violent conflicts, such coverage usually involves extensive use of military sources and perspectives. This terminology is often extremely technical and strategic in nature and may also include graphics – especially maps – that reinforce this sense of distance (Bennett & Paletz, 1994; Entman, 2004; Jasperson & El-Kikia, 2003).

The third routine for lowering the level of emotionalism in these types of news stories is to transform victims on the other side into statistics (Liebes, 1997). It is understandable why journalists would personalize their own people's victims and depersonalize those among the enemy. Nevertheless, the consequences of this routine are likely to be profound. Constantly being told so much about one's own innocent victims and so little about those on the other side fans the flames of hatred. This mechanism could also be considered a form of denial.

Here, too, we are not suggesting that these mechanisms are necessarily rooted in the journalist's individual needs to avoid either anxiety or guilt. There are professional reasons to adopt a patriotic mode of reporting. Nevertheless, the fact that these mechanisms are so similar to those employed by

individuals does suggest that there may be something deeper at work.

### *Providing Context*

A second, related, defense mechanism for dealing with a dissonant event is to rationalize what happened. Here the major emphasis has to do with the diversion of blame, either by emphasizing extenuating circumstances (e.g. a regrettable accident) or by shifting the guilt to the enemy. Thus, one of the most common routines is to employ terms or descriptions that present one's own actions as a *reaction* to the violence carried out by the other side. This contextualization can be provided by political leaders, military sources, outside experts, or even the journalists themselves. Given the fact that most conflicts include a cycle of violence, it is easy to believe that our side is simply 'returning fire'. A related type of coverage places such events within a wider and familiar political context. Thus, the weaker side attributes their violence to the enemy's oppression, while the stronger side is likely to talk about the continuing war on terrorism.

In sum, the theoretical principles center on the ways in which the news media socially construct news stories, reflecting and reinforcing existing beliefs about a conflict and the enemy. The true power of these routines is rooted in the fact that they are, for the most part, transparent. People living within a particular environment are unlikely to pay attention when they continually receive information in the same cultural package.

### **Research Strategy**

The research strategy for this study involved carrying out an analysis of different news reports with regard to two events from the Second Intifada. The first event was the attack by a Palestinian suicide bomber, who blew himself up on a bus at Pat Junction in Jerusalem in the early morning of 18 June

<sup>3</sup> For a summary of the literature on psychological defense mechanisms, see Weinberger (1998) and Vaillant (1992).

2002, killing 19 Israelis, many of them children. The second incident was the killing of Hamas leader Sheik Saleh Shehadeh by the Israeli Air Force about a month later, on 23 July. In addition to Shehadeh and his wife, 16 people were killed, including nine children. Each of these incidents represents a dissonant event for the attacker and a Victims story for the side that was attacked.

It is only fair to point out, however, that the Palestinian Authority was not directly involved in the terrorist attack on Pat Junction. The attack was carried out by Hamas, and Arafat's government condemned it. Nevertheless, this and similar terrorist attacks do place the Palestinian Authority on the defensive. The United States and Israel constantly accused the Authority of providing political and financial support for terrorism. In addition, the Authority's attitude towards the attackers has always been ambiguous. Suicide bombers are considered *Shahidim* (Islamic martyrs), and they and their families were treated with honor after their deaths.

Two news stations were chosen for comparison: Israel's Channel Two and Palestinian television. Israel's Channel Two is a commercial television channel that was created in 1992. While public regulators exercise a relatively loose supervisory role over content, the station is privately owned, and news resembles what one would expect to see in other Western countries (Caspi & Limor, 1999). The Palestinian Broadcast Corporation (PBC), on the other hand, is under a good deal of control by the Palestinian government (Jamal, 2003).<sup>4</sup> Palestinian television is the official voice of the ruling government, which means, among other

things, that opposition groups (e.g. Hamas and the Islamic Jihad) were (at the time) rarely allowed access. A survey, carried out in 2001, revealed that about 60% of the population watch news on Palestinian television at least three times a week.<sup>5</sup>

The analysis was based on an in-depth reading of the major Israeli and Palestinian evening news broadcast for each event (8:00 pm and 7:00 pm respectively). The goal of these readings was to examine four major features of the broadcast. In an attempt to increase the replicability of the method, a good deal of our examination centered on relatively straightforward indicators. First, in order to understand the level of cultural control over the flow of information, we attempted to look at the ethnic homogeneity of the journalists and their sources. The second parameter concerned the level of emotionalism conveyed in the broadcast. In keeping with the earlier discussion, we were interested in the level of prominence given to the news story, techniques that could raise and lower the level of drama, and the extent of personalization granted to the victims. The third dimension had to do with the ways in which the day's events were placed into context. We were interested in any elements that referred to or suggested ethnic solidarity, accusations against the other side, and any justifications that were given for the violence. These last two aspects deal specifically with attributions of blame. Finally, we were purposely looking for exceptions to the rules. In each case, we were consciously attempting to find routines that suggested that news is not always as ethnocentric as we had assumed. Some surprises did emerge, and these provided new insights about how journalists construct such stories.

<sup>4</sup> In the past, Palestinian television was under control of the Israeli military authorities. While some of these constraints still have a certain influence on Palestinian newspapers, the Israeli authorities have no effective control over what is broadcast by the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority as part of the Oslo accords.

<sup>5</sup> The survey is part of an ongoing joint Israeli-Palestinian project carried out by Jacob Shamir of the Truman Institute at Hebrew University and Khalil Shikaki of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah (see <http://truman.huji.ac.il>).

## Analysis

The analysis begins by examining the Israeli and Palestinian coverage of the terrorist attack at Pat Junction, in which 19 people were killed. This is the type of event that serves to reinforce Israeli hatred for the Palestinians and to place the Palestinian leadership on the defensive.

In Table I, we present a first summary of the Israeli and Palestinian television coverage of the attack at Pat Junction. We start with the ethnicity of those involved in creating the two news stories and indicators concerning the level of emotionalism associated with the broadcasts. As discussed, these routines are permanent and influence every news story that is constructed. In Israel, all of the journalists and anchors who covered this story were Jewish. The news was broadcast in Hebrew. Similarly, Palestinian television employs Palestinians as journalists and as anchors. There is nothing surprising about the fact that antagonists use their own people and language to report the news. The fact that such routines are obvious does not, however, lessen their importance. Indeed, as argued, the fact that these practices are inconspicuous may increase their impact; citizens remain unaware of the inherent cultural assumptions that are transmitted as they listen and watch.

The same can be said, for the most part, about the use of quoted sources for news stories.<sup>6</sup> Thus, while the evening news on Israeli television will occasionally provide a sound bite from Palestinian figures, the vast majority of sound bites and interviews come from Jews. One is especially unlikely to hear Palestinian voices in a Victims story that follows a terrorist attack. Thus, in the Israeli story about the Pat Attack, viewers were exposed almost exclusively to Jews talking to

other Jews about what the Palestinians did to 'us'. The Palestinian voices that are heard are always placed within a culturally acceptable framework. One of the few Palestinian sources quoted, for example, comes from Hamas. Not only is the organization shown claiming responsibility for the attack, but excerpts from a Hamas training video (on how to make explosives and choose a target) are integrated into the broadcast.

The only sources used in the short Palestinian broadcast come exclusively from the PLO. Thus, despite the fact that Hamas carried out the attack, the Palestinian's official television channel did not include any inputs from these sources. It is ironic that, at least at the time, Hamas sources had greater access to Israeli television than the Palestinian media. No Israeli sources were quoted during the broadcast, despite the fact that the attack took place in Israel and that Prime Minister Sharon made an on-site statement that was widely reported in the international media.

### *The Level of Emotionalism*

The analysis turns to three aspects of the coverage that raise the emotional impact of this type of news story: the amount of prominence, the level of dramatization, and the extent to which there is an attempt to personalize the victims. All of these are central elements in the distinction between the Victims and Defensive modes of reporting.

The Israeli version of the story is as prominent and dramatic as one would expect. The attack is not only the lead item; it is virtually the only item. As often happens in Israel, the normal news broadcast was extended (by 14 minutes), so that the entire broadcast runs for 45 minutes. The images and sounds from the scene itself convey the horror of the event. In the initial scene, one hears the wail of ambulances and a policeman screaming through a megaphone to clear the interchange so that the wounded can be taken to

<sup>6</sup> We purposely refer here to 'quoted' sources because, when journalists depend on other types of sources, it is impossible to track them.

Table I. Coverage of the Attack on Pat Junction: Ethnocentric Flow of Information and Emotionalism<sup>a</sup>

	<i>News routine</i>	<i>Israeli coverage</i>	<i>Palestinian coverage</i>
Ethnocentric flow of information	Ethnicity of journalists/anchors	All Jewish	All Palestinian
	Ethnicity of sources	Almost all Jewish	All Palestinian (PLO)
	Prominence of news stories	Lead item Almost only story Extended broadcast (45 minutes)	Second item in lineup 5 minutes out of 30
Emotionalism	Level of dramatization	Frightening sounds from scene Images of burnt-out bus Images of body bags/leg of deceased (calm voice-over)	No sounds Images of ambulances (Sharon next to body bags) Calm voice-over
		Personalization of Victims	Pictures of dead Names, ages, neighborhood Interviews with victims' families

<sup>a</sup>Items in parentheses represent exceptions to the general pattern.

hospital. The scene could perhaps best be described as managed chaos, as medical staff frantically attempt to evacuate the wounded to the many ambulances that have arrived. The most dramatic and difficult images have to do with the dead. There are both long shots and close-ups of a long row of black body bags that have been placed on the sidewalk. One also sees, albeit for a brief moment, the bare legs of one of the victims as medics pull the plastic bag over her body. Another difficult image is provided by the ultra-Orthodox volunteers who are wiping the blood off the street. The Israeli public has become quite familiar with the work of this group of volunteers (ZAKA), who take it upon themselves to collect human remains for burial.

There are two elements in the Israeli coverage that run counter to this trend. First, the voice-over accompanying some of the images is relatively calm and analytical. This is a

good example of the type of 'exception to the rule' we attempted to find. Previous discussions with Israeli television editors revealed that they are concerned with offending their viewers with overly graphic images. It would seem that the professional norm for covering such stories is to provide sufficient emotion and drama to produce stimulating news without crossing the line of public tastes.

The most emotional elements in the Israel broadcast have to do with the way the victims are portrayed. The news begins with their pictures, and the audience is told their names, ages, neighborhood or city, and the number and type of family survivors (e.g. a wife and two daughters). The fact that the attack took place early in the morning provided the Israeli reporters with an opportunity to talk to grieving relatives, co-workers, and classmates. There is a great deal of weeping throughout the broadcast, and the fact that so many young people were killed makes it

especially difficult to watch. One particularly emotional item centers on interviews with the sister and the mother of a 22-year-old woman who was killed just a few hours earlier. It starts with emotional testimonials by the two relatives and then moves on to a pictorial montage of the young woman.

The Palestinian coverage of the attack at Pat Junction was considerably less dramatic. The attack on Pat was not even the first item on the news lineup; that place is given over to Arafat, who had hosted a formal visit by an Arab dignitary. As is often the case with this type of news, the first item was dedicated to covering the leader. The attack on Pat was the second item and is given a mere 5 minutes out of the 30-minute broadcast. Another notable feature of the report is that the audience never heard any of the sounds from the scene itself. There were, however, several images of ambulances with the wounded being loaded onto stretchers and a graphic image of Prime Minister Sharon standing next to a row of body bags.

The voice-over that accompanies these images consists of the anchor reading an official statement issued by the Palestinian authority (detailed below). The use of this type of voice-over serves two functions. First, it reduces the emotional impact of the deaths by maintaining a certain amount of analytical distance. Second, it allows journalists (and the government) to place the dissonant images within a politically appropriate culture frame. As discussed below, the Israeli news media adopt a similar mechanism when they employ a Defensive Mode of reporting.

### *Constructing a Cultural Frame*

The discussion turns to those news routines that enable journalists to place the events within a culturally appropriate framework. A summary of these observations can be found in Table II.

A useful and relatively straightforward method for examining the storyline is to

focus on the headlines of each broadcast. These headlines are meant to set up the story and, thus, provide a quick summary of the major themes that will be discussed. Here is how the story of the attack at Pat was introduced on Israeli television.

Nineteen killed and dozens wounded in a suicide attack (Pigua) on a bus in Jerusalem. Ten of the victims are from the Gilo neighborhood. In the hospitals sixteen people are still hospitalized, some of them in critical condition. Eight of the wounded are children. In the Gilo neighborhood a special headquarters was set up to deal with the families of those that were killed. . . . In consultations among the security forces it was decided that Israel would react much more harshly than usual. Prime Minister Sharon came, for the first time, to the site of the attack. [Insert of Sharon speaking from site:] 'What type of Palestinian State? What are they talking about'. Hamas took responsibility for the attack this morning, with a special training film for preparing the bomb and choosing the target.

The headline provides all of the elements one would expect when one is writing in the Victims Mode of reporting. The most important part of the story has to do with the personal tragedies, then the community efforts made to come together in support of the families, and, finally, a clear attribution of blame against the enemy and a promise of retribution. All of this is quite in keeping with what we would expect from terror management theory: the story serves to reinforce the cultural worldview of Israel's virtue and Palestinian perfidy.

The broadcast contains a number of ethnic solidarity stories that focus on the 'wider families' that were affected. A number of the killed and wounded were on their way to school, and, thus, one of the stories describes the scene at one of the schools, as teachers and classmates attempt to cope with what has happened. A similar story focuses on the Gilo neighborhood in Jerusalem, where the bus began its route. This is a community that had already endured loss of life

Table II. Coverage of Attack on Pat Junction: Placing the Event in Context

<i>News routine</i>	<i>Israeli coverage</i>	<i>Palestinian coverage</i>
Justifications for violence	None	(Condemning attack) Reaction to occupation
Stories about ethnic solidarity	Shock/grief at victim's school Grief in Gilo neighborhood Solidarity among fellow bus drivers	None
Demonization of enemy	Hamas training film preparing bomb 'They celebrate the killing of children' 'Islamic fascists'	'Israeli crimes against our people and holy places'

in the early stages of the Second Intifada, owing to nightly shootings from the territories. This story revolves around community workers talking about their dashed hopes that the killing was over. The final ethnic solidarity story centers on the bus driver who was killed. The driver had replaced another who was five minutes late for work (and who was therefore saved). The item presents the bus drivers as a community united through the vagaries of fate and luck.

The demonization of the enemy is made authoritative through the role of Ehud Ya'ari, Channel Two's 'Arab affairs' correspondent, who combines the roles of journalist, analyst, and expert. Like all the other journalists appearing in the broadcast, he is Jewish, and he is, therefore, not only a key framer of any Palestinian voices that are heard but also frequently a substitute for them (this occurs literally when we see Hamas and Palestinian Authority spokespeople while hearing Ya'ari's voice-over). When asked to explain by one of the anchors (in a tone of voice that stresses the incomprehensible barbarity of the act) how the perpetrators of the attack can openly 'celebrate the killing of children', Ya'ari argues that we are now witnessing 'something which it is forbidden to call anything other than "Islamic fascism"', in which the public statements of Islamic and Palestinian groups celebrate 'the killing of pigs' and cite Koranic verses telling the Jews to prepare their graves. He calls this a 'culture of death and of slaughter'.

The Palestinian frame for the attack at Pat is provided by the government's official statement on the events. As might be expected in this type of media system, journalists have considerably less discretion about how to place the day's events into a wider political context. As discussed, this station is the official voice of the Palestinian Authority, and, thus, political and ideological considerations are considered more important than those having to do with audience appeal. It is also important to remember that the Palestinian Authority did not take responsibility for the act and even condemned it.

The official statement begins with a condemnation of the attack and stresses that killing Israeli civilians does not serve Palestinian interests. The announcement then goes on to talk about the daily price the Palestinian people have paid because of the crimes carried out by the Israeli government and its army of occupation. The statement also talks about the 'Israeli crimes against our people and against our holy places'. The official statement is designed, then, to condemn both the Hamas opposition and Israel at the same time. The attack is placed in a political context that does not really justify it but does frame it as part of the overall struggle against the Israeli occupation.

In the end, however, it is perhaps the brevity of the broadcast that is the most telling. The relatively small amount of attention devoted to the issue tells viewers that

this incident is unimportant, and this too is a form of contextualization. The Israeli news media perform a similar function when Palestinian deaths are often mentioned only in passing. Denial is perhaps the most efficient way of all to deal with uncomfortable realities.

### The Killing of Shehadeh

The killing of Shehadeh provides us with an event in which the civilian victims were Palestinians. Israel received a great deal of international criticism for this attack. A summary of this set of results is presented in Table III.

As always, the ethnocentric control over the flow of information is an important mechanism for constructing this type of news story. Palestinian television once again refrains from using either Israeli or Hamas sources, despite the fact that this was an attack by Israel on a Hamas leader.

In the Israeli version, the anchors, the reporters, and the vast majority of sources are all Jewish Israelis. There are a few short

sound bites from Palestinians that allow Israelis to hear some of their reactions. Revealingly, however, many of these quotes are given within the context of what might be called a 'Palestinian propaganda' segment, in which the Arab affairs correspondent demonstrates how the other side is exploiting the incident for its own purposes. We will return to this point later on.

### *Prominence, Dramatization, and Personalization of Victims*

The Palestinian version of the Shehadeh killing is consistent with the Victims Mode of coverage that is characterized by a high level of emotionalism. Starting with prominence, it is not only the lead story in the 30-minute broadcast, it is the only story. There are also a number of techniques that raise the level of drama associated with the event. In contrast to the way Pat was covered on Palestinian television, one hears the chaos and the panic from the scene itself, and the viewers see (often in close-up) many of the victims. The most difficult scenes to watch all involve children who were killed or

Table III. Coverage of the Attack on Shehadeh: Ethnocentric Flow of Information and Emotionalism

	<i>News routine</i>	<i>Israeli coverage</i>	<i>Palestinian coverage</i>
Ethnocentric flow of information	Ethnicity of journalists/anchors	All Jewish	All Palestinian
	Ethnicity of sources	Mostly Jewish (Palestinian eyewitnesses)	All Palestinian (PLO)
Emotionalism	Prominence of news stories	(Lead item) 15 of 30 minutes	Lead story Only story
	Level of dramatization	Few sounds from scene  Calm voice-over Extensive military (analysis Dead baby wrapped in flag) (Children in morgue)	Frightening sounds of chaos/panic Dead and wounded children Dead baby wrapped in flag Children in morgue
	Personalization of victims	None	Names and ages of children

wounded. The children appear at four different sites throughout the broadcast. The first is when viewers see children being pulled out of the rubble after the building collapsed. A second item was filmed at the morgue, and one sees a worker in a white coat pull out a number of drawers that contain dead children and babies covered with sheets. The third scene takes place at a local hospital, where the wounded are interviewed. The last view of the victims comes from a mass funeral procession that includes a striking scene in which an angry mourner raises the body of a dead baby into the air. In keeping with this mode of reporting, the names, ages, and pictures of each of the dead are presented.

The Israeli broadcast, on the other hand, uses a number of mechanisms that *limit* the emotional impact of the event. The results with regard to the level of prominence are mixed. The item is the first one mentioned and half of the 30-minute broadcast is devoted to the story. Nevertheless, when the headlines are announced at the beginning of the broadcast, it is only one of five items that are featured. These results remind us that journalistic denial has its limits; when the event is significant enough to create international waves, it cannot be ignored.

Despite the relatively high level of prominence devoted to the story in Israel, there is little attempt to dramatize the events. The

images and sounds from the scene itself are much more subdued in the Israeli version than those that were broadcast to the Palestinian audience. There are only eight seconds of raw footage, and all of the other scenes are accompanied by voice-overs that place the images within an Israeli cultural context. Finally, there is an extensive use of military analysis that also lowers the emotional impact of the incident.

There is another anomaly in the Israeli broadcast that is worthy of note. One of the most powerful images to circulate that day was the scene of the dead children in the Palestinian morgue that was mentioned earlier. This was shown on Israeli television, and there can be little doubt that such pictures raised the emotional impact of the story. Here, too, however, the overall impact of the images was reduced by the accompanying voice-over claiming that the film was part of a propaganda campaign against Israel.

#### *Placing the Event in Context*

A summary of the ways in which the Israeli and Palestinian media place the killing of Shehadeh in context can be found in Table IV. The Israeli version is a perfect example of the Defensive Mode of reporting, while the Palestinian version demonstrates the Victims Mode.

Because the Israeli report on this event is considerably longer than the Palestinian story about Pat, there is considerably more material

Table IV. Coverage of Attack on Shehadeh: Placing the Event in Context

<i>News routine</i>	<i>Israeli coverage</i>	<i>Palestinian coverage</i>
Justifications for violence	Legitimate attack on 'super-terrorist' Next attack on Israel imminent Technical mistake	None
Stories about ethnic solidarity	None	Victims as <i>Shahids</i> Descriptions of national mourning Dead baby in Palestinian flag
Demonization of enemy	Hamas training film preparing bomb	'Israeli crimes against our people and holy places'

to analyze. The central storyline is that a major terrorist leader who was responsible for murdering scores of Israelis has been killed and that, unfortunately, some civilians also died, owing to a mistake in judgment. This theme is quickly established in the anchor's opening lines that are designed to set up the entire story: 'Selah Shehadeh, member of Hamas [literally, 'man of Hamas'], was the right target, at the right time, but apparently in the wrong place. So it emerges from the ambivalence in Israel following the results of the operation to eliminate this super-terrorist.' As noted, the 'results' were the killing of 17 other people, including 9 children, by a missile fired from an Israeli jet fighter. There is no explicit attribution of blame here, but the statement implies (1) that the attack was justified (he was the right target) and (2) that the attack was well planned (the timing was right). The statement also contextualizes the killing more broadly in order to legitimize it (he was a Hamas super-terrorist) and foregrounds a military/operational view of its execution (it was well timed). So, one might ask, what went wrong? Apparently, Shehadeh was 'in the wrong place', implying that, if he had not hidden in a residential area, no civilians would have been killed.

The most notable group of sources for the Shehadeh coverage almost all come from the military. These voices provide the analytical terms and tone that is an essential component of the Defensive Mode of reporting. Footage from a press conference held by the Head of Army Intelligence stresses that Shehadeh was planning numerous terrorist attacks, including one scheduled for the next few days. Blame for the civilian deaths is averted by the rather dry description of the Head of Army Operations, who is quoted as saying that 'we undertook a precision attack in which we fired a single missile which hit his [Shehadeh] house, which was situated in a heavily populated neighborhood. This building collapsed.'

There are two correspondents who were responsible for preparing the major coverage of the event: the military correspondent and the Arab affairs correspondent. Similar to our findings with regard to the Palestinian report about Pat, there is an inconsistency between the images and the voice-over. Thus, as the audience was shown pictures from the scene of destruction, the military correspondent talked about Shehadeh being involved in hundreds of terrorist attacks. The journalist went on to state that Shehadeh was also 'mentioned' as a suspect in connection with some of the worst terrorist attacks that Israel has endured, including a bomb at a discotheque that killed 20 Israelis, most of them teenagers.

In addition, the coverage from the scene is broken up by using a number of inserts that place those images within a more acceptable framework. These inserts include archive footage of terrorist attacks that are attributed to Shehadeh and quotes from Israeli officers who justify the elimination of Shehadeh. Thus, after showing a few seconds of Palestinians running from the collapsed building, an insert appears from a press conference organized by the military. There is then a brief hospital interview (presumably borrowed from another network) with one of the wounded Palestinians, which is immediately followed by another officer claiming that the missile hit exactly where it was supposed to and that they had not expected any adjoining buildings to collapse.

There is some criticism of the operation, but these criticisms center on the mostly technical question of what went wrong. Moshe Nussbaum, who normally covers the police beat, formulates these criticisms as explicit questions that are spelled out and fill the screen as text: (1) 'Why did military intelligence about the extent of civilian proximity to the target not get through to those authorizing the attack?' and (2) 'Was the use of F-16 warplanes excessive?'. Note that such

questions ignore any moral or political issues that could be linked to the attack. This process of intellectualization serves to reduce any anxiety associated with what happened and mostly steers clear of dealing with any moral issues.

The report by the Arab affairs correspondent uses a similar tactic of placing some difficult images within a culturally acceptable framework. His opening setup line demonstrates his major theme: 'Arafat has been waiting a long time in order to be able to yell "massacre" and to list Sharon's sins from Kibia to Sabra and Shatila. He [Arafat] tried it in Jenin and today it looks like the moment has arrived in Aza. An Israeli mistake he believes can change the balance.' The correspondent then presents a number of images and quotes that demonstrate how Arafat and others are appealing to the world to intervene in the conflict. One fascinating element in this 'Palestinian propaganda' segment is when the correspondent provides an analysis of what Palestinian television has been showing all day. He argues that they have been constantly using emotional images of the bodies as part of a 'campaign to cause people to forget who Salah Shehadeh was and to market the disaster of the other victims'.

This 'Arab propaganda' frame is one that is often employed by Israeli journalists to explain away difficult images. By implying that such pictures are part of a smear campaign against Israel, it suggests that they are not real.

### *The Palestinian Version*

The Palestinian story of the Shehadeh incident is one of a tragic and shocking crime carried out by a vicious aggressor. It is a story told by Palestinians to Palestinians from the beginning to the end. Once again, Chairman Arafat is the first voice to be heard, and his words set the stage for the entire news story:

President Yasser Arafat emphasized that what the Israeli occupation carried out against our people in Aza last night is a cruel crime that

should be condemned, one that a person with any wisdom or conscience cannot possibly understand. Sharon doesn't want peace. He wants to continue his hobby of spilling blood and carrying out what are basically massacres.

The broadcast continues with a clip showing Yasser Arafat in front of a microphone reading exactly the same statement.

The sense of ethnic solidarity can be felt throughout the broadcast, but it becomes especially prevalent in the coverage of the funeral procession. The correspondent continually stresses the sense of unity the Palestinian people feels at times like these. The victims are constantly referred to as *Shahids* (Islamic martyrs), and it is made very clear that the dead have performed the ultimate sacrifice for the Palestinian cause. The Palestinian journalist also stresses the sense of ethnic unity by talking about the tens of thousands who are participating in the funeral and the fact that every single office or shop is closed in honor of the *Shahids*. The correspondent places a major emphasis on the cultural assumptions surrounding a *Shahid's* funeral: 'This is the biggest wedding in which we celebrate together with the 15 *Shahids* – babies, women, and adults – including the Sheikh Salah Shehadeh, one of the Hamas leaders and his wife Lila and his daughter Iman'. The audience is then shown a visual of a dead baby placed in a Palestinian flag held above the crowd. The voice-over for this particular image reinforces the message: 'The baby *Shahid*, wrapped in a Palestinian flag is above us all'.

It is interesting to think about the fact that, unlike the Israeli Victims story about Pat, the Palestinian story about Shehadeh does not focus on grieving families or specific communities. The language and the symbols that are employed all emphasize the national dimension rather than the personal one. The very fact that the victims are considered *Shahids* transforms them into national symbols and effectively removes them from

their personal surroundings. This suggests that there are different ways of expressing ethnic solidarity and that a mobilized press may be more likely to construct a national narrative rather than a more individualistic or personal one.

The demonization of the Israeli enemy is mostly provided by the political leadership, but also by the journalists themselves. Arafat's above-quoted words provide the first attack on Israel. The journalists make their own contribution when they provide the following lead-in to some of the worst images: 'Viewers should note that in the following report pictures are shown from the brutal crimes of the occupational forces of Israel against our people especially against babies'. There are also a number of other terms and descriptions employed throughout the broadcast that reinforce the same storyline: 'massacre', 'children murderers', 'terrorists', 'Zionist, Sharonist terror', and the claim that 'the Nazi Hitler would be embarrassed by the murderer Sharon's actions'.

## Conclusion

The goal of this study was to provide a better understanding of how journalists construct culturally acceptable news of violent conflict. A distinction was made between mostly permanent routines that provide ethnocentric control over the flow of information and those routines that are adapted to deal with varying types of events. Explaining how journalists deal with discordant events is an especially important avenue for researchers to explore. The notion of journalistic defense mechanisms should provide some insights that can be used cross-culturally.

There were a number of particular mechanisms for dealing with such stories that are worth exploring further. The use of contextualizing voice-overs proved to be an important technique in both Palestinian and Israeli television reports of discordant events. As

noted, these types of voice-overs serve two important functions. They allow local journalists to lower the dramatic impact of such images and to place the story within a politically appropriate context. The use of a more military perspective to cover such events works in a similar fashion. It is a form of intellectualization that lowers the level of anxiety associated with such incidents, as well as being a means of rationalizing what happened. The routines employed by Palestinian television ran along similar lines, but it was clear that political considerations – such as placing Arafat at the beginning of the broadcast – were more important than commercial ones.

The mechanisms used in the Victims Mode of reporting are more straightforward but may be even more powerful. It is difficult to overestimate the impact of watching one's own people being killed, especially when the victims become people rather than statistics. The most reasonable conclusion for anyone constantly exposed to such stories is that 'whatever our country is doing pales in significance when compared to what the enemy is doing to us'. The ethnic solidarity theme was found in both the Palestinian and the Israeli broadcasts, but there was an interesting difference. Whereas the solidarity expressed in Israel was more focused on interpersonal relationships (i.e. classmates and co-workers), the approach taken in the Palestinian version centered on national symbols of unity. It is reasonable to expect that this latter version can also be found in the coverage of other mobilized presses.

Is there anything that can be done to reduce the level of ethnocentrism in the news? Perhaps the most important change would be to allow journalists and experts from opposing sides to present their opinions and viewpoints in each other's news media. At the very least, editors and producers could be encouraged to integrate more news reports from foreign news stations that are

more likely to adopt a more even-handed approach to dealing with such conflicts.

The most general conclusions from this study, however, are rather pessimistic. The news media are much more likely to intensify conflicts than to subdue them. While some citizens may occasionally be able to look beyond their national ethnocentrism, most of what they see, hear, and read in the news provides constant reminders of their own nobility and the enemy's barbarity.

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