

News Media and the Authority of Grief:
The Journalistic Treatment of Terrorism Victims as Political Activists

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ABSTRACT

News Media and the Authority of Grief: The Journalistic Treatment of Terrorism Victims as Political Activists

Zohar Kadmon Sella

The personal and national dimensions of terrorism victimhood lend the victims their unique moral authority and political legitimacy. The analysis of the news media coverage of victims' campaigns, on issues such as memorialization, criminal justice, hostage crises and peace activism, reveals that the more such campaigns are closer in time, space, and relevance to the attack that the victim-advocates underwent, the greater are their chances for positive coverage. Deferential coverage of victims' campaigns reflects journalism's cultural role as reinforcing common values and myths, including by way of portraying victims as heroes. Where victims' campaigns are less related to the physical memory of the attack and more concerned with the military or legal aspects of terrorism, journalists take on their informational role and employ traditional professional standards. Such standards include subjecting victims to potential criticism, and at the very least "balancing" their arguments with official views. In issues where the victims' arguments seem far removed from their personal experience, their influence over the news media is small. This range of journalistic notions is offered under the organizing mechanism of the Experience-Argument Scale. The two extreme ends of the Scale, the "deferential" end and the "disregarding" end, are where journalism's missions are in danger of compromise. Journalism at the "deferential" end is emotional, reluctant to bring forth opposing opinions, and in effect may contribute to policies that are driven more by trauma than by considered opinion. At the other end of the Scale, journalism is deaf to the victims, and fails to enrich policy debates with the lessons of their experience. The comparative

examination of coverage in the U.S. and Israel illuminates the different relationships between press and government in these two cultures, and how local responses to victims reflect the particular local history of terrorism, and the particular notions of nationhood, solidarity and patriotism.

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To Oshrit

Introduction

As modern terrorism has become a mass-mediated enterprise, its victims have been increasingly ubiquitous in the news media.¹ Initially, victims tend to appear as unwilling participants and witnesses to the events. At the scene of the attack, the victims express their shock and grief, and occasionally their immediate response to the political circumstance that has led to violence. Some express their confidence that peace and justice will prevail, some cry for revenge, and others direct their anger to the security or policy failures that have put them in danger. During long hostage situations, both the direct victims (if they are allowed to) and their families lobby for diplomatic solutions.² Victims, randomly caught up by political violence, often

¹ “Modern terrorism” is a term often used to characterize terrorist incidents between the years 1968-1993. The “modern” element of terrorist activity consisted of sophisticated exploitation of modern transportation, increasing availability of ammunition and explosives from terrorism-sponsoring states, and the utilization of an ever-evolving communication technology—both mass-media and consumer electronics. The 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, the 1995 sarin gas attack in Tokyo and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing marked the advent of “new terrorism,” or “catastrophic terrorism,” which was new not only in its large scale, but also in that it was characterized by lethality that was not accompanied by negotiable demands. The 2013 Nairobi mall massacre typified this genre, and highlighted its media dependency, as this was an ongoing hostage situation whose single purpose was to remain on the international news agenda as long as possible, making known the perpetrators, al-Shabaab, and the political instability in Somalia.

² This happened, for example, during the Iran Hostage Crisis, during the long captivity of Americans held by Hezbollah in the 1980s, and during the long captivity of Ingrid Betancourt in the Colombia FARC territory.

choose to engage in an array of terrorism-related policy issues long after the attacks, thus remaining in the media spotlight in a new, political capacity. The political pressure groups that victims establish vary in form and intensity, but they all work for state solutions—legislation, diplomatic initiatives and judicial decisions—aimed to bring the perpetrators to justice and increase national security.

Terrorism victims possess a particular kind of political legitimacy, one that derives from their trauma and loss. More important, it derives from the fact that terrorism victims typically are targeted not as individuals but as members of a particular nationality, religion or ethnic group. Particularly when a national conflict is involved, their unique and tragic experience creates an aura that cannot be separated from their policy arguments and lends them the moral authority of national heroes.

Terrorism victims' political activism is a subset of a larger phenomenon of victims (of violence, disease, accidents or natural disasters)-turned-activists. Victim-activists possess a particular type of political legitimacy that can be called "the politics of personal trauma." The politics of personal trauma capitalizes on the victims' personal loss to advance policies aimed to enhance the community's personal safety, health and living conditions. When facing those who obtained their political legitimacy by tragedy, journalists face a contradictory situation, one that calls for empathy toward victims on the one hand, and for their professional responsibility to scrutinize political players and their motives on the other. What principles and practices govern the tension between compassion and critical stance? This question is in the heart of this work.

Covering victims-turned-activists: between deferential and critical stances

For journalists, the involvement of terrorism victims in national policy debates poses distinct professional challenges. While policy debates are commonly expected to be highly rational, terrorism victims complicate the discourse with their sadness, an emotion unanswerable within the parameters of logical, institutional debate. The supposedly straightforward journalistic approach to a topic—be it anti-terrorism measures, the establishment of a memorial site, or the monetary compensation of victims—is more difficult to sustain once the victims' trauma permeates the discussion.

Journalists may feel deference toward the victims and reluctance to criticize them, particularly in the midst of an armed conflict that typically involves a surge of patriotism and with it, a wave of adoration to the victims. Indeed, journalism largely reinforces a positive, even clichéd, image of the victims and hesitates to define them in negative terms. The coverage of victims tends to portray them stereotypically as icons of moral purity who seek good, demand justice and strive for a better, safer world.

But journalists may also suspect that victims are a part of a sinister ploy, brought to the stage by calculated political strategists who seek to capitalize on their moral purity and impart some of their special aura on their political campaigns. When

it comes to complex national security or foreign policy issues, journalists may believe that the debate should only be reserved for people with professional or academic credentials. They may then dismiss the victims, who seem to offer little more than painful personal experience and general ideas. Or they may choose not to dismiss the victims, as they remember that they themselves lack actual military or public policy experience or education, even though this rarely prevents them from reporting knowledgeably on the most complicated issues. Indeed, journalists and victims are connected by their non-expertise, their public mindedness and sometimes—although most journalists would not admit to this—their advocacy roles.

These journalistic notions are informed by journalists' sense of commitment to the national purpose, which clearly tends toward sympathy for the unlucky innocents who have fallen victims to the random mass-violence that targeted the community's national, ethnic or religious values. Loyal to their audiences' feelings, and to their own feelings as members of their communities, journalists initially demonstrate great sensitivity when approaching a story that involves terrorism victims. Indeed, these victims, who embody sacrifice and national heroism, are one of the most revered groups in society.

While journalists strive to do the “right thing,” by their own and their communities' standards, namely compassionately adopt the victims' point of view, they largely suspend some of what are commonly regarded as journalistic instincts—in particular, holding public figures and their motives up to scrutiny. Indeed, the ambition to expose and hold public figures accountable for their actions has defined

American journalism ever since it took on its muckraking role. So when victims cross the line from random witnesses and commentators to well-organized political figures, and as they begin to compete over public opinion and political power, journalists have an increased difficulty striking the right balance between deference on the one hand and skepticism on the other.

In their coverage of victims, journalists must struggle with the inherent tension between the pity and admiration that they often express, genuinely or not, toward the victims, and the world in which these victims choose to operate, the landmine-filled terrain of national politics. The conflicting loyalties involved in victims' coverage, as this dissertation will demonstrate, can impact not only journalists' responses to the victims (vacillating between compassion, sobriety and negativity), but sometimes also their own definition of professionalism. 'Professionalism,' in the context of coverage of victims, may come to include the pro-victim approach as a distinct professional norm—or rather, duty—usually reserved for times of national emergency. It is precisely because the social norms surrounding terrorism victims test journalism's self-proclaimed obligation to look upon the political world with skepticism that I believe the case of terrorism victims is a worthy subject of study.

Previous scholarship that informs this work

The premise of this work is that journalists are reluctant to risk unseemly or premature criticism of terrorism victims because they feel that they would be out of step with what they perceive to be general societal deference to the victims. This

inclination most often overlaps with journalists' authentic sympathies to the victims, as journalists are part of the very communities in which they and their families live. Indeed, journalists choose their profession precisely because of their connection to their communities and their confidence in their ability to truthfully represent and meaningfully relate to their communities in their choices of issues and in their storytelling.

This hypothesis follows two strands of scholarship. The first is the cultural approach to communication, as articulated in James Carey's seminal definition of journalism as the literary, ritualistic representation of a community's shared beliefs (1975, 18). Carey offered his seminal idea, that the primary condition for social unity had been journalism's continuous expression of the consensus. "The great and ongoing task of cultural maintenance, the constant process of reminding and reinforcing values, could only be achieved through repetition and habit" (Kadmon Sella 2007, 110). Terrorism typically had the effect of bringing the attacked community together and solidifying it. Following Carey's line of thought, journalism was the social mechanism that articulated the collective insistence upon the attacked values and upon the community's physical rehabilitation and survival. Terrorism victims embodied this consensus not only because they were a living reminder of an ongoing danger, but just as importantly, because their personal survival carried the promise that the community would endure. They illustrated, through their suffering, that to belong to the community—the only reason for which they or their loved ones were singled out—exacted a cost. The community, in other words, was ultimately a matter of life and death, and journalism was there to express this idea in the

continuing, repeating manner that kept the ideological basis of the community consistent and intact.

A second strand of scholarship that explores the journalistic deference to terrorism victims is specific writings from the areas of media studies and political science, searching for the relationship between victims' coverage, public opinion and policy decisions. This literature suggests that victims strongly appeal to journalists (Liebes 1998, Lule 1991) because their victimhood play into media's tendency to cover terrorism in a way that “[pushes news media’s] thirst for tears, grief, tragedy, and drama to and even beyond the limits of professional journalism’s ethics in their hunt for pictures and sound bites” (Nacos 2007, 61). The victim-dominated coverage of a crisis has the potential effect of exacerbating public pressure over the government that handles the situation, pushing it either to concessions or to retaliatory measures. Deference, especially when shared by journalists and the political establishment, may lead to the establishment of pro-victim policies that have not been given due deliberation and consideration (Chapter 1 illustrates how in 2002, a group of 9/11 family members, backed by the unanimous deference of journalists and the New York political elites, succeeded to derail the planned International Freedom Center in Ground Zero).

The 1979-1981 Iran hostage crisis was one of the firsts to be diagnosed with a pro-victim oriented coverage that was believed to have eventually affected public opinion and U.S. policy. That approach was most memorably represented in Walter Cronkite's staple signoff of the *CBS Evening News*, beginning in January 1980,

stating the number of days in which the hostages were held captive. Commentators such as Ellen Goodman tied Cronkite's phrase with the gradually increasing public impatience with the standoff and the declining support for President Carter:

Now, the nightly Cronkite count, even more than the small boxscore numbers on the front pages of dozens of newspapers, has become a flag at half-mast, a daily probe of a wound, a political statement.

The closing hymn passes through our minds quickly like a flashcard -- do something! do something! -- reminding us of what we chorus night after night counting the 20th day, the 145th day, the 222nd day of captivity for the American hostages in Iran.³

Research validated Goodman's intuition. Brigitte Nacos's quantitative analysis of the Iran hostage crisis coverage (1994:23-30) pointed to the then-novel phenomenon of prominent appearance of the hostages' families in the news. "From the early weeks of the hostage ordeal," she concluded, "when domestic opposition was virtually non-existent, the constant attention to the predicament of the hostages and their loved ones as well as to their aggressively anti-American captors dramatically diminished the usually dominant, preferential treatment of administration officials in mass-mediated foreign policy debates." (Nacos 1994:30) Eventually, when the hostages were released in January 1981, it was already too late for President Carter, who had lost the 1980 reelections to President Reagan.

Tamar Liebes attributed terrorism victims a similar role in the context of Israel's first Intifada, namely the Palestinian uprising of 1987 to 1993. Liebes argued that when the Israeli news media covered Palestinian suicide bombings they switched

³ Ellen Goodman, "And That's the Way it Is – Or Is it?" *The Washington Post*, June 17, 1980.

into panic-filled “disaster mode,” where victims dominated the coverage.⁴ There, the media embraced the victims’ accusations that the Israeli government had failed to protect them. And when journalists questioned those public officials suspect of contributing to the vulnerability of the nation’s security, they echoed the victims’ accusatory arguments. ‘Disaster marathons,’ as Liebes called them, destabilized the political system and threatened to overturn the political leadership of the attacked community.⁵

This dissertation should serve as a useful addition to the literature on a third strand of scholarship – the sociology of news, and in particular, to the writings on journalistic values. Terrorism victims seem to embody, for example, many of the themes that Herbert Gans (1979\2005) identified as the enduring values of American journalism. They are considered altruistic, patriotic and heroic—traits that are assumed to them by virtue of their victimhood—and as such, they reinforce the ethnocentric belief that Americans are a morally superior nation. As political advocates, they demonstrate another value which journalists appreciate, and that is individualism: they take initiative, many times independent of or in opposition to government policies, to advance a personal vision of the public good.

⁴ It should be noted, however, that Liebes’s “disaster marathon” framework is more deeply embedded in the “cultural approach” scholarship (as Katz and Dayan’s “Media Events”) than in the quantitative political sciences.

⁵ While some found the term “disaster marathon” to aptly apply to the 9/11 coverage, clearly the politically destabilizing element of disaster marathons was missing in the post 9/11 American press, not only during the initial days following the attacks, but for years to come. The American press demonstrated complete trust in the military and in the intelligence assessments during the run-up to the war, only to realize, in the midst of it, that its national security reporting was altogether lax and misled. It was following this chapter in the history of the U.S. press, and others that demonstrated similar, uncritical cooperation with the administration’s line and the voluntary confinement to institutional sources (one example is the institutional denial of the practice of torture of CIA detainees) that Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston (2007) reached their famous diagnosis, that the American press was a “semi-independent press.”

But if they wish to conform to the celebrated values of American journalism, victims *must* speak in a strictly personal way that draws heavily on their experience, and avoid the risk of devaluating their arguments by sounding too “political.” While Gans spoke of political “moderatism” as an enduring value, for activist terrorism victims, moderation is not enough. As the following chapters will demonstrate with respect to all the types of victim advocacy, American victims can only retain their moral purity if their line of argument cannot be identified as partisan.

Distance between experience and argument as a factor in victims’ coverage

While initial deference to victims is strong, it is also provisional. Political participation, even if successful, shifts victims from a position of reverence and media protection to the area of political news coverage, where they are potentially exposed to criticism. The degree of such criticism largely depends on a perceived distance between the victims’ personal experience and their political argument, as the next paragraphs will explain.

My work thus far (Kadmon Sella, 2006b) indicates that the journalistic treatment of terrorism victims is largely deferential but not necessarily defined by the absence of skepticism. Journalists question or criticize victims in a variety of circumstances. They do so when they believe that they can show clear wrongdoing by

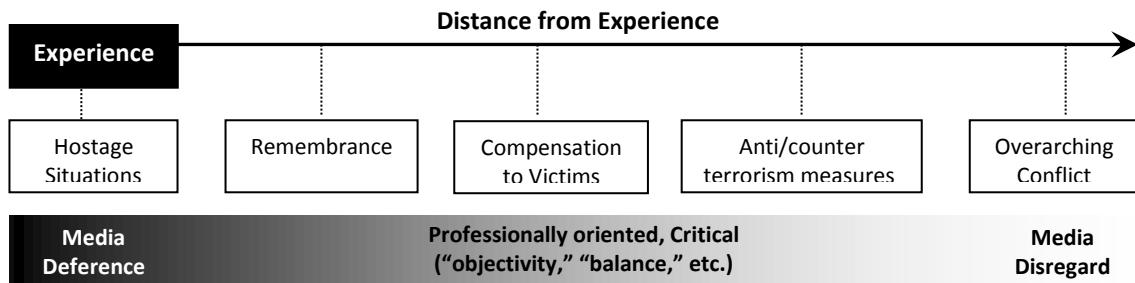
victims, especially when victims are suspected of lying or exaggerating about their victim status. Journalists, particularly in the U.S. (and much less in Israel), may also lose trust in the victims if the latter reveal clear political affiliation. Chapter 4, which analyzes the coverage of victims' anti-war activism, demonstrates how in the U.S., political talk by victims can have a detrimental effect on their prestige and influence. Journalists are also mindful of the passage of time and of the monetary compensation awarded to the victims, as if these two factors—time and money—somehow decrease the victims' tribulations and legitimize rougher journalistic treatment. The coverage of victims both decreases and "normalizes" (namely, reclaiming the average emotional distance of journalism from its topics of coverage) as the memory of the tragedy slowly fades.⁶ Lastly, journalists—and this is the crux of my dissertation—are particularly critical of victims if they feel that their experience of victimhood has no bearing on the policy for which they advocate.

When exercising editorial discretion or source selection concerning terrorism victims, the press intuitively assesses *the distance between the victims' experiences and their arguments* and consequently subjects them to either a critical or supportive lens. Specifically, journalists are aware of the proximity—in time, place and topical relevance—between the terrorist attack experienced by the victims and the issue in which they are trying to exert influence. *The bigger the distance, the more*

⁶ More than 12 years from that day, it seems that now journalism scholarship is at a point that allows it to examine how, as time went by, the press's interest in the 9/11 family members diminished. The monetary compensation that they received, and the wish of bereaved spouses to move on with their lives and establish new families, may have also played a part in their media fade-out. At the same time, new victim-related issues surfaced, in particular, the medical treatment of bystanders and rescue workers who suffered from respiratory and other ailments caused by their exposure to debris and hazardous materials in Ground Zero.

comfortable journalists feel abandoning their initial deferential stance and treating victims as regular sources or subjects of coverage.

The Experience-Argument Scale



In this dissertation I conceptualize this distance between Experience and Argument, as well as its journalistic ramifications, in the form of a scale. At one end is press deference to victims; it then moves through doubt and criticism to journalistic disregard of the victims or the dismissal of their claims on the other end. The closer the victims' argument to their tragic, but politically empowering, experience, the more likely they are to be treated with journalistic deference and be positioned on the left end of the Scale. For example, victims' involvement in remembrance issues is generally welcome by media because the conceptual distance between the victims' argument and their personal experience is very short: remembrance sites and anniversaries are direct representations of the attack and are deeply connected to the physical event both in time and in place. When victims try to shape the way the attack is remembered, the news media allow them to dominate the debate.

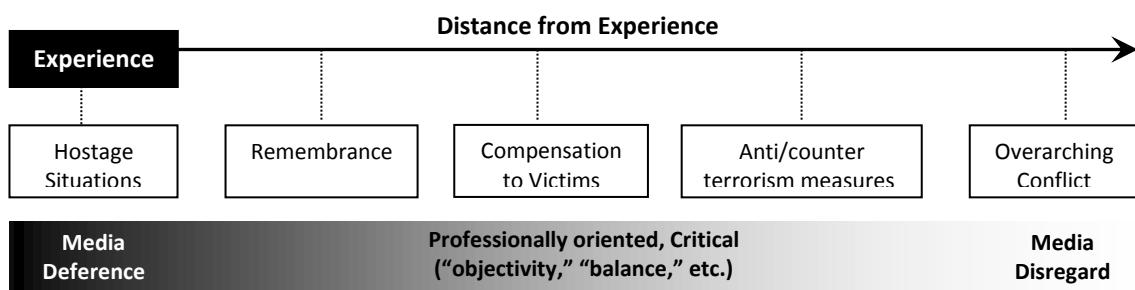
Victims' typical political endeavors and the Experience-Argument Scale

The overall news coverage of terrorism seems to suggest that victims' political endeavors can be categorized into five major policy areas, which have varying levels of "conceptual distance" from the victims' personal experience:

1. Ongoing hostage situations.
2. Remembrance: the symbolic preservation of the terrorist attack through memorials and anniversaries.
3. Compensation of survivors and family members.
4. Counterterrorism and antiterrorism policy (including safety measures such as aviation safety and regulatory control over international money transfers), and criminal and civil justice.
5. Geo-political conflicts related to the particular attack (e.g. the war in Afghanistan and Iraq following 9/11).

The coverage that I have surveyed led me to position these policy areas on the Experience-Argument Scale, as follows:

The Experience-Argument Scale



Of the policy areas that appear on the Scale, I elaborate in depth on the topics of remembrance in Chapter 2, abducted soldiers (an interesting subset of hostage situations) in Chapter 3, and victims' involvement in the overarching conflict that has bred political violence in Chapter 4. The issues of anti and counterterrorism are represented by examples in the various chapters and mostly appear in comparison to the other topics, usually demonstrating "regular," namely not deferential neither excessively negative, journalistic practices.

Anti and counterterrorism lobbying is located at the "middle" of the Experience-Argument Scale, where journalists apply their everyday reporting standards, because in these areas the victims' claims are contrasted, or "balanced"—if to call upon another professional ideal—with judicial norms or with the concerns of the security apparatus. Antiterrorism and counterterrorism policies attempt to prevent future terrorist acts and the formation of new terrorist organizations (antiterrorism), and to retaliate against the actions of active terrorists (counterterrorism). As with all national security issues, antiterrorism and counterterrorism are handled in formal executive and legislative forums. Journalists are highly respectful of these traditional, structured mechanisms. This is a contested, insider-driven, political terrain where victims do not easily fit, and where their moral gravitas competes with the mutually dependent relationship of news media and the established political system.⁷ If a

⁷ The various organizations formed by the families of 9/11 victims have been a formidable force in American policymaking, at least during the first years following the attacks. The most notable example

policy issue is perceived to be a technical one, or if it concerns the use of force, journalists seem to prefer sources that can demonstrate sufficient credentials or a high degree of expertise. Victims are considered qualified to speak in general terms about the need to address a threat or to punish the perpetrators of terrorism, rather than to assess specific details of national security or diplomacy policy proposals.

The absence of a chapter dedicated to anti and counterterrorism should not imply that these are issues where victims are relatively less involved. Quite the contrary: Beyond their well-known involvement in the trials of the perpetrators of terrorism, victims have been successfully lobbying for advanced security measures and against their early release.⁸ Nevertheless, I found this type of victim involvement to be less telling about journalism as a profession and as a cultural institution than the issues that involved the ends of the Experience-Argument Scale. Extreme deference (demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3) threatened to bend journalists' professional norms to the point of redefining the pro-victim approach as a stand-alone professional duty, reserved for troubled times. And when victims became involved in political issues that were perceived to be outside the authority granted by their victimhood (see Chapter 4

of 9/11 family members' activism was the "Jersey Widows," who forced a reluctant Congress and White House in 2002 to form the Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States—commonly known as the 9/11 Commission—as an independent authority, separate from and potentially critical of the White House. Another notable example was the success of an organization called "9/11 Families United to Bankrupt Terrorism" to overturn the Bush administration's decision to let the Dubai Ports World Company operate six East Coast ports. Today, some 9/11 family organizations have joined human rights organizations and civil liberties activists in a campaign to shut down the U.S. detention center at Guantanamo Bay and American "Black Sites" in Europe and the Middle East.

⁸ One of the most influential endeavors in this area was the success of relatives of the victims of the Pan Am 103 downing in 1988 in lobbying for improvements in aviation safety. Moreover, they relentlessly lobbied Washington and the United Nations to pressure Libya into extraditing agents believed to have carried out the bombing, and continued to pressure for sanctions against Libya. These families may well have had a hand in Gadhafi's turn-around—swearing off terrorism and abandoning his nuclear program—to the point where international sanctions were lifted, and Libya was no longer considered a state sponsor of terrorism.

on victims' involvement in the overarching conflict), journalists were less inclined to embrace the victims. The danger in that area of the Scale was that in their negativity, journalists abandoned their normal cultural role to uphold the victims' special status and didn't listen to them. Victims, by virtue of their status, were normally forgiven for expressing unpopular views. But where the right end of the Scale was concerned, the opportunity that the victims presented, to expand the range of opinion to include the anti-war alternative at the outset or the midst of an armed conflict, was passed over. In the example of victims' anti-war campaigns, rejecting their agenda ultimately meant a refusal to consider an earlier end to the "rally around the flag" period.

Identifying the Scale's journalistic modes

In order to evaluate the modes of journalistic treatment that characterized the various topics—deferential, professionally oriented, critical or oblivious—this work approached the coverage of victims with some specific questions in mind. Among them—

- Are victims' reported opinions exempt from the “balancing act” that signals a commitment to the ideal of objectivity?
- Are the victims automatically perceived as representatives of the larger victim population (rather than assumed to be speaking only for themselves)?
- In quoting victims' opinions, do journalists add a personal, sentimental dimension to an otherwise hardheaded policy account?

If the answer to the above questions in a particular case was “yes,” then we were facing a clear case of journalistic deference. When dealing, for example, with issues of remembrance, as Chapter 2 has shown, journalists sometimes treated the more vocal victims as spokespersons for the entire group of victims, even when the speakers were merely voicing their own opinion.

Example: hostage situations and the left end of the Scale

While remembrance issues exhibit close connections between the victims’ Arguments and their Experience, hostage situations exhibit the *full convergence of these elements*, as the victims are at the center of the ongoing terrorist event. No wonder, then, that the news media are attracted to hostages and their family members more than to any other player in the hostage drama, except for, perhaps, the terrorists themselves. The victims’ views on how to resolve the crisis are given equal—and often greater—importance to those offered by the authorities.⁹

During the typical hostage situation, the hostages and their families beg their government to negotiate for the hostages’ safe release, while the government is

⁹ Hostage situations raise crucial counterterrorism and antiterrorism policy issues. Every decision that aims to resolve the particular incident (counterterrorism) bears on the prospects of the recurrence of similar attacks (antiterrorism). The short term and long term consequences of hostage crisis management make it a matter of national policy. In attempting to influence government decision-making with respect to the specific event, hostages and their families are taking a stance in a policy dispute and could be conceptually categorized as political activists.

reluctant to give in or even to communicate with the kidnappers, fearing that in doing so it would encourage recurrence of similar acts, perhaps even by the same people. Faced with such conflict, the media are potentially torn: on the one hand, their sympathies are with the families' heart-wrenching pleas to end the crisis. On the other, they acknowledge the legitimacy of the government's hardline, and long-term oriented, approach.

But are the media really torn between these two forces? The literature—as well as the experience of the average media consumer—suggest that in reality, journalists experience no conflict at all, as the temptation to focus the coverage on the hostages and the hostage scene is too great, and journalists cannot resist the complete identification with the hostages and their families. Translating this reality to the Experience-Argument Scale, hostage situations, in which the victims' Argument pertains directly to their Experience, qualify for the very left, "deference" end of the Experience-Argument Scale.

During the 17-day TWA hostage crisis in June 1985, for example, U.S. television networks sent massive crews and star anchorpersons to Beirut to interview the American hostages and their Hezbollah hostage takers. As the hostage scene quickly developed into a frenzied media circus, American journalists became blind to all but the need to secure the hostages' release. In their ambition, they interposed themselves between the hostage takers and the Reagan administration to the point of virtually assuming the role of negotiators, posing the terrorists questions such as: “Any final words to President Reagan this morning”? (Hoffman 1998:134). Most

scholars agreed that the hysterical coverage of the Beirut crisis pushed the United States and Israel to concede to the terrorists' demands and to compromise their national security interests.

In their attraction to the tragedy and suspense associated with the hostage drama, the news media downplay any strategic policy options other than the immediate release of the hostages. The media are constantly preoccupied with the possibilities of either mounting a military attack on the terrorists, or accepting the terrorists' demands—options that would end the crisis without delay. Indeed, if we look at hostage situations through the Experience-Argument prism, the media dominance of victims (provided that they are visible) and their families is inevitable. The victims are the protagonists of the terrorist spectacle as it unfolds.

Example: victims' antiwar activism and the right end of the Scale

At the right end of the Scale, the politically empowering loss and the victims' Arguments are conceptually remote and so the news media are consequently disinterested or even negative. There, I situate victims' attempts to influence public opinion in favor of an end to "the overarching conflict," namely the larger geo-political conflict that has generated the attack and has often exacerbated following it. Terrorism victims often call for peace in the name of the civilian victims of both sides involved. Chapter 4 analyzes the media coverage of one such U.S. organization, September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, and an Israeli-Palestinian

organization, the Parents Circle, whose members are both Israeli and Palestinian bereaved family members. The Parents' Circle took upon itself to build bridges between bereaved people and exemplify the potential for co-existence, and perhaps mutual forgiveness, of Israelis and Palestinians. Peaceful Tomorrows connected similarly with Afghan and Iraqi victims, but Peaceful Tomorrows' mission was particularly challenging because the war that it was dealing with was taking place in a far-away land and the civilian victims on whose name it was speaking were, in the eyes of the American public, the faceless residents of the third world.

Journalism's "dual duty": the cultural role and the informational-democratic role

The relationship between victims and the news media greatly depends on whether the victims hold a politically adversarial stance to that of their government. Official government policies, to be sure, are always taken seriously by media, and probably nowhere more than in the news coverage of national security matters. But when the victims' personal and painful voice meets the military and bureaucratic jargon of generals and state officials, journalists need to simultaneously satisfy two distinct expectations. The first and more "culturally oriented" duty—to follow James Carey—calls journalists to mirror the experience of a traumatized nation that fully identifies with the victims.¹⁰ The other duty has more to do with the press's democratic role, and it requires journalists to serve as the information channels that

¹⁰ This expectation clusters together several journalistic loyalties. Among them, the patriotic loyalty to the shared experience of terrorism, the stylistic practice of personifying arguments, and the loyalty to individuals aggrieved by government wrongdoing.

notify the citizenry—the ultimate overseers of government—of the actions and policy options of its elected ruling institutions. I refer to these two duties as a “dual duty.”

The potential dilemma that journalists' “dual duty” can generate is sharply manifested in hostage situations. There, the great terrorist drama pulls journalists—in tune with the popular sentiment (which most often overlaps with their own) and with their cultural role—toward the victims, and away from the government's long-term, strategic considerations. However, once the conflict between victims and government lacks the urgency of the hostage situation, journalists are ambivalent, and seem to exercise their traditional professional norms in a much more visible way. This is evident, for example, in the coverage of victims' advocacy for antiterrorism and counterterrorism policies.

Scope of research: A U.S.-Israel comparative study

This is a comparative study of press-victims relations in the United States and Israel, aimed to highlight similarities and differences between these two journalistic cultures, as reflected from the struggle between the press's conflicting loyalties to the particular, local public sentiment on the one hand, and to its similarly particular journalistic normative system, on the other.

Comparison promises a release from an ethnocentric point of view that might take for granted underlying structural and cultural assumptions. As an Israeli who

resided in the United States for six years, I could be suspected of failing to notice important political and cultural undercurrents in both these countries. A comparison should help to transcend the self-evident and to lend an explanatory dimension to what is otherwise obvious (Hallin and Mancini 2004:2). One of the major findings of this dissertation, in this respect, is that the political spectrum reflected by the mainstream Israeli news media is broader, and more open to extreme views, than the U.S political spectrum of the mainstream media discourse, which is constricted to the traditional, well known views of the two-party system.

The factual basis of the comparison is the modern history of terrorism in the United States and Israel. The American experience of terrorism in the past 40 years has been very different from the Israeli one. While American citizens were occasionally hit on foreign soil (Americans traveling abroad have been an easier and more popular target for anti-American terrorism), domestic terrorism has been relatively rare. Conversely, Israel has endured routine terrorism by various Palestinian and Lebanese groups, most recently during the Second Palestinian Intifada (also known as the Al Aksa Intifada, 2000-2005), the armed conflict with the Hezbollah in the summer of 2006, and Hamas's frequent rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip on the southern region of Israel in the past 15 years. While terrorism against Israelis has always been perceived as part and parcel of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the United States—at least until 9/11—regarded terrorism as an isolated phenomenon.

The most notable example of the U.S. treating terrorism as a burst of extraordinary criminality—rather than as a systematic product of dangerous ideologies—was the Oklahoma City bombing. After the initial suspicion that the bombing was a case of Muslim terrorism was proven false, and Timothy McVeigh was identified as the perpetrator, it became clear that the attack was inspired by the right-extremist, White Supremacist, Christian Identity milieu in revenge for the FBI's assault on a compound of a Christian sect in Waco, Texas and other incidents. But although this was a classic case of domestic terrorism, it did not register as an announcement of war between pro and anti-government positions, nor did it result in fundamental political changes or shake the American belief system as much as 9/11 did. More than anything, it was attributed to the deranged character of McVeigh and his fellow conspirators. The 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center was similarly and famously dismissed as extraordinary rather than indicative of a looming threat.

9/11, however, marked the change of a world order, defining it in terms of an ideological clash between Western civilization and Islamic fundamentalism. While singular and devastating in scope, 9/11 (together with the 2004 Madrid train bombings, the 2005 London bombings and other attempted attacks that were prevented) situated Islamic terrorism in a larger, long-term narrative of war, parallel in some respects to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (although the “war on terror” lacks the clarity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the reactions of the U.S. and Israel to terrorism have also been different). In this dissertation I reflect on these distinct national histories of terrorism because they ultimately bear on the status of the victims

in both countries, on the values that they embody and the extent and nature of the attention that they receive.

Comparative perspective: adversary relations between media and government

The difference in scale, context and frequency of terrorism is but one factor that affects the portrayal of the victims in the news. Much more challenging and important for this dissertation would be to try and attribute any differences in the media coverage of the victims to the *systemic* differences between Israeli and American news media. One such systemic difference that has direct bearing on the relationship between victims and the news media is explored in Chapter 3's discussion of abducted soldiers, and that is the degree of journalistic loyalty to the government's point of view.

The coverage of victims largely depends on the extent to which the press feels free to air anti-establishment grievances.¹¹ The very nature of political activism is

¹¹ The importance of the systemic factor of an adversarial press-government relationship in the context of the coverage of terrorism victims is evident in regions where the press is oppressed and does not in the first place work in the public interest. One blatant example has been the consistently negative coverage of the Beslan Mothers Committee by the Russian daily Pravda. The Committee, which represents families who lost their children in the September 2004 three-day siege of the Beslan's School by Chechen terrorists, has been the most active voice in Russia condemning President Putin's administration's mishandling the hostage situation. Pravda, known as the Russian government's mouthpiece, showed nothing but contempt for the Committee and its pleas. It denounced the mothers who left Beslan to meet Putin as "ready to leave their children's graves and thus abuse their memory," and went on to provide an "expert opinion" angle to that story, in which a psychologist diagnosed the Beslan mothers as displaying "desperate aggression... in a combination with the eternal role of a victim, which they doomed themselves to play" ("Beslan Anniversary Darkened With Blasphemous Fuss," Pravda - English Edition, September 2, 2005, at <http://english.pravda.ru/russia/8865-beslan-0>).

that it aims to create change by challenging the ruling government's position, and victims' campaigns, in all of the topics that this dissertation illustrates, do exactly that. In order to succeed, they need a free press whose ideological ties and sense of commitment to the government line are not too strong to accommodate opposition.

The assumption that political activists go hand in hand with confrontational journalists is romantic but not always true. The news media can take an anti-establishment position that is more sophisticated, and less risky, than direct confrontation. The dedication that the Israeli press exhibited toward the Shalit cause, for example, and the pressure that it mounted on the Netanyahu government to advance an exchange deal, were not framed in the news as an opposition to the Netanyahu government in the traditional, political sense of “opposition.” As Chapter 3 illustrates, the coverage was not negative or critical toward Netanyahu as much as it took the form of a catatonic reiteration of the unspecified idea that Gilad Shalit must return. The militaristic values that constructed the obligation to return Shalit, mostly the “leave no man behind” principle, defined the coverage in patriotic, emotional and a-political terms, whereas a pragmatic debate about the pros and cons of an exchange deal was secondary.¹²

¹² Chapter 3 goes further to show that the U.S. coverage of the Bowe Bergdahl case, on the other hand, was characterized by the same matter-of-factness that characterized the coverage of all military issues, without any apparent journalistic agenda, including not an anti-establishment one, not direct nor indirect. The Shalit-type overflowing emotionalism may have been missing from the Bergdahl coverage because of the different circumstances, namely the suspicion that Bergdahl defiantly deserted his post before he was captured, or the Bergdahl family’s cooperation with the administration’s request to keep a low profile, yet it is hard to imagine the U.S. press demonstrating the same frenzied devotion for a missing soldier that the Israeli press had.

To what extent are the American and Israeli presses critical of the political establishment of their respective countries? For American journalism, an adversarial relationship with the government defines its sense of purpose (even as a good deal of coverage follows governmental frames). It is one of the rationales for the First Amendment, as the prohibition against enacting press laws protects the press's freedom to irritate the government by holding it accountable or its actions (although this Constitutional provision similarly protects bad, biased and government-compliant reporting).

In the service of its watchdog role, American journalism has embraced "objectivity" throughout the 20th century—as it still does—like no other journalistic culture worldwide. Objectivity, acknowledged from the outset as an unattainable ideal, inspired journalists to monitor the great powers of society—government, corporations, workers' unions, religious associations—using a rhetorically detached approach, and a transparent, consistent methodology of balance. Walter Lippmann championed objectivity as the "scientific" practice of journalism (Schudson 1978, 154), meriting it the title, protections and esteem of a "profession." Michael Schudson, wondering how a myth has become a professional tenet, argued that the significance of objectivity lay in the recognition of the shortcomings to which it responded, namely "relativism, a belief in the arbitrariness of values, a sense of the hollow silence of modernity" (1978, 158). In the 1960s, when the civil rights movement and an unpopular war cultivated a culture of dissent, and as the U.S. government was experimenting aggressively with "news management," the dispassion and detachment associated with "objectivity" were seen as the passive, unengaged

unquestioning of the social order, “a complicity with official sources whose most alarming feature was that it so self-righteously claimed to above partisan or political considerations” (Schudson 1978, 162). Journalistic values adapted to this criticism, and objectivity developed in a different direction, embracing the evolving expectation from journalism to participate in the ongoing struggle for social equality. This is how “fairness” became objectivity's most salient feature.

Israeli media scholars take “objectivity” for granted as a primary professional norm among the Israeli press (Zandberg & Neiger 2007), and it also appears as a formal professional obligation within various journalistic codes of ethics, such as the Rules of Journalistic Ethics issued by the Israel Press Council.¹³ But objectivity's practical manifestations have been much more limited compared to the U.S. Israeli journalism employs an opinionated, even judgmental language. And the structure of Israeli dailies is such that commentary is not always physically or editorially distinct from hard news. The two appear side by side, occasionally on the front page (though less frequently in news websites, which are more clearly divided into news reporting and opinion). It seems that the Israelis' stated commitment to journalistic objectivity has been more the result of the influence of American media studies over Israeli academia and Israeli journalists than an organic, self-motivated development. Moreover, Israeli journalists defined “objectivity” quite narrowly while holding other

¹³ Rule No. 6 of the Israel Press Council, titled “Objectivity,” states as follows:

- A. A newspaper and a journalist shall distinguish in the publication between news items and opinion.
- B. A news item which is published within the framework of an expression of opinion shall be subject to the rules of ethics concerning news items.
- C. The publication of news items shall be fair and not misleading.
- D. The headline shall not be misleading.
- E. A newspaper and a journalist shall distinguish in the publication between an advertisement and editorial material, in such a manner that an advertisement shall not be published which represents itself as being editorial material.

values in a higher place. A 2005 survey commissioned by the highly esteemed media criticism website *The Seventh Eye* and the Israel Democracy Institute showed that Israeli journalists valued “the presentation of both sides of the story” more than they valued “neutrality,” (this is similar to the U.S. emphasis on "balance") and that the least valued journalistic norm was the rhetorical representation of objectivity, namely the “the avoidance of first person language” (Tzfati and Libio 2005).

As for the identification of objectivity with non-partisanship, Israeli print news organizations, for the most part, cannot be politically recognized as either conservative or liberal (although when Sheldon Adelson’s pro-Netanyahu daily *Israel Hayom* challenged the hegemony of *Yedioth Aharonoth*, the latter became increasingly hostile to Netanyahu). Ask Israel’s leading political journalists, and they will tell you that they are basically contemptuous of politicians, and that Israeli politics is a rather sad contest between selfish ambitions, devoid of any sincere commitment to public service. Here is how *Yedioth Aharonoth*’s political columnist Nahum Barnea described in 2006 a meeting he and *Yedioth*’s Shimon Shiffer had held with Benjamin Netanyahu, as the latter was campaigning for Prime Minister.

The stated purpose of our meeting was an interview. When we were done, Netanyahu asked that our written piece would highlight certain phrases from the interview. We agreed, as he indeed had said things that were of public interest.

But he didn’t stop there. “I want them also in the subhead,” he demanded.

We looked at him in confusion. This man has been in the public arena for 24 years, three of which he served as Prime Minister. As Minister of Finance, he controlled billions. He could have left us, the little guys, the phrasing of our subheads.

“These kind of pieces normally don’t have subheads,” we replied.

“A-Ha!” he exclaimed in a “gotcha” tone. “You will use a tiny font, such that no one sees.” And he put his thumb next to his middle finger, to illustrate the miserable size of the letters. “I want to know now the size of the font,” he demanded. And I recalled something I once wrote on another politician, that he was not big enough to afford to be so small.

Israeli journalists often try to embarrass politicians over their obsessive attempts to control their public image, and the exposure of “backdoor” exchanges of the type that Barnea and Schiffer had with Netanyahu is but one way to do that. But beyond opinion columns such as Barnea’s, the Israeli news agenda itself manifests negativity toward the political world, as a great deal of journalism’s investigative energies are directed at exposing political figures’ egregious personal spending of public funds, or nepotism behind appointments to public office, or any other self-serving misdeeds. This antagonism does not imply, however, that Israeli journalism has a particularly revolutionary or anti-establishment streak. Yuran suggests that the media’s manifested disdain over Israeli politics is in fact a form of compliance, as if discontent replaces a deeper critical gaze and active oversight. The assumption that politicians are corrupt, he argues, becomes a tool in the hands of those who defend the corrupt politician of the hour, because if all politicians are corrupt, and corruption is the norm, then how come that particular person takes all the fire? (Yuran 2001, 191.)

American journalists share this antagonistic view of the political world, yet they seem to see things in a way that harmonizes with governmental definitions of problems. As Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston observed with respect to the symbiotic relationship between Washington and the press:

Most of the time, on the surface at least, there is plenty of antagonism between reporters and the officials who try to feed them. [...] But the daily rituals of feeding the beast (as the White House press corps is known to those who handle press relations) tend to be relatively bloodless affairs in which there is much ado about nothing—rather like posturings of wary adversaries who recognize their respective niches in the curious ecology of Washington politics. (Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston 2007:5)

While Israeli journalism is openly scornful about the petty and egotistical forces that navigate Israel's policymaking, the American press is more understated and reserved in this respect (and its criticism of U.S. politics probably also complies with Yuran's observation that the nitpicking chat substitutes for a meaningful probe of the establishment). Israeli journalists, for example, have much less patience with—and attribute lesser importance to—formal political speeches or government-initiated press conferences, and their visible dialogue with the political system, as heard, for example, in radio's leading political shows, is much more interrogatory, and much less courteous, than the American one.

Ideological backgrounds of Israeli and U.S. journalism

The American and Israeli presses come from significantly different historical and ideological backgrounds. While they both have a publicly minded orientation, there is a difference in the way they discharge their commitment to the public interest. America's liberal tradition perceives its news first and foremost as a free-market enterprise that enjoys a Constitutional protection against government intervention, allowing it the free hand it needs to perform its watchdog role. In Israel, a state with a

strong socialist tradition, journalism historically and voluntarily behaved as a *public service*.

From its early days and until the 1980s, Israel's strongest ethos was a "survivalist" ethos that demanded collective subordination to the national state-building efforts. In a manner typical of developing countries, the press was expected to serve national solidarity, follow the government line and abide to military censorship (Nossek and Limor 2011). Specifically to Israel's two historical main dailies, *Ma'ariv* and *Yediot Aharonoth*, although most of their reporters have not personally favored the Socialist Mapai (the Workers Party of Israel)-led government, these newspapers nevertheless kept a "national," patriotic line that refrained from harsh criticism of government policies. *Ma'ariv*'s legendary editor, Azriel Karlibach, declared the paper's goal to be a "national" establishment, safeguarding the legitimacy of the state and its governing authorities (Lehman-Wilzig 1999).

As the media market became commercially-oriented and press organizations severed their affiliations to political parties, the notion of the press as a public service remained but confined itself to two central obligations: the first was to cater to the entirety of the Israeli population and to address the problems of all segments of society; the second was to hold government accountable in a manner commensurate with the complaints and concerns of the ordinary citizen. *Yediot Aharonoth*, after losing its hegemony to *Ma'ariv* in the 1950s, began to broaden its coverage by offering

..a diverse range of opinion (without deviating from the consensus when it came to fundamental issues.) There was a twofold brilliance in this approach: First, the entirety of readers were spared from any “cognitive dissonance” because within a day or two they could find a commentator whose worldview matched theirs. Secondly, the joint appearance of contradicting viewpoints, side by side on the same page, created an impression of conflict. *Yedioth* became the place where the action was. (Lehman-Wilzig 1999, 7.)

Committed to the entire populace, the Israeli press was never forced to pledge its “objectivity” to its audience in order to prove its ideological detachment from government and its effectiveness as a watchdog. Rather, it positioned itself on the side of “the people,” with an emphasis on *all* people. The Israeli press celebrated *egalitarianism*, much more than objectivity, as its basic professional norm. Journalists were proud when they spoke to power in the voice of the displeased ordinary citizen.

Another factor in the dominance of egalitarianism in Israeli journalistic culture has been the small size of the Israeli news market. In Israel, whose population is similar in size to that of New Jersey, the number of national mainstream news outlets is limited to three broadcast evening newscasts (the public *Channel 1* and the commercial broadcasters *Channel 2* and *Channel 10*), two main national newspapers (*Yedioth Aharonoth* and *Israel Hayom* hold altogether approximately 70% of the market), three online news websites (*Walla*, *Yedioth Aharonoth*-owned *Ynet* and *Mako*) and two news and current affairs radio stations (the IDF station *Galatz* and the public *Reshet Bet*). These Hebrew language news sources dominate the entirety of the Israeli market (together with some niche Russian and Arabic language TV channels, websites and dailies). The Israeli audience has a preference for Hebrew, and while English-language TV news channels from all over the world are available for cable

and satellite viewers, their popularity, as the popularity of foreign news websites, is marginal. The size of the Israeli market is such that segmentation is a largely irrelevant business model, and mainstream news organizations (with the exception of the left-leaning and more upscale *Ha'aretz* and religious Jewish publications) must cater to the entire Jewish population in order to survive. Israel's "mass press" news culture—in broadcast, print and online—has a wide, a-political appeal, which emphasizes the human, personalized, aspect of stories and is willing to attack the political establishment regardless of the party in power.¹⁴

In the United States, the economic hardships of journalism pulled the news business in the entirely opposite direction. There, the press leaned toward demographic and ethnic segmentation. The economic strategy of American journalism in the beginning of the 20th century, of expanding exposure to the widest audience possible—and using objectivity to signal that it fit all audiences—was replaced with a focused appeal based on class, income and, as far as cable news was concerned, political affiliation. In such an environment, Fox and MSNBC presented two contrary and irreconcilable versions of reality. Fragmentation expanded, or rather

¹⁴ These mass-press features of the Israeli press dominated its coverage of the conflict with Hezbollah in the summer of 2006 in a way that is typical of the press's reaction to terrorism. Initially, the Israeli press rallied behind the government's decision to strike Lebanon in retaliation for Hezbollah's killing and kidnapping of Israeli soldiers on the Israeli side of the international border. But the rallying period was short, soon replaced with fear for the lives of Israeli forces in Lebanon, and great doubts over the decision to conduct massive ground operations against Hezbollah strongholds embedded in Southern Lebanon's densely populated areas. The increasingly critical attitude of the press toward Israel's military strategy culminated in an almost unequivocal call for a retreat from Lebanon. In the soul-searching that followed the conflict, the Israeli media were criticized for morally siding with soldiers and soldiers' families, creating a national atmosphere of defeat that undermined the military effort. The persistent expressions of anguish and outrage in the media throughout the conflict culminated in—or at least contributed to—the formation of a government investigative committee found the cabinet liable for over-extending combat. The Israeli-Hezbollah conflict is a recent display of the mass-press characteristics of Israeli journalism: over-emphasizing emotional themes of loss and revenge and associating them—sometimes rightly, sometimes not—with allegations of government dysfunction.

exploded, with the advent of online journalism. The economic downfall of print journalism called for constant experimentation with online journalism business and subsidy models, such as publicly funded, not-for-profit investigative reporting projects, collaborations with journalism schools and foundations, and the erection of pay walls within the online editions of legacy newspapers. The Tow Center for Digital Journalism termed this era “Post Industrial Journalism,” where the journalistic work (writing) no longer took place where newspaper production (printing) did, and which was characterized mostly by uncertainty. "We are plainly in an era where what doesn't work is clearer than what does, and where the formerly stable beliefs and behaviors of what we used to call the news industry are giving way to a far more variable set of entities than anything we saw in the 20th century." (Anderson, Bell and Shirky, 2012)

Just as online news organizations and initiatives invented new strategies for financial sustainability, they were also reconsidering traditional journalistic norms and questioning their adequacy to the realities of Post Industrial Journalism. The liberty to adopt or relinquish the methodologies and rhetoric of objectivity, or any other professional norm, and to engage in political partisanship or any other form of advocacy, ultimately obscured “journalism” as an institution and a profession. Online journalism offered “different definitions of news” (Downie and Schudson 2009), and the difficulty of news organizations in this confused environment to convince the public that they were offering a dependable version of reality was reflected in a catastrophic loss of the U.S. audience’s trust (Jay Rosen referred to the audience as “the people formerly known as the audience,” as they were themselves generating and

disseminating news via social networks).¹⁵ The scholarly preoccupation with the economic survival of journalism, particularly of the investigative type, has left the question of the state of journalistic professional norms unattended. With journalism entering a survival mode and large-scale wrongdoing is in danger of remaining undiscovered, the burning wish among journalism scholars and educators has been that stories be funded, researched, written and seen the light, while their seeming objectivity has simply become less important. The online world provided political pressure groups, victims included, with opportunities to work outside the known parameters of established journalism, in blogs or in single-issue advocacy websites. The personal voice of the victims fit well with the already increasing personal, blog-influenced style of online journalism.¹⁶

Terrorism victims as representations of national identity

Terrorism triggers a negotiation process of core meanings, a process that takes visible place in the media. One concept that strongly underlies the coverage of terrorism, and particularly terrorism victims, is *national self-identity*, because it is a fundamental component of the terrorism narrative. The attacked community rarely

¹⁵ Jay Rosen, "The People Formerly Known as the Audience," *Huffington Post*, June 30, 2006. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-rosen/the-people-formerly-known_1_b_24113.html

¹⁶ September Eleventh for Peaceful Tomorrows had started its journey, as described in Chapter 4, as a disparate group of victims' relatives who individually expressed themselves online in different venues, and were brought together by a peace organization that came across their messages and identified their common purpose. Chapter 4 also reveals the difficult interactions that Peaceful Tomorrows had with mainstream television, both the hyper-partisan cable news as well as the more internationally oriented and supposedly balanced CNN. For organizations like Peaceful Tomorrows, whose anti-war message was, at least until 2007, outside the legitimate range of opinion (as defined by the bi-partisan political system), online journalism offered hope for an expansion and diversification of the publicly debated, and currently narrow, political spectrum.

perceives terrorism as a criminal story about evil perpetrators attacking innocent victims. Rather, terrorism narrative explicates the fact that the attack has targeted the community for ideological reasons, and the story of the attack includes a vigilant defense of the attacked ideology as well as the belief that it will endure and prevail.

One way to mount an ideological defense is that is to craft a story that puts forth victim-protagonists *who most adequately represent the community's ideals* and let them recount the events, interpret them and express belief in retribution and victory. Terrorism victims are more newsworthy as sources, commentators and political actors if they can demonstrate compatibility with a desirable, pre-ordained concept of the national self-image. This choice of “preferred victims” is, of course, not a unique phenomenon to terrorism coverage. It is part of the routine exercise of news judgment, a product of journalists’ working assumption, that people want the news to be about “themselves,” and the habit of prioritizing the news according to the proximity of their protagonists to the self-image of the audience.

In the case of international terrorism (rather than terrorism targeting a religious or an ethnic group), journalists are attuned to any “national” features embedded in the biographies and personalities of individual victims. When casting victims for this role, news organizations establish what are, in effect, “victim hierarchies.” As a desirable minimum, they should be local citizens, native in the local language, from upper-middle class, and from wholesome looking families. After all cultural factors—such as origin, physical appearance and occupation—are accounted for,

some victims are recognized as occupying a demographic and ideological national “center” while others are deemed more “peripheral” and thus, uninteresting.

A comparison between the characteristics of “preferred victims” in terrorism coverage in Israel and the U.S. reveals that these two cultures define their countries’ national “centers” quite similarly. In the U.S., the most influential group of 9/11 family members has been the “Jersey Widows,” who rose to immediate fame as they fought for the establishment of the 9/11 Commission, as well as Lisa Beamer, wife of United Airlines flight 93 hero Todd Beamer. Their coverage emphasized the “all American” family life that these women had lost. But media critics did not fail to notice the fact that these were the wives of Manhattan lawyers and bankers (Todd Beamer was an account manager for Oracle), and not of the immigrant service workers who also perished in 9/11.

One of the striking differences between the national media coverage of 9/11 and that of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing was the fact that none of the Oklahoma victims achieved the media prominence of some 9/11 family members (although the local Oklahoma press, as Chapter 2 describes, did grant them endless honors, especially given their principle role in the establishment of the Oklahoma memorial). Was this simply because of the lower death toll of the Oklahoma attack, or the fact that it was a case of domestic terrorism, presumably easier to contain than the ominous and more elusive international terrorism? Was it because the national media did not find Oklahoma City residents as newsworthy as Northerners or that 9/11 happened to take place in the city that where the heart of the national media resided? Have

family members of Oklahoman federal employees failed to match the American ideal the way that 9/11 victims did? Or was it for much more mundane reasons, such as the fact that the Oklahoma victims' lobbying took place in the local level, for example their engagement in the trials of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, while lobbying in the context of 9/11 took place primarily (not including the rebuilding of Ground Zero) at the federal level?

Similar questions arise with respect to the Israeli media's coverage of victims of Palestinian suicide bombings inside and outside the Green Line (Israel's international border prior to the 1967 war). The scale and tone of the coverage of attacks perpetrated inside the Green Line—particularly within Israel's big cities—have been much more extensive and emotional than coverage of attacks against Israeli settlers in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, although both cases involved Israeli citizens. This was because the victims who embodied the Israeli "national center" were the secular Jewish residents of the Tel Aviv metropolitan area. A personal history of sacrifice, like past service in a combat unit in the Israeli Army, comported even better with the desirable Israeli self-image, as well as an advanced academic degree. The settlers, on the other hand, were perceived as "outsiders," who chose to live in a dangerous area for ideological convictions not shared by most Israelis.

The relative inferiority of the settler-victims was apparent in Israeli broadcasters' reluctance to cancel commercial breaks as they broke the news of a Palestinian attack on settlers. As a rule, commercial broadcasters executed "commercial blackouts" during reports of terrorism, out of respect for the victims and

awareness of the intolerable dissonance between the gruesome news footage and the glamor of television advertising. But when the attacks targeted settlers, broadcasters were less willing to incur the financial losses associated with lost advertising time. Their reluctance to cancel commercial breaks in these circumstances drove the Second Authority for Television and Radio—which supervised commercial broadcasting—to initiate in 2000 a directive that straightforwardly stated: “No commercials shall be incorporated in a news report of a terrorist attack.”¹⁷ This regulatory measure was intended to “correct” what the Second Authority perceived as the broadcasters’ skewed sense of “newsworthiness” in their coverage of terrorism victims. All Israeli victims should receive equal journalistic treatment, implied the new directive, so not to be subject to journalistic calculations of proximity and audience appeal (Kadmon Sella, 2006a).

Coverage of terrorism victims vs. coverage of other victims

Terrorism victims do not have a monopoly over the politics of personal trauma. The political arena accommodates representatives of the endless variety of human tragedy: car accidents, fatal diseases and natural disasters are but a few. As terrorism is a topic of the highest national priority and involves questions of national security and often also foreign policy, the participation of terrorism victims is different than the participation of other victims in that it involves high-level politics (as it does in the case of war veterans and relatives of POWs and MIAs). Unlike other victims, terrorism victims are unwilling players in an ongoing ideological—be it geo-

¹⁷ Directive No. 11-034, November 11, 2000. In 2002 the Council incorporated this directive as Rule §16(F) of its Advertising Rules.

political, ethnic or religious—struggle. The efforts of terrorism victims to participate in the national security debate that follows their calamity are fascinating because these are ordinary people determined to impact the most acute, existential challenges a community can face.

The incongruence between terrorism victims' personal voice and the high-powered, professionally closed culture of the government's security apparatus is most striking in discussions on how to address a national threat as grave as terrorism. And this incongruence presents unique challenges to journalists: should they accept the victims as legitimate participants, despite their lack of the typical education, experience or credentials shared by the officials that they wish to influence? Or should journalists keep them in the background, more as reminders that wrong policies carry a human toll, than as advocates of pragmatic solutions? The involvement of victims in the most critical policy junctures forces journalism to handle complicated questions such as how to regard expertise or a lack thereof, how to express disagreement with these venerable symbols of national sacrifice, and more. The high-profiled nature of the issues makes these questions more pressing than in the coverage of other policy areas that involve the politics of personal trauma.

It is also the exceptional clout of terrorism victimhood that makes it unique and particularly challenging for journalism to address as it is for society at large. As living evidence of their nations' physical vulnerability and the enemy's barbarism, terrorism victims embody national endurance and moral perseverance. Certainly, military casualties are similar symbols of national struggle, but their sacrifice is a

“legitimate”—and not entirely unpredictable—consequence of war. There is no such “legitimacy” in the death and suffering of civilians who are attacked while going about their everyday lives.

The unique status of victims is deeply connected to the horrific randomness of terrorism. Terrorism regards all members of a community as potential targets, and forces each of its members to face the threat of her own death by an attack. Terrorism victims, more than casualties of war, symbolize the community’s greatest fears.

Terrorism victims defined

For the purposes of this dissertation, “victims” are people who suffered significant physical or emotional wounds, or who lost close family members, in a terrorist attack.

Defining “terrorism” is challenging and inherently controversial. There is no definite, agreed-upon definition for this term, which is used in both a descriptive and a pejorative way.¹⁸ Most common definitions of “terrorism” share the following elements: an organized activity carried out by non-state actors and driven by political ideology, conducted as a tactical surprise, and targeting civilians or non-combatant

¹⁸ The mere labeling of an organization as a “terrorist group” derogates it, and implies the legitimacy of using military means to eliminate it. The term “War on Terror,” for example, conveys not only a political message, but also the moral justification for it: terror warrants war. Similarly, perpetrators of attacks would rarely choose to regard themselves as “terrorists,” as they would rather be called “militias,” “freedom fighters,” “guerilla forces,” “paramilitary troupes,” or, best of all, “army.”

military personnel. Media scholars enriched this definition by adding media dependency to the list of terrorism characteristics. As terrorism's aim is to terrorize a larger population than the directly victimized group, unreported acts of terrorism are futile.¹⁹

This dissertation is not limited to any strict definition of terrorism, which might unnecessarily limit the analysis and prevent discussion in analytically comparable and applicable phenomena. Therefore, I occasionally explore other forms of political violence if they are similar to "traditional" terrorism in ways that significantly illuminate the arguments that this work examines. Moreover, because the definition of terrorism is in the eyes of the beholder, I concentrate on events that are considered terrorism *by the attacked community*, even if they do not necessarily comply with common "terrorism" definitions. In Israel, for example, the kidnapping of soldiers on active duty for use as bargaining chips is considered an act of terrorism, even though it is not directed at civilians. The kidnapping of an Israeli soldier by a non-state actor (as opposed to the capturing a soldier within a conflict that international law recognizes as "war") qualifies, in the eyes of the Israeli public, as a terrorist attack.

Moral confusion between terrorism victims and terrorists

¹⁹ This perspective was implied, for example, in Walter Laqueur's claim, that "the media are the terrorist's best friend. The terrorist act by itself is nothing; publicity is all" (1976:104), in Benjamin Netanyahu's assertion that "unreported terrorist acts would be like the proverbial tree falling in the silent forest" (1986:109), and in Brian Jenkins's proclamation: "Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims. [...] Terrorism is a theater." (1975:4)

Since I began my work on this project, I have often found myself having to explain why I was studying media representations of terrorism victims rather than those of terrorists. In fact, it happened so very often that when I introduced my research topic to people in or outside the field, they actually confused “terrorism victims” with “terrorists.” While they heard me say “terrorism victims,” in their mind’s eye they saw suicide bombers. I realized how easily victims could be confused with perpetrators, particularly as the perpetrators were sometimes perceived as victims themselves—victims of political oppression, of a dire economic situation, or even of their own mental instability. Israeli novelist and thinker Amos Oz identified this confusion between evil-doing and victimhood to the beginning of the 20th century:

The modern social sciences were the first major attempt to kick both good and evil off the human stage. For the first time in their long history, good and bad were both overruled by the idea that circumstances are always responsible for human decisions, human actions and especially human suffering. Society is to blame. Painful childhood is to blame. The political is to blame. Colonialism. Imperialism. Zionism. Globalization. What not. So began the great world championship of victimhood. (Oz, 2005)

According to the perspective that Oz criticizes, terrorism can become—as it does both for students of terrorism and for the general public—an equation where victims fight victims to the point of morally canceling each other out. This blurring process comes to completion when terrorism victims become perpetrators of violence (an extreme, yet useful, example for this state of moral vagueness has been the confused and hesitant international response to the Balkan wars in the 1990s). Given the psychological fascination with terrorists, and the belief that understanding their particular life circumstance is a first step in the battle against terrorism, it is obvious

why terrorists' "victim" status has been much more extensively studied than that of the victims themselves.

The need to critically examine the politics of personal trauma

It was terrorists, then, and not victims, who have occupied the primary interest of media scholars. And while largely absent from media studies, victims have been the center of extensive research in psychology, which focused on their trauma and healing process, as well as the law, which compared their legal status and eligibility for disability benefits with those of disabled war veterans or of war widows. But media scholarship on victims has been scarce, and tended to concentrate on their appearances in the live, breaking news from the scene of the attack. Scholars recounted the typical heart-rending narratives of the victims: the shocked eyewitness, the accidental survivor and the bereaved family member telling of a deceased victim whose prospects were destroyed by the attack. They argued that these roles pushed the coverage toward the hyper-emotional and sensational, and that the media's fascination with the personal stories of terrorism victims lay in the much-regretted entertainment value of human sorrow. These were important observations, yet they were limited to one aspect of victims' media presence and rarely continued to follow victims' political endeavors in the months and years that followed.

This dissertation is an opportunity to critically examine victims of political violence as an overlooked political pressure group. More importantly for our field, it is an opportunity to learn about journalism through its reaction to the inherent tension

between victims' revered social status and their explicit political ambition. This tension brings journalists to question, and sometimes to relinquish, the traditional practices of political coverage.

While largely absent from media studies, the practices and consequences of the "politics of personal trauma" have been the subject of a robust philosophical debate. Thinkers worldwide, numerous enough to be collectively called "anti-victimists," have been expressing concern that victimhood as a moral argument was over-dominating the political discourse. Joseph Amato (1990), for example, articulated this concern dramatically:

Taking the side of victims, which has been so important for the advance of decency, justice, and well-being in the world, has also been an exploitative moral rhetoric in modern history. At its extremes this rhetoric elevates the claims of suffering beyond all other claims, even those of justice and fairness. Transformed into ideologies on the one hand, yet understood to be embodied in specific groups of victims on the other, this rhetoric, in the hand of its proponent, lays claims to such lofty responses as compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and love. None of these responses belong to the natural emotional perimeters of everyday morality and work-a-day politics. (p. xxii)

Amato may be overstating his case. There is no reason to exclude "compassion" from the lexicon of rational public discourse. And yet, Amato represents an anti-victimist concern that has been taking hold in the past two decades (as elaborated in Chapter 4), that the language of victimhood outweighed rational political language, if only because the language of victimhood derived its insights from personal experience (shared by a homogenous category of victims—blacks, Muslims, women, etc.) while the political debate—at least theoretically—addressed

issues of national interest in a comprehensive, multi-perspective way. The anti-victimist approach is in fact a reaction to the moral hegemony of individual “rights” in Western social, political and legal thinking. “Rights,” be it ethnic minority or gay rights, have always begun with the outcry of victims of violence or discrimination, and the over-sensitivity of the political establishment toward the victims reached a point, anti-victimists argue, that the state rushed, without proper consideration, to rectify all claims of disadvantage and victimhood.

Similar arguments regarding the unseemly power and inflated definition of victimhood were also implied in the scholarly reconsideration of modern reparation policies. Reparations, historically introduced through Germany's monetary compensation to Holocaust survivors, were occasionally awarded, for example, to victims' descendants, highlighting the philosophical and definitional complexity of the relationship between suffering and reparations. For John Torpey (2006), the idea of reparations signaled disillusionment from the belief in the ability of the existing social order, and in particular, left-wing universalism, to achieve social justice. In this respect, reparations were a retroactive ad-hoc substitute for meaningful change, a practical way of addressing a problem on an individual basis rather than taking on the more ambitious task of a comprehensive future-oriented reform.

Journalism and the politics of personal trauma

Journalism, which defines itself in professional terms, may seem too self-conscious, too committed to “balance,” “detachment,” and “objectivity” to allow itself to surrender to the rhetoric of victimhood warned by anti-victimists. But in fact, as Chapter 1 contends, journalism sometimes demonstrates the moral tendencies that Amato is warning against. Journalism as a cultural institution takes upon itself a responsibility to rework, reflect and articulate the popular sentiment of the community it serves, so that expressing sympathy to victims is almost an instinctive journalistic response. As previously noted, journalists themselves often genuinely share many such impulses and assumptions, drawing them from the milieu in which they live and raise families. These tropisms, however, are sometimes at odds with professional canons. Some media scholars see this sympathy as leading to over-exposure of the victims arguments, which in turn amounts to irresponsible journalism. As Tamar Liebes argued:

The use of victims as policy experts on terror has become an accepted news convention in the process of defining news as melodrama. This convention alone seems responsible for the worst sample of public opinion that one can have at the precise moment, as victims are too involved at their own predicament to provide a considered opinion. (1998: 80)

But Liebes’s insights referred to the initial coverage of an attack, when the victims typically cried for revenge. This dissertation, however, followed the victims’ engagement in national politics as it became much deeper and institutionalized. There, journalism’s cultural mandate—to validate the victims’ claims—made way to a

different mandate, a professional mandate that required them to treat victims in the same non-sentimental way that they treated all other political players. The special social status of terrorism victims offered a unique opportunity to expose a conflict between two concepts of news: as a cultural unifier that expressed the popular sentiment, and as a democratic institution that kept a critical eye over the democratic processes of policymaking.

Chapter 1

Deference to Terrorism Victims

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, situated at the Columbia Journalism School, educates journalists on how to cover traumatic, violent events. The Center's ethical tip sheet for interviewing victims begins with the rule, “[a]: Always treat victims with dignity and respect—the way you want to be treated in a similar situation.” (Hight and Smyth, 2003)

The expectation here is that journalists would employ a gentle interviewing approach and editors would guarantee the dignified portrayal of victims. Beyond its plea for courtesy, the rule calls for humanity – for empathy – in victims' coverage. Journalists would be able to do that, they are reminded, if they bear in mind that only chance separates them from “a similar situation” – so states the rule – of victimhood.

While the tip sheet speaks of victimhood in general, it has particular validity in the case of indiscriminate terrorism, given the role played by chance in the terrorist scheme. What makes indiscriminate terrorism so powerful is its randomness; it strikes down anyone who chances to be in the targeted location. Indeed, fatal illnesses or accidents are always, to some extent, the product of chance. But in terrorism, the victims are beyond unlucky – they are losers in a malevolent man-made game of chance.

The uniqueness of terrorism victimhood

Terrorism is a national tragedy of a particular kind. Many disasters – such as floods, plane crashes and high school shootings – are referred to and mourned as national tragedies, but that is because all or most of their victims happen to belong to a particular national group. In terrorism, the targeted population's nationality, religion or ethnicity, are not coincidental but are the symbolic targets of the premeditated attack. Terrorism targets people who embody the attacked ideology. While the dead and injured and their loved ones are either the direct or secondary victims of the attack, all other members of the collective entity are also victimized by the danger from which they were lucky to escape, by the threat of a subsequent attack or the prospect of war. By power of their shared identity, and the knowledge that they have been, and remain, desirable as potential targets, the members of the attacked community constitute a “third rank” of victims, after those directly affected and the secondary victims, namely the family members.

The notion of shared victimhood is felt in the national press's coverage of terrorism, where the story it tells is much larger than the typical crime-reporting account of perpetrators, violent acts and individual victims. The media also speak of the attack's blow to the national pride, the collective fear of future terrorism, and also the determined intent—articulated through military jargon or through the aggressive, bloodthirsty *vox populi*—to retaliate, persecute the perpetrators, and even demolish them. And sometimes, when the media can accommodate political opposition without being suspected of anti-patriotism, the media deliberate on the root causes of terrorism, and criticize the government for its gross security failure.

In order to understand the journalistic attitudes toward terrorism victims, it is necessary to make an initial conceptualization of terrorism as a media phenomenon, and then to situate the victims within the suggested framework. The most compelling theoretical concept that has been suggested thus far for media coverage of breaking-news terrorism has been the well-established and yet still-evolving concept of media events.

Terrorism as a media event

The commanding "must see TV" quality of mass-mediated terrorism, its increased appearance during the 1980s, and – particularly – its new "breaking news" form within cable news channels during the 1990s, led some media scholars to

examine terrorism coverage within the framework of Katz and Dayan's live, historic *media events* (for an early example of this application see Weimann 1987), and demanded its inclusion. Retrospectively, this critique has been so persistent and consistent that it achieved the same conceptual validity and scholarly status as its object, the original form of media events.

Media events¹ were described by Katz and Dayan as live, ceremonial and symbolic events, preplanned, scripted and co-produced by the establishment and television networks, commanding the attention of the whole nation, and sometimes the world. To recognize a television live drama as a media event meant to endow it with particular social importance – one of value reaffirmation, integration and solidarity. Katz and Dayan's enigmatic title, *Media Events: On the Experience of Not Being There*, meant to draw our attention to the fact that media events did not merely offer a compensation for our inability to be physically present at an event, but rather a superior experience to physical presence. No wonder that terrorists similarly strove to produce their own media events and usher in the entirety of the targeted community, by means of mass media, to the terror scene.

While Katz and Dayan's media events were socially unifying and celebratory occasions, critics maintained since the late 1980's that mass-mediated terrorism belonged to this exclusive club of extraordinary television moments. Spectacular terrorism attacks, argued Weimann and others, were media events in that they were

¹ "Media Events" was first presented at Katz, E. (1980) "Media Events: The Sense of Occasion," *Studies in Visual Anthropology* 6, 84-89.

transformative, produced “time-out” television, interrupted social routine and constructed some of society’s most fundamental collective images. Indeed, mass mediated terrorism stood out in a media environment that increasingly became what Todd Gitlin described as “a perpetually vanishing present streaking by [where] images stream on, leaving traces in our minds but [...] strangely indifferent to us” (Gitlin 2001:20-21.)

The original media events concept was quite rigid. Its architects specifically refused to open it up to breaking news of all kinds, and in particular breaking bad news. For Katz and Dayan, traditional media events remained meticulously and grandly scripted, reflecting the happy, peaceful consensus.² But spectacular terrorism undoubtedly answered to some of the crucial elements of the media event model, such as the event’s place at society’s center, its massive exposure and the profound social change that it marked. James Carey (1998) offered the first widely accepted expansion of the media events concept, when he suggested that media events could contain high-profiled “rituals of excommunication” that performed institutional and ceremonial social rejection. As for mass mediated terrorism, Weimann (1987) ignited an academic debate when he argued that hostage situations constituted a new category of media events, “Coercions,” which were pre-planned by terrorists rather than co-produced by media and government. While the ceremonial element was clearly absent from these events, “the symbolic presentations of national unity (flags and yellow ribbons), human grief (families united in their trouble, funerals with full military honors), and leadership (the White House, the President) [were] latent

² In media events, conflict was miniaturized (Contests), resolved (Conquests) or suspended (Coronations) (Katz and Dayan 1992).

messages of social order and unity." (Weimann 1987:27) Liebes (1998) used the Israeli television coverage of suicide bombings in 1996 as her first illustration for a new genre of "disaster marathons" – kin to media events – in which the press incited hysteria, over-criticized a vulnerable government and precipitated a political shift to the right (see also Liebes and Peri 1998).

The scholarly demand to acknowledge terrorism spectacles as media events intensified following the September 11th attacks and the Madrid and London bombings of 2004 and 2005, respectively. Indeed, "New Terrorism" dominated the media through digital multi-platforms, attaining the "exceptional and extraordinary status" typical of media events (Bouvier 2007:53). The coverage – by international news channels and in most countries – demonstrated ideological assimilation with Western authorities, integrated Western society and enacted not only social change but a new world order (and disorder).

Finally, early in 2007, Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes suggested a fundamental revision to the original idea of media events. They acknowledged that shocking news events – mainly war, terror and disaster – came to dominate the media much more than pre-planned and happier media events, that the fragmented media market had turned "shared viewing" into an unlikely circumstance, and that in our cynical times, celebratory ceremonies had lost their popular appeal. They declared a new category of "disruptive" media events – mesmerizing, sudden, messy, and most importantly, socially destructive, in that they highlighted the impotence of the attacked

government. These were the media events of our time, they claimed, titling their essay “No More Peace.”

21st century media events – integrative or destructive?

Current scholarship on terrorism as a media event is still in need of a refined direction. While there seems to be an agreement that New Terrorism constitutes a new form of media events, scholars differ over the socio-political implications of these events. Broadly speaking, most of those who have analyzed Al Qaeda’s spectacular terrorism of the past 20 years have argued for the socially *integrative* potential of the journalistic narration of the events. They ascribed less importance to the initial chaos and concentrated instead on its quick shift to the orderly, calm and professional journalistic style, the journalists’ focus on national leadership and the reaffirmation of national values.³ Other scholars, however, saw the terrorist media event as a trigger to social upheaval. Most prominently, Katz and Liebes’s above mentioned “disruptive” media events (2007) – partially grounded on Liebes’s “disaster marathons” (1998) – engendered blame and despair, to the extent of undermining the legitimacy of the governing institutions.⁴

³ Media events aside, Davis and Walton argue that since the news represents a universal aspiration for peace and order, terrorism is treated as a disruption and as an offense to society. News of international terrorism, just as domestic one, aspires to a “moral closure” that favors the state and condemns the terrorist (Howard Davis and Paul Walton, “Death of a Premiere: Consensus and Closure in International News,” in Howard Davis and Paul Walton (eds.), *Language, Image, Media*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983).

⁴ Specifically to the 1996 suicide bus bombings, Liebes argued that the press’s fierce criticism of Shimon Peres’s labor government contributed to his loss of the May 1996 elections to Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu (Liebes 1998).

Apparently, the crucial point of disagreement between these views has been the question of control over the unfolding events and over their meaning-making process. Advocates of the traditional view believe that journalists strive – and ultimately succeed – to coordinate with the authorities a body of accepted explanations and narratives, while those who view media events as disaster marathons see them as irreversibly hijacked by terrorists, leaving the press and the government perplexed and hard pressed for solutions.

These scholarly trends are difficult to reconcile. The September 11th attacks – to name the most important and researched example – received such different readings. On the one hand, some scholars reviewed them along the same lines as a traditional media event, where despite the initial confused and conflicted media discourse, journalism soon embraced a therapeutic role (Sreberny, 2002), termed by Michael Schudson “pastoral journalism.” “It offer[ed] reassurance, not information; It [sought] to speak to and for a unified people rather than a people divided by conflict and interested in conflict. It [sought] to build community rather than to inform it” (Schudson, 2002:43. See also Bouvier 2007). Nacos, Bloch-Elkon and Shapiro’s (2011) careful reading and analysis of the television coverage on the day of September 11, 2001 showed that TV anchors hyped the idea of war and, together with the Bush administration, laid the groundwork for the war on terrorism right then and there.

The opposite, "disaster marathon" strand of scholarship, suggested that the improvised nature of the coverage "amplifie[d] the terrorists' intent to produce uncertainty, instability, and anxiety." (Blondheim and Liebes 2002:275). Scriptless media were "in the position of an inadvertent accomplice of the perpetrators" (*ibid*, 275), thereby weakening American leadership. James Carey offered a third reading, distinguishing between the coverage on the day of September 11 itself – which he commended for its supreme journalism, "calm, poised, systematic, without panic or speculation" – and the following days, in which it gave in to uncontrolled grief and deteriorated through the "unhappy rediscovery" of patriotism. (2002:74).

In retrospect, it is clear that the news of the events of 9/11 served – for a few years – to increase the American public's support for the Bush administration rather than diminish it, and that the nationalistic response to 9/11 allowed that administration to mount the War on Terror despite its factually unsubstantiated reasoning. In other words, it seems that the traditional media event view of 9/11 was better suited to its political outcome than the "disaster marathon" view. The "non stop" elements of the 9/11 coverage lacked the hysteria and political unrest that have come to characterize marathons: the *New York Times'* "Portraits of Grief," for example, appeared continuously for more than a year, but it was a solemn, composed and entirely non-political journalism (to the extent obituaries qualified as journalism), and the continuing search for bodies was also intensely covered but again, without the urgent despair and political rage of the Israeli marathons, and with the patriotic overtones that characterized 9/11 coverage. The American press has since publicly

acknowledged and regretted its submission to the administration's 9/11-driven war propaganda (Bennett, Laurence and Livingston 2007; Montgomery 2005). In short, the journalistic response to September 11 resembled the ideological compliance typical of a traditional media event much more than the vocal political frustration that characterized a disaster marathon. Certainly, it is important to acknowledge the elements of marathon that existed in the continuing coverage – such as the *New York Times*' "Portraits of Grief" and the ongoing search for survivors and human remains – yet in terms of political atmosphere, coverage conformed to the national, patriotic rally-ness of media events.

New, cataclysmic terrorism, I wish to argue, does not take the form of a disaster marathon. It has such traumatic effects that the press's role is first and foremost to reclaim and delineate a bruised collective identity and work for social unity. It cannot do so without backing the existing political leadership. But when terrorism displays signs of repetition, and when it is continuously destructive but not to the point of posing an existential threat, disaster marathons can ensue, demanding answers and challenging an evidently weak government. Finally, terrorism may become utterly routine, in which case it is no longer a media event, neither a disaster marathon. Such was the succession of terrorist attacks in Israel during the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005.)

The Al-Aqsa Intifada broke out in September 2000, following the visit of Ariel Sharon, then Israel's opposition leader, to Jerusalem's Temple Mount, site of the holly Al-Aqsa Mosque, and arguably ended with the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza

Strip in September 2005. The Intifada took the form of clashes between Palestinians and Israeli armed forces in the Occupied Territories, as well as Palestinian suicide bombings aimed at Israeli civilians both within and beyond the so-called “Green Line” — Israel’s international border prior to the 1967 war. Even though suicide bombings have been hitting Israel since 1993, the wave of suicide bombings during the Al-Aqsa Intifada was the fiercest. Gradually adjusting to this reality, the Israeli public turned to media for updates rather than consolation, and indeed, Israeli television responded by covering the incidents in an informative, standardized and non-melodramatic way.

Victims – protagonists of terrorist media events

The debate over the definition and scope of terrorist media events informs a discussion of the place of the victims in terrorism coverage. Once terrorism is regarded a media event, two immediate implications should be considered. First, media events center on their *protagonists*; they are “rituals of coming and going” (Dayan and Katz 1992:119), rites of passage where audiences identify with the heroic transformations of the events’ central characters. According to the traditional interpretation of a media event, the public officials who “star” in these events are admired for their fatherly concern and for effectively voicing collective grief (the example of Rudolph Giuliani is inevitable), while in the disaster mode, they are scorned for negligently allowing for the attack. The rescue workers and victims are also protagonists, and they are quintessentially *transformed from anonymous citizens*

*and civil servants into figures of bravery and national sacrifice.*⁵ Here is a typical September 11th victims-related report from the *New York Times*:

Abraham Zelmanowitz, a computer programmer praised as a hero for remaining with his quadriplegic friend rather than flee the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, was buried in Israel today. [...] Mr. Zelmanowitz, who worked for Empire Blue Cross and Blue Shield on the 27th floor of the north tower, refused to leave behind his friend and co-worker of many years, Edward Beyea, 42, who could not descend the stairs in his wheelchair. Both men died when the tower collapsed (*New York Times*, August 6, 2002).

Or, consider this AP report from June 17, 2009, with regard to the similar honor bestowed on the rescue forces:

Scientists in California say they have cloned a dog that helped with search-and-rescue after the New York terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. Five German shepherd puppies cloned from a dog named Trakr have been delivered to owner James Symington, a former police officer.

An acknowledgement of mass-mediated terrorism under the auspices of the traditional media events model further means that the reverential tone of the coverage embraces the victims and establishes their special status. A central feature of traditional, ceremonial media events is the news media's suspension of their critical outlook in favor of a celebration of society's core values such as progress (moon landing) and peace (President Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem). In terrorist media events, on the other hand, the news media join the establishment not in celebration but in *defense* of national values (Weimann 1987).

⁵ Schmid and de Graaf argued that news protagonists belonged to one of three groups: the 'good,' the 'bad' and the 'superstars' (1982: 75). Weimann and Winn applied this classification to terrorism coverage, where the 'good' were the victims and the security forces; the villains were the terrorists, and the 'spectacular' were celebrities from both camps – either heads of state or mega-terrorists (1994: 102).

In the case of 9/11, President G. W. Bush's first public address set the defiant tone echoed in the media in the days and weeks to come: "Today, our fellow citizens, *our way of life, our very freedom came under attack* in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts." American news media reverberated this sense of urgency – *A Nation Challenged* was the *New York Times'* special supplement during the following months – and engaged in the national effort of restoring belief in the United States and in its commitment to democratic values. As in traditional media events, the journalistic voice coalesced with the official voice, leading to an absence of "sides," namely, of a debate upon which "objectivity" could be applied.

"When terrorists struck on September 11, there was only one side. No editor demanded a quote from someone saying why it was fine to fly airplanes into buildings. No one expected reporters to take an "objective" view of the terrorists" (Goodman 2001, quoted in Schudson 2002). When the occasional commentator ventured to make an incongruent statement—like Bill Maher's suggestion, a week after 9/11, that firing U.S. cruise missiles from hundreds of miles away was a more cowardly act than flying planes into buildings—the outrage was overwhelming. The vast majority of journalists were swept by the "we are all New Yorkers" sentiment. "We were supposed to be detached journalists, but I'm an American citizen first," said former CNN anchor Judy Woodruff. "This was not just another story for me. It was my country, my city." (Gilbert, 2002:171).

This sentiment was echoed by journalists globally, constituting, as Sreberny noted, "a cultural geography of attachment." (p. 223) In such a climate of consensus,

when the media slide from neutrality to the “we” voice and the public discourse is dedicated to reclaiming national ideals, *the victims are perceived as the personification of those ideals*, and everyone is in part, a victim.

In such times of crisis and togetherness, victims cannot be portrayed other than as courageous, resourceful and hopeful. The sad optimism of the injured victims represents national endurance, and victims’ heroic deeds gain mythic dimensions. Todd Beamer’s call for revolt on board of United Airlines Flight 93 – “Let’s Roll” – memorably embodied the American spirit. The phrase, first offered by President Bush as a source of inspiration, encapsulated American vigor in times of challenge.⁶

Victims – protagonists of disaster marathons

Disaster marathons typically display rage against both enemy and government. The escalating frequency of the attacks suggests a systemic security failure to which the leadership should be accountable. In disaster marathons, the political debate erupts immediately, at the scene of the attack, with the victims voicing the popular discontent, as they are accompanied with repeated images of blood, panic and destruction. Given the jaggedness of Israeli politics, at least at times, it is less surprising that the political debate erupts already at the scene of the attack. The

⁶ Initially, "Let's Roll" was licensed by Beamer's wife for use on t-shirts and baseball caps to raise money for the victims, but as with all things popular, it soon degenerated into a commercial slogan, with marketers trying to patent trademarks using the words. Apparently, victimhood – as all national assets – was not immune from tastelessness.

dramaturgy of terrorism breaking news echoes what is already the national political culture.

Replacing reason with grief, disaster marathons elicit emotions beyond the emotional range appropriate for political discourse. And the tendency of print journalism, in disaster mode, is to duplicate to the extent possible the “live” quality of electronic media, where imagery precedes narrative and experience precedes explanation. Yuran (2008)⁷ usefully illustrated this point using a *Yediot Aharonoth* front-page story about the May 14, 2008 Qassam rocket attack, the first one to hit the town of Ashkelon. The newspaper’s headline read “This is How a Visit to the Mall Ended,” and below it, it displayed a photo of a bloodied baby shoe.



Figure 1: *Yediot Aharonoth* cover photo by Avi Rokach, May 15, 2008

⁷Noam Yuran (2008) "Paper Shoe," *The Seventh Eye* (Hebrew), May 17, 2008, available at: http://www.the7eye.org.il/DailyColumn/Pages/170508_yuran_bloody_shoe_on_yediot_achronot_front_page.aspx?RetUrl=/WRITERS/Pages/noam_yuran.aspx

The headline and the photo combined did not reveal any meaningful detail about what had happened, except for the fact that there was some bloody violence involving a child in a mall. The shoe, taken away from the scene of violence and displayed instead on someone's palm, lost its original context and became an enigmatic object. In order for the horrified reader to learn what the story was about, he or she had to read on. This was a similar dynamic to the one offered by television's live disaster marathon, where the viewer was initially introduced to an event through the shocking imagery of violence and devastation, and the factual information necessary to clarify the upsetting images arrived later (Yuran, 2008). Moreover, the print version of the paper was surely produced with the awareness that readers had formerly learned of the attack from the electronic media. Having no new information to offer, the paper settled for rage.

In the 1990s, Israeli television coverage of what was at the time a novel phenomenon of Palestinian suicide-bombings entered, for the first time, marathon mode. The established public Channel 1 and the new entrant to the broadcast news market, the young private-owned Channel 2, both new to notions of competition, were dramatic to the point of hysteria. Both channels showed extensive interviews with victims, and their expressions of grief and fury escalated the chaos.

The frame of "disaster" calls for people who scream the most, either in agony or rage – the louder, the less controlled, the better.

We saw people who "miraculously" escaped, we saw victims in hospital beds and we saw families waiting outside the operating theater. (Liebes 1998: 80)

The victims' expressions of despair and political outrage did not help to elevate the already shallow journalistic discourse. As Liebes and Kampf pointed out – using perhaps a phrase more accusing than they intended it to be – “at the most emotional moment in their lives, [victims'] responses did not quite fit the Habermassian idea of considered, altruistic, and rational opinions.” (2007: 109)

Palestinian media and disaster marathons

Disaster marathons are not an exclusively Israeli phenomenon. Just as September 11 has been interpreted through the marathon prism, so can any other instance of mass mediated, multi-victim violence. The Palestinian media coverage of Israeli strikes in the Occupied Territories is particularly interesting and important because the accepted truth of the Israeli Palestinian conflict is that any violence is retaliatory and essentially parallel to a former violent act by the other side.

Of the frames offered thus far for coverage of political violence, the frame of disaster marathon is most suitable for the Palestinian television news in their coverage of large scale Israeli violence. In their illuminating comparison of the so-called “victim mode” of Israeli and Palestinian television during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, Wolfsfeld et al found basic similarities in the graphic style and ethnocentric ideologies of these two media systems. They reviewed the Palestinian Broadcast Corporation's (PBC) coverage of the Israeli Air Force killing of Hamas leader Sheik Saleh Shehadeh on July 23, 2002, an incident in which 18 people were killed,

including nine children. Initially, and similarly to Israeli disaster marathons, victims were referred to in personal terms, identified by their names, their backgrounds and their particular circumstances. Also similarly, television did not spare gruesome images and continuous displays of chaos and grief. But different from Israeli television, PBC also appropriated the victims, shifting them from the personal realm to the national one by declaring them *shahids*, namely martyrs. The explicit evocation of martyrdom meant that the personal narratives have given way to complete ideological dominance of Palestinian nationhood. The obvious reason for PBC's uber-nationalistic line was the fact that it was controlled by the Palestinian Authority, and that Palestinians were engaged in a bloody nation building process. In that respect, Palestinian disaster marathons stood in a stark opposite to Israeli disaster marathons, which were characterized by rage against a failed government. In their powerful, even brutal evocation of the patriotic sentiment, Palestinian disaster marathons bore ideological characteristics of the classic media events, where journalism and state were assimilated.

Victims and patriotic sentiment

A lot has been written about the way nations “rally around the flag” as they prepare and carry out military onslaughts, and how a patriotic press is indispensable to the war effort. A review of the American literature on this subject should begin with Walter Lippmann (1922), who identified this phenomenon in the context of World War I. Lippmann darkly argued that leaders harnessed symbols – most prominently,

the flag – to generate visceral public support.⁸ The rallying effect was a response to foreign policy crises that involved the nation and its leader—the President—directly, and it was a temporary effect, diminishing with the increase in the war’s casualty toll (Mueller 1973). Hallin (1986) saw the press’s enthusiasm at the initial phases of the Vietnam war as a reflection of similar sentiments held by the majority of political actors and the public at large, collectively sharing a sphere of consensus. Entman and Page identified the rallying effect in the news leading to the 1991 Gulf War, ascribing it to the press’s dependency on official sources: “the higher [the sources’] power to shape newsworthy events, the more attention they receive,” hence the administration’s media superiority over its dissenters within the political establishment (1994: 97). Finally, in the period leading up to the American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, American news media “tossed away skepticism in favor of cheerleading” the Bush administration in its claims for an Iraq-Al Qaeda connection and the existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (Gitlin 2009), earning Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston’s infamous title, a “semi-independent press.” (2007).

The reverential treatment of victims in the aftermath of a terrorist media event is a manifestation of the “rally around the flag” phenomenon. After all, victims are national symbols, and not so different from the flag, they evoke one’s love for one’s country. Of the abovementioned scholars who conceived and discussed the “rally around the flag” syndrome, I found Daniel Hallin’s analysis of the mass-mediated

⁸ Lippmann: “Where masses of people must cooperate in an uncertain and eruptive environment, it is usually necessary to secure unity and flexibility without real consent. The symbol does that. It obscures personal intention, neutralized discrimination, and obfuscates individual purpose. It immobilizes personality, yet at the same time it enormously sharpens the intention of the group and welds that group, as nothing else in a crisis can weld it, to purposeful action. It renders the mass mobile though it immobilizes personality.” (p. 153)

discourse about and throughout the Vietnam War to be most useful for elucidating the special place journalism reserved for terrorism victims. In his monumentally influential “spheres” model, Hallin distinguished three areas of journalism, which accommodated different modes of political discourse. The sphere of consensus celebrated shared values; the sphere of legitimate controversy involved issues on which there was an institutional debate, and the sphere of deviance was concerned with socially illegitimate views. It is in the sphere of consensus where terrorism victims usually resided.

Hallin argued that in the initial phases of the Vietnam war, like most wars, the journalistic discourse was situated in the sphere of consensus, because journalists were attuned to the public that rallied behind the administration, and to the unanimity of opinion between Republican and Democrat representatives. But most importantly, the press gradually feeling and projecting the growing skepticism of military officers in the field, trickling down and leading to the decline in the morale of the troops. As long as the troops’ spirits were high, the newsroom projected a positive and patriotic mood. But when the troops began to doubt their mission, the coverage reflected their distress, which contributed to the gradual shift of the war to the “sphere of legitimate controversy” (Hallin, 1986).

Victims of indiscriminate terrorism can have similar influence. They can heighten the patriotic tones by rallying behind the anti-terrorist effort, or express anxiety of and distrust in the security forces’ ability to prevent future attacks, or offer an inconclusive mix of these outlooks. Like soldiers, victims stand – albeit

unwillingly – at the ideological forefront of a conflict. But unlike soldiers in combat, victims are more visible, and much less bound by censorship or other, softer, forms of control (e.g. the system of embedded journalists). In their freedom to express content and discontent in the critical period following an attack, victims have an impact on the spirit and essence of the public discourse, be it a one of consensus or of controversy.

Victims – residents of the sphere of consensus

The coverage of victims of indiscriminate terrorism is usually set deep within the sphere of consensus. At least, *they* are situated in the sphere of consensus in the limited sense that their sincerity and public-mindedness are hardly ever questioned. Victims can express political agitation during protracted disaster marathons and offer anti-establishment points of view, but as long as the memory of the attack is still fresh, their sacrifice validates them as heroes of the establishment and they bear but a minimal risk of being confronted for their views. Be their political convictions what they may, *victims begin their political life at the sphere of consensus*, and at a fundamental level, they never entirely leave it. Even in instances where their opinion is considered outrageous, there is usually a level of respect and acceptance that is maintained. Indeed, the spheres model has been typically used to trace shifts in the political legitimacy of social issues and political groups, such as anti-war movements (see Murray et al, 2008). But the spheres model can also be useful in identifying *constant* social statuses of particular social groups. Corporate CEOs, arguably, occupy the sphere of legitimate controversy because they act out of monetary interest, which is inherently suspected for being at odds with the public interest. Individual corporate

types may break the law and cross over to the sphere of deviance, but their fundamental social locus, or point of departure, is the sphere of legitimate controversy. Similarly, people who embody national sacrifice take up steady residence at the sphere of consensus. They may orbit around the sphere of legitimate controversy when they attempt to influence anti-terrorism policies, or even further – to the sphere of deviance – if their pacifism seems out of touch with the patriotism of a nation embroiled in war (see Chapter 4). Nevertheless, victims' coverage will always reflect, to some degree, the fundamental respect that is reserved for figures of consensus. This means that the coverage of the most controversial victims will always include, in the least, a respectful nod to their circumstance of victimhood.

This consensus also means that offending the victims may be equivalent to betrayal. When the right wing political extravaganza Ann Coulter wrote in a new book that the group of 9/11 widows known as the Jersey Widows “enjoyed their husbands’ deaths” which had put them in the political limelight, not only was she lambasted, but the media who interviewed her and confronted her were also criticized for airing her views and plugging her book.

Moral purity, however, is not always sufficiently interesting to deem newsworthy, and the consensus surrounding the victims does not necessarily mean that they have the necessary appeal to ensure media exposure. Some victims are in a socially disadvantaged place to begin with, and this chapter’s subsection on “preferred victims” will elaborate on this type of victim hierarchy. Moreover, as the following

chapters will show, when individual victims take on explicitly political missions, they sometimes find themselves compromising their own social acceptance.

The sphere of consensus: legitimization of victims of targeted terrorism

Targeted terrorism aims at political leaders or people who are otherwise well known and politically representative. The tendency to portray terrorism in mythological terms of good vs. evil serves to “centralize” these targeted victims, so that in their deaths or their pain, they shift from the sphere of legitimate controversy, which they previously occupied, to the sphere of consensus (Schudson 2003:187.) “Terrorism is treated as a disruption and as an offense to society, regardless of its motives. It aspires to a ‘moral closure’ that favors the state and condemns the terrorist” (Davis and Walton, 1983.) In their effort to re-legitimize the existing power structure and institute order, the media orient victims of targeted terrorism toward the consensus.

Yoram Peri, a proponent of hegemony theories, argued that after the assassination of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli media reconstructed Rabin’s biography to conform to the ideals of the secular, left-leaning Ashkenazi Jewish elite that dominated the mainstream media. Rabin’s life story was rewritten in a way that downplayed his warrior image and emphasized his achievements as a peacemaker and a 1995 Noble laureate. Accused throughout his life of being aloof and friendly to the rich elites, Rabin, the seasoned politician, posthumously became the plain, unpolished

Sabra, authentic as your average Israeli (Peri 1997.) Several years later, the Israeli press beautified the legacy of Rehavam Ze'evi, the right wing general and politician who was assassinated in October 2001 by members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Portraying Ze'evi as a fatherly figure and an elderly statesman, Israeli media obscured the fact that he was a “transferist” – a term denoting a proponent of the transfer of Palestinians from the Occupied Territories to neighboring Arab countries.

Victims – protagonists of routine terrorism

Routine terrorism is no longer a media event, nor is it a disaster marathon. Similar to other violent incidents, its reporting is governed by news production habits and procedures. The beat system applies here too, and the prescribed sequence of coverage begins with the eyewitnesses and security personnel at the scene of terror, then the nearby emergency room, where hospital officials assess the death toll, and finally, the political circle, where politicians voice their well-known, clichéd reactions. The coverage lacks authentic public outrage because routine and socially contained terrorism no longer calls forth new policy questions, or at least, public interest in these questions seems to wane (This does not imply, however, the existence of a political stalemate. While each act of violence during the Al-Aqsa Intifada received routine media coverage, the constant wave of terrorism did instigate political soul searching, culminating with Israel's pullout from the Gaza strip in August 2005).

During times of routine terrorism, fundamental issues are pushed to the political background. In fact,

Terrorist attacks are shown [on Israeli television] through a civil prism rather than a political one. This is expressed by a sequence of news items that cover central landmarks of civic life (the mourning family, the hurting neighborhood, the educational institution, the workplace, etc.) The news program ignores the broader issues of possible political ramifications and the conflict at large, dwelling mostly on the human perspective (Liebes and Kampf 2007:112.)

Routine terrorism thus takes on a more personal media frame. The victims are no longer the heroic figures associated with spectacular or otherwise shocking terrorism. Instead, the seeming inevitability of terror brings them closer to victims of other misfortunes, such as car accidents.

“*I, We, My Town, Our Town*” was the title of a *Yedioth Aharonoth* commentary on August 20, 2003 following a suicide bombing in Jerusalem. The piece, written by *Yedioth*’s correspondent Gad Lior – a Jerusalem resident – demonstrated not only the depolitized news frame of routine terrorism, but also the power of the “we” voice to underline the personalized outlook:

For 68 days, the terrible bang was not heard in my town. We yearned to forget the gunpowder smell, the sirens that tore the city with their terrible howls, the horrible sights.

Every Jerusalemite knows those horrible sounds and smells. 60 attacks in five years. These are the numbers in this city.

[...] and suddenly it was over.

The bang was heard throughout the city. Nobody asked what had happened. Everybody knew.

(Quoted in Kohn, p. 93-94).

And indeed, the Al-Aqsa Intifada presented a classic case of routinization of terrorism. Between June 2001 and August 2004, Israel experienced 21 terrorist attacks that individually claimed the lives of at least 10 people, and many other attacks that were less deadly. Of the 21 major attacks, seven took place in buses, six in restaurants or bars, and the remaining eight in other public spaces – among them markets and bus stops. The combination of repetitive attacks and constant Israeli military and Shin-Bet (the clandestine General Security Service) operations in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank created the likeness of a war of mutual attrition, and Israelis and Palestinians alike were getting strangely accustomed to this new chapter of violent normalcy in the history of their conflict.



Figure 2: An illustration by Orit Bergman, describing the growing public apathy toward the routine attacks of the Al Aqsa Intifada, *The Seventh Eye*, March 2004

Israeli television had to adapt its production mechanisms to the frequent interruptions of Israeli civil life. Beyond the on-the-spot beat reporting from police, hospitals, and army headquarters, producers of entertainment shows prepared somber, alternative openings and endings, ready to be rolled out for the next incident. Routinization also meant that Israeli television struggled to keep its regular programming schedule intact and to avoid protracted disaster marathons that meant painful cancellations of commercial breaks. The victims' "blood bar"—a term invented by television executives to determine whether an attack justified breaking from the programming schedule and going on an advertising blackout—was raised repeatedly: while once an attack which claimed the lives of two Israelis justified such interruption, in 2003 only a much deadlier attack merited it. This ongoing ethical struggle meant constant negotiations with the Second Authority for television and Radio—the regulator of commercial broadcasting in Israel—over the sensible middle ground between television's economic pull toward normalcy and the public's expectation for a commercial-free grieving period.

Routine terrorism and television's economic sacrifices – advertising blackouts

Despite the fact that advertising blackouts are a defining element of television-mandated national mourning periods, such blackouts are a phenomenon that has been hardly – if at all – studied by the communications research community, or, for that matter, by any other discipline. Following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, for example, American television refrained from

airing commercials for four full days.⁹ On September 11, 2001, some networks took up a five-day suspension of commercials.¹⁰ These blackouts are probably the most valid, quantitative representation of the tribute the media are willing to pay – literally and figuratively – to victims. And they are particularly telling in small countries like Israel, where the relatively limited resources of advertisers prevent them from alternative solutions such as the ad hoc production of serious commercials that speak of the difficult moment.

The Second Authority's oversight on commercial blackouts before and during the Al Aqsa Intifada was – typically of routinization – a process of constant adjustments. With the losses of advertising revenue mounting, networks became increasingly pragmatic. They hesitated to start advertising blackouts and rushed to end them. The Second Authority, on its part, reacted with vigorous regulation. The regulatory saga began in November 2000, when the Second Authority Council promulgated an unequivocal directive: “*No commercials shall be incorporated in a news report of an attack.*”¹¹ The directive’s sweeping language applied it on many gray areas, such as news reports of relatively minor attacks, developing news reports that could not yet determine whether an attack involved any fatalities, and follow-up

⁹ Jack Gould, 100 Advertisers Receive TV Plea, *New York Times*, December 3, 1963.

¹⁰ Vanessa O’Connell, “TV Networks Cut \$320 Million of Ads in Crisis,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 19, 2001.

¹¹ Directive No. 11-034, November 11, 2000. In 2002 the Council incorporated this directive as Rule §16(F) of its Advertising Rules. Note that the Hebrew word that the Second Authority used for an “attack” in this context was “pi-gu-a,” which carries the connotation of a “hurtful” attack. I intentionally avoided translating “pi-gu-a” as “terrorist attack” because it is doubtful whether the Second Authority would consider attacks against soldiers as acts of terrorism. The idiosyncratic word “pi-gu-a,” on the other hand, can cover attacks which target either military or civilian targets.

reports that repeated the news of earlier attacks as part of a daily summary. Yet, this directive, as well as other rules which prohibited the juxtaposition of entertainment shows with news reports of attacks, were strictly enforced: The Second Authority's Annual Reports of 2001 to 2004 reveal no fewer than seven administrative proceedings that resulted in the imposition of sanctions for violations of these directives.

In an attempt to minimize the risk of penalty, networks started to consult on “gray area” cases with the Second Authority and obtain specific, ad hoc exemptions from blackouts. The constant, de facto regulatory monitoring became de jure in February 2002 with a directive that stated that once a blackout began, “*the return to the normal programming schedule would be subject to specific authorization by the Second Authority’s Director General.*”¹² This directive closed a full circle of complete control by the Second Authority over advertising blackouts – now, one directive forced a blackout on every terrorism situation unless it was specifically excused by the Second Authority, and the other directive locked the network in a blackout situation until the Authority permitted it to end. It is possible that the antagonism that culminated from such regulatory pressures led network executives to search for ways to escape advertising blackouts in cases where their conscience may have otherwise not allowed them to keep advertising on the air.

The regulatory imposition of commercial blackouts, and the increase in the frequency and lethality of suicide bombings, caused Channel 2 to cancel a total of

¹² Directive No. 0171, February 10, 2002.

15:02 hours of advertising time throughout 2001 and 7:56 hours throughout 2002.¹³

These figures represented a loss of approximately 2% of the total annual advertising time. The Second Authority understood the grave financial implications of these massive cancellations and was therefore amenable to a standardized system that would provide the networks – once they returned to their normal programming schedule – with increased per-hour advertising quotas in comparable times on other, non-violent, days. These detailed legal structures mean that routinization of terror, in the Israeli context, not only engendered the development of adjusted news genres and production habits, but also created the distinct regulatory area of advertising blackouts.

The networks naturally resented this detailed regulatory intervention. Beyond the general argument that advertising blackouts fell within the privileges of their freedom of speech, they insisted that they were aware of their responsibilities as national markers of mourning periods and had no interest in offending their audience by dangling images of happiness in the face of death. Moreover, they argued, advertisers themselves were aware that once thrown in the context of violence, the most innocent ads could become grotesque.¹⁴ But the Second Authority remained distrustful, especially following the controversial “split screen” incident.

¹³ Source: The Second Authority for Television and Radio 2001 Annual Report, available at <http://www.rashut2.org.il/editor/uploadfiles/chan2v3%20%20%20A.pdf> (in Hebrew), p. 54; The Second Authority for Television and Radio 2002 Annual Report, available at <http://www.rashut2.org.il/editor/uploadfiles/final2.pdf> (in Hebrew), p. 58. The 2001 figure includes an advertising blackout for one civil disaster, the collapse of a banquet hall in Jerusalem that claimed the life of 21 celebrators and staff.

¹⁴ An insurance ad, which ran on ITV during the reports of the July 7th, 2005 London transit bombings, showed a woman asking “Have you made a plan for the future? If not, you should do it now. The unexpected could be just around the corner and when it happens, it will be too late.” (“ITV Rapped for ‘Insensitive’ Timing of Ad,” *Guardian Unlimited*, August 31, 2005)

On March 3rd, 2002, more than a year into the Al-Aqsa Intifada, a suicide bomber detonated himself on a busy street in Jerusalem. At the time of the attack, Telad, a Channel 2 network, was broadcasting an important Premier League soccer match. In its belief that the routine of terrorism made it acceptable for its audience, Telad decided to physically split the television screen in two, so that while two-thirds of it showed the typical breaking-news report from the scene of the attack – with its harsh imagery – the remaining third displayed the ongoing soccer match.



Figure 3: Channel 2's (*Telad*) split-screen, March 3, 2002.¹⁵
The title reads: "A number of casualties and dozens of injured in an explosion"

But Israelis were outraged. They perceived the juxtaposition of death and soccer as a sacrilegious mix of the sacred and the mundane. *Telad* defended itself by arguing that giving up the soccer match would have meant giving up to the terrorists' wish to disrupt everyday life. The Second Authority condemned *Telad* for the split-screen incident, but perhaps in recognition of *Telad's* problematic situation, did not impose a monetary fine.

¹⁵ This image was taken from the Israeli on-line newspaper Walla, at: <http://news.walla.co.il/?w=/190657>

Routinization of terror is further characterized by its permeation of the most mundane forms of journalism. Constant, socially contained violence is simultaneously processed through "serious" journalism and lighter, more entertaining, genres, such as morning shows and political satire. The Al-Aqsa Intifada provided ample examples for this process, and in particular, the Qassam rockets fired from the Gaza strip to the Israeli town of Sderot in the Negev beginning at 2000. The shelling, and the ways in which the region was coping with a state of constant alert, were initially hard news material, but by 2007, a year of particularly intense firing, Israeli media alluded to the situation in a vast range of journalistic forms, allowing for *ynet* – Israel's leading online news source – to include this humorous report in its gossip column:

Baby Boom

The shelling of Qassams ceased for one day in honor of the visit of (Sderot-born Israeli top model) Miri Buhadana and her growing belly to Sderot. [...] Qassam launchers ceased fire today in salutation to Buhadana, Sderot's first lady (Keren Natanzon, March 7th 2007, *ynet*¹⁶.)

Yediot Achronoth was also looking for original journalistic forms to drive away the fatigue from the routine Sderot coverage. Among its initiatives were a project in which Sderot residents were asked to document their everyday lives using cameras provided by the paper, and a home-swap between a Sderot boy and a Tel Aviv girl. These and other citizen journalism projects brought about the inevitable accusation that the paper was degrading the coverage into reality TV (Tausig, 2008.)¹⁷

¹⁶ <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3373777,00.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.the7eye.org.il/PaperReview/Pages/PR27012008.aspx>

Preferred Victims

Political violence fractures the ideological status quo and prompts the media to actively defend and reconstruct the main ideology. Advocates of hegemony theories challenge the existence of a “main ideology,” and argue that the media propagate an elite agenda (Hall et al, 1980.) Journalists would argue that the journalistic product does not reflect an “agenda,” but rather their independent judgment according to their professional criteria for newsworthiness. But in any case, coverage of victims, as any news material, reveals a social hierarchy, which particularly distinguishes between the geographic, demographic and cultural center and the periphery.

Moran and Tzfati’s content analysis of Israeli print news of terrorist attacks during 2002 confirmed that the coverage of attacks perpetrated inside the Green Line—particularly within Israel’s big cities—was much more prominent and extensive than coverage of attacks against Israeli settlers in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, although both cases involved terrorism against Israeli civilians (Moran and Tzfati, 2006.) To the mostly secular practitioners of mainstream media, the settlers were perceived as “outsiders,” who chose to live in a dangerous area for ideological convictions not shared by most Israelis.

The relative inferiority of the settler-victims of the Al Aqsa Intifada was also apparent from Israeli broadcasters’ reluctance to respond to such attacks with advertising blackouts. The Second Authority’s 2000 aforementioned directive – “No

commercials shall be incorporated in a news report of an attack” – was intended to “correct” what the Second Authority perceived as the broadcasters’ discriminatory attitude toward victims who lived outside the Green Line, and to a lesser degree, victims who were not city dwellers. All Israeli victims should receive equal journalistic treatment, implied the new directive, so as not to be subject to journalistic calculations of proximity and audience appeal.

One memorable incident took place on February 16, 2002, at 7:45 PM, when a Palestinian suicide bomber detonated himself near a pizzeria in the West Bank settlement of Karnei Shomron, killing two people and injuring 30. At that time, Channel 2’s *Telad* was broadcasting, again, a premiere league soccer match. Conscious of the fact that such breaking news would require an advertising blackout, *Telad* decided to postpone the story for about an hour and a half, while benefiting from the match’s commercial breaks. The Second Authority was outraged by the delay and declared the Karnei Shomron incident a violation of the commercial blackout rules.¹⁸ It is not a coincidence that news reports of attacks have usually followed commercial breaks, with networks routinely taking “one last breath” of commercials before surrendering to the mandatory blackout. However, at this time, the Second Authority suspected that the delayed reaction to the incident had much to do with its remote, politically contested, place of occurrence and its settler victims.

¹⁸ Information about broadcasters’ violations and Second Authority sanctions is available at the Second Authority’s website, at: <http://www.rashut2.org.il/criticViolation.asp?catId=70>

Victims of Qassam rockets complained of similar marginalization. Residents of Sderot and the western Negev felt that despite the shelling of their area by rockets launched from Gaza since 2000, their plight received much less attention from the media than Israeli victims of Intifada-related suicide bombings of the same time. While it is difficult to determine whether the media were practicing a hegemonic, Tel-Aviv centric agenda or simply reflecting the general disinterest in the remote area, there is at least a kernel of truth to the allegation that the media displayed an “orientalist” approach toward the region and its residents, many of whom are Sephardic Jews and Russian immigrants (Gottlieb, *The Seventh Eye*, 1/1/07.¹⁹) When the shelling intensified throughout 2007 and 2008 and the media finally championed a wave of national support to Sderot, coverage remained episodic, focusing on the specific tragedies and damage caused by the shelling, while the much needed media discourse on the poor state of the region and its economic hardships remained largely absent.

The weakest victim group in Israel, however, is probably Israeli and Palestinian Arabs. To the extent that Jewish terrorism is reported, it needs to be blatantly deadly, spectacular or systematic in order to be termed terrorism by mainstream media. In the reports of the November 2009 arrest of Ultra-Right terrorist Yaakov Teitel, he was immediately dubbed “the Jewish terrorist,” but it is questionable whether he would have earned the terrorist title had he not – in addition to the murder of two Palestinians – attacked a prominent Jewish university professor. Unlike the case of Jewish victims in remote areas – whose disregard can be explained

¹⁹ <http://www.the7eye.org.il/articles/Pages/article6611.aspx>

by the media's practice of cultural hegemony – it is clear that the low status of Arab victims of terrorism in the Israeli media is indeed a reflection of their general inferiority within Israeli society. Arab victims, for example, lag behind in terms of their legal rights for state recognition and assistance. Only in September 2005, and following the deadly Shfar'am incident,²⁰ did these victims win an amendment to the law that guaranteed monetary compensation to terrorism victims. Whereas until then, only victims of violence perpetrated by “an organization hostile to the state” were entitled to redress, now the scope of victimhood broadened to include people who were subject to violence “in the context of a national conflict.”²¹ Israeli Arab victims may not be reported frequently or extensively. However, on the occasions that the media display visible sympathies to Israeli Arabs – such sympathies are particularly strong when Israeli Arabs fall victim to Palestinian terrorism – such sympathies come natural and Jewish audiences approve of them. Of course, the press takes great care in mentioning that the Arab victims are Israeli *citizens*.

A hierarchy of victims, particularly in the context of routine terrorism, may include victims of the other side of the conflict. The normalization of political violence, typically characterized by a depoliticized news frame, can allow for the development of a more humane, or better, less demonized frame with regard to the victims of the “other side” (Liebes and Kampf, 2007). An acknowledgment of the “others” as similarly entangled in the conflict creates the emotional and political space needed to consider them as victims. And yet, as victims, they will always remain

²⁰ In the Shfar'am incident, Israeli Jew Eden Natan-Zada opened fire inside a bus, killing four Israeli Arabs and wounding 22.

²¹ Victims of Hostilities Law of 1970

inferior to “our” victims. Persiko (2008²²) drew attention to a *Yediot Aharonoth* story headlined “From both Sides of the Qassams,” which told of Osher from Sderot and Mohammed from Gaza, both lying unconscious in an Israeli hospital. While Osher was told to be “critically wounded from a Qassam directed at Israeli citizens,” Mohammed was “wounded by an IDF shell which was aimed at terrorists but accidentally hit him.” With Israeli victimhood portrayed in “unjust” terms compared to the Palestinian one, the apparent symmetry between the mishaps of those boys was ultimately a fake one. Overt media sympathy for Palestinian victims of Israeli assaults, however, is not well tolerated within Jewish-Israeli society. Israeli journalists who take upon themselves to illuminate the life conditions of Palestinians are perceived by Israeli society as political ideologues, judged according to the political convictions of Israelis as either great humanitarians or anti-Zionists. In any case, systematic coverage of the plight of the Palestinians – such as the one carried out by *Ha’aretz*’s Gideon Levi and Amira Hass – is never regarded by fellow journalists or media critics as objective journalism.

A U.S. hierarchy of victims may partly account for the fact that none of the Oklahoma victims achieved the media prominence of some 9/11 family members. Was this simply because of the smaller scale of the Oklahoma incident, or perhaps because the national media did not find Oklahoma City residents as newsworthy as Northeasterners? Have families of Oklahoman federal employees failed to match the American ideal the way that 9/11 victims did, or is it that Oklahoma is too far away from New York, the media center of the universe? The national press covered the

²² http://www.the7eye.org.il/PaperReview/Pages/paper_review_12022008.aspx

Oklahoma victims extensively, focusing initially on individual tragedies and later, on their attendance and testimonies at Timothy McVeigh's and Terry Nichols's trials. But again, no individual victim or group of victims achieved the symbolic status or political prominence of some 9/11 victims. The local coverage of the Oklahoma victims by the leading local paper, the *Journal Record* – which centered on the trials but also on the construction of the memorial – lacked controversy, save for concerns over the appropriate allocation of charity funds or the question of allowing the opening of businesses adjacent to the bombing area. There was nothing and no one in the local coverage that national media found worthy of amplifying. The relative lack of interest in the victims in the national media can be ultimately attributed to the fact that the bombing was the doing of “fringe terrorism” in a relatively remote place, rather than the existential threat represented by Al Qaeda and its affiliates in their much deadlier and coordinated attacks on United States’ economic and military centers on September 11, 2001.

The following chapters will examine the coverage of victims of political violence as they are transformed from participants and witnesses of attacks – in other words, from news sources for facts and personal narratives – into outspoken figures of political conscience who get involved in the issues that emanate from attacks, such as remembrance and anti-terrorism policies. The patriotic journalism that accompanies violent media events (disaster marathons not included) over time regains its critical mode, and journalists once engage in unsentimental reporting rather than keeping with their role as guardians of the consensus. For the proponents of the watch dog role of the press, a “return to reporting a kind of politics in a style that [is] reporting as usual

[feels] redemptive, as if a fever had just broken after a prolonged illness" (Schudson 2002:39.) When the victims are involved in contentious public affairs, the initial deference toward them is negotiated with antithetical orientations that govern political coverage, and in particular, the professional methodologies associated with the ideals of objectivity and balance.

Chapter 2

Memorialization

Remembrance does not happen automatically. Without purposive commemorative work, society is bound to forget all but the most traumatic events. In the United States, the first national commemorative effort was the establishment of military cemeteries following the Civil War. As Faust (2008) observed, the sacrifice of 620,000 soldiers in that war demanded the enormous federal task of burials, identification of the bodies and memorialization, underscoring the notion that "sacrifice and the state became inextricably intertwined." That "work of death," according to Faust, was a socially and culturally defining task for the recovering North, to a point where "death created the modern American union – not just by ensuring national survival, but by shaping enduring national structures and commitments." (2008:6)

Remembrance requires the “moral entrepreneurship” (Pacifici-Wagner, 1996) of individuals and organizations that have an interest in imprinting an event in the collective memory. In their competition over commemorative genres and forms of anniversaries, memorials and museums, these moral entrepreneurs aspire to cement a particular version of the events, one that is affixed to a final set of preferred values. Commemoration is an ambitious enterprise, in that it intends to produce – by means of “symbolic simplification and concentration” (Collins, 2004) – objects and rituals that convey timeless ideals and provide long-lasting moral guidance to society.

These commemorative contests over the symbolic and tangible social memory take place in various public arenas. Institutional and non-institutional parties meet formally and informally in municipal hearings, protests, and court sessions, where they cajole, argue for moral superiority and form alliances. The press is imperative in this process. Given its power to amplify certain views and delegitimize others, it is considered indispensable for raising public support. After all, the success of a commemorative project is largely measured by its popularity.

Victims and survivors are a constant and predominant feature in the commemoration battle. Having paid the heaviest price, they believe they have the strongest claim over the memory of a war or a terrorist attack. The least they are entitled to—mandates conventional wisdom—is an appropriate occasion and space to reflect on the event and their loved ones who perished. In his book *Shadowed Ground*, cultural geographer Kenneth E. Foote surveys America’s remembrance sites. Whenever memorialization is concerned, he observes, victims and survivors “will

always remain close to the heart of the debate—and usually insist upon this position—but their role should not include the power to veto all decisions” (2003:342).

Journalists who attempt to narrate the contested field of commemoration, and who are vulnerable to the victims’ moral authority, may virtually and publicly ratify the victims’ right of veto over remembrance projects.

The Experience-Argument Scale

I propose to examine the media influence of victims using a qualitative system that I devised and termed *the Experience-Argument Scale*. The Scale offers a framework for assessing the level of journalistic attitudes—that I termed “deference,” “professionalism” and “disregard”—manifested in the coverage of a particular topic.

The Experience-Argument Scale is not reserved for the analysis of the relationship between terrorism victims and the media. In fact, terrorism victims are only offered here as an example for the larger phenomenon of journalism’s response to the authority of grief. The Experience-Argument Scale can be used to evaluate the press treatment of any citizen group whose moral authority derives from painful personal experience, such as ailing people who lobby for better healthcare or family members of victims of car accidents who work to improve road conditions. In these cases and others, the Scale may help illuminate and even foresee situations where the press would either bend its self-proclaimed professional standards or adhere to them in its coverage of any policy issues that emanate from human tragedy.

To be more precise, the Scale is designed to evaluate situations where the press encounters political players who had previously undergone a traumatic event that granted them what we could call “an authority of grief.” The coarse (and nevertheless valid) psychological assumption at play here is that in the face of tragedy, journalists are engulfed in their own humanity, and led to identify with the victims, to avoid offending them and to side with their arguments. Consciously or not, the affected journalists put aside the professional standards that, in the course of everyday political reportage, are supposed to guard them from their own biases—at least, in the classic, albeit much contested, sense of “objectivity.” The resulting coverage, in such circumstances, is deferential to the victims and it lacks traditional markers of objectivity. “Deferential” news stories are sometimes of a lesser quality of journalism, if the topic at hand requires an extensive review of conflicting considerations, but deference stands in the way of a comprehensive analysis of the issue.

My examination of individual print news items combined a search for formal signifiers of the objective method, and other—informal and more fluid—indications of journalistic attitude. I was mainly looking for signs of detachment, heard-headedness, criticism and empathy.

A victim-related story that displayed formal features of the practice of objectivity typically included some or all of the following:

(1) The story brought forth and elaborated on opinions that were contrary to the victims' claims.

(2) It did not overplay victims' emotional utterances.

(3) It was mindful that a single victim, or even a victims' organization, may not necessarily represent the entire victim population.

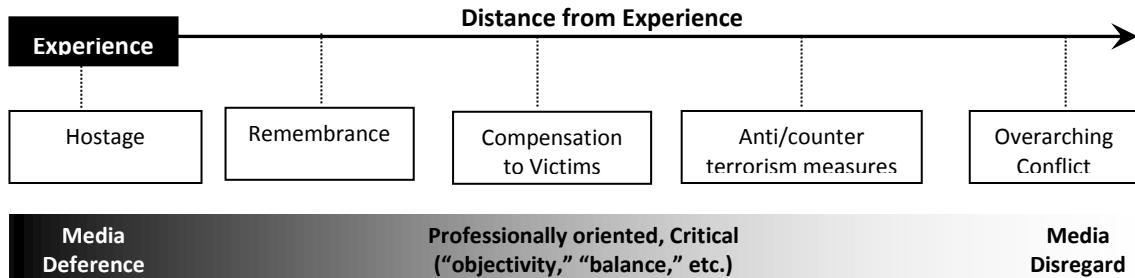
My main finding, which became the underlying principle of the Scale, was that the *proximity* of a debated terrorism-related topic to the tragically and politically empowering attack qualified the victim-advocates in the eyes of journalists and deflected press criticism.

The element of *argument* in the Experience-Argument Scale denotes an issue that the victims promote, for example aviation safety, compensation by perpetrators or state, anti-war activism, etc. “Argument” is therefore synonymous with “topic,” “issue” or “debate,” all referring to a conversation whose proximity to the original event will largely determine the extent to which the media will be sympathetic to the victims and embrace their claims. Proximity, in fact, appears to be a stronger factor than the essence or the merit of the victims’ argument. In other words, even an unpopular argument, once voiced by the victims rather than by—for example—public officials, will be well received by the press, if it is sufficiently pertinent to the terrorism event. Among other things, an attitude of deference means that even the voice of a single victim bears an unparalleled moral force, let alone claims made by a victims’ organization.

The term *proximity* is understood here in both pragmatic and conceptual terms. A political action by a victim that is close in *time* to the attack, or directly relates to its *place* of occurrence, possesses an inherent media appeal and power of persuasion. This chapter, which deals with remembrance, is really about victims' attempts to cement their interpretation of the events and retain control over the objects that signified the attack. The victims hold the power to authorize and stipulate the appropriate use of the attack's markers of memory: the location of the attack, the names and biographical details of the deceased, photographs from the scene of terror, etc. These signifiers of memory possess close conceptual approximation to the calamity and as such, they are considered the victims' property.

The coverage that I examined confirmed that the more the victims' arguments pertained to the specific circumstance of their tragedy, the better they fared with the press. This was most strikingly displayed in the journalistic treatment of two topics: remembrance issues (memorials and anniversaries) and coverage of families' appeals for the release of loved ones who were held hostage (which Chapter 3 explores). A close reading of news items related to these topics revealed the frequent absence of the conventional markers of journalistic professionalism, and their replacement with an uncritical and supportive journalistic approach. All of these merited the positioning of the issues of "remembrance" and "hostage situations" at the "Media Deference" end of the Experience-Argument Scale. Other topics, which were further removed from the original terror experience, elicited a more "professionally oriented" journalistic response, which included, for example, skepticism and formal displays of balance.

The Experience-Argument Scale



The “Distance from Experience” arrow of the Scale represents *proximity*—the receding distance between the particular attack that the victims underwent, and the topic of their argument. This arrow runs parallel to the gradual shift from “Media Deference” to “Media Disregard,” to show that the greater the distance between the victims’ argument and their politically-empowering terror experience, the more they are likely to meet a critical or indifferent press. In this and in the following two chapters, I will report on my findings derived from the use of the Scale, beginning with this chapter’s examination of the topic of remembrance. I will introduce topics that are typically subjects of victims’ activism—remembrance, the call to free abducted soldiers, and anti-war victims families’ organizations—assess them in terms of their distance from the politically originating terror attack, and examine the journalistic response that they induce.

The essential purpose of remembrance projects is to invoke memory through a representational form of the events. In terms of the Experience-Argument Scale, the fact that remembrance stands in direct reference to the original terror experience

positions this topic at the reverence side of the Scale. It is slightly right of “Hostage Situations” because in hostage situations, the families’ activism takes place as the terrorist event is actually happening, so there is no distance between the Argument and the Experience (Chapter 3 will elaborate on that). But back to the subject of this chapter, victims, who bear the live memory of violence and endure the greatest loss, are considered the appointed guardians of the meaning of the attack. The press, in this context, takes an instrumental role in impressing the victims’ narrative on the collective memory.

The following sections will describe the victims’ role in the establishment of memorials commemorating the victims of the attacks, and the ways in which the American and Israeli news media validate—in different ways because their journalism is different—the victims’ central role in the commemorative debate.

The cultural geography of violence

In order to fully understand the coverage of memorialization efforts, and specifically—the particularly complicated and tortured memorialization of terrorism, we need to first acquire a basic understanding of how different types of memorial designs correspond to certain memorialization purposes. Indeed, there are tragic events that communities want to mark and remember for eternity, while there are events that they try to erase and forget. Foote (2003) distinguishes four types of

social approaches to places where violence and tragedy have taken place: sanctification, designation, rectification and obliteration.

Sanctification commemorates events through a creation of a dedicated, permanent monument. Sanctification enshrines events that are “seen to hold some lasting positive meaning that people wish to remember.” (2003:7)¹

Designation is a more modest form of commemoration, suitable for events that are considered significant but that “lack the heroic or sacrificial qualities associated with sanctified places” (2003:18). Designation may mark an event in the landscape through name plaques and parks. Unlike sanctified sites, designated sites are not the loci of public commemorative rituals.

Rectification and *Obliteration* are acts of purposeful forgetting. Rectified sites are restored to their previous state, their signs of violence erased. In obliterated sites, an acute sense of shame associated with the events leads not only to the eradication of any evidence of violence, but also to the effacement of the actual place of occurrence.

¹ Foote's framework leaves the important example of Nazi death camps unresolved and unaccounted for within Foote's categorization. Concentration camps mark phenomena that hold no lasting positive meaning, but their preservation is testimony to the immensity of historical events that commands remembrance in a sanctified form.

Sanctification and the social consensus

Sanctification is mostly associated with the heroic sacrifice of soldiers who perished in a triumphant war. Bravery and sacrifice warrant explicit sanctification in the form of a designated, well-tended and prominent monument, a commemoration genre Foote terms "a field of care" (2003:9). Sanctification can be accomplished only if it enjoys perfect agreement with the feelings and memories of the survivors, the families of the dead and society at large.

Sanctification of military defeat is a much more complicated task. Commemoration of defeat calls for the negotiation of conflicting moral interpretations. The difference in circumstance between victory and defeat parallels the difference between monuments and memorials. As Sturken notes, "monuments are not generally built to commemorate defeats; the defeated dead are remembered in memorials. Whereas a monument most often signifies victory, a memorial refers to the life or lives sacrificed for a particular set of values." (Sturken 1997:48)

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial presented the complicated challenge of commemorating defeat. The next paragraph will recall the particular conflicts that the Vietnam memorialization embedded, and then relate them to the U.S. experience of memorializing terrorism.

The Vietnam War Memorial: sanctification of defeat

One of Foote's main observations in *Shadowed Ground* is that sites of violence that do not fit a victorious, patriotic vision, rarely achieve sanctification. Instead, they are abandoned or marked in the most modest of ways.² The American landscape, he argues, is mostly shaped by the belief that acknowledging the darker side of violence—as oppose to the bright victories that it may bring—will detract from society's cohesiveness and strength.

Memorialization of defeat, indeed, is scarce, and once accomplished, it tends to concentrate on the fallen, as if to compensate retrospectively for the war's lack of a just cause or to distract from its undesirable ending (Mayo, 1988). Such ambivalence, for example, has been the legacy left by the 1982 Lebanon War on the Israeli collective psyche, which is why "when Israeli officials speak in ceremonies occasioned by the Lebanon War, they extol its soldiers in words that are vivid and inspiring. Their remarks on the war itself are vague and pointless. They affirm the war as a historical entity but deny it an elevated place in the national experience."

(Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, 1991:380)

² An important exception is Gettysburg, which introduces many sanctified Civil War battle monuments, some glorifying both the North and South, and some even exalting the South as loser over the North as winner. "Gettysburg was recognized as significant by both sides soon after it was fought," explains Foote. "Once the war ended, retrospective assessments reinforced the judgment of Gettysburg as a turning point—even the midpoint—of the war. This judgment in turn allowed veterans on both sides of the conflict to use the Gettysburg battlefield as a point of reconciliation." (2003:123) With respect to the famous, bipartisan High Water Mark of the Rebellion Monument, Foote writes: "It is remarkable insofar as it was commissioned exclusively by Northern states but paid tribute to units of both sides. It was a critical step in reinterpreting the battlefield as a place in which all Americans could take pride". (p. 129)

Similarly, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial had to contend with the divisiveness of the war and the fact that it was ultimately lost. The Veterans Memorial Fund, which was in charge of the memorial design and construction, required in its mission statement that "The memorial will make no political statement regarding the war or its conduct. It will transcend those issues. The hope is that the creation of the memorial will begin a healing process." (Scruggs and Swerdlow 1985:53, quoted in Sturken 1997:50). The eventual design, erected seven years after the American withdrawal from Vietnam, projected these negative associations by dedicating itself to the memory of the fallen in the explicit way of name inscriptions and also through its ascetic style (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, 1991.) As Danto (1985) noted, "The paradox of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington is that the men and women killed and missing would not have been memorialized had we won the war and erected a monument instead" (quoted in Sturken 1997:48).³ Also unique to this memorial was the fact that unlike typical war memorials, and also different from its neighboring monuments at the Washington Mall, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial could not be seen from afar. Only visitors who approached its sunken, black structure (both, non-triumphant elements of the memorial) could see it (Sturken 1997:46).

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the only war memorial in the United States devoid of any expressions of glory, heroism or national pride, marked an important milestone in the history of the U.S.'s culture of grief.⁴ American grief has been

³ Arthur Danto, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *The Nation*, August 31, 1985.

⁴ The divisiveness of the war translated to continuing divisiveness over its memorial. The persistent criticism that the memorial did not look like a war memorial and that it was "perpetuating humiliation,"

gaining social legitimacy and visibility, shifting from private, secluded spaces to the public sphere. These changes have allowed for the creation of a new memorialization genre, marked for the first time by the Vietnam War Memorial: *sanctification of tragedy*. Unique to this genre is its openness to displays of visitors' grief. The Vietnam Memorial set the precedent for that by allowing visitors to leave personal offerings, such as notes and flowers, at the wall (Linenthal 2001: 134).

Memorializing terrorism: from designation to sanctification

In their close examination of the processes that led to the establishment of the Vietnam War Memorial, Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz (1991) fully attributed the initiation of the memorial to a war veteran, Corporal Jan Scruggs, who came up with the idea for a monument that would list the 58,000 war dead, and established the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. Had he not introduced his initiative to the Vietnam-Era Caucus, the national remembrance marker of the war would have been—as suggested by the Caucus before the memorial idea gained prominence—a Vietnam Veterans Week.

While the success of a single veteran in achieving the construction of the Vietnam War Memorial was unusual for its time, today victims' endeavors are common when it comes to memorialization of political violence. Shifting social norms—in particular, the increasing value of individual rights and the growing

led to an addition of a more traditional monument to the memorial grounds, a statue of three soldiers—white, black and Hispanic—returning from battle (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, 1991:395)

acceptance of public grief—allowed victims and survivors to play an increasingly central role in the conception and conceptualization of commemorative projects.

The centrality of victims in the memorialization process can also be attributed to the fact that the state's regulators of commemoration—such as governmental and municipal committees—have an inherent difficulty in deciding on the set of meanings associated with political violence and particularly, terrorism. Given that both military defeat and terror attacks are public displays of national humiliation, state officials normally perceive *designation* – rather than sanctification – as a sufficient and relatively uncomplicated commemorative solution. Through designation, which requires no more than a plaque with the victims' list, social memory of terrorist attacks can evade difficult questions and instead, preoccupy itself with the victims. Indeed, Israeli terrorism-related memorials are typically modest stone structures bearing the names of the deceased, and they adhere to Foote's designation category in that they lack national markers and avoid the grandiosity and patriotic overtones characteristic of sanctified sites.

After the Vietnam War Memorial externalized public grief, the next development in the U.S. memorialization history was the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, which introduced an era of large-scale terror-related sanctification sites. The Oklahoma City National Memorial and the National September 11 Memorial both address terrorism in new, defiant and dramatic ways. More than anything, they offer a form of explicit historical containment of terrorism in the American national experience.

Sanctification of U.S. terror sites

In his analysis of the cultural geography of American violence, Foote positions terrorism under the category of criminal mass murder. Mass killers, he argues, leave a shameful imprint on the life of a community, their survivors “caught between conflicting desires, both to efface and to memorialize.” (2003:180) The instinctive response to mass murder, he observes, is *rectification*, namely eradication of the tangible memory of violence through the restoration of the site. Episodes that produce a particularly high level of shame, argues Foote, result in the complete *obliteration* of the site.

While the categorization of multi-victim terrorism as a subtype of mass murder is valid, I believe that terrorism victims’ memorialization needs are markedly different than those of victims of non-political murder. Foote’s assertion that “the higher the death toll, the more likely becomes its obliteration,” does not apply to terrorism, where deadliness is considered today to require sanctification.⁵ (p. 204) The sense of shame that Foote ascribes to communities that had undergone mass killings is related to the fact that they had unknowingly let a killer flourish in their

⁵ While terrorism victims tend to press for sanctification, their need to obliterate the site nevertheless exists. In his account of the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing, Linenthal reported that many victims expressed a wish to efface the destroyed site, which was too painful for them to see: “‘for me,’ said Philip Thompson, whose mother’s remains were recovered after the building’s implosion, ‘it was like a tomb, and for many of us, it just couldn’t stay. It would drain you every day.’ Pam Whicher thought that the building, like her husband, was dead. It symbolized to me the broken bodies of those that died inside it.” (1991:136). There are a few sites that purposefully incorporate broken buildings as a reminder of the scars of violence or even as penance: e.g. the tower of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church (Gedächtniskirche) on the main street in Berlin, badly damaged in the Allied bombing raids, was incorporated into a WW2 memorial.

midst.⁶ Terrorism, however, should not be categorized along with non-political mass-murder because it is usually perpetrated by outsiders. The affected community bears a much weaker sense of responsibility, let alone shame. Writing on the public perception of the Oklahoma City bombers, Edward T. Linenthal pointed to the “outsider” quality of terrorists:

Interpretive strategies portrayed McVeigh and Nichols as “in” but not “of” America, peripheral beings who did not threaten [America’s own] convictions of innocence. [...] Portraying both men as “animals,” “monsters,” “drifters,” “loners,” “right wingers,” “robots,” “mutated creatures,” served to separate them from “real” Americans. (Linenthal 2001, p. 19)

Beyond the perpetrators’ insider-outsider distinction, there are other differences in the perception of victimhood of these two types of atrocities, the purely criminal and the politically driven. Terrorism victims are deemed particularly worthy of sanctification because their victimhood derives from their random association with a specific national, religious or racial group. Given that the ideological target of terrorism is a chosen identity, each and every person bearing that identity is an indirect victim of the attack. As noted in Chapter 1, the individual victims are private persons, but at the same time they are representatives of the shared, and attacked, ideology. Seen as wounded embodiments of their community’s core values, terrorism victims consider themselves and their deceased loved ones worthy of *sanctification*.⁷

⁶ Foote also equates terrorism with racial massacres, whose places of occurrence were rectified or obliterated, as the black communities’ wish to honor the victims was met with the white communities’ embarrassment over the acts (2003:327), and, perhaps, the shameful triumphalism with which they had been committed. (One of Foote’s most compelling arguments is that the American landscape is physically silent with respect to the mass scale violence against blacks during the 19th and early 20th century, as well as to the former brutal conquests of Native American peoples. These communities are still in the process of gaining the sufficient powers required for claiming memorialization.)

⁷ Victims of sheer criminality, on the other hand, may refuse memorialization and opt for rectification or obliteration in order to prevent a situation where an aberrant, inexplicable act perpetrated by deranged individuals is honored through a monument. (A relatively novel exception is spectacular

Ironically, the choice between sanctification and rectification is in the hands of the perpetrators. The more they succeed in relating the attack to an existing national or international political conflict, the more likely it is that their act will be enshrined in a sanctified form. Violence that is politically obscure, or understood as sheer criminality, has lesser chances of being grandly sanctified.

Foote concludes that the after-effect of terrorism on the affected landscape—similarly to the general response to non-ideological mass murders—is *rectification*. My review of terror-related memorials leads to a different conclusion, that the American terrorism landscape – however new and scarce – is one of *sanctification*. The first terrorism-related memorial to signal the shift from rectification to sanctification was the mid-sized memorial fountain honoring the six victims the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

shootings in educational institutions. The shooting sprees at Columbine High School in 1999 and Virginia Tech in 2007 were commemorated by large memorials. Erected in the past decade, these memorials reflect the growing acceptance of public displays of grief. Also, the young age of the victims made these crimes stand out and merited their sanctification.) However, once violence succeeds in communicating itself as an episode within an existing ideological conflict, it essentially deems itself “historical.”



Figure 4: The World Trade Center Memorial, commemorating the victims of the 1993 WTC bombing

The design of this memorial, which was destroyed on September 11th 2001, was halfway between designation and sanctification. Its inscription explicated the rationale for sanctification, namely, the public dimensions of terrorism victimhood:

On February 26, 1993, a bomb set by terrorists exploded below this site. This horrible act of violence killed innocent people, injured thousands, and made victims of us all.

This inscription marks an interpretation of terrorism that is commonly driven by victims in the U.S. and Israel, which is that terrorism is *everybody's* business, and that their wounds and the death of their loved ones constitute a piece of national history that deserves to be prominently enshrined.⁸

⁸ The memorial grounds dedicated to the victims of the August 1998 attack on the American embassy in Kenya—although outside the geographical scope of *Shadowed Ground*—demonstrate the post-Oklahoma-City-bombing tendency to sanctify terror sites. The August 7th Memorial Park in Nairobi

Terrorism landscape in Israel

The terrorism landscape in Israel is different from the American landscape in that it reflects routine terrorism. A survey of institutional terrorism-related memorial sites in Israel – those erected by local municipalities or other official regulators of commemoration – reveals a landscape that addresses terrorism but contains it within Israeli normalcy in non-punctuated, non-dramatic forms. Israeli memorialization thus takes the more modest form of *designation*.

There is no legal or otherwise set standard for form, language or size of terror-related memorial constructs, and they differ from each other. However, the typical site includes a small and plain looking monument displaying the victims' names (figures 1&2). It possesses very subtle national markers, such as a uniform appearance of names (Shay 2005.) The memorial object is not necessarily commensurate with the lethality of the attack. Some of the deadliest attacks were remembered through plaques (such as the 2001 Sbarro and Ben Yehuda St. attacks in Jerusalem,) while attacks that resulted in two or three casualties were sometimes remembered through monuments.

offers a Peace Memorial Museum, a Peace Building Kids Club and a conference center, promoted on the memorial's website as a "unique and tranquil venue for events" (the website is available at <http://www.memorialparkkenya.org/>).



Figure 5: The Matza Restaurant Memorial



Figure 6: The Dolphinarium Memorial

Within all forms of memorialization, however, victims' names are an indispensable feature.⁹ And just as the names of the victims have to appear, the names of the perpetrators are never there. Committed to the ideology of the attacked communities, memorials refuse to award the perpetrators with any kind of recognition. While Israeli memorials sometimes mention that the victims "were murdered by vile people," they do not identify the perpetrators' religion or ethnic group.

The Central Memorial for the Victims of Hostile Acts and Terrorism in Mount Herzl, Jerusalem, is the largest terrorism monument in Israel and the only terror-related

⁹ In Israel as well as in the United States, survivors, family members and friends advocate for explicit identification of their loved ones. In the case of small-scale attacks or at times of particularly routine terrorism, victims may insist on name lists because they work against the public instinct to ignore the event and move on. With the precedents set by the Vietnam Memorial and the Israeli Central Memorial for the Victims of Hostile Acts and Terrorism, enumeration in these two countries seems mandatory.

sanctified site. Interestingly, the monument's design evocates personal grief as it lists every single victim who perished since 1860.¹⁰



Figure 7: The Central Memorial for the Victims of Hostile Acts and Terrorism, Mount Herzl, Jerusalem

Press coverage of remembrance battles

The involvement of terrorism victims in remembrance battles is well reflected in the design of American and Israeli memorials. But before a monument is erected,

¹⁰ The curious fact that the time period that this memorial represents begins in the 19th century – decades before the formation of the state of Israel -- indicates an interpretation of terrorism that includes violence perpetrated against Jews in Ottoman and British Mandate-era Palestine. The memorial clearly avoids commemorating the victims' sacrifice to the State of Israel, and instead, the sacrifice sanctified here is a broader one, associated with Jewish life in the land of Israel. Israel is absent from the monument, and the purpose of sacrifice remains secondary and vague. Instead, the memorial's central theme is loss. A large square surrounded by walls carrying name plaques, conveys emptiness, and a hole in a tall reclining structure similarly speaks of a void and communicates vulnerability. The centrality of the names and the absence of state are similar features of the Vietnam War Memorial.

the memorialization battle is well reflected in the national press, which serves as one locus, perhaps the most important one, for gaining legitimacy and public support. In the following paragraphs, I will employ the Experience-Argument Scale to examine journalistic attitudes toward victim-led memorialization efforts. The analysis will concentrate on four memorials: In Israel, the Beit Lid and Maxim memorials, and in the United States, the Oklahoma City National Memorial and, perhaps most importantly, the National September 11 Memorial and Museum.

It should be clarified from the outset that in all of the cases surveyed—both in the United States and Israel—victims were met with journalistic deference. This is the unequivocal premise of the coverage of memorialization. But a close reading of the coverage provided more nuanced features of deference. Deference had different manifestations and it had its limitations, which differed in the U.S. and Israel according to the different journalistic cultures—and broader social differences—of these two countries.

Beit Lid: A victim-driven attempt at sanctification

The Beit Lid attack took place on January 22, 1995. It was the first “double suicide bombing,” in which two suicide bombers affiliated with the Islamic Jihad detonated themselves on a bus stop busy with soldiers, with the second bomber setting himself off minutes after the first, killing those who rushed to the scene to help. A total of 21 Israeli soldiers and one civilian were killed in the attack. The planning and

construction of a memorial in the place of the attack took 13 long years, mostly because of difficulties in securing a piece of land for the memorial.

I surveyed the entire coverage of the Beit Lid memorialization process in three major publications. *Ynet* is an online newspaper published by *Yedioth Aharonoth*, and while it is considered a separate publication, it is the second leading Internet news source in Israel and reflects Israel's news values. *Nrg Ma'ariv* is affiliated with *Ma'ariv* and similarly represents mainstream Israeli journalism, although it is much less popular (5th in popularity among Hebrew language online news sources), and *Globes* is the leading business news publication in Israel.¹¹

As described in the Chapter 1, mainstream Israeli newspapers do not express avid commitment to the American tradition of objectivity. Their commitment is rather to an ethos of inclusiveness, and they purport to speak on behalf of the Israeli public at large, and in particular, the aggrieved citizen.

Historically, Israeli journalism began in the 1940s as a party press. During the 1980s, with the growing influence of American values on Israel's culture (and in particular, American philosophies of justice and personal freedoms that found their way to Israel's Constitutional law), Israeli journalism developed an awareness of "objectivity" and the fairness that it is supposed to engender. But the Israeli notion of "objectivity" has had a limited scope: it was only expected from political coverage,

¹¹ Ranking in this paragraph is based on the December 2010 TIM survey, conducted by TNS Israel.

mainly in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where journalistic partisanship was seen as an obstacle to truthfulness. There was much less expectation of objectivity in other contexts, and objectivity was completely absent from coverage of social issues. There, the primary interest that was served was that of the typical citizen, and it was served in an openly non-objective approach.

Deference to the Beit Lid victims

The pieces surveyed here with connection to the Beit Lid remembrance project, as well as all the press surveyed with respect to the Maxim memorial, belonged to the category of political “hard news.” Nevertheless, and typically to the coverage of victims, the coverage by these publications was entirely sympathetic to the families, and lacked most markers of objectivity. Typical headlines read: “Bureaucracy Delays Construction of Monument to the Victims of the Attack” (*Ynet*, by Felix Frisch, January 23, 2001) and “A Monument of Pain” (*nrg Ma’ariv*, by Elad Hoffer, November 10, 2007). A *Globes* story took the narrow form of a Q&A with the chairperson of the Beit Lid families’ organization who complained about their difficulties securing land for the memorial. The story did not seek the response of those allegedly responsible for the delay (“Grief is not Interesting, the Monument is Interesting,” *Globes*, Ron Paz, June 15, 2008).

There were stories that attempted to bring a multi-sourced, fuller picture of the memorialization process, but these were dominated by sources who were supportive

of the families, while those accused of complicating the project were either not sought for comment or quoted as making general and formal statements, such as the following one:

The Israel Land Administration recognizes the importance of allocating a piece of land to the victims of the Beit Lid disaster. We are doing what we can to materialize the memorial. Planning and allocating land take time because of their complexity and because of the need to coordinate between many different authorities. (Or Glaser, *Nrg Ma'ariv*, 2002)¹²

Some stories employed openly judgmental language on the part of the reporter, ascribing the standstill to “heartless bureaucracy” and blaming “legal requirements” for “bedeviling” the families (*ibid*, Or Glaser, 2002.) Most tellingly perhaps, *Nrg* reports ended with the contact information of the families’ organization, “for donations.” (Or Glaser, 2002 and 22.1.2006)

While journalists were genuinely trying to be helpful to the families, the coverage of the protracted memorialization process also revealed the weakening effect that the passage of time had on the victims’ influence. The Beit Lid families planned an unusually ambitious memorial. The sanctified site was meant to reflect the magnitude and shock of the first “double suicide bombing.” But the exponential increase in suicide bombings during the Al Aqsa Intifada eroded the imprint that Beit Lid left on the public and on the press. While the press coverage remained sympathetic to the families throughout the long memorialization process, the volume of that coverage gradually diminished. In the later years of the saga, coverage only

¹² While the story does not appear in the *Nrg* website, it was reproduced in: http://www.ezy.co.il/memoSite.asp?memorial_id=162 [Hebrew]

appeared at anniversaries, summarizing any progress that had been achieved in the past year and updating on the status of the families' current hurdles.

The memorial as a site of sanctification, the press as a site of designation

The Beit Lid memorial was finally erected in 2008. The memorial differs from the generic, simple stone structures that inhabit terrorism sites throughout Israel. The monument is a large statue, depicting 22 life-size figures – 21 soldiers and one civilian – climbing up a ladder, their posture proud and resolute, toward the sky. The designer of the monument, Sara Konforty, wrote that the design was intended to represent "the might of the Jewish people. ... Fortitude, strength and grit were what I wanted to convey, perpetuity and infiniteness, as oppose to death and obliteration."¹³



Figure 8: A detail from the Beit Lid Memorial

¹³ http://www.sarakonforty.com/HE/product_show_4345.html

The memorial grounds also include an amphitheater and memorial chambers dedicated to the victims. The grandness of the memorial, its various elements and its prideful design reflected the families' notions that the uniquely orchestrated and exceptionally deadly Beit Lid attack merited a defiant reaction in the form of a sanctified site. In this sense, the Beit Lid memorial endorsed, consciously or not, the increasing perception of terrorism victims as heroes (an interpretation elaborated in Chapter 1.) The particular narrative of the Beit Lid attack included a moment of heroism that justified this. The victims of the attack's second explosion, which targeted those who rushed to help the wounded, were not—according to this narrative—victims of indiscriminate terrorism, but symbols of courage and sacrifice, meriting sanctification. As this chapter will further illustrate, in the United States, the “heroification” of terrorism victims began with the design of the Oklahoma City Memorial and continued to dominate the National 9/11 Memorial, particularly with respect to “first responders.”

Another distinguishing factor that tipped the scales toward the sanctification of the Beit Lid site—again, rather than designation—was the fact that 21 out of the 22 victims were soldiers. In Israel, soldiers hold a particularly dear place in the national conscience, and when they die, they are mourned as dead children (this point will be elaborated in Chapter 3's discussion of abducted soldiers. Fear of soldiers' kidnappings is one of Israel's major psychological and strategic weaknesses.) The fact that the Beit Lid victims were mostly soldiers was also responsible for its exceptionally heroic design.

But again, the escalation of Israeli-Palestinian violence diluted the effect of the Beit Lid attack and worked against the grandiosity of the design. At this time of writing, more than 17 years after the attack, the memorial continues to suffer from a shortage of funds necessary for its maintenance. The victims families' difficulties in raising sufficient public donations for the memorial's upkeep revealed the incongruence between what the families were hoping for the memorial to become, and the relatively indifferent response of the Israeli public. Israeli culture, it seems, wishes to remember terrorism victims but at the same time, to move on. For a society that experiences waves of terrorism, *designation* remains the most appropriate form of commemoration, not sanctification.

The distinction between designation and sanctification is a useful way to look at the different modes of journalistic deference that the Beit Lid families met. The families aimed for sanctification, and indeed achieved emotional and occasionally one-sided stories from journalists who were trying to help them gain support for the memorial. But the Israeli experience of routine terrorism diminished the impact of the Beit Lid attack. With the years, the Beit Lid victims' families were only capable of eliciting coverage about the memorial's problems on anniversaries, and not much more. Here, too, the expectations of the families to receive a "sanctified" treatment were unrealistic. The press was deferential and sympathetic, to be sure, but in modest quantities that were commensurate with *designation* rather than with *sanctification*. The U.S. examples that will follow will show how the American culture was different in that it sanctified its terrorism victims, who died in the spectacular attacks in

Oklahoma in 1995 and in 2001 in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington. In the U.S., sanctification took place both at the landscape and in the news media.

The memorialization of the Maxim attack

The Maxim attack took place in a Haifa restaurant on October 4, 2003, during the Al-Aqsa Intifada. A female suicide bomber affiliated with the Islamic Jihad detonated herself at the busy Maxim restaurant on a Saturday afternoon, killing 21 people. When the relatives of the victims began to organize in order to plan and build a memorial, they wanted to locate it at the entrance to the restaurant. But the restaurant owners objected, claiming that the memorial should be placed nearby, yet far enough so that the restaurant's business would not be affected. The dispute represented a classic tension between two of Foote's classifications, with the victims pressing for sanctification or designation of the site and the landowner hoping for its rectification (2003:342)



Figure 9: computer-generated image of the families' design of the Maxim memorial

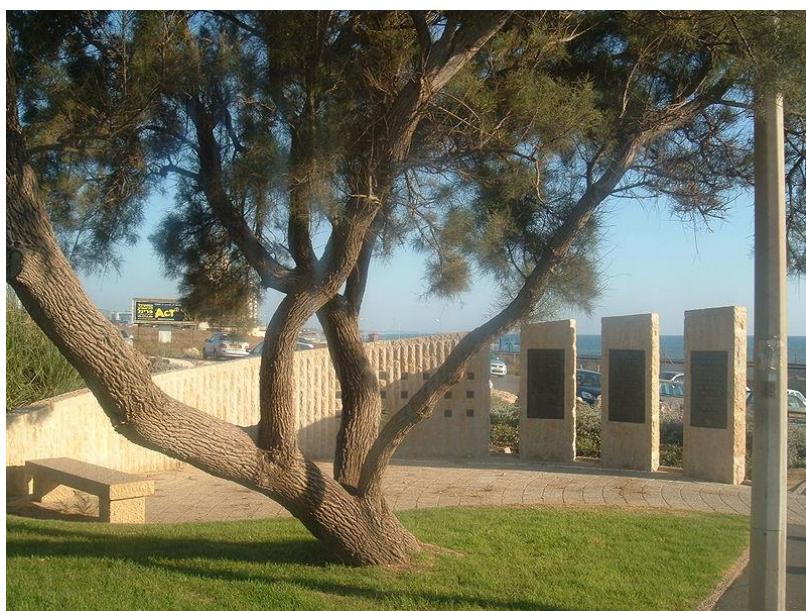


Figure 10: the Maxim memorial, Haifa

Ynet dedicated one story to the dispute between the families and the restaurant. Specifically, it reported on a demonstration held by family members at the entrance to the restaurant on the second anniversary of the attack. A close reading of this *Ynet* story (by Ahiya Raved, Oct. 10, 2005) reveals markers of journalistic deference to the families similar to those that appeared in the *Beit Lid* coverage, and additional ones.

The story appeared both on *Ynet*'s Hebrew and English language online editions. In the Hebrew version, the headline ran: “*Demonstration at Maxim: ‘This is the Place of Murder. Bon Appetit.’*” It appears as if the editors of *Ynet*'s English edition did not think their readers would be comfortable with sarcasm, and so the headline of the English language version of the story ran: “*Families: Don't Blur Victims' Memories.*” Apparently *Ynet* attributed different sensitivities to its different constituencies, assuming – in keeping with the cultural stereotype – that Israeli readers had a stronger stomach than its target English speaking audience, American Jews.¹⁴

The family members in this story were framed as “righteous dissenters.” The memorial was about to be located at a distance from the restaurant—per the owners’ request—and the family members were the opposing side. Although the families possessed the moral upper hand, in fact—*because* they possessed the moral upper hand—they were portrayed as underdogs. The power of the underdog frame was acknowledged by Herbert Gans, who argued that one of American journalism’s enduring values was individualism, and that the “ideal individual struggles successfully against adversity and overcomes more powerful forces.” (1979:50) This appears to hold true to Israeli journalism as well, where the underdog frame signals moral superiority.

¹⁴ *Ynet*'s English language editor Allan Abbey indicated that his target audience was American Jews, telling *Forward*: “There are 6 million English speaking Jews in America, and only 200,000 in Israel.” (“Israeli Newspaper Brawl Moving to the Internet,” by Nathaniel Popper, *Forward* February 25, 2005.)

Deference and the holocaust reference

This *Ynet* story, similarly to the Beit Lid reports, laid out the victims' arguments extensively and persuasively, evoking not only the victims' own grief but also painful Jewish history. Eli Regev, a bereaved father, was quoted as saying: "The dimensions of our disaster cannot be minimized. Entire families were destroyed in this attack, three generations of one family, something that has not happened since the Holocaust."

The Israeli press's coverage of terrorism is particularly open to Holocaust references. Beyond the obvious summoning of the Holocaust to heighten emotions, the Holocaust serves as a deep framework that lends terrorism a compendium of meanings. Terrorism, suggests the Holocaust analogy, is perpetrated by Nazi-like evildoers, who victimize innocent Jews. But just as the State of Israel was founded to protect the Jewish people from the recurrence of another Holocaust, so will the Israeli army hunt Palestinian terrorists down and foil the next attack (Nossek, 1994.)

From the victims' perspective, evocation of the Holocaust is a way to equate their own level of sanctification with that of the victims of the Holocaust. Such interpretation, it should be noted, is uncontested by Holocaust survivors and Israeli society at large. It is when social groups outside or in the fringes of Israeli society draw analogies to the Holocaust that they face fierce rejection by Holocaust survivors, who own and regulate the Holocaust memory similarly to the way terrorism victims

control the memory of their attacks (a complex example was the claims made by Jews displaced by the Israeli Defense Force during the 2005 Disengagement from the Gaza Strip, equating Israel to Nazi Germany.)

The *Ynet* story further concentrated on the family members' demonstration—an undeniably newsworthy action—without asking whether the families' claims were, in fact, shared by the larger Maxim victim group. Indeed, the question of representation, as critical as it is when establishing the dimensions of a reported dispute, is rarely asked in the context of victim-activists. Representation is deemed irrelevant in a situation where the voice of a single victim carries great weight, let alone the claims of a victim group, and let alone in a context that is newsworthy on the criterion of conflict.

The Oklahoma City Memorial: sanctification both in landscape and local press

The Oklahoma City bombing took place on April 19, 1995. Timothy McVeigh, a follower of militia and white supremacy ideologies, detonated a truck bomb parked in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City. He chose the Murrah Building among a few buildings that he had visited across the U.S., because it fit his idea of the ideal target—a building that hosted multiple Federal agencies, and whose destruction would produce an exceptionally high death toll. The explosion caused the building to collapse, killing 168 people, including 19 children from a daycare center that operated in the building.

McVeigh was caught, tried and convicted of murder, the use of weapons of mass destruction and conspiracy. He was executed on June 11, 1997. His accomplice, Terry Nichols, was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole.

The Oklahoma City National Memorial, dedicated in April 2000, commemorates the 168 victims of the attack. The large memorial grounds include two Gates of Time, a Field of Empty Chairs, a reflecting pool, a Memorial Fence (a segment from the original chain link fence that surrounded the site of the bombing) and a memorial museum.

Foote admits that given the strange fact that the Oklahoma bombing was carried out by seemingly ordinary Americans,¹⁵ he was surprised by the speed in which the memorial was constructed and more so, by its grandiose design (p. 337). Indeed, the memorial is extraordinary in its huge size and the richness of its aesthetic and symbolic elements. The memorial, Foote believes, is the successor of the Vietnam War Memorial in that it continues the gradual shift in the ways Americans have been dealing with tragedy. While formerly, mass murder sites were suppressed through rectification and obliteration, now there was a growing public acknowledgment of the place of violence in society and growing inclination to sanctify the victims. *Los Angeles Times* reporter Jesse Katz observed the changing

¹⁵ Timothy McVeigh revealed his motives in an April 26, 2001 letter to Fox network: "Foremost, the bombing was a retaliatory strike; a counter attack, for the cumulative raids (and subsequent violence and damage) that federal agents had participated in over the preceding years (including, but not limited to, Waco.) From the formation of such units as the FBI's "Hostage Rescue" and other assault teams amongst federal agencies during the '80's; culminating in the Waco incident, federal actions grew increasingly militaristic and violent, to the point where at Waco, our government - like the Chinese - was deploying tanks against its own citizens." The letter is available at: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,17500,00.html>

American attitude toward tragedy, noting that "if a terrorist's bomb had savaged the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in another day and age it's quite possible that no evidence of the attack would mark the site today."

This change also allowed victims to dominate the memorialization process, as was the case in Oklahoma.¹⁶ One of the early realizations of the Oklahoma Memorial task force—a committee established by Oklahoma City Mayor Ronald Norick to lead the process—was that as complicated and heart wrenching as it may be, victims' participation was crucial for the project's legitimacy. As Robert Johnson, the head of the task force, later recalled: "The credibility of the project rested on the privileged place of the voices of family members and survivors, and this commitment became the bedrock on which the entire process rested" (Linenthal, p. 176).

While the memorial task force felt a moral obligation to have victims lead the commemorative process, this was not an obvious course of action, in the sense that the Oklahoma bombing was the deadliest terrorist incident on American soil to that day, and there were no precedents that could help assess if the inclusion of the victims was indeed a good idea (while it was a war veteran who initiated the Vietnam War Memorial, the memorial design was ultimately chosen by a professional body, the

¹⁶ American grief, argued Katz, was increasingly public, driven by social forces such as the victims' rights movement and the confessional style of daytime talk shows. President Obama's authorization of photography of soldiers' coffins is a recent, potent illustration of the social containment of grief (although one could argue, that both Bush administrations refused to release photos of returning coffins because they feared that spotlighting casualties would undermine public support for the two Gulf wars, while Obama's reversal of the policy was, in part, an effort to project greater transparency as well as to distance himself from the wars.) Another, related phenomenon is the transformation of places of grief into scenes of public debate, as manifested in the U.S. Supreme Court March 2011 decision to apply First Amendment protections on protests held at military funerals.

Commission of Fine Arts.) At the same time, the task force's decision to give primacy to the victims seems, in retrospect, an inevitable one, insofar as it is almost impossible to resist the particular moral and political powers of terrorism victims in issues of remembrance. Today, participation of victims in memorialization is a universal phenomenon, just as the authority of grief is a human, culture-crossing moral force.

Victims and survivors were involved in every aspect of the conceptualization of the Oklahoma City memorial, and they have had substantial authorship over the meanings that the final construct communicated. Most importantly, victims participated in the onerous, bitterly debated task of articulating the memorial's mission statement, and were represented in the committees that decided on the semi-final and later, on the winning design for the memorial.

Many features of the Oklahoma National Memorial attest to the centrality of the victims in the memorialization process. One of them is the Memorial Fence, where people continue to leave mementoes in honor of the victims, in a manner similar to that of the Vietnam War Memorial, thereby keeping the memorial "alive."



Figure 11: The Memorial Fence, Oklahoma City National Memorial

Edward Linenthal's work on the aftermath of the Oklahoma City Bombing, "The Unfinished Bombing," detailed the challenges that the memorialization process entailed. In this comprehensive account, three commemoration debates loomed large: (1) whether to include victims in the design selection committees (they were included); (2) whether the memorial should include references to survivors (it does); (3) whether Fifth St., the adjacent street to the Murrah Federal Building, should be part of the memorial ground (it finally did.)

To explore the press reports on these debates, and specifically, whether journalists deferred to the victims the same way the task force did, I examined coverage by two local publications, the *Oklahoman* and *the Journal Record*, and by the national press.

The *Oklahoman* is published in Oklahoma City but covers the entire state. With a weekday print edition circulation of almost 125,000, it is the largest local daily in Oklahoma.¹⁷ The *Oklahoman* has been owned for more than a century by the local Gaylord family, and although the family also owns a few country music TV channels, the *Oklahoman* is one of the few remaining papers to escape media conglomeration. In a June 1998 *American Journalism Review* piece dedicated to the history and performance of American independent press, James V. Risser appreciated the Gaylord family's deep commitment to the Oklahoma community. But while noting that the family's donations supported numerous civic, educational and cultural projects in Oklahoma, Risser argued that the *Oklahoman* did not serve its Oklahoma readership all that well. The paper was self-described conservative and used AP copy – in the words of one of its managers – “nine times out of ten.” (Risser 1998) The *Oklahoman*, Risser concluded, was “a journalistic underachiever.” A harsher June 1999 piece by Bruce Selcraig in the *Columbia Journalism Review* declared the *Oklahoman* “the worst newspaper in America,” citing a strong right wing bias, lack of minority staff, and in particular, poor news judgment. Its “unflattering nickname has

¹⁷ Source: The Audit Bureau of Circulation, FAS-FAX Report - 3/31/2013.
<http://abcas3.accessabc.com/ecirc/newsform.asp>

become so ingrained in the state lexicon that from Muskogee to Guymon hardly a literate soul doesn't know of "The Daily Disappointment," wrote Selcraig.¹⁸

The *Journal Record* is a "daily general business and legal newspaper,"¹⁹ with a modest circulation of 3411.²⁰ The paper's headquarters, located near the Murrah Federal Building, was damaged by the bombing. The Journal Record Publishing Company is owned by Dolan Media, which specializes in business information services. Dolan Media owns more than twenty business and legal publications across the United States, as well as public notice and legal filing services. To judge by its products, the company is situated more in the business, legal/finance culture than in the purportedly more independent-minded and narrative-driven journalistic culture. The company's commitment to the business sector was evident in the *Journal Record's* coverage of the conflict between local businesses and Oklahoma bombing victims surrounding the inclusion of Oklahoma City's Fifth Street in the memorial grounds.

As one would expect, given the traditional role of a local paper and the ways in which it is immersed in its community, both the *Journal Record* and the *Oklahoman* embraced the victims. Borrowing from Foote's categorization, these publications' coverage displayed the journalistic equivalent of *sanctification*.

¹⁸ Columbia Journalism Review 37 no5 46-51 Ja/F '99

¹⁹ <http://journalrecord.com/about/>

²⁰ <http://www.mondotimes.com/l/world/us/36/2019/5031>

The unmitigated empathy to the victims was exemplified in an April 18, 1996 *Journal Record* column written by the paper's former editor Max Nichols on the first anniversary of the bombing. Nichols praised the national press's coverage of the anniversary, commenting that the journalists who visited the city didn't come "looking for people who trade on the bombing, for problems with the Memorial Task Force or ways to criticize the planned memorial," but instead "came here with sympathy for the victims, survivors and their families. They [the visiting journalists] also seemed to have great respect for what *we* are trying to accomplish with the memorial through a 350-member task force."²¹ [italics added]

Nichols employed the "we" voice—a mark of loyalty that presumed unanimity of opinion—and ended with an unequivocal statement about what he saw as the role of journalism in the face of the formidable task of memorialization: "Our job is to support it." And indeed the *Journal Record* demonstrated its support through selective coverage of the problems that the task force faced, and in particular, by leaving some of its most important internal debates unreported. The paper mostly reported memorialization issues that involved political institutions and the coverage, on the most part, gravitated towards the victims in ways that conformed to the deference end of the Experience-Argument Scale.

²¹ Max Nichols, "The Task Before Us," *The Journal Record*, 18 April 1996

Oklahoma: The Spreiregen dispute

One of the early decisions the Oklahoma task force needed to make was the makeup of the design selection body. The task force hired the Washington-based architect Paul Spreiregen on a trial basis to advise on the selection process. Spreiregen, the former chairman of the competitions committee of the American Institute of Architects, had previously organized the national competition for the design of the Vietnam Memorial. His pertinent experience and international stature were supposed to ensure a smooth selection process and attract an international group of elite designers. But a conflict arose when Spreiregen stated his belief that selection was primarily a matter of expertise and therefore recommended that the selection committees would only consist of design professionals. Victims, he argued, should be kept out of the process because, he said, “I don’t go to an accountant to have my appendix removed.” (Linenthal 2001:189) The task force rejected Spreiregen’s view, insisted on the participation of victims, let Spreiregen go and hired three architects to serve as a Competition Advisory Team. These architects, as opposed to Spreiergen, were amenable to the inclusion of victims in the selection committees.

The Journal Record did not report on the conflict with Spreiregen. While the appointment of the new Competition Advisory Team was reported, it was without mention of the prior termination of Spreiregen’s contract. One of the architect-members of the new advisory team announced in a *Journal Record* story that they were “absolutely committed to the task force that this is the process of the family

members, [and] that the project is all-inclusive.”²² And so, the questions of the suitability and potential contribution of the victims to the design selection process were never offered for public scrutiny and deliberation.

The Oklahoma memorialization process was the first in which family members and survivors were given the opportunity to participate, in a profound way, in the establishment of a grand, national memorial sanctifying victims, and yet, the *Journal Record* did not think that the questions of their inclusion, authority and qualifications merited public discussion. Rather, the composition of the selection committees was reported as a formal, finalized and morally unequivocal fact.²³

The *Oklahoman* did cover the Spreiregen saga, not as an independently newsworthy item, but as a detail within general reports on the progress of the memorial. The first story, “Task Force Pieces Together More Than Bombing Memorial,”²⁴ began with the personal story of a survivor-turned-memorialization-activist, Calvin Moser. The opening paragraphs secured the victims’ perspective as the fundamental perspective of the story. This is how the story began:

To Calvin Moser, the eight-month discussion about a memorial to the April 19 bombing was a greater memorial to his friends and co-workers who died than any edifice of brick or stone.

²² Al Serradell, Creating a monument with world significance, *The Journal Record*, 24 June 1996

²³ “Evaluation panel forms for memorial design,” *The Journal Record*, 17 January 1997; “Final memorial design committee announced,” *The Journal Record*, 5 June 1997

²⁴ By John Perry, *The Oklahoman*, March 24, 1996

The piece continued with a description of the divisions and tensions that the task force endured, including the conflict with Spreiregen. Spreiregen himself was a source for this story, defending his support for an all-professional selection panel and warning that

If that level of emotion persists, I don't know how they're going to do the selection process they've got. It will just fall through. I don't think a design competition is good therapy.

The story, however, ended with a stamp of approval for the task force's decision to include victims in the selection committees:

And for the bombing survivors and victims' relatives, the decision to ignore Spreiregen's reservations won their trust in the process.

"Bob Johnson [the head of the task force] stood up and said this is more important, the feelings of the families and survivors is more important than just putting up a stylistic memorial," said [family member] Gottshall. "That took a lot of courage."

This *Oklahoman* piece did provide Spreiregen with a fair chance to voice his objections to the design selection process. At the same time, it gave prominence to the task force's view. A reader of the *Oklahoman's* coverage was ultimately left with the impression that the Oklahoma community, as represented by the task force, the victims and the *Oklahoman*, rejected an inappropriate idea suggested by a Washington outsider who was insensitive to the emotional needs of the grieving community.

Oklahoma: memorializing survivors

The second important conflict that Linenthal recounted in his book concerned the *survivors'* place in the victim hierarchy and their representation in the memorial ("Survivors," here, refers to people who experienced and endured the attack.) Relatives of the deceased were reluctant at first to acknowledge the survivors' experiences and hence their legitimacy as partners to the commemoration process. With time, the family-member group accepted survivors into the so-called "trauma club" and granted them the right for explicit sanctification within the memorial through a Survivors' Wall.

The Survivors' Wall, an original segment of the Murrah Federal Building adjacent to the eastern gate, is an unprecedented commemorative feature. The sanctification of survivors—of the living—is no less than a radical element within a commemorative genre traditionally dedicated to the dead. The Survivors Wall enumerates more than 800 people who qualified as survivors by a designated Survivors' Definition Subcommittee through a complicated process. In order to create an applicable benchmark, the committee delineated a geographical "zone of danger" surrounding the Murrah Building, qualifying as "survivor" any person caught in that zone at the time of the bombing. The subcommittee struggled with many borderline claims of survivorship made by people who were outside the "zone of danger" but experienced emotional distress, as well as people who entered the zone of danger immediately after the bombing, and even claims by property owners in the area who suffered financial loss. The subcommittee's work entailed constant

negotiation between two powerful concerns: first, to broaden the scope of victimhood in the spirit of inclusion, and the second, to avoid trivialization of the survivor title (Linenthal p. 202).



Figure 12: Survivors' Wall, Oklahoma City Memorial

As difficult and tension-fraught as Linenthal describes it, none of this process was reported by the *Oklahoman* neither by the *Journal Record*. These local papers did not provide their constituencies the service of publishing the survivor qualifications, just as they did not report on the disappointment of any of those who had been disqualified. If there was an attempt by any of the disqualified to put pressure on the committee through local press, the press did not cooperate. This lack of coverage reflects the complete commitment to the victim-led task force and to the swift resolution of all memorialization problems.

Oklahoma: the Fifth Street problem

Fifth Street, which ran by the Murrah Federal Building, was the subject of a particularly heated debate. People walking on the Fifth Street sidewalk perished in the Oklahoma City bombing, and in the aftermath of the attack, Fifth Street was the place where rescue operations took place. The memorial task force considered Fifth St. a “sacred ground” (Linenthal p. 190). As such, it remained closed throughout the commemoration process, and became a formal component of the memorial grounds. The task force’s wish for the street to remain closed encountered the objections of local businesses who feared diminished commercial traffic. The tension in this case was similar to that of the Israeli Maxim case, namely between memorialization and commercial interests, or between *sanctification* and *rectification*.

The *Journal Record* followed this issue quite closely. As a business-oriented publication, it was evidently torn between two local, powerful groups: terrorism victims and business owners. The coverage, as the following analysis will show, reflected the *Journal Record*’s difficult position.

The first *Journal Record* story dedicated to the Fifth Street question was a June 17, 1996 story titled “Plans to Reopen Part of 5th St. Criticized”²⁵—criticized, that is, by the victims. As in the coverage of the Spreiregen dispute, the opening

²⁵ Paul Queary, “Plans to reopen part of 5th Street criticized,” *The Journal Record*, 17 June 1996.

paragraph accommodated the victims, letting their perspective set the tone for the rest of the piece:

Claiming a block in front of the Oklahoma City bombing site as sacred ground, relatives of bombing victims say they will fight businesses and city officials who want to open the street.

The story framed the victims as righteous dissenters, similarly to the Israeli press's case in its coverage of the Maxim victims who demanded to locate the memorial close to the bombing site. The same moral position was taken here, that sympathies should go to the victims who demanded an appropriate memorial, rather than to those who complained that memorials hurt businesses. In this story, three sources voiced the victims' perspective, while only one source defended the reopening of the street.

Had moral priorities been different, the *Journal Record* could have offered an inverse frame that would have emphasized the opposition to the victims. In this hypothetical case, the story would have been titled "Plans to Keep 5th Street Closed Criticized." This could have been a perfectly sensible frame: After all, the task force had explicitly expressed its wish for a closed Fifth Street earlier in the process, the street was included in the memorial grounds outlined in the memorial's mission statement, and it was in fact closed by the police on April 19, 1995 and remained closed since. In other words, the closing of the street was the official stance to be criticized by ordinary folks, not the other way around. Even the Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating supported the victims' view, stating that he was

“not aware of a traffic artery running right beside the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier... or George Washington’s tomb at Mt. Vernon. This site is already a shrine... You do not run vehicles across sacred ground.”
 (Linenthal p.192)

These circumstances suggest that the victims’ view could have been presented as the “main” view, to be criticized by others. The decisions and statements by the task force and the Mayor, combined with the reality of a closed street, could have served as pegs upon which to frame the story in a way that would center on those who may have been the true dissenters, namely the business owners. But the frame that was ultimately chosen put the victims in the position of “righteous dissenters,” a position that lent them moral superiority.

The task force, reported the *Journal Record*, was preparing for an upcoming decision on the matter by the Oklahoma City Traffic Management Division. The paper followed up on that meeting with an August 20, 1996 story, “Panel Stalls on 5th St. Reopening,”²⁶ in which Matt Driskill reported that the Traffic Management Division was deadlocked on the Fifth Street issue. This institutional conflict within the Traffic Management Division, the bread and butter of political reporting, merited a traditional journalistic “pro vs. con” treatment. Uncharacteristically for coverage of terrorism victims, Driskill brought forth a sober account of the various contending forces in the matter, victims included, and his account demonstrated typical markers of objectivity by describing both sides in a balanced way:

²⁶ Matt Driskill, “Panel Stalls on 5th St. Reopening,” *The Journal Record*, 20 August 1996

On one side of the street are business owners and residents in the area who want to see the street reopened, at least partially, to restore the flow of traffic interrupted more than a year ago.

On the other side are victims and survivors of the blast who say to reopen the street would desecrate hallowed ground.

A close examination of the story reveals, however, a slight advantage to the businesses' arguments for opening the street. While three sources favored a closed street, and only two favored opening it, the latter appeared first and their argument was detailed and persuasive. Again, the *Journal Record*, a business-oriented publication, appeared, in this story, to tilt to the businesses' side.

While Driskill took pains to project balance in his story, he gave a realistic assessment of the outcome of the Fifth Street dispute:

City staff present at the meeting Monday said publicly they favored reopening two lanes of 5th Street but said privately they believe the council will vote to keep the street closed.

Driskill knew that at the end of the day, the victims would prevail. In a subsequent September 11, 1996 story, "5th Street Issue Goes Before Panel," which anticipated the next step in the process – a City Council approval, Driskill repeated his projection:

City officials say publicly they want both sides to be heard, but privately nod when asked if the street will remain closed and traffic rerouted.

The *Journal Record's* detailed accounts of the Fifth Street debate reflected the concerns of the Oklahoma business community. By contrast, the *Oklahoman's* coverage was meager, indicating an editorial assumption that the size of the memorial grounds and the future of the street were either uninteresting or not sufficiently important to the general Oklahoma population (perhaps the *Oklahoman* realized that it could not compete with the relatively intensive coverage of the *Journal Record*.) In any case, The *Oklahoman*, a non-specialized daily, dedicated only one story to this matter, a July 17, 1996 piece that conveyed the task force's willingness to address the worries of the business community. The piece, titled "Closing of NW 5th Mulled Task Force Studying Issue Further,"²⁷ began with a message of reconciliation issued by the task force's spokesperson. A count of the named sources in this piece reveals an advantage to the task force with three sources (the spokesperson, an Advisory Committee architect member and a relative) compared to only one source representing business owners. And while the arguments for the closed street were dramatic and persuasive ("We could create the most wonderful, wonderful memorial in the nation, but if the environment around it isn't appropriate, then the memorial loses some, if not all of its value") the arguments presented for opening the street were unspecific and weak.

²⁷ Jack Money, "Closing of NW 5th Mulled Task Force Studying Issue Further," *The Oklahoman*, July 17, 1996

Oklahoma and the national press

The national press did not follow the Oklahoma memorialization process very closely. Anniversaries provided opportunities for general updates on the memorial's planning and construction status. The events of September 11, 2001 also renewed interest in Oklahoma's unique, victim-led memorialization effort,²⁸ and generated deeper pieces that demonstrated attitudes that only distance allowed, such as criticism and even humor.²⁹ Such attitudes were, and are to this day, completely absent from the local Oklahoma coverage of the memorial.

Some of the pieces that appeared in the national press stood out in their candid and detailed assessments of the complicated work of the task force. The Spreiregen dispute, which – as pointed out beforehand – was never discussed in the *Journal Record*, appeared in these pieces as a crucial episode that cemented the victims' control over the memorialization process.

One such post-9/11 piece was a January 14, 2002 *New Yorker* commentary by Paul Goldberger, which described the Oklahoma memorialization process as an important education for New York as it began to grapple with the future of Ground

²⁸ See for example, Alexei Barrionuevo, "How Oklahoma City Remembers --- Survivors of Bombing Fought With Families of the Dead To Have Say in Memorial," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 13, 2001.

²⁹ It was only in a Chicago Sun piece that Bob Johnson, the chairman of the task force, described himself – alluding to the hardships of the memorialization process – as “53 going on 72.” (Lois Romano, Squabbles Divide Oklahoma City on Blast Memorial, *Chicago Sun*, March 27, 1996.)

Zero. Goldberger's astute assessment of the Spreiregen chapter of the Oklahoma memorial was that

By almost every professional standard, Spreiregen was right. Victims' families can't be expected to make a knowing judgment about what constitutes the best public memorial. Giving them control would seem to be a concession to a kind of victims' culture, elevating sentiment over any other value. In the end, however, [task force chairman Bob] Johnson's gamble that he could trust the families proved to be right, in large part because the mission statement set forth a program for the memorial that made the kitsch that Spreiregen feared almost impossible [because] [...] the language of the mission statement was too sophisticated for angels and praying hands.

Goldberger's justification of Spreiregen's view, and his labeling of Oklahoma's memorialization strategy as a "gamble," would have been considered offensive in the Oklahoma local context (so would have been his views on some of the elements of the finalized memorial, which he thought to be overly explicit and entertaining.)

Goldberger was not the first journalist to doubt the victim-led strategy. One of the earliest and most notable accounts of Oklahoma's memorialization effort was Jesse Katz's April 19, 1997 *Los Angeles Times* piece, "Memorial: A Driving Need for Catharsis." In this lengthy and detailed piece, published on the occasion of the attack's second anniversary, Katz addressed a question that the local Oklahoma press could not have acknowledged: Was the memorialization process progressing too quickly, and did it suffer from the overwhelming influence of victims' emotions? Could a slower process produce a memorial that would present a clearer-sighted perception of the place of the event in American history? By casting doubt over one of

the underlying principles of the process – memorialization as therapy – Katz underscored the Oklahoma press's ideological and professional shortcomings. A monument, he argued, had to begin with a long wait, "long enough for the painful act to be cast in a patriotic or heroic light." But the victims needed to act immediately and immerse themselves in memorialization, because, as a bereaved Oklahoma mother was quoted as saying in the piece, "we're desperately searching for some sense out of the senselessness, and this is one way we can find that."

None of the professionals quoted in Katz's piece had appeared in the *Oklahoman* or the *Journal Record*. While this is predictable with respect to sources such as New York professors, it is less so with respect to the University of Oklahoma history professor, William W. Savage, who observed in Katz's piece that the Oklahoma community was developing an unhealthy fetish for the tragedy in the form of an overly grand memorial. Savage's opinions never found their way to the pages of the local press.

The fact that Katz was not a local reporter, but a distant critic at the *Los Angeles Times*, allowed him to write about the far-off events in Oklahoma with more than a hint of cynicism. Describing the design competition entries, he noted that many

took very literal note of the blast's numerology, proposing centerpieces with 168 pillars, 168 flags, 168 trees, 168 fallen logs, 168 fountains, 168 wishing wells, 168 garden plots and 168 windmills, which would allow the dead spirits to soar in

"the breath of the blowing wind." One offered a bell tower with 168 different chimes, rising from an acrylic pool with broken children's toys molded into the plastic water.

The *Oklahoman* and the *Journal Record* never itemized the numerically based proposals. They would never risk the trivialization that might be associated with such enumeration.

While the Oklahoma City bombing was and still is considered an eminent chapter in the history of American political mass-crime, second only to September 11, 2001, the coverage of the Oklahoma memorialization effort reveals a difference in perspective between local and national coverage, with the national press demonstrating an approach less committed to the victims than the local press. This distinction between local and national coverage did not characterize the coverage of the memorialization of September 11, 2001, hence the phrase "We are all New Yorkers." But as 9/11 victims' involvement in the planning of Ground Zero was becoming institutionalized, the New York press was the first to express unease with respect to some victims, their motives and agenda.

Ground Zero

During the 10 years that passed between 9/11 and the inauguration of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, the gaping hole at the place where the Twin Towers used to stand, and where 2,749 people lost their lives on September 11,

2001, has come to symbolize more than the horror and death that befell on New York City that day. For years, that hole also represented paralysis. The ongoing confrontations between landowners, government agencies and 9/11 victims created a continuous near-deadlock in the planning and construction process of Ground Zero. As Deborah Sontag wrote in a September 11th *New York Times* 2006 anniversary piece, “The combination of big money, prime real estate, bottomless grief, artistic ego and dreams of legacy transformed ground zero into a mosh pit of stakeholders banging heads over billions in federal aid, tax breaks and insurance proceeds.”³⁰

Ground Zero was probably the most politically explosive memorialization project in modern United States history. Unlike the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, which similarly sanctified victims of an international conflict, the newly constructed Ground Zero site had to address the World Trade Center’s iconic past as the financial center of the world and a New York—albeit not necessarily celebrated—architectural landmark. The new complex was expected to revivify that past to the extent possible and to revitalize downtown Manhattan. At the same time, the memorial and the museum within it had to offer an interpretation of the consequences of September 11th, 2001. To name one challenging aspect, the memorial complex had been oftentimes called to offer an honest assessment of the American antiterrorism and military responses to September 11, including such hotly-debated topics as the Patriot Act, the War in Iraq and Afghanistan, and perhaps even the CIA’s “black sites” and the torture at Abu Ghraib. With time, as new chapters of anti-Western terrorism were being written, and as American troop deployment in the Middle East

³⁰ Deborah Sontag, The Hole in the City Heart, *The New York Times*, September 11, 2006.

continued, the interpretive burden on the September 11th memorial—to those who held that expectation from memorialization—became ever heavier.

The design competition to rebuild the site and the towers included opportunities for the public to participate in the various choices involved. The immensity and complexity of the task, combined with the general invitation for public participation, brought 9/11 family members to unite and form organizations that pursued specific purposes, large and small, within the site, such as a park or the separation of the firefighters' names from those of the civilian victims on the name walls. There can be no doubt as to the most important 9/11 families' memorialization campaign, in that it had the most influence on the ideological framework of the site. This was the battle won by a families' organization called Take Back the Memorial, when it succeeded in the summer of 2005 in irrevocably cancelling the construction of the planned International Freedom Center (IFC) within the memorial complex. The IFC battle will be contrasted in this chapter with another pivotal battle that involved 9/11 families, the national dispute over Park51, the Islamic cultural complex to be built two blocks away from Ground Zero. The changes in the social attitudes toward 9/11 victims in the past decade reflect the different roles that the victims have been playing in the Park51 conflict.

The IFC dispute

The idea for the IFC—the International Freedom Center—was conceived shortly after the attacks by the New York investor Tom A. Bernstein. The IFC was meant to complement the memorial and the museum. While both of the latter were to tell the story of September 11, the IFC’s focus would have been the larger theme of freedom. Freedom, argued Bernstein, was the fundamental ideal of the United States; freedom, interpreted by hard-core Islamists as Western nihilism, was the ideological target of the perpetrators of the attacks. The IFC would insist on America’s commitment to freedom through exhibitions that would illustrate pivotal chapters in the history of the ideal, such as the abolition of slavery, as well as current struggles for independence worldwide. The Ground Zero site would further demonstrate the theme of freedom through its most central project, the Freedom Tower, designed by Daniel Libeskind.

Initially, the IFC and the philosophy behind it were welcomed by the Bush administration and New York’s governing and political elites. In June 2004, the IFC, together with the Joyce Theater, the Drawing Center and the Signature Theater Company, were selected from more than 100 competing cultural institutions to occupy the memorial complex. The IFC continued to materialize through the selection of an architectural design. But while the IFC seemed to be underway, victims’ opposition began to surface, both in meetings with the various government agencies responsible for rebuilding Ground Zero, and in the news media.



Figure 13: The chosen International Freedom Center design plan by Snohetta

The IFC dispute was the most victim-dominated political battle over Ground Zero. There were other important battles, such as the insistence of 9/11 families that the footprints of the towers remain empty. Indeed, the reflecting pools in Michael Arad's design conformed to this principle, powerfully combining the symbolic powers of Foote's most dramatic memorialization responses, sanctification *and* obliteration. Nevertheless, 9/11 families took part in the IFC dispute much more than the New York public, and the struggle underscored the families' claim of ideological ownership over the site.

As in my examination of other memorial projects in this chapter, here too, I was looking to assess the journalistic attitude toward the 9/11 family members involved in the IFC dispute within the framework of the Experience-Argument Scale. Specifically, I was looking to evaluate the tension between journalistic deference to the victims and adherence to the ideal of objectivity. For this purpose, I examined the full coverage of the IFC dispute in the *New York Post* and the *Daily News*. Being quintessential New York papers—long-established tabloids that compete fiercely for mainly working-class and ethnic readers in the outer boroughs—these publications were inclined to reflect the strongest sentiment toward the events of 9/11 and the victims, and to be in the most difficult position to criticize the victims. As a contrast, I also surveyed the coverage in the more elite, nationally focused *New York Times*.

The political partisanship that underlined the dispute made the New York papers' job ever more difficult. This was not only about family members who wished for a certain memorial design. This was about family members who rejected a universal interpretation, suspected as liberal, of September 11th.

The planning of the IFC took place over a period of almost four years, from early 2002 until the summer of 2005. Attacks by 9/11 family members over the IFC began very late in the process, in June 2005 (a year after it was selected), but nevertheless the ensuing war was brief, leading to the IFC's demise within an astonishingly short period of two months. The first 9/11 family member to publicly criticize the IFC was Debra Burlingame, sister of Charles "Chic" Burlingame, the pilot of American Airlines Flight 77 which crashed into the Pentagon on September

11. In June 2005, Burlingame, who served as member of the board of directors of the World Trade Center Memorial Foundation, contributed an op-ed piece to the *Wall Street Journal*, in which she claimed that the IFC was a far-left, anti-patriotic Trojan horse.³¹ She warned that

rather than a respectful tribute to our individual and collective loss, they [visitors to Ground Zero] will get a slanted history lesson, a didactic lecture on the meaning of liberty in a post-9/11 world. They will be served up a heaping foreign policy discussion over the greater meaning of Abu Ghraib and what it portends for the country and the rest of the world.

All of that, argued Burlingame, would serve to obscure the real purpose of the site, that of commemorating the dead. She ended her piece asking, "Ground Zero has been stolen, right from under our noses. How do we get it back?" Debra Burlingame's piece, published by the prominent and well-respected *Wall Street Journal*, was immediately echoed by a group of 9/11 family members, expressly affiliated with a small families' organization called Take Back the Memorial. Although Take Back the Memorial comprised of a core of no more than two-dozen family member activists, it succeeded in portraying itself at that early point in the process as the voice of the victims, as no other victim family members tried to change that frame. Seizing the momentum spurred by Burlingame's piece, Take Back the Memorial held that same month an anti-IFC protest at Ground Zero. The morning of the demonstration, the *New York Post* announced that a "Rally will Hit 'Blame U.S' Exhibit."³²

³¹ Debra Burlingame, "The Great Ground Zero Heist," *Wall Street Journal*, June 7, 2005

³² Andi Soltis, "Rally will Hit 'Blame U.S' Exhibit," *New York Post*, June 20, 1995

In what seemed to be a direct result of this effort, then-New York Governor George Pataki and other government officials began expressing doubts over the IFC's mission. New York Senator Dem. Hillary Rodham Clinton, reported the *New York Post*, stated unequivocally that as far as Ground Zero was concerned, the families had to be satisfied.³³ Clinton, who as a Democrat would perhaps have been expected to support the IFC, chose to support the families' objections.

At a time when he was supposed to celebrate the materialization of his vision, Tom Bernstein was suddenly put in a position where he had to defend the fundamental idea of the project. A mere month after Burlingame's op-ed piece, the *Daily News*' headline ran "WTC Museum Not Anti-U.S., Boss Vows."³⁴ Three weeks later, on July 31, 2005, a *Daily News* editorial, titled "Taking Back Ground Zero" – a headline clearly echoing "Take Back the Memorial" – asked: "Hallowed ground? Yes. Public Square? No. The Freedom Center cannot entertain intellectual free-for-alls and guarantee the sanctity of the site."

The strength of the anti-IFC victim-led message was such that it succeeded in leading the *Daily News* to object to the IFC's capacity as a discussion forum. Paradoxically, the paper was in the odd position of advocating for limited freedom of speech in Ground Zero.

³³ Deborah Orin, "Hill No! Nixes 9/11 Freedom Ctr," *The New York Post*, September 24, 2005

³⁴ Douglas Feiden, "WTC Museum Not Anti-U.S., Boss Vows," *Daily News*, July 7, 2005

All the while, New York tabloids were not behaving as an adequate forum themselves as far as the future of the IFC was concerned. The *Daily News* in its editorials repeatedly stood by Take Back the Memorial, pushing Tom Bernstein to desperate promises that the museum would never denigrate America. Not only did the paper never give Bernstein an opportunity to convince New Yorkers that the museum was an ethical, non-political institution appropriate for the site, but it also avoided extending the forum beyond the predictable triangle of Take back the Memorial members, government officials and Tom Bernstein himself.

The *Post* similarly celebrated the opposition to the IFC. It ran more than 20 editorials against it, and many of its “hard news” pieces featured the family member-activists’ side, and that side only,³⁵ in the most provocative terms, such as “Let the ‘Blame America’ crowd find another spot. Hey, what about somewhere in Iran?” said Church Parish of Oakhurst, Calif.”

The generally acknowledged political differences between the left-leaning *Daily News* and the right-leaning *New York Post* did not play a role in this case, where both publications adamantly supported the anti-IFC line. What was markedly missing from the IFC coverage by these publications were the independent voices of academics, human rights activists, plain New Yorkers or any other group who could have provided broader perspectives on the topic. To be sure, the press’s immediate

³⁵ Tom Topousis, “9/11 Kin Despise Revise of Freedom Center,” *New York Post*, September 7, 2005; Tom Topousis, “WTC Kin and Congress Turn Up the Heat,” *New York Post*, September 23, 2005.

support for Take Back the Memorial also reflected the fact that the political establishment was not divided on this issue, as both New York Republican and Democratic leaders stated that the consent of 9/11 families in this matter was paramount. Eventually, the IFC was formally cancelled in August 2005.

Take Back the Memorial's victory over the International Freedom Center took place at a time when the press were almost, although not yet, ready to examine claims of 9/11 families with criticism. Throughout 2006, as New Yorkers were beginning to lose their patience with the constant delays in the Ground Zero rebuilding process, 9/11 family members were increasingly scrutinized for vetoing any design for the site that endowed it with broader meaning than the mass grave of their loved ones.

Indeed, at the pivotal moment of the cancellation of the IFC, in August 2005, New York journalists had not been ready yet to evaluate the IFC dispute with the same notion of balance that characterized day-to-day political journalism. And when that moment arrived, somewhere in 2006, when time had taken its toll on the victims' authority and the local press was finally ready to question the victims' claims with respect to the IFC, it was already too late for the IFC to achieve reconsideration. This is not to say, that lessened deference to the victims in an earlier phase of the debate would have necessarily reversed the fate of the IFC. Rather, the point here is that the delay in the restoration of professional norms meant that a meaningful, timely public debate on the appropriateness of the IFC within Ground Zero was essentially denied.

While my examination centered on the *Daily News* and the *New York Post*, I surveyed the *New York Times'* coverage as well to learn how this elite publication, which caters national readership and is widely considered the U.S.'s "paper of record," navigated the IFC dispute. The *Times'* coverage was similar to that of the tabloids in one respect, in that the IFC saga was treated as a "dispute" between existing "sides." The *Times* did not enrich the debate with views of potentially independent thinkers, such as directors of similar museums, historians or memorial design specialists.

Despite this limitation, the *Times'* coverage of the dispute was more balanced than the tabloids', and provided Tom Bernstein with greater opportunities to express his vision and his hopes that the center would ultimately materialize.³⁶ The *New York Times* also attributed the family members with a lesser role in the cancellation of the IFC, and chose to frame the debate in general, non-political terms, rather than the tabloids' "victims vs. Bernstein" or "left vs. right" frames. In a typical September 29, 2005 piece, the *Times* reported that

A growing number of critics—whom Mr. Pataki was trying to mollify—contended that the center would take away space that could be used for a museum devoted solely to 9/11 and that it would detract from the solemnity of the memorial by focusing on geopolitics and on national and international social history.³⁷

³⁶ For example: David W. Dunlap, "Freedom Center in Doubt," *The New York Times*, September 25, 2005

³⁷ For example: David W. Dunlap, "Pataki Solution on Museum Flies in Face of Planning," *The New York Times*, September 29, 2005

This interpretation of Take Back the Memorial’s position was a generous one in the sense that it did not frame their opposition as “political”, but as “moral.” While Debra Burlingame and Take Back the Memorial were clearly and consistently expressing their concerns that the founders of the IFC would form it in their liberal image and that the resulting institution would come out as anti-patriotic, the *Times*’s coverage nevertheless distanced the entire debate from political partisanship. In a way, by denying them their self-proclaimed political frame of reference, the *New York Times* was displaying a unique form of deference to the Take Back the Memorial’s family member-victims.

The provisional nature of deference

The cancellation of the IFC in November of 2005 triggered, for the first time, open criticisms of the victims. The most accusatory of them was Robert Kolker’s *New York Magazine* piece “The Grief Police.”³⁸ Like the *Times*, *New York Magazine* had a loyal hometown base and did a lot of “service” journalism, and similarly to the *Times*, it strived for a credible national presence with investigative and political pieces. The national dimensions of these publications allowed them, given the passage of the adequate time from September 11, to be the first to abandon the deferential perspective and to dare and criticize family members.

In “The Grief Police,” Kolker described Take Back the Memorial in

38 Robert Kolker, “The Grief Police,” *New York Magazine*, November 29, 2005.

unprecedentedly harsh terms, as a "self-interested obstructionist force that could hold up Ground Zero's progress for years, banishing any sign of cultural life downtown – except, perhaps, for the culture of mourning."

Kolker's piece signaled the end of the "grace," protective period that the American press granted 9/11 victims. Deborah Sontag, for example, could comment in a 2006 anniversary piece dedicated to the continuing problems in Ground Zero, titled "The Hole in the City Heart,"³⁹ that [family members] "have come to be seen by some community, business and redevelopment leaders as impediments to progress. Some view the advocates as self-appointed and unrepresentative; others, in private conversations, describe them heatedly as radical or loopy or desperate for attention."

The victims' diminishing visibility in the Ground Zero context underscored a shift from journalistic deference to level-headedness and even criticism, conveying an important lesson: nobody, not even victims of political violence, is invulnerable to the sobering effects of time.

Derailing the IFC, for example, was Take Back the Memorial's most considerable and last success. The organization's later public campaign, to call off Michael Arad's belowground memorial in favor of a much larger street-level memorial center, did not meet the same spirit of deference and failed.

³⁹ Deborah Sontag, "The Hole in the City Heart," *The New York Times*, September 11, 2006.

2010: The Park51 Muslim Community Center

When the battle over the planned Muslim community center—known as “Park51” or the Cordoba House project—erupted in May 2010, it became clear that not only was the ideological war over Ground Zero far from over, its scope was also widening. Geographically, remembrance was now seen as expanding beyond the Ground Zero site to the entire Lower Manhattan area. It also concerned a wider range of values: this was not the case of family members claiming a personalized, victim-based memorial, nor was this a conflict along the lines of the IFC dispute, between a so-called “American” vs. a universal interpretation of September 11. Rather, Park51 raised explosive questions about the legitimacy of and the tolerance to Islam in a post-9/11 United States.

The controversy began when Muslim-American leader and Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf presented before the Lower Manhattan Community Board his plan for a 13-story Muslim Community Center at 51 Park St., two blocks from Ground Zero. The idea of a Muslim institution in such close proximity to the Ground Zero site induced massive and fierce opposition, mostly from the political right. Opponents took particular offense at the fact that the proposed center included a mosque—they dubbed the entire project “the Ground Zero Mosque”—and expressed outrage at the idea that the Ground Zero area would host an institution celebrating Islam, the same religion in whose name Al Qaeda attacked on September 11, 2001.

For a while, the Park51 project seemed to have weathered its opposition. It succeeded in obtaining all necessary official approvals, as well as explicit endorsements by New York mayor Michael Bloomberg and, on August 14th 2010, by President Obama. Nevertheless, the unrelenting opposition led the projects' leaders to reconsider its location as well as its mission—to date, they have opened the center at the existing Park51 building but have not begun construction work on the new and bigger facility—and it is unclear whether the project, in its planned form, will materialize at all, as it is struggling to meet its fundraising goals.⁴⁰

The Park51 controversy, despite its much higher profile, shared important similarities with the IFC dispute. Both involved a conflict between those who wanted to limit the 9/11 story to the brutal attack on the US by Islamic extremism (a vision of a monument that concentrated on the American experience of the attack; a downtown Manhattan that was free of any site celebrating Islam) and those who wished for a more expansive narrative that accommodated larger themes and constituencies (a museum that drew comparisons between 9/11 and international experiences; a downtown Manhattan that accommodated Islamic institutions of worship). Both the IFC and the Park51 disputes were similarly delineated by partisan lines.

⁴⁰ A legal suit issued by a former New York fire fighter challenged the Landmarks Preservation Commission's decision to deny landmark status, and thereby allow demolition, of Park51's location—45-47 Park Place—a decision that had potentially paved the way for Park51's new tower. The New York Supreme Court dismissed the claim on the grounds that the plaintiff did not have a legal standing in this issue. This reasoning suggests that the process of diminishing deference to the victims of September 11 was taking place in all areas of public life—not only within the press or the political establishment but also within the judicial system.

And, both conflicts, five years apart, involved the morally charged voices of 9/11 family members and 9/11 families' organizations. But while in 2005 the public was exposed only to those family members who fought the IFC in the name of so-called patriotism, the coverage of the Park51 controversy offered a variety of victims' opinions. In 2010, there was no single person, group or organization that could be taken as representative of the 9/11 families population. As Talking Points Memo (TPM) editor Josh Marshall explained in his August 15, 2010 Editor's Blog:⁴¹

Since almost three thousand people died as a result of the attacks, many thousands count as family members of the dead. And given that the public at large is at best divided over the mosque question and likely on balance against it, it stands to figure that there's a similar spectrum of opinion among these families. Yet I have not seen any *clear evidence* that as a group these people are against the Cordoba House project.

Although some victim-protagonists of the IFC dispute were also active here, this time they faced a more complicated environment that resisted domination by a single group or voice, and journalists—such as Josh Marshall—who were sensitive to the diversity of opinion within the family members' population. Debra Burlingame, for example, the IFC's most conspicuous opponent, assumed a leading, vocal role against the Park51 initiative.⁴² Most New York news publications granted her anti-Park51 message considerable exposure, similar to that that characterized her anti-IFC

⁴¹ http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2010/08/getting_some_facts_on_the_table.php?ref=fpblg

⁴² Ms. Burlingame posted a statement explaining her objections to Park51 in a website of the organization that she had co-founded, "9/11 families for Safe and Strong America." This organization was part of the "Coalition to Honor Ground Zero," "a coalition of American citizens who are deeply concerned about the proposed building of a mega-mosque and Islamic Center at Ground Zero." See <http://stopthe911mosque.com/2010/08/14/911-families-stunned-presidents-support-of-mosque-at-ground-zero/>

campaign. Indeed, the *Wall Street Journal* did not publish a Burlingame op-ed piece this time, but when it reported on President's Obama's endorsement of Park51 it quoted Burlingame within that story as saying that "this president has abandoned the American people."⁴³ The *New York Post*, which repeatedly expressed unequivocal objection to Park51, presented Burlingame regularly as a source of angry opposition. When it reported on the Muslim Center's bid for federal funds, Burlingame was quoted as arguing that "this [was] federal money, it was not intended to fund a propaganda issue."⁴⁴ And she was also critical of Mayor Bloomberg in a *Post* investigation of what the paper termed "cozy" relationship between the Mayor's staff and the founders of Park51.⁴⁵

Burlingame was similarly featured in the *Daily News*. Like the *Post*, the *Daily News* objected Park51. In an unusual piece, the *Daily News* set out to find alternative Lower Manhattan locations for Park 51. Burlingame refused to approve any of the suggested sites, explaining that "you had destruction from river to river... People had body parts on their windowsills... The idea that you can just mark off an area and say, 'That's what Ground Zero is,' is crazy."⁴⁶

⁴³ D. Barrett & J. Weisman, "Obama Defends Plan for Mosque Near Ground Zero," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 14, 2010.

⁴⁴ T. Topousis, "GZ Mosque in 9/11 Cash Grab," the *New York Post*, November 23, 2010.

⁴⁵ S. Goldenberg, "City Hall Ghostwrote GZ Mosque's Letter," the *New York Post*, December 24, 2010.

⁴⁶ Michael McAuliff and Larry McShane, "News Finds Alternate Sites for Park51 but They Don't Pass Muster With Mosque Opponents, *The Daily News*, August 25, 2010

But differently than in the IFC coverage, Burlingame's message was now contrasted by the dissenting voices of fellow victims. One was former U.S Solicitor General Ted Olson, a 9/11 widower, who expressed support for the Park51 project on the basis of religious freedom. *The Daily News* reported on Olson's position, describing him as an "unlikely source" of support for President Obama in the matter.⁴⁷ Olson may have been noted as an "unlikely" supporter of Park51 because of his conservative politics, but perhaps also because he was a victim, and as such, had been automatically assumed to belong to Park51's opposition.

Park51 also gained the public support of the 9/11 families' organization September 11 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, which existed at the time of the IFC dispute but did not take an active role in it. Peaceful Tomorrows will be described in detail in Chapter 4, as it has been the leading 9/11 families-oriented anti-war group. The political leanings of the *Daily News* the *New York Post* may have prevented them from accommodating an organization that believed in the peace making power of the dialogue between 9/11 victims and civilian victims of violence worldwide, including victims of American military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The *Post* did, however, publish a pro-Park51 opinion piece by Peaceful Tomorrows member Adele Welty.⁴⁸ But even without the help of New York tabloids, Peaceful Tomorrow's message found its way to the *Huffington Post* and *Salon.com*. If 9/11 relatives had been assumed thus far to be associated with a view of Ground Zero as solely dedicated to the victims, and as particularly sensitive to patriotic notions, Ted Olson

⁴⁷ Thomas M. Defrank and Kenneth R. Bazinet, "President Obama has 'No Regrets' over Ground Zero Mosque Remarks," *The Daily News*, August 18, 2010.

⁴⁸ Adele Welty, "A Time for Peace," *The New York Post*, August 4, 2010

and Peaceful Tomorrows proved it wrong. Dona Marsh O'Connor, the National Spokesperson for Peaceful Tomorrows explained in a *Huffington Post* column that when people justified their positions by the “sensitivities of the 9/11 families,” they should have asked themselves—

what about the sensitivities of families like mine and hundreds of others who join me in supporting the Islamic Center? Are our loved ones somehow less worthy than those of family members who oppose its construction? I am sensitive to what I believe is a threat to religious freedom, to the First Amendment, to our hallowed Constitution. I am sensitive to the notion that, in the name of my daughter, an entire religion is being demonized for the acts of a group of heinous criminals.⁴⁹

The left-leaning *Huffington Post* also brought forth another pro-Park51 novel perspective, and that of 9/11 Muslim family members, who expressed anger at their stereotypical association with the perpetrators rather than with the victims.⁵⁰

While the tabloids presented more varied perspectives of 9/11 victims than they had done previously, the *New York Times*'s Park51 coverage demonstrated a more dramatic change, as far as the victims were concerned. While in 2005 the *Times* reported extensively on Burlingame's opposition to the IFC, it hardly mentioned her opposition to Park51. In fact, *the Times coverage generally overlooked the victims.* This suggests that almost ten years after 9/11, the power of the victims—as far as the *New York Times* was concerned—had eroded to a point where they were no longer seen as an indispensable feature of Ground Zero coverage. With time, their image had

⁴⁹ Donna Marsh O'Connor, The Sensitivities of 9/11 Families, *The Huffington Post*, September 9, 2010

⁵⁰ Omar Sacirbey, Another Wound for 9/11 Muslims Who Lost Loved Ones on September 11, *The Huffington Post*, August 9, 2010

been tainted by proclamations of political convictions, by overt alliances with political players, and perhaps by the suspicion that they had turned into “professional” victims.

When the *Times* outlined the contending forces in the Park51 debate, family members were mostly absent and instead of possible incarnations of Take Back the Memorial, the most vociferous dissent seemed to have come from “*conservative bloggers*.” Indeed, in the years that passed since the domination of victims over the IFC dispute, the growing blogosphere allowed the cultivation of a new class of bloggers, whose private-persons-turned-activists role partially overlapped with the one formerly reserved to the victims.

Like victims, bloggers were perceived as having no professional stake and no motive besides sheer public mindedness and an ambition to influence public policymaking. But unlike victims, who spoke in personal terms and whose arguments assumed the validity of sacrifice and grief, bloggers had the privilege of speaking on behalf of an unequivocally identified and often celebrated political identity. Bloggers saved journalists from the dilemmas that came with victims’ coverage: the temptation and reluctance to expose victims’ partisanship and the fear of unseemly journalistic criticism. Indeed, as I will explore in detail in Chapter 4, victims typically employed a “mom discourse” (Eliasoph, 1998) in a conscious or unconscious effort to deflect dissent (e.g. “my late husband wouldn’t want this country to...”), while bloggers freed journalists from the paralyzing effects of that discourse.

In its Park51 coverage, the *Times* paid particular attention—including an extensive profile piece⁵¹—to Pamela Geller, a Manhattan conservative blogger who was becoming the face of the Park51 opposition. The Executive Director of “Stop Islamization of America,” Geller displayed a flamboyant public persona and became a constant news television commentator in a way that many compared to that of Ann Coulter. She was, allegedly, responsible for branding Park51 “the Ground Zero Mega-Mosque.”

Ultimately, the coverage of Ground Zero-related disputes until the inauguration of the memorial complex in September 11th, 2011, demonstrated the diminishing power of 9/11 victims. The fact that the victims spoke in multiple voices exacerbated this process. Where they once used to produce a seemingly monolithic message that exerted commanding moral force, with time different victims expressed different positions and their press presence was mostly symbolic: they provided support and legitimacy to the more considerable forces in the final stages of the remembrance battle over Ground Zero—politicians, developers and media pundits.

⁵¹ Anne Barnard & Alan Feuer, “Outraged and Outrageous,” *The New York Times*, October 10, 2010

Chapter 3

Abducted Soldiers

Terrorism is a means to achieve visibility, win recognition, demonstrate the weakness of the attacked community, and in the case of hostage situations, to advance a specific tactical cause, most commonly ransom or a prisoner exchange deal.

Hostage situations, violent political dramas as they are, are considered the epitome of newsworthiness. This is a carefully planned type of newsworthiness, as the perpetrators want—or rather, need—to effectively communicate their multi-layered system of messages (to the targeted community, their own community and the world),

and structure their acts in a way that aspires to accord with the prevalent news criteria of a targeted media system (in their best case, international media).

The hostage crisis plays on the universal attraction to human drama. Nacos (2007) demonstrated this point using one particularly visible hostage crisis, the Abu Sayyaf kidnapping of 10 international tourists, some of them German nationals, and their confinement in the Philippine island of Jolo in the summer of 2000. "Providing much more drama, suspense, and human interest than *Survivor* or *Big Brother*," wrote Nacos, "this reality show was offered, in one version or another, on literally all of Germany's television and radio channels and in the print media as well" (p. 86).

The hostage drama is intensified because so few outcomes are possible. The perpetrators may reach their frustration point, kill the hostages and disappear; a successful negotiation process may secure the hostages' release; a heroic rescue operation may free the hostages, preferably with the perpetrators caught alive and brought to justice, and a failed rescue operation would end with a killing field. These typical, anticipated possible endings lend the hostage situation its brutal simplicity and make it a good, coherent story. To augment the drama even further, perpetrators prefer locations that already have media presence or are easily accessible by the media, and they may also aim for a victim population (or an individual victim) whose profile would increase the targeted community's identification and concern.

The responsibility over the fate of the captured hostage lies with the government of his or her country, according to formal nationality criteria, or with the local government of the location in which he or she is being held. Usually, one of these states has the power to set the terms as of how to handle the situation, including the choice of whether to be in the forefront of the crisis, or whether to seem as a silent partner to the other. Whichever state is in charge of the situation, it must first decide its measure of overt and covert responsibility over the hostage, and devise its release strategy accordingly. The core dilemma that characterizes hostage situations is whether to negotiate with the terrorists or not. If negotiations succeed, the freedom of the hostage comes with a heavy price:

The argument against negotiating with terrorists is simple: Democracies must never give in to violence, and terrorists must never be rewarded for using it. Negotiations give legitimacy to terrorists and their methods and undermine actors who have pursued political change through peaceful means. Talks can destabilize the negotiating government's political systems, undercut international efforts to outlaw terrorism, and set a dangerous precedent (Neumann, 2007:128)

Management of a hostage crisis is an improvised decision-making process, as there are no set rules, or prescribed scenarios, that help regulate the way in which a state should handle it.¹ Even the “negotiation or no negotiation” dichotomy is not necessarily a dichotomy: while the Israeli government (through the Egyptian government) and the PLO were negotiating the release of the Jewish and Israeli hostages held in the Entebbe airport in July 1976, the Israeli government was already

¹ Following the Shalit deal, explored in this chapter, the Israeli government established a special committee, chaired by former Chief Justice Meir Shamger. The committee handed its recommendations to the Israeli cabinet two and a half months following the Shalit deal. The committee's mission was to help resolve future abduction cases by establishing procedures (such as the chain of command within the Israeli government) and specific self-limits for exchange negotiations.

planning the commando raid in which seven hostage-takers were eventually killed, 102 hostages were released and four hostages died. The government's freedom to manage the crisis as it deems fit, including the option to ignore the crisis and leave the hostages for their own devices, turns the public debate about the proper government strategy into a particularly contested field.

Modern terrorism, namely political violence committed during the second half of the 20th century, introduced an increase in high profile kidnappings, largely due to two technological advancements that were beneficial to the terrorist endeavor. The first was the growth of commercial aviation, which allowed terrorists to coerce groups of victims, who bore the particular and desired national identity, into convenient locations, thus diminishing the control of the targeted nation over the situation. In addition, the growing sophistication and prevalence of communication equipment allowed for the visibility of the crises wherever they occurred. For example, hostage takers of the Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics took advantage of the newly introduced television satellites that were designated to transmit the games to a world-wide audience; and in 1985, Hezbollah sent a videotaped recording of the captured CIA agent William Buckley to western news agencies, introducing a method that would soon become standard practice in hostage cases.

Examining coverage of anti-American terrorism between 1980 and 1993, Nacos (1994) argued that terrorists operating abroad succeeded in circumventing the American-centered coverage that characterized domestic attacks. Perpetrators of international terrorism elicited a more internationally oriented coverage, which meant

a deeper contextual emphasis on the regional conflicts in which they were involved and on their political agenda. Clearly, the hostage taking of American citizens outside the U.S. (whether in Beirut, the Philippines, or through U.S. airline hijackings) was, from the perspective of terrorists, more viable than attacks on U.S. soil, and generated more global media coverage.

The widespread fascination with hostage crises has been well explored and theorized by academia, which occasionally criticized news organizations for overplaying the drama and inadvertently serving the hostage takers. Indeed, the conflict and stress that are inherent in the situation, the complex psychology of the hostage-captor relationship, the ongoing agony and anger of the hostages' families and the excruciating dilemmas that present themselves to the crisis managers present a mix of action-film, thriller and reality show drama that seems import itself from the realm of Hollywood entertainment into the realm of news.

One strand of scholarship explored the mythical, theatrical qualities of the hostage crisis and provided dramaturgical analyses of the hostage scene. One of the first illustrations of terrorism as a case of media seduction was offered by John Bowyer Bell in his short 1978 essay "Terrorist Scripts and Live Action Spectaculars" in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, where he portrayed the dramatic elements of the spectacular terrorism of the 1970s. The essay provided a vivid, almost cinematic account of the way that the media at the 1972 Munich hostage crisis were playing into the hands of the terrorists: The Olympic compound was fully equipped with up-to-date media facilities; the place was swarming with thousands of journalists and

cameramen; the Olympic games provided an opportunity for the Black September terrorists to disrupt a peaceful multi-national event and bring worldwide attention to the plight of the Palestinian people; but most importantly, the hostage drama presented, for the first time, real, live violence with an uncertain outcome. In its final phase, it included a change of scenery, as the cameras followed the bus that drove the terrorists and the hostages to the Munich-Riem airport (Bell 1978: 48-50). In his writing, Bell (1931-2003), an American terrorism expert who was also a painter and an art critic, drew on his artistic sensibilities to extract the most gripping elements of the Munich crisis and juxtapose them with descriptions of eager, rushing journalists. When describing the “terrorist script” of the 1976 Entebbe hostage crisis, Bell appreciated the fact that the Israeli raid provided an unexpected turn to the story. Terrorism gave the best quality news, but when the terrorists lost control over the situation, it became even better. Or in Bell's words, "what made the Israeli commando raid on Entebbe Airport doubly dramatic was that the terrorists had not written in that role; they were as stunned as would be a theater audience if Hamlet refused to die or Macbeth won out in the last act" (Bell 1978: 49).

Studies that conducted a methodical comparison of the scope of media attention granted to various types of attacks were able to discern the elements that were particularly attractive. Jenkins, in a somewhat cold-blooded study, argued that hostage situations elicited more coverage than bombings, despite the fact that they culminated in fewer casualties than bombings, because the hostage crisis was a situation in which “human life hangs on the balance. [...] By contrast, a death [in a

bombing], even many deaths, are news for only a few days. They lack suspense and are soon forgotten" (Jenkins 1978: 119).

Another strand of scholarship reviewed media coverage of hostage situations from a political science perspective that focused on public opinion and its political implications. Nacos (1994), for example, recognized the potentially deleterious effects of hostage situations on the stability of the government of the attacked community. The Iran hostage crisis of 1979-1980, for example, impaired President Carter's leadership to the degree that he lost the 1980 reelections (Nacos, 1994: 28-29, 80).² In retrospect, Nacos (2007) believes, President Carter was judged too harshly, and was not sufficiently appreciated for bringing the hostages home safely, as well as for the fact that no hostage was harmed during the almost 15 months of the crisis (except for one U.S. serviceman, killed in an accident during a failed rescue operation).

The hostage drama involves three circles of victimhood: the direct victims are the captive individuals, the hostages, who are often hidden from view, their whereabouts unknown, and their voice rarely heard. Their victimization means the indirect yet brutal victimization of their families. Relatives of hostages are considered "secondary victims," who fully qualify as "victims," here and elsewhere in this dissertation, as they are the hostages' extensions and representatives, emotionally and

² According to Nacos's analysis, the Iran hostage crisis initially stimulated a rallying effect, but that faded with the administration's on-going failure to end the crisis, combined with the journalistic tendency to report the dissent of the administration's political opponents. Public opinion thus shifted accordingly, with more Americans willing to abandon the initial tough stance that characterized the rallying phase and concede to the Iranian demands.

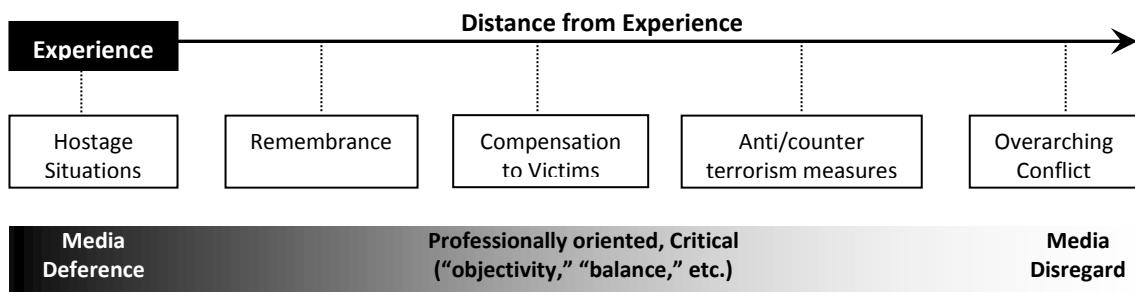
also practically. Family members work with, or against, the relevant governments, and sometimes achieve dialogue with the hostage takers, in order to secure the release of their loved ones. Family members are situated in the eye of the media storm. The third circle of victimhood involves the national or otherwise defined group from which the hostages were selected.

This dissertation focuses on the hostages' families, and much less on the hostages themselves. This is because the journalistic treatment of the hostages is bound to be enthusiastic and compassionate, reflecting the collective concern over their well-being. Any sign of life or communication from them achieves media dominance, a fact that is well known to the captors, who strategically release videos and photos of hostages to keep negotiations alive and increase their bargaining power. The families, however, are in a more vulnerable place. As the crisis prolongs, and as information about the hostages becomes scarce and chances for their safe return decrease, family members are susceptible to the gradual loss of public, and media, interest.

Nevertheless, family members, along with the hostages themselves, occupy the highest-interest incidents in the news repertoire and as national symbols they are accorded with deferential journalistic treatment. As ordinary citizens who are suddenly, violently, and potentially indefinitely detained by a hostile organization, the hostages (and their families) are situated at the deference end of the Experience-Argument Scale. Their ordeal—the Experience—is taking place in present time, pertaining directly to their Argument—that is the plea for their release. This complete

convergence between the experience and the task of the victims—namely freedom—puts them in the most favorable journalistic place.

The Experience-Argument Scale



The 1985 TWA airliner hijacking illustrated this point well. This case may well have been the most coverage-intensive hostage crisis in American media, dominating the evening network news for the 17 consecutive days of the crisis. American network news flew their leading anchorpersons to the hostage scene in Beirut to interview the hostages and their families, and to participate in the press conference that the Shiite captors organized.

The massive exposure of the crisis and the media's compliance with the hostage takers' plan became a source of vast criticism, culminating in the decision of the United States Congress House Committee on Foreign Affairs to conduct *Hearings on the Media, Diplomacy and Terrorism in the Middle East*, which featured the testimonies of a variety of military experts, scholars and news professionals (such as Ben Bagdikian and Peter Jennings). Most agreed that the hysterical coverage of the

Beirut hostage scene pushed the Reagan administration to concede to the terrorists' demands. Democrat Representative Thomas Luken argued that American media "have yet to learn how to avoid serving as the 'ransom' that is now paid to terrorists who take hostages. Many of the members of the sub-committee are deeply concerned about the astonishing spectacle of TV news shows from the Middle East apparently co-produced by television and the terrorists."

The TWA hostage crisis required a new conceptualization, within communication theory, of the role of the media in times of violent crises. It was this incident that led Gabriel Weimann (1987) to suggest that spectacular, live terrorism shared major attributes with Katz and Dayan's media events³ frame, meriting the constitution of a fourth media events category that he termed Coercions.⁴ Unlike traditional media events, Coercions were pre-produced by terrorists rather than by news organizations or the state. As terrorism strove for the world's attention, it needed to employ the most dramatic and commanding form of visual content, and to produce a live broadcast that would hijack the scheduled broadcast and coerce audiences into

³ For a discussion of the inclusion of terrorism within the framework of media events, see Chapter 1. Katz and Dayan's media events were historical occasions when all news media united in the simultaneous, celebratory coverage of national events. In the past, Media Events combined live transmission of the actual event, from its designated location, with studio commentary (Katz and Dayan, 1992). Today, Media Events involve multiple production crews, who broaden the coverage to include the informal gatherings that typically surround Media Events. For example, a Media Event from the Contest category, which involves a national athlete, will commonly include her family's reaction as they watch the televised event, as well as cheers from her friends in her hometown bar. Simultaneous online activity would then add another spontaneous layer to the Event, altogether reflecting and reinforcing the prescribed general attitudes toward Media Events—joy, exhilaration and awe.

⁴ As in the traditional classifications of Media Events—Contests, Conquests and Coronations—this was history in the making; the broadcast created a "being there" impact on the viewing audience, which also felt obligated to watch and participate, and the high drama involved heroes and villains (Weimann, 1987). The various adaptations of the Media Events framework to the 24/7 saturated media landscape and to the phenomenon of live, disruptive, spectacular violence is explored more broadly in Chapter 1.

watching. Hence, a new form of media events, of the pre-planned catastrophe type, was newly offered.

The participation of the *victims* in the live hostage drama answers to an important characteristic of media events. The victims and their families strive for the return of social order, either by way of a victorious onslaught against the hostage-takers, or by way of agreeing to their demands. Either way, the victims express the collective aspiration for the restoration of peace and normality. These ambitions echo the roles that Katz and Dayan (1992) assigned to media events:

Contests are a training ground for the construction of social institutions based on rules (p. 28) [...] Like Contests, Coronations proceed according to strict rules, dictated by tradition rather than by negotiated agreement (p. 36). Coronations remind societies of their cultural heritage, provide reassurance of cultural and societal continuity, and invite the public to take stock. [...] Unlike Contests and Coronations, Conquests tend to break rules. [...] The message of Conquest is that great men and women still reside among us, and that history is in their hands. (p. 37)

Among media events types, hostage situations mostly resemble Contests. Indeed, a hostage situation *is* a violent contest, whereas the victims are the subjects of the good vs. evil relationship of the state and the perpetrators. The hostages and their relatives typically and publicly express (at the outset of the crisis) trust in the government's crisis management capabilities. In their vote of confidence in a morally superior and competent leadership, the victims are important norm-reaffirmation agents within the media events scheme.

With the proliferation and dominance of live mass-mediated mass-violence in the past decade, particularly with respect to the game-changing Al-Qaeda attacks in New York, Washington, Pennsylvania and later London and Madrid, the scholarly need to conceptualize spectacular terrorism within the media events framework became ever more pressing. Chapter 1 described how during the 1990s, the media events framework was challenged, gradually accommodating the possibility of containing “negativity” (for example, James Carey’s *Rituals of Excommunication* as media events that displayed state-sanctioned, institutional humiliation of citizens whose actions were seen to challenge social norms), culminating in Katz and Liebes’s dramatic afterthought to *Media Events* in which they finally modified the concept to contain the frequently growing media dominance of disaster, war and terror (2007). These disruptive media events, however, did not necessarily entail consensus reaffirmation. Rather, they presented the state with a leadership challenge, and in extreme cases, had the potential of surfacing mass opposition that could lead to the overturning of a government.

In a retrospective examination of this alteration of one of the most salient theoretical concepts of communication theory of the past 50 years, it is noteworthy that the first case that was initially offered as the basis for rethinking media events was the 1985 two-week long TWA hostage crisis, which indeed put the Reagan administration in an uncomfortable position, reminiscent of the Carter administration’s indecisive handling of the Iran hostage crisis. It is much in the hands of the hostages’ families to define the crisis, when it is finally resolved, as a government failure or the happy restoration of peace and personal security.

Case analyses – soldier abductions in the U.S. and Israel

The following discussion will survey two exemplary cases from a particular type of hostage situation, the phenomenon of abducted soldiers: Cpl. Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier who was captured by Hamas in 2006 and held for almost five and a half years, and Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, an American soldier abducted by the Afghan Taliban in 2009. The circumstances of these two abductions were quite similar, as both soldiers, who were in their early 20s when captured, were held for long periods of time as bargaining chips for a potential prisoner exchange deal. Both were held in unknown locations controlled by their captor-organizations, with the occasional, and scarce, sign of life. In Gilad Shalit's case, Israel and Hamas reached a deal that secured his eventual return in October 2011. As of this writing in 2014, Bowe Bergdahl is still held in captivity.

The inclusion of the coverage of abducted soldiers within a dissertation about journalistic attitudes toward political activism of terrorism victims requires addressing the following definitional difficulty: How could hostile acts against *soldiers* fit within a discussion of terrorism victims? Organized violence, perpetrated by quasi-military organizations against soldiers in their active line of duty, is typically labeled as “insurgency,” “guerilla activity” or “war,” not “terrorism.” Once the victim, according to this traditional distinction, is a military individual rather than a civilian, the term “terrorism” no longer applies.

This question would raise serious difficulty were this dissertation grounded in a legal or political science frame of reference and applying those disciplines' terminology. However, this is not the case here. This dissertation is grounded in the cultural study of communication, and explores the journalistic manifestations of certain features in the collective identity and in the accepted belief system. The premise of this dissertation is that communities hold victims of political violence in a heroic, cherished place, which the media reflect and validate. As the following sections will illustrate, in Israel, the victimhood that draws the most extreme manifestations of solidarity and angst is that of abducted soldiers. Abducted soldiers, as the Shalit case illustrates perfectly, are perceived as child-victims, first in the hierarchy of victims. So for all intents and purposes of this dissertation, cases of abducted soldiers apply, and should be similarly examined through the Experience-Argument Scale, as they elicit the same journalistic behaviors and challenges as cases that fall in the traditional definition of terrorism.⁵

As the Israeli and American cultures differ in their collective attitudes toward the military and its soldiers, as well as in the relationships between the national press, the government and the military leadership, these differences account for the degree

⁵ The terror effect involved in soldier abduction situations is exacerbated by the captors' denial of any international norms that mandate the humane treatment of prisoners of war, such as those required by the Geneva Convention. This is because hostage takers rarely see themselves as "fighting a war." In their terminology, they are an oppressed party who is forced to rise up through radical measures. Also, abducted soldiers are typically kept out of the reach or influence of international organizations, such as the Red Cross, and they are under the absolute, arbitrary control of the captors with respect to their living conditions and visibility.

of journalistic commitment to the abducted soldiers' cause and provide insights into the different psychological and operational modes of the two news-media systems.

Gilad Shalit—an extraordinary exchange deal

October 18th 2011, the day of 26-year-old Gilad Shalit's return from over five years in Hamas captivity, was an exhilarating day in Israel. All media outlets dedicated themselves to the continuing coverage of Shalit's homecoming. They followed the preparations in Shalit's hometown, at the air force base where he was to meet his parents, and at the border crossing where he was to be handed to Israeli officers. All through the uninterrupted daylong broadcast, journalists and commentators rejoiced at the first sight of Shalit, endlessly replaying the short footage of him emerging from a car next to the Egyptian border, and later of his meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense and the chief of staff, who waited for him on a runway as he disembarked from a helicopter. This was a true media event in its 21st century form, where the event simultaneously took place in different locations – both in the real and the digital world – and the commentary was less scripted and more in tune with the non-formal, emotional presentation style of contemporary news.

Although the Shalit deal involved the simultaneous release of 1027 Palestinian prisoners – among them some masterminds of the deadliest suicide bombings – news media seemed reluctant to spoil the moment of joy for the Shalit family and for the

millions of Israelis who became so identified with it, calling Shalit "the son of all of us." The coverage of the Palestinian prisoners' homecoming was minimal, and Arab-affairs correspondents occasionally apologized for acting on their duty to refer to the Palestinian homecoming on such a day.

While coverage framed Shalit's return as a happy ending, it was only momentarily trying to push aside the fact that Israelis were perplexed and worried that the price Israel had agreed to pay for Shalit's return was too high. Some feared that the exchange deal could prove to be an irresponsible act, a surrender to the popular wish for Shalit's reunion with his family. The opponents of the deal expressed concern for Israel's safety and the limiting of Israel's options when handling future abduction cases.

These fears took two years of aggressive campaigning on the part of the Shalit family to overcome. Israelis' "leap of faith," from dreading a deal to eventually accepting it, reflected in the polls. In 2009, according to an *Israel Hayom* poll, only 52% of Israelis approved of a theoretical exchange deal which included the release of prisoners who had "blood on their hands."⁶ By contrast, a survey conducted by *Yedioth Aharonoth* one day before the execution of the deal showed that 79% of Israelis favored the actual, final deal, which indeed included the release of prisoners who were considered to have had "blood on their hands".⁷ Another survey by *Israel*

⁶ "In Favor of a Deal – Even with Blood on Their Hands," *Israel Hayom*, November 25, 2009. http://www.israelhayom.co.il/site/newsletter_article.php?id=4444 (Hebrew)

⁷ "Poll: 79% of Israelis Support Shalit Deal", *Ynet*, October 17th, 2011, available at <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4135847,00.html>

Hayom, conducted one day before Shalit's release, similarly found that 75.7% of the Israeli public supported the deal.⁸

Before Shalit's release Raviv Drucker, a leading journalist and commentator, had described his objections in his influential blog, expressing them as a series of questions ("as I am only a journalist").⁹ Here are some of Drucker's queries:

Doesn't the release of murderers convey a message for future murderers, that they will not have to pay the full price for their acts?

Doesn't the release of 1,000 prisoners, as a consequence of an abducted soldier, convey a message to the Palestinians and to the Middle East, that Israel responds only to aggression and that aggression is the only way to force Israel into action?

What will we do if in the next time, they will abduct 3 or 10 soldiers?

Up until the day of Shalit's return, many Israelis feared to risk the safety of the general population for the freedom of one man, perceived by many Israelis as "the Boy," but indeed, one man. Notably, however, in the months that passed since the execution of the deal, the debate did not reemerge. To the time of this writing, there have not been any major attacks on Israeli citizens by released prisoners. Ultimately, the deal has seemed not to affect Israelis' sense of personal safety.

⁸ Lapidot, A., (2011) Israel Hayom Finds Most Israelis Support Shalit Deal, *Israel Hayom Newsletter*, October 11th, 2011, available at: http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=1492

⁹ Raviv Drucker's Blog, February 2009. Available at: <http://israblog.nana10.co.il/blogread.asp?blog=394281&blogcode=10549685> (Hebrew).

The Shalit Campaign

On June 25, 2006 Hamas attacked an Israeli tank that was positioned at a guarding post near the Gaza Strip, killing an officer and a soldier and abducting Shalit, alive, from the tank. The IDF immediately retaliated by raiding the Gaza Strip, for the first time since Israel's 2005 "Disengagement" from Gaza. More than 300 Palestinians were killed in the raid, but Shalit's location was not discovered. Less than three weeks later, on July 12, 2006, the Israeli military suffered another abduction: two reserve soldiers—Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev—who served at the Israeli-Lebanese border were abducted by Hezbollah. The incident led Israel to embark on its largest attack on Lebanese soil since the famously unsuccessful 1982 Second Lebanon War. Nearly two years after the second abduction, Israeli intelligence determined that the two Lebanon abductees, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, had been killed on the day they were captured, and that the attackers, who had not provided any details on their condition, were in fact holding their dead bodies. Throughout the time that their fate was unclear, until shortly before their bodies were returned in July 2008, the Goldwasser and Regev families united with the Shalit family in a joint campaign for the release of "the Boys."

In the five years and four months of Shalit's absence, his family succeeded in keeping his plight high on the Israeli and international news agenda, exceeding all previous efforts by families of kidnapped soldiers. The public efforts of the Shalit family began after initial three years in which it kept quiet per the government's request. But when it embarked on its campaign, the campaign was uncompromising,

fueled by a determination not to repeat previous failures of hostages' families to bring their loved ones back. The Shalit family was an upper class family according to Israeli standards (Shalit's father, Noam, was an executive at the Israeli metalworking company Iscar, owned by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway). Together with a devoted circle of supporters, the family managed to secure the necessary resources to mount a continuous media-savvy, large-scale, sophisticated and ultimately effective campaign.

The campaign, funded by contributions that Noam Shalit raised in Israel and abroad, was planned and executed through the pro-bono work of Israel's leading public relation firms, advertising agencies and media consultants. Gilad Shalit's image was illustrated and iconized in blue and white, the colors of the Israeli flag. It was disseminated on stickers and billboard signs, and offered as a profile photo for Facebook users on the anniversary days of Shalit's kidnapping. Shalit's parents and brother took a visible role in the campaign, holding meetings with dignitaries in Israel and abroad and securing the prominent coverage of their efforts through continuous and direct pressure on Israel's news media executives.



Figure 14: The Gilad Shalit campaign logo

The campaign's most sweeping operation took place in June 2010. The Shalit family, together with tens of thousands of supporters, marched from Shalit's hometown of Mitzpe Hila, in the Western Galilee, to Jerusalem. The 12-day march, which a total estimate of 200,000 people had joined,¹⁰ dominated the news, culminating with a live broadcast of an Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra concert near the point of Shalit's abduction, and ended at the residence of Prime Minister Netanyahu. There the Shalit family set up a tent where it resided until the Shalit deal was finalized and approved in October 2011. Responding to the march, Netanyahu convened a press conference, clarifying the status of the negotiations between Israel and the Hamas, and in particular, the Israeli demands not yet met by Hamas. Netanyahu warned that a deal could backfire and compromise Israel's national security, and mentioned specific, previous exchange deals that had proved that released prisoners were in the habit of returning to terrorist activity. He spoke of and to all relevant groups of victims:

I look into the pained eyes of the Shalit family, and I ache with you – the Shalit family. I also look into the pained eyes of hundreds of family members of terrorism victims, and I feel their pain. In the same breath, I am also thinking about those families whose loved ones will be murdered in further terror attacks if we break Israel's principles regarding the release of murderers.¹¹

¹⁰ Cohen, Gili (2011), "As Gilad Shalit Goes Free, A 5-Year-Long Media Campaign Comes to a Close," *Ha'aretz*, Oct. 18, 2011, available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/as-gilad-shalit-goes-free-a-5-year-long-media-campaign-comes-to-a-close-1.390523>

¹¹ Prime Minister Netanyahu's July 1st 2010 speech appears at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website and available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2010/PM-Netanyahus-Remarks-at-a-Special-Press-Conference-Regarding-the-Continued-Efforts-to-Release-Kidna.htm>

Another memorable campaign event took place on Israeli Independence Day, in May 2011, five years into Gilad Shalit's captivity. Yoel Shalit, Gilad's brother, and Yoel's girlfriend interrupted the traditional torch lighting ceremony in Mount Herzl, Jerusalem, breaking through security, entering the stage crying "Gilad is still alive" and holding signs calling for his return. In other words, the torch lighting ceremony, which bears all the signs of a media event—a national celebration of Israel's achievements and values, performed on broadcast television channels in unison—was almost hijacked by Yoel Shalit. Almost, because Yoel Shalit happened not to enter the pre-planned television camera frames in the event, and was therefore not visible to the viewers of the live broadcast. The interruption, however, was recorded and replayed numerous times on the following day and discussed extensively in the news and in the Internet social networks. Yoel Shalit's choice of venue to express his grievance served to convey multiple messages. Apart from the sheer visibility of the event, and its potential reach to almost every household in Israel, Yoel Shalit's interruption of the ceremony undermined its ideological premises. Shalit defied Israel's right to indulge in self-congratulatory activities while Gilad was in captivity, challenging the most basic point of the event – that the state of Israel was a commendable moral enterprise.

The Shalit campaign, dubbed "the longest media campaign in recent Israeli history,"¹² was the first hostage campaign that tried to achieve public support for a prisoner exchange deal. It was the first hostage campaign that took on an aggressive, adversarial approach against Benjamin Netanyahu's government, attempting to

¹² ibid, 7.

undermine its popularity and turn public opinion over the hostage affair into an electoral factor.

The Arad lesson

Israel experienced the captivity of Shalit and the abduction of Regev and Goldwasser as a repetition of a previous national trauma – Israel's failure to bring home Air Force navigator Ron Arad. Arad was captured in 1986 by the Lebanese Amal organization, after he and the pilot of his fighter jet had to eject due to a technical failure during a military mission in Lebanon. Israel immediately managed to bring home the pilot, who parachuted not far from Arad and hid until he was rescued, carried on the rails of a helicopter. But Arad, who parachuted into an inaccessible area, was left behind. Initially, Israel rejected Amal's offer to release Arad in return for hundreds of prisoners, in hope that the passage of time would reduce his bargaining price. But in 1987 Amal sold Arad to another group or to Iran, and his tracks were lost. Despite years of efforts by various international mediators, Arad's whereabouts were never discovered.

The failure to successfully negotiate the return of Arad was rightfully attributed to Israel's diplomatic and national security leadership. Israel retaliated for Arad's kidnapping by kidnapping Sheikh Obeid and Mustafa Dirani, both potential bargaining chips. However, meaningful negotiations over the exchange of Arad never took place, and Obeid and Dirani were eventually released in 2004, together with 400

other prisoners, in exchange for a kidnapped Israeli civilian and the coffins of three Israeli soldiers who were kidnapped in the Har Dov incident.

In 2008 Hezbollah announced that Arad was dead, prompting fears that Gilad Shalit, who at the time had been two years in captivity, was approaching a similar, bitter end. These fears, exacerbated by the tragic exchange Golwasser's and Regev's coffins, drove the Shalit family toward a much more conspicuous and manifest anti-government position than the Arad family had taken. Indeed, for many years, the Arads acquiesced with the government's advice to maintain a low profile that would, arguably, allow covert negotiations for Arad's release. A public campaign, the family was warned, would increase Arad's price and compromise Israel's bargaining power.

Arad's family later regretted its compliance with the government's request. Tami Arad, Ron's widow, acknowledged in an interview she gave four years into Shalit's kidnapping, that she had been naïve:

When I try to analyze the reason why I don't visit the Shalit family at their protest tent every week, I realize that I must be trying to distance myself from the missed opportunities, from the hopes which proved to be false, from the pangs of conscience over my failure to hold a hunger strike outside the Prime Minister's office, my failure to move to live outside his doorstep.¹³

¹³ Taken from Tami Arad's speech in an Israeli Air Force ceremony commemorating 24 years of Arad's absence. Reported in *Ynet*. URL: <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3970169,00.html>

Gilad's father, Noam Shalit, drew the connection between Arad's fate and his decision to take on an opposite strategy. Upon Gilad's return, Noam Shalit said:

There is no doubt in my mind that had we stayed home in Mitzpe Hila, the chances of having Gilad alive and at home would have been extremely low. We have learned the lesson from the Arad family tragedy, and I said that to Tami [Arad] before and apologized that we had used their tragedy in order to avoid repeating their mistakes.¹⁴

Before Shalit, Israeli scholars regarded the Arad case as a story that was being kept alive in the news successfully, despite the fact that there were hardly any external developments that qualified it as "news." Kaplan (2008) argued that the Arad story maintained its high-profile presence in the news for many years because the concept of missing soldiers, as socially and psychologically construed in Israel, elicited in the most potent way Israelis' national sentiments of camaraderie and collective responsibility. But until Shalit, the potential power and willingness of the media to step further and push for an exchange deal – either explicitly or by way of closely following the Shalit family media initiatives – had not yet revealed itself. This is because, as previously noted, the Arad family cooperated with the government and did not actively seek media attention.

¹⁴ Noam Shalit in the 2011 Eilat Journalism Convention, December 5th 2011, reported in *Globes* (Hebrew).
http://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000703778&nl=821&utm_source=2&utm_medium=mail&utm_campaign=globesAlerts

The maintenance work of hope for missing soldiers

In her 2008 analysis of the Israeli press coverage of the Arad affair, Tenenboim Weinblatt, writing before the Shalit campaign's most spectacular initiatives, concluded that the Arad story had achieved considerable news presence. Tenenboim Weinblatt attributed the maintenance of the Arad story to literary "non-closure" strategies that kept the story alive despite its lack of factual hinges. The coverage, she argued, employed mythologizing techniques that emphasized the mysterious, unresolved nature of Arad's ordeal. News of Arad was all about rumors, as reflected in the following typical headlines: "Jordanian Weekly: Ron Arad is Probably Being Held in Lebanon"; "A Syrian Journalist: in 1993 Arad was held in a Syrian Prison" (quoted in Tenenboim Weinblatt, p.39). The coverage discussed possible developments rather than reported facts, and was amassed with speculations by public figures regarding the whereabouts and prospects of Arad, who treated any meetings with foreign government officials as groundbreaking negotiations. Ultimately, Tenenboim Weinblatt argued, this open-ended approach helped sustain the belief in Arad's impending return.

The non-closure, mythologizing strategy adds a new dimension to the concept of journalistic deference, and it joins the journalistic behaviors characteristic of the left side of the Experience-Argument Scale. Where the victims are so high on the journalistic agenda, the news is, to some extent, invented, even independently from the hostage and his or her family, in order to keep the story alive.

The open-ended strategy expressed itself, once again, in the coverage of the Regev and Goldwasser July 2008 exchange deal, in which Hezbollah sent back the soldiers' coffins in return for five Lebanese prisoners and the coffins of 194 more. It was well known at the time that the two had been critically injured during the kidnapping incident. A month before the deal, Israeli intelligence had concluded that the two were dead. The press nevertheless downplayed this information and continued expressing hope that the soldiers would return alive, relying on Hezbollah's announcement that it would not reveal whether the two were dead or alive until the day of their exchange. Hezbollah's strategy of clouding the status of the two soldiers played on Israelis' most delicate nerve – the recent and final announcement of Arad's death and the guilt associated with it. Soon after the day of the exchange arrived and two coffins emerged from the Hezbollah vehicle, media critics, as well as commentators in the mainstream news media, accused the press for irresponsibly swallowing Hezbollah's bait and deceiving the public into believing that the soldiers may return alive.¹⁵

While Tenenboim Weinblatt concentrated on a description of the narrative strategies of the Arad coverage, Kaplan (2008) offered an explanation for the open-

¹⁵ The same approach characterized the coverage of the 2004 Har Dov swap deal. In this deal, Israel received an Israeli businessman and the coffins of three soldiers who had been abducted by the Hezbollah in 2000 in Har Dov, near the Lebanese border. In exchange, Israel released 436 prisoners, including Sheikh Abdel Karim Obeid and Mustafa Dirani. There, too, the soldiers were known to have been dead three years before the exchange. As early as 2001, the IDF's Head of Human Resources announced that the IDF had sufficient information to ascertain that the soldiers were dead. Nevertheless, the coverage of the exchange deal was ambiguous and inconclusive with respect to their fate (Kaplan 2008:413).

ended approach. Basing his explanation on the literature that associated national solidarity with notions of fraternity, male masculinity and self-sacrifice, Kaplan identified national solidarity as a form of “extended friendship” (Kaplan, 2007). National solidarity, he argued, required an emotional bond between citizens and fallen soldiers. This meant experiencing fallen soldiers as the loss of friends, grieving over their deaths in an intimate, personal way, as well as feeling close attachment to and great concern over missing and abducted soldiers.

This special affinity between Israeli civilians and the fallen soldiers is rooted in the place of the Israeli army within Israeli civil society, and the fact that there are no clear boundaries between the two. The mandatory army service makes the military experience an integral part of Israeli life for most of every Jewish adult’s years (after the two or three year army service is completed, Israelis return to the army every year for their reserve service). There are relationships and resemblances between the army and other civilian organizations such as schools and boy scouts, so that the military culture is woven into Israeli life.

While fallen soldiers are treated as lost relatives, *missing* soldiers evoke an even more heightened sense of solidarity because "the missing are situated at a unique juncture between the living and the dead. On the one hand, they represent a strong presence and the prospect of returning to everyday life. On the other hand, they signify heroic sacrifice similar to that of fallen soldiers (Kaplan 2008:414).

Missing and abducted soldiers are simultaneously positioned at the “present time” that occupies the “news,” and at the “mythic” time, where timeless, heroic tales reside. The open-ended approach, with its continuous hope for the soldiers’ return, mythologizes them and secures their defining role in Israeli nationhood. In its convergence of “present time” and “mythic time,” the coverage of missing soldiers exemplifies the cultural role of journalism as James Carey conceptualized it, that is the constant reinforcement of shared cultural narratives. The moral principle associated with missing and abducted soldiers is “leave no man behind” – an absolute, collective responsibility over the safety of each and every individual of society, let alone an individual who meets danger while in the service of society.

Weinblatt-Tenenboim and Kaplan’s discussions of the open-ended approach considered the special cultural role of missing and abducted soldiers in Israeli society. To them, the press only reflected the strong common sentiment toward these special victims. Noam Yuran’s discussion of the press’s open-ended coverage of the Goldwasser and Regev exchange deal (2008)¹⁶, however, took on a more critical approach toward Israeli journalistic culture. Yuran argued that as much as the press was emotionally engulfed in the general, “natural,” sentiment toward the soldiers, it was also making a calculated choice to side with the families, even at the price of inflaming their unrealistic hopes. “The media,” he wrote, “were carried away in the wave of false hopes because they wanted to lose themselves to emotional

¹⁶ Noam Yuran, “The Ratings of Death,” *The Seventh Eye* (Hebrew), July 18, 2008, available at: <http://www.the7eye.org.il/21294>

identification. They wanted to shift the news work away from the realm of reportage and into the realm of identification and emotion."

Indeed, the false suspense in the news leading to the execution of the Regev and Goldwasser deal touches on the central argument of this chapter, the deliberate choice by journalists to adopt the point of view of the hostages' families. Indeed, as the Regev and Goldwasser families refused to give up hope, the Israeli press also avoided a sober, true-to-the-fact assessment of the soldiers' prospects. Yuran's criticism, in this respect, was directed at what he perceived as journalists' *intentional* decision to identify with the families. This was not a case of a press spontaneously surrendering to emotionalism. This was a conscious choice – or as journalists saw it, a professional choice fit for special circumstances – to set aside the usual reporting standards in favor of “submerging” themselves in the emotional moment. The result, however, was that the press was suppressing well known,¹⁷ official information in favor of the families' unrealistic expectations (Yuran 2008).

The tendency of the Israeli press to succumb to the families' perspective, apparent in the coverage of the Hezbollah deals, suggests an explanation for its readiness to embrace the Shalit campaign.

¹⁷ On June 3rd 2008, almost two months before the execution of the Regev and Goldwasser deal, representatives of Israel's three security organizations – the Mossad, the military intelligence and the Israel Security Agency (“Shabak”) – submitted their independent conclusions that the soldiers were dead (Amos Harel and Yuval Azulay, “The Conclusion that the Soldiers were Dead had been Submitted Three Weeks Ago,” Haaretz 6/24/08, available at: <http://www.haaretz.co.il/1.1332690> (Hebrew)

Like the failure to bring back Ron Arad, the return of Regev and Goldwasser's coffins emboldened Shalit family's decision to embark in 2008 on a very public, desperate and occasionally theatrical campaign, assisted by a public relations apparatus. At the time, officials responsible for the negotiations with the Hezbollah blamed the Regev and Goldwasser families – as in the Arad case beforehand – for interfering with the clandestine negotiation process. The families, they argued, inadvertently served Hezbollah by increasing pressure on the Israeli negotiators.¹⁸ But this approach was losing ground, and particularly in the coverage of the Regev and Goldwasser deal, the press had already proved its loyalty to the cause of the families, and cooperated with the pressure that the families attempted to generate. The success of the Shalit campaign can be partially attributed to the growing frustration over the repeated failures to bring abducted soldiers back when they were still alive, and the growing general legitimacy of the idea of a prisoner exchange deal.

Some of the Shalit campaign initiatives had direct mass appeal, without much need for journalists' good will: Yoel Shalit's interruption of the Independence Day televised ceremony coerced the nation into attention; similarly, the popular march from the north of Israel to Jerusalem, together with the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra concert near the Gaza border, attracted inevitable news attention because of its massive scale. Other initiatives, however, took place in smaller settings but were theatrical and media-tailored. A notable media-dependent initiative of this kind was the "Gilad Shalit chamber." The organizers built a mock solitary confinement chamber inside a television studio outside Tel Aviv, meant to replicate Shalit's

¹⁸ See Ran Binyamini, "Hakol Diburim" (It's All Talk), *The 7th Eye* (Hebrew), September 1, 2006, at <http://www.the7eye.org.il/articles/pages/article6421.aspx>

presumed living conditions in Gaza. Journalists, politicians and celebrities – such as actors and soccer players – were invited to spend an hour alone in the small, dark and dirty chamber. Internet news sites aired continuously a live stream from the chamber, and the prominent participants later shared, in news columns and blogs, the horror and boredom that they had experienced while in “captivity.”

Hostage situations and the Experience-Argument Scale

The media embrace of the abducted soldiers’ families, as manifested in the coverage of the Hezbollah prisoner exchange deals, as well as in the continuous coverage of the Shalit campaign efforts, positions the coverage of hostage situations in the Deference extreme of the Experience-Argument Scale. Deference meant that in the conflict between the government and the families, with the government warning that exchange deals were detrimental to Israel’s safety and the families speaking of the sacredness of human life and the obligation to save it at all costs, journalists were siding with the latter.

The situation of missing and abducted soldiers, as well as civilian hostages, as Kaplan observed, combines two dimensions of time – the “here and now” of the concrete story of a particular missing victim, and the mythic time associated with the heroic narrative of national sacrifice. As the Experience-Argument Scale suggests, victims fare better with the media if their experience of victimhood has greater proximity in terms of space and time to the issue that they are advocating. Hostages,

and hostages' families, are situated in the present, sometimes for long periods of time. Other, more "typical" victims of attacks are usually situated in the "present" for a brief violent moment, and as they work toward policy solutions, they must, at the same time, work also to preserve the memory of the experience that lent them legitimacy as political advocates. These victims must maintain the collective memory of the violence that was inflicted upon them in order to secure their place in mythical time. Hostages and their families, however, simultaneously occupy present time and mythical time, and by that they answer to journalism's "dual duty" (see Chapter 1) to supply timely information about current affairs and to reaffirm prevalent cultural narratives and myths.

While this chapter has concentrated thus far on the Gilad Shalit case, the Israeli phenomenon of journalistic deference to hostages' families applies to both soldier and civilian hostages. So far, I have explained the media success of the Shalit campaign through an analysis of the place of fallen soldiers in Israeli nationhood, augmented through the unprecedented scale and the professional navigation of the Shalit campaign. But we can also trace broader, deeper reasons for the unconditional love that the media bestowed on the families.

The growing legitimacy of personal grief

The Shalit campaign could not have been as imposing and effective as it was, had it not tapped into the changing nature of Israeli grief over victims of war and

terrorism, either soldiers or civilians. Israeli society, increasingly embracing individualism, has been gradually turning its back on one of the fundamental values of early-days Israel, the Masadaic idea of personal sacrifice for the public cause. This was one of the implications of the shift towards post-Zionism¹⁹ in the 1980s, along with the ascent of the political Right which was not rooted in socialist culture, the growing influence of American culture and the rise of capitalist values, privatization and commercial television industry.

During the first decades of Israel's foundation, social norms mandated the suppression of personal grief, especially with respect to casualties of terrorism and war. Israelis were expected to accept the fact that life in an independent Jewish state sometimes demanded sacrifice. Israel's "national religion" was characterized in those early years by trust of government, frugality and participation in the Zionist effort. That set of norms, however, was replaced in the 1980s by a new "secular religion," that emphasized individual rights, self-fulfillment, and legitimized criticism of government and the national narratives (Almog, 2001).²⁰ Uri Ram (2005) tied the ascent of these individualistic, bourgeois values to the fact that the period of the 1970s and early 1980s was a relatively peaceful chapter of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

¹⁹ Post-Zionism rethinks the mission of a Zionist state in a globalized world. It criticizes state policies and establishments that employ ethnicity or religion-based criteria and wishes to replace them with an egalitarian, secular civil democracy that complies with liberal, international norms.

²⁰ Looking for the embodiment of the Israeli Secular Religion, Oz Almog found. Stef Wertheimer as a representation of its ideals. Stef Wertheimer is an esteemed Israeli industrialist who committed himself to developing new communal villages in Galilee. His vision is to develop the Galilee through world class high-tech industrial facilities and to provide modern high-quality living communities. The villages that Wertheimer supports aspire to self-sufficiency and independence from state resources. Noam Shalit is a senior employee of the Wertheimer industry, and Wertheimer was personally committed to the Shalit campaign, financially and otherwise. The Shalit campaign reflected Wertheimer's principles: pro-activeness, self-sufficiency and non-reliance on state solutions.

The 1980s were also characterized by prosperity and liberal economic policies, most notably, massive privatization. As economic prosperity led to “post materialistic” aspirations that centered on self-fulfillment and individual rights, so did Israeli society “reject the modern, bureaucratic authority and replaced it with the empowerment of personal autonomy. [...] Israel shifted from a collectivistic, state-oriented, labor-federation type culture, into an individualistic business and marketing oriented culture” (Ram, 2005:47). These cultural shifts were exacerbated by the erosion of Israel’s ongoing control over the occupied territories and the two Intifadas. But most importantly, the event that may have caused Israelis to abandon the ideal of self-sacrifice more than any other event in Israel’s history was the 1982 Lebanon War, the first war which mainstream media viewed as a war of choice, and whose casualties were perceived, for the first time, to have died in vain, rather than to have fallen in the protection of their country.

As the social climate was changing, at that time, in favor of an individualistic (and materialistic) approach, victims were gradually gaining *personhood*. The mourning of the victims as people who did not achieve the full life that they deserved, brought questions of justification to the surface.²¹

Gilad Shalit’s personality fitted into this individual approach to victimhood. His image, as seen in pre-captivity photos and home videos as a shy teen-ager, was

²¹ Questions of justification reached a dramatic climax in Israel’s 1996 Disaster Marathons (Liebes 1998,) namely the hysterical coverage of the frequent suicide bombings of that year (see Chapter 2). That coverage, filled with the spontaneous, angry responses of the victims, exacerbating the political frustration that led to the political shift in that year’s elections (Shimon Peres lost the 1996 elections to Benjamin Netanyahu.)

irresistibly endearing. He was not the hero of early-day wars, who was expected to withstand the horrors of imprisonment (as in the 1970s when Israeli soldiers were held as prisoners of war in Egypt for over three and a half years). Rather, questions loomed large regarding his ability to endure his situation and remain sane and capable. A year into his captivity, his family published a story he wrote as an 11-year old, “When the Fish and the Shark First Met,” about a fish who befriended a shark. The story was published as a children’s book, with each page illustrated by a different Israeli artist, and was later produced for theater. The analogy between Gilad Shalit and the innocent fish, which tried to convince the shark not to eat him, reinforced Shalit’s gentle, peace-loving image. In March 2009, the campaign concentrated on another heartfelt aspect of Shalit’s personhood, when it offered for public use a new Hebrew font, the Gilad Shalit font, in which each letter’s design was copied from a handwritten note that Shalit had written to his family while in captivity in 2008. The font was free and available for download.

The fact that the campaign emphasized Shalit the person was crucial to its success. It had to tap into the notions that Kaplan associated with “extended friendship,” thereby equating the concern for Shalit with the idea of national solidarity.

Israel's no-negotiation policy vs. a reality of ongoing deals

The history of the Israeli policies regarding the problem of POWs and abducted soldiers (by non-state organizations) reflected this societal shift from “national religion” to “secular religion.” In the 1950-1960, POWs were not regarded as heroes, but rather as embodiments of military or personal failure.²² When the early-day Israeli POWs returned, they did not receive a heroes’ welcome, and their identities were unknown to the general public (Haber 2008). Moreover, they were often suspected of treason, and even if not, they sometimes chose to conceal their POW past. The 1974 Yom Kippur War marked a change in the attitude toward POWs. Perhaps following the U.S “Operation Homecoming” of Vietnam POWs in February 1973, the Yom Kippur POWs were the firsts to be regarded as returning heroes.

The decades of the 1960s and '70s introduced terrorist hostage takings, and in particular, attacks on civilian targets after the 1967 War by non-state Palestinian and Lebanese organizations. In an attempt to deny legitimacy to these organizations, Israel held an official “no negotiations with terrorists” policy, and whenever possible, it attempted a military onslaught on the hostage takers (as in Entebbe.) However, the pressure for the return of the hostages led the Israeli government to circumvent its own no-negotiation rule and conduct indirect negotiations through international mediators. Ultimately, when Israel came to tend to the Shalit problem, it had no clear rule-of-thumb or policy for the proper approach to the matter, including the undecided

²² Israel, in its attempt to achieve prisoner exchange deals, occasionally initiated abductions of soldiers of neighboring countries for bargaining purposes. In fact, this was the origination of the “bargaining chip” doctrine (it had lasted until it was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1997) (Shraga, 2008.)

question about the appropriate price for Shalit. The involvement of international mediators long ago became a well-known fact that rendered the “no-negotiation” policy meaningless and even ridiculous. The broadly accepted post-factum assessment of the Shalit deal has been that Israel could have reached the deal years earlier, and paid a much smaller price, had it pursued it with a definite idea of its goals and limits and with the same determination that it demonstrated in 2011.

Because of the overlap between civil society and the military system in Israel, civil associations have typically been deeply involved in the POW and soldier-hostages problem. Such involvement of non-state agencies has been remarkable given the great sensitivity of the subject, the secrecy that surrounds it, and the fact that it involved foreign policies and international operations. The most notable and controversial of these non-state agents was “Born to Freedom,” a not-for-profit organization that existed between 2001 and 2012. Born to Freedom was established by Israeli lawyer Eliad Shraga, formerly the Arad family’s attorney. Its initial mission was to succeed where the government failed, and obtain information about Ron Arad. The association’s aim later broadened to collect all possible intelligence regarding the fate of Israel’s POWs by offering a 10 million dollar prize to any person who provided meaningful information on their whereabouts. The funding for the organization and for the prize came entirely from the Israeli government.

Born to Freedom advertised the prize worldwide, including in states considered hostile to Israel (such as Iran.) Throughout its years of existence, Born to Freedom was criticized for acting in a realm that was essentially under the

government's prerogative. Even Israel's Attorney General expressed unease in the face of a private organization that was privy to sensitive intelligence.²³ The association, to which the Israeli government granted 100 million Shekels (approximately 28 million U.S. Dollars) during its years of operation, ceased operations in 2012 after a Ministry of Defense committee asserted that it had ultimately failed to collect any meaningful information (no one received the 10 million dollar prize) and that the government could itself manage the reward system. The case of Born to Freedom serves to illustrate the blurring of the lines between government, military and civil society in the context of Israeli POWs, where the central mission of finding them has been essentially outsourced to a semi-voluntary not-for-profit organization.

Shalit: an a-political campaign

It took almost five and a half years, and two Israeli prime ministers (at the beginning of the negotiations, Ehud Olmert presided as prime minister) to reach the Shalit deal. When Netanyahu attended to the Shalit issue as prime minister, he was already known as a vocal opponent of previous exchange deals.²⁴ Given his clear predisposition, the Shalit deal was a particularly tough call for him. It also raised the

²³ The Attorney General ruled that the association could advertise the prize, but it must hand any information that it might receive to the state's security organizations. See Ronny Linder Ganz (2013) "Guilt Over the IDF's POWs Cost the State 100 Million Shekels," *The Marker*, January 14, 2013. Available at <http://www.themarker.com/news/1.1906494> [Hebrew]

²⁴ For example, in 1985, shortly after the Lebanon War, Israel handed the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine 1,150 prisoners in exchange for three soldiers. Netanyahu, who was at the time the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, wrote a letter to then foreign minister Yitzhak Shamir explaining his objections to the deal, known as the Jibril Deal (after the head of the Popular Front, Ahmed Jibril). Netanyahu even considered resignation.

bar for the Shalit campaign, which needed to coerce the prime minister, a well-respected terrorism expert, into changing his well-known course, putting him in the risk of seeming weak and inconsistent.

Looking at the media's growing—to the point of frenzied—support for the campaign over the years, and given Netanyahu's initial and known objection to the idea of the exchange, it is tempting to argue that this was a case of the media acting in direct, fearless opposition to government. However, this notion of a contrarian media, taking the popular position in a political issue and forcing the government to act upon the collective will, is over-romantic and only partly true. In essence, the Shalit issue has been de-politicized by the press, and taken outside the realm of the well-known left vs. right, post-Zionist vs. neo-Zionist²⁵ adversity, or for that matter, any other political debate that could have alienated the public.

How was the Shalit issue depoliticized? Through the press's emotional pleas for Shalit's return and for his reunion with his family, devoid of specific discussions of consequences and possible scenarios (the danger of freeing convicted felons to resume activity, the toll in terms of future abductions and the rising price within future exchange deals); by framing the issue as a personal-interest story and not as a complicated policy dilemma; and by refraining from tying the Shalit issue to Israel's historic, existential problem, that is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The hope for Shalit's return was shared by all Israelis, regardless of their political affiliation, and it

²⁵ "Neo-Zionism" is taken to mean the sectorial, nationalistic response to the effects of globalization on Israel. Neo-Zionism reinforces the elements that define Israeli society in terms of its ethnic, Jewish majority.

was this hope alone that the press advocated. Indeed, public opinion in the “deal or no deal” question did not necessarily correlate with left or right tendencies, which were defined in Israel in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian question. But rather, support was shared by the entire political spectrum. And so, while the Israeli right has been traditionally “hawkish” in its reluctance to make any concessions to the Palestinians, in this case the “no concessions” principle was played down, and did not diminish much of the support for the deal. And while leftist commentators expressed hope that the deal would carry the seed for future peace negotiations between Israel and Hamas, support for the deal was never widely perceived, by the public or by media commentators, as an exclusively “leftist” position.

The last-minute public opinion polls that showed more than 75% approval rate for the deal²⁶ proved the success of the campaign’s main objective, which had been to steer the debate away from the meaning of the Shalit deal in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and instead, concentrate on Shalit the person, the boy. Indeed, the campaign occasionally addressed the deal’s security concerns: once, in the billboard campaign in which former senior security officials expressed their belief that the deal had not entailed serious security risks; and again, in June 2011, four months before Shalit’s return, when the Shalit family needed to ensure Netanyahu’s commitment to

²⁶ See footnotes No. 7 and 8 in this chapter. While these surveys did not ask respondents to identify themselves politically, they did include certain questions that illuminated the left vs. right divide and at the same time, the commitment of the right to the deal. For example, in the abovementioned *Yedioth Aharonoth* survey, 49% of the respondents noted that they believed Prime Minister Netanyahu had given in to public pressure, compared to 43% who believed that the deal demonstrated his leadership. That survey also showed that 53% thought that by agreeing to the deal, the Israeli government dropped some of its principles—a position most likely taken by the more nationalistic segments of Israeli society. These examples serve to show, that most of those who had reservations about the concept of an Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, yet ended up supporting the deal.

the ongoing negotiations. At that time, Noam Shalit came forth to publicly attack Netanyahu, calling him “weak” and “insensitive,” and asked Israelis to text message “I Support” (the deal) to the campaign’s phone number so that these votes would accumulate and prove that the Israeli public believed in the deal and was not afraid. Nevertheless, these two examples were quite exceptional, as the vast majority of the Shalit campaign initiatives—the Shalit march, the Shalit typeface, the Shalit mock chamber, the interruption of the Independence Day torch lighting ceremony, the constant reminders of the loss of Ron Arad—all framed the Shalit case as a personal tragedy. In its summary of the five-year long Shalit campaign, *Ha’aretz*’s Gili Cohen noted that campaign leaders had "tried to find out whether there was a way to avoid having the future prisoner exchange known as the "Shalit deal," in an attempt to prevent the family from being associated with any resultant security issues."²⁷

The press, this chapter argues, mostly took a similar, and arguably—politically evasive, approach. The willing cooperation with the campaign sometimes blurred the distinction between reporting and advocating, especially in the case of independent campaign-like initiatives taken by the press. *Ma’ariv* newspaper, for example, did not only cover the Shalit march, it also distributed—together with its printed edition—a yellow ribbon, as the yellow color has become “the official color of the Shalit campaign,”²⁸ symbolizing the hope that Shalit would see the sun again.

²⁷ ibid, 6.

²⁸ Eli Levi, "The Yellow Time: The Color of the Fight for Gilad," *NRG Ma’ariv*, June 22, 2010, available at: <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/123/106.html> (Hebrew)

These de-politicization efforts sometimes came from additional, unexpected sources, such as the regulatory agencies that supervised the media. In June 2011 the Shalit campaign submitted a television ad, commemorating five years of Shalit's captivity, for the approval of the commercial television franchisees, which in turn passed it over for review by the Second Authority for Television and Radio. The ad surveyed the history of the Ron Arad tragedy through overlapping newspaper headlines from the time of his captivity. The ad began with hopeful headlines about the existence of signs of life and about ongoing negotiations, gradually turning into headlines of his presumed, and then confirmed, death. The ad concluded with the following phrase: "Gilad Shalit has been in captivity for five years. We *can* and we *must* bring Gilad home today." The Second Authority refused to approve the ad, claiming that it violated a rule that prohibited advertising from conveying political messages referring to public controversies.²⁹ The Second Authority required two deletions: the first was the removal of two headlines that mentioned prime-minister Netanyahu ("Netanyahu: I am convinced that Ron Arad is alive and that we can bring him home," and "the negotiation for the release of Ron Arad blew up because of Netanyahu's stubbornness"). The second was the deletion of the words "we can" and "today" from the concluding phrase, to have its shorter version say "we must bring Gilad home."³⁰ In the Second Authority's view, it was debatable to argue that a deal was viable, and that it was viable at that time. The so called legitimate, apolitical

²⁹ Rule No. 11 to the Second Authority for Television and Radio Rules (Ethics in Television Advertising), 1994, states: "A franchisee shall not broadcast an advertisement that conveys a message in a political, social, public or economic issue that is under public controversy."

³⁰ Inna Shender, "The Second Authority Censored a Clip by the Shalit Headquarters: 'It Is a Controversial Topic,'" June 30, 2011, *Mako*, available at <http://www.mako.co.il/special-mako-news/Article-70c3d465641e031004.htm>

statement, on the other hand, expressed as a mere urge to bring Gilad home, was the exact message that the mainstream media conveyed.

Love of country as a de-politicization strategy

The media's general evasion of the controversial aspects of the Shalit deal, and the reduction of the Shalit issue into the ordeal of one Israeli family, were, as this chapter argues, part of a de-politicization mechanism of the Shalit issue—from the political to the personal. Another de-politicization mechanism involved framing the issue as one that involved “military values,” particularly the idea of “leaving no man behind”.³¹ This chapter previously spoke of Gilad Shalit as the soldier-boy. This was an important feature in his captivity image, as crafted by the public relations campaign, and it was based on an already existing notion, that Israeli soldiers evoked the same sentiments as children did. The child-like image of Shalit lent the “leave no man behind” principle horrifying urgency.

The overlap between childhood and soldiery requires some elaboration. The mandatory military service in Israel, for 18-year-old men (who serve for three years) and women (who serve for two years), makes army duty a collective experience,

³¹ The duty to bring abducted soldiers back to Israel at all costs has been tied to the biblical Jeremiah phrase “And there is hope in thine end saith the Lord that thy children shall come again to their own border” (Jeremiah 31:17), as well as the Mishna phrase “He who saves one soul saves an entire world.” The latter was quoted by Prime Minister Netanyahu in the cabinet meeting that approved the Shalit agreement.

shared by almost every Jewish household. The army serves—proudly—as a mechanism for cohesion, whereby, for example, immigrant Jews assimilate and become Sabras. While non-Jewish minorities and the ultra-orthodox are exempt from service, those minorities who have chosen to enlist—such as the Druze—were rewarded with economic allocations to their communities as well as increased openness for their participation in the highest governing institutions (Krebs, 2006).

As a relatively young nation, which won its independence through victory in war, Israel still views the military as one of its pillars. Older Israelis still remember the days where the nation was under existential threat, and the military was seen as its only protection from a second Holocaust. Israel is no longer the militaristic nation that it was in the 1950's and 1960's, but some rituals from this era stayed with it through the current era of individualism: Memorial Day is still a national mourning day, where restaurants and movie theaters shut down by law and the entire country stops at 11:00 A.M. for two minutes of silence. Evasion of mandatory military service is still considered by many Israelis as a sin.

The deep presence of the military in Israeli life, including the shared experience of Israeli parents “sending their kids to the army,” thereby unwillingly exposing them to new dangers, is the basis for the child-soldier concept. For example, the theme of the worried mother, of the Jewish mother type, who directly and insistently contacts army commanders on behalf of her son only to embarrass him in her over-involvement, has been a well-known Israeli stereotype. A much more meaningful manifestation of parental involvement in army life was the Four Mothers

Organization, established in 1997 by four mothers of Israeli soldiers who had served in Lebanon. Four Mothers advocated an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon on the basis of concern for the soldiers' lives. The organization is known to have been one of the major forces influencing the Israeli government into the final withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. The Four Mothers' emphasis on the child-soldier concept was a genuine, and at the same time shrewd, politically disarming de-politicization strategy. More broadly than the emotional bond with its child-soldiers, the Israeli army is an object of deep reverence as an embodiment of Israeli nationality, so that any issue that can be framed using army values (such as "leave no man behind") has the power to generate consensus and mute public criticism.

The stronghold of the Israeli army in the heart of the consensus is inexorably related to the breakdown of other traditional national establishments and markers. Israelis have been increasingly frustrated with the decrease in the quality of state services: the education system has been famously deteriorating as well as the state-run health system. Israel has been slowly deserting the welfare state model and practicing neo-liberal economic policies, which are responsible for growing economic gaps. In terms of trust in government, religious parties joined a Likud government and strengthened the ethno-centric Jewish-religious agenda, thereby alienating Israel's economic backbone, the secular middle class. The laissez-faire policies of the self-proclaimed business-friendly Likud government resulted in a disastrous increase in the cost of living, and led to mass protests, including street demonstrations, from the middle-class in the summer of 2011 and to a deep change in the makeup of the Knesset in the 2013 elections. While Netanyahu was granted another term as Prime

Minister, the newly appointed 2013 Knesset reflected a deep ambition for social and economic change.

The long arc of Israelis' relationship with the idea of Israeli collectivity was succinctly articulated by Israeli songwriter Meir Goldberg in a *Ha'aretz* interview:

Along the decades the Hebrew language has changed, and these changes are reflected in my writing. The use of grammatical persons is an example. When I was young, there were many "we" songs—we, the pioneers. With time, "we" became "I." For instance, "what will become of me, I am not getting along with myself."³² During the 90's the "we" voice returned, but this time "we" were speaking of the screwed up elements of Israeli collectivity, such as in Aviv's [singer Aviv Geffen's] "We Are a Fucked Up Generation."³³

With the gradual loss of trust in—and lack of identification with—traditional government institutions, the army remained as a stronghold of old-fashioned values of solidarity. The army, with its moralistic, "pure," value system, has been traditionally perceived as separate from the "dirty," interest-driven political system. Note, for example, the title 'Israeli Defense Force,' which implies that the army could never be on the "attacking" side, because it resorts to violence only if it has to. The notion of an army that would rather not fight is encapsulated in the concept "shooting and crying."³⁴ This expression, created following the 1967 war, began as a derisive phrase to describe the hypocrisy of the Israeli army (namely, a trigger-happy army that disguised itself with pacifist lingo) but later changed to mean the last-resort approach

³² "What Will Become of Me," sung by Arik Einstein and Josie Katz, 1970

³³ Yechiel and Halutz, "Face Matters," *Ha'aretz Weekend Magazine*, March 8, 2013

to war. “Shooting and crying” demonstrates an attitude that can be termed “emotional militarism,” where the military tries to essentially disguise itself as a peace organization. For example, when Israeli military bands sing peace songs, they exhort military emotionalism, which beyond an aspiration for peace also includes brotherhood and solidarity. And when the entire country prays for the return of a captured soldier, it practices military emotionalism.³⁴

Besides the moralistic, “feel good” value system associated with the army, the strong hold maintained by the army within the disintegrating Israeli society has other, more fundamental causes. An obvious one is Israel’s constant “survival mode,” which makes the military a first national priority. Shalem (2008) offers another explanation:

The IDF has been influenced from the shift of the Israeli society from collective values to universal values. [...] While according to the army data the motivation for combat service has not declined, it seems—albeit the lack of studies to support this—that the volunteers for combat service relate to it as an opportunity for social standing and personal fulfillment rather than as a national mission or as a way to advance collective values.

The army, according to this thesis, is no longer a strictly ideological apparatus, operating on patriotism alone. It also offers itself as an opportunity for personal benefits, particularly as a first successful step in young peoples’ careers. The army’s adjustment to the materialistic, competitive Israeli culture helps maintain, at least for the time being, its popularity and relevance, although Ram (2005) suggests a

³⁴ The grassroots organization that was formed to assist the Shalit campaign titled itself “The Army of Gilad’s Friends,” thereby adopting the military frame, together with the compassion associated with “military emotionalism.”

broadening gap between Israel's "militarized state" and Israeli civil society. Since the 1980s, he argues, the Jewish secular elite have been gradually distancing themselves from all collectivistic ideas and institutions, and passing over the military career option (namely, extending service beyond the mandatory period) in favor of the private sector. Ram makes an interesting connection between the decline in the level of militarism of the middle and upper classes, and the 1993 Oslo accords, which he claims were the product of the new individualistic and less militarized generation (p.50).

"I am an Israeli first, and only then a journalist"

Media critics have consistently criticized the Israeli press for conducting the "maintenance work of hope" for POWs and abducted soldiers, occasionally at the expense of a full and sober account of the POWs' prospects. Journalists themselves, speaking of their motives, defend their approach as patriotic. In a 2008 Tel Aviv University conference panel on the media coverage of the POW issue, military correspondents from *Ma'ariv* and *Yedioth Aharonoth* were asked if their predominant self-definition was that of Israelis or of journalists. Both answered unequivocally that they were "Israelis first," and explained that they were acutely aware of the possible negative effects that their writing could have on the release efforts. *Yedioth Aharonoth* military correspondent Amir Rapaport, explained that "being an Israeli did not imply compliance with whatever it was that the security establishment expected from us journalists. But rather, it was the absolute knowledge that I would never publish a

piece that carried the risk of diminishing the chances of a soldier's return." (Rapaport 2008)

The reporters were further asked how they handled the conflict between the expectations of the government and the families, with the government hoping for the media silence that would release negotiations from external pressures, and the families working to keep the POW issue high on the public agenda. Rapaport (2008) replied in a way that revealed the Israeli distinction between patriotism and love of government. "Had I known," he said, "that there was a system, and that there was somebody within that system who considered the interests of the abducted soldier above all, I would have perhaps acted upon that system's requests. But I have no trust in the system."

Rapaport expressed the general frustration of the Israeli public with the continuing failure of successive Israeli governments to achieve the safe return of abducted soldiers. He also expressed the conceptual distinction between the love of Israel and the love of government. Patriotism, indeed by definition, did not require any devotion to Israel's formal governing institutions, but only the love for an abstract, imagined national body, as represented by the soldier-hostage.

Criticism of the Shalit campaign

The limited scope of the public debate over the various approaches to the Shalit affair was a constant cause of criticism by media critics and journalists alike during the five years of Shalit's absence. When the question of the quality of the coverage arose in the 2008 Tel Aviv conference on POWs and MIAs, Rapaport's position as a military correspondent for *Yedioth Aharonoth* did not prevent him from arguing that

The problem is not that Gilad Shalit is not on peoples' minds. The problem is that there is no quality debate. We are going through an awful process, which increasingly targets the "emotion glands." The government should put forth the deal and analyze it, and stimulate the minds and not just the emotions. The media are not encouraging a public debate and it is here where we are failing (Rapaport 2008.)

Rapaport's seemingly contradictory statements revealed a genuine challenge that the Israeli press faced. On the one hand, he identified himself as a "patriot first," who would not publish any information he suspected might be perilous to Shalit. In other words, he would minimize discussion of the Shalit negotiation details. On the other hand, he acknowledged his, and his peers', regrettable tendency to keep the Shalit debate on a shallow, emotional level of discourse while their obligation was to develop it into a full-blown policy debate. Paradoxically, reporting on the possibility of a deal was bad for Shalit, but good for democracy, and this paradox complicated the task of reporting, requiring constant deliberation about what to say and what to

withhold. This is perhaps another reason why the Israeli media chose the easier way of framing the Shalit coverage as “we want Shalit back, period.”

Among those who maintained their opposition to the deal on a rational, security-interest driven argument was *Yedioth Aharonoth*’s national affairs columnist Shimon Shiffer.³⁵ However, the well-reasoned journalistic objections to the deal – which were never disrespectful of the Shalit family – could not compete with those journalistic voices that called for Shalit’s return and implied that any scope of deal would deem necessary and legitimate. As early as 2007, both *Yedioth Aharonoth* and *Ma’ariv* endorsed a deal in the form of prominent front-page editorials.

There were other instances of direct criticism of the Shalit campaign. In August 2009 the Shalit campaign initiated demonstrations outside three local prisons, calling to stop visitations by family members and members of the International Red Cross to Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons, until Hamas granted Gilad Shalit similar privileges in Gaza. The news website *Walla*, which is the most visited news website in Israel, criticized the campaign for advocating inhumane measures that would violate the ethical standards, set in international treaties that mandate the treatment of prisoners. This criticism was expressed, however, in an unusually apologetic way, with the lede stating:

³⁵ See Shimon Shiffer’s radio interview with Nissim Mishal, October 16, 2011 (Hebrew), available at: <http://www.103.fm/programs/Media.aspx?ZrqvnVq=FGJIIG&c41t4nzVQ=EL>

Do yourselves a favor and read this piece thoroughly before you tear Udi Hirsch [Deputy Editor and the writer of the piece] apart in your talkbacks only for thinking that the Shalit campaign lost its way.³⁶

In this and other instances, criticism of the Shalit campaign self-consciously emphasized, at the same time, the utter legitimacy of the campaign, its motives and causes. Also, critics were directing their negative opinions at campaign decisions and strategies, and rarely at the Shalit family.

Victims vs. victims

In light of the personification of the cause for the release of Shalit, it is not surprising that the most vocal opponents of the prisoners swap deal were the families of those who had been killed by the Palestinians who were to be freed in the exchange deal. A clash between two victim groups comes in sharp contrast to the background assumption that victimization is proxy for unity. Victims symbolize a unified category of an ethnic, national or religious community. When victims are revealed to be divided, they attest to a fundamental schism within the community and therefore inter-victim conflicts are of symbolic and political significance.

The organization representing the victims of the prisoners was the Almagor Terror Victims Association, a right-leaning organization whose main objective, as

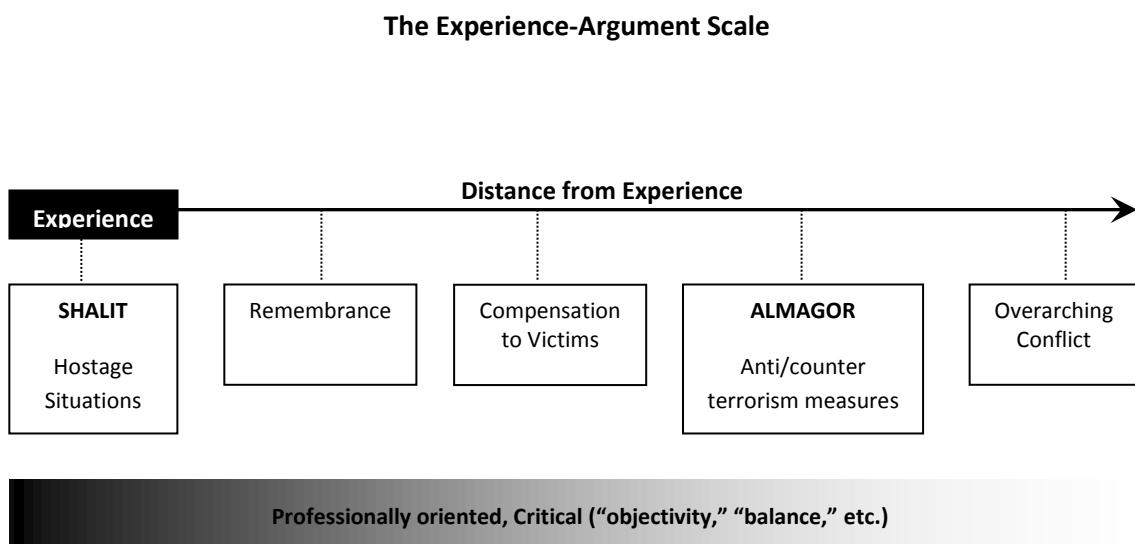
³⁶ Udi Hirsch, "The Shalit Campaign Has Gone Out of Control," *Walla* (Hebrew), August 26, 2009, available at: <http://news.walla.co.il/?w=/2971/1544397>

reflected in its mission statement, was to prevent prisoner swap deals.³⁷ Shortly after the Shalit family relocated to its tent outside the Jerusalem residence of Prime Minister Netanyahu, in 2010, Almagoor pitched its own tent across the street. Almagor was contrasting the Shalit family's message with the "security argument" message, namely that freed Palestinian prisoners will resume attacks on a massive scale, generating new cycles of violence and victimhood. Almagor's cause was also personified through photos of slain family members, their victimhood symbolizing the outcome of past, failed, policies.

While one would expect that the two tents – victims vs. victims – would carry similar weight, Almagor's tent hardly received any coverage, and was evacuated after several days. Almagor could not compete, that late in the game, with the already iconic image of Gilad Shalit. It could not compete with the overwhelming impetus of the campaign and the widespread legitimacy that it succeeded to acquire for a prisoner swap deal. In terms of the Experience-Argument Scale, the argument of the Shalit family, speaking of immediate measures to end a stressful situation that was taking place here and now, was much more appealing than an argument made by victims of past attacks that were over and gone. The Shalit family was advocating for the urgent, pertinent solution of an ongoing hostage crisis; Almagor, on the other hand, was advocating for the abstract, general anti-terrorism policy of retaining prisoners who were convicted for terrorism-related offenses for their full sentence. The fact that Almagor as well as other victims' families were repeating a predictable security-over-deal argument, and behaving as "professional," organized victims, may have contributed to the general media "desensitization" to these victims.

³⁷ Almagor's website is available at: <http://www.al-magor.com/english.htm>

The following diagram illustrates the position of each “victim” – Shalit (and the Shalit family) vs. Almagor (representing families of victims of past attacks) – within the Scale, and the corresponding consequences in terms of media treatment. The relevant issue for the Shalit family is the hostage situation. The relevant issue for Almagor is the anti-terrorism measure of retaining terrorism-related convicts for their full sentence:



While the Shalit campaign focused on raising awareness of the life conditions and humanity of Gilad Shalit, it went further in an attempt to directly address the larger policy questions involved and defeat the “security argument,” by recruiting public figures who would dismiss the fears raised, among other people, by the victims’ families. The Shalit campaign produced television commercials and billboard ads presenting five high-ranking military and Mossad veterans, who had the

experience and authority to assert that the deal did not pose a serious threat to Israel's security. The ads included quotes such as the following:

My experience allows me to assert that the release of terrorists, even the most murderous ones, does not pose a danger that the Israeli intelligence and security forces cannot overcome (Ya'akov Peri, former Head of the Israeli Internal Security Forces.)



Figure 15: Former security officials in a Shalit campaign ad

As the Shalit campaign was gaining energy and public prominence, the hostility between the Shalit family and the victims' families grew worse. In October 2011, as Israel and Hamas finalized the Shalit deal and it was about to take effect, this opposition between present victimhood and past victimhood crystallized into a showdown at the Israeli High Court of Justice. In this battle, Almagor was joined by victims' family members, and these individuals provided identifiable faces and increased public empathy to the entire victims' group. The most visible members of

this group were the Schijveschuurder brothers, whose parents and three siblings had been killed in the 2001 suicide bombing at a Sbarro restaurant in Jerusalem.

As in previous cases, Almagor and the families petitioned to abort the prisoner swap deal on the grounds that the government did not exercise due care in considering the security risk that the collective prisoner release entailed, and that the outcome of a deal would encourage future kidnappings. They further claimed that the government should have considered the families' pain upon witnessing the early release of the people convicted for killing their loved ones. And they brought another issue before the court, and that was the timing of the government announcement of the list of the soon-to-be released prisoners.

The announcement of the identities of the prisoners was mandated by the Court, which had held in an earlier ruling that the government must allow victims' families sufficient time to apply for an injunction when the perpetrator involved in their experience was up for early release. Conscious of the potential political damage of this confrontation, the Israeli government withheld, as long as it could, the prisoner list of the Shalit deal. Only three days before the execution of the deal did the government publish the prisoners' names. The petitioners argued in this respect that the list should have been disclosed earlier in order to allow them to raise their objections properly. Indeed, the government's conduct in this matter could be interpreted as indifference to the families, but it might also have reflected a sober assessment of the powerful potential of these families to ignite a public campaign that could have sabotaged the swap deal. In a personal-story-driven media, the publication

of the list of up-for-release prisoners granted any family of a relevant victim the status of a legitimate speaker in the dispute for and against the deal. By postponing the release of the names until the very last moment, the government managed to keep those families outside the public debate and minimize their influence.

The court dismissed the petition against the Shalit deal, as it did in all previous, similar cases. It dismissed the claim regarding the timing of the publication of the prisoners' list, reasoning that the Israel-Hamas negotiations had been known to be going on for several years, and that the families could have raised their objections to the release of particular prisoners throughout that time. In its decision about the dismissal of the claim regarding the security risk that the deal posed and the pain that it inflicted upon the families, the Supreme Court explained that these claims involved questions of morality and national security, rather than legal questions, and that therefore their resolution was under the exclusive authority of the executive branch, and that they were immune from judicial scrutiny.³⁸ Moreover, the court made it repeatedly clear that future cases would be decided similarly, and left no room for foreseeable exceptions.

Nonetheless, for the victims' families, the petitions – despite their predictable, unsuccessful outcome – served multiple purposes. First, the fact that the Supreme Court granted the families legal standing in challenging a national decision of such

³⁸ The reluctance of the Supreme Court to overturn security-related government decisions has been vastly examined within the legal and social studies research communities. One of the explanations for the Court's approach has been its fear of losing its public legitimacy if it were perceived as defying the state narrative of a Jewish state under constant, fundamental threat (Barzilai, 1999), as well as fear of government "retribution" through legislation sanctioning conduct previously prohibited by the Court.

magnitude meant that the Court had formally but implicitly granted the families official confirmation as valid players in the anti-terrorism policy field. Second, the petitions might have been futile in terms of the merits of the families' case, but they nevertheless served as a formal outlet for the families' grief and political discontent, for the ultimate purpose of media coverage and public exposure. The court proceedings created a newsworthy occasion, utilized as a journalistic beat.

Looking at these Court rulings from a cultural point of view suggests that they occasionally reaffirmed the families' status explicitly and canonized it into Israel's legal records. In 2000, for example, the Supreme Court prohibited Israeli authorities from keeping prisoners who had been convicted for attacks of Israeli citizens in Israeli jails after they finished their prison sentence. The court held that Israel could not use former prisoners as bargaining chips in the negotiations for the release of Ron Arad and others. In the obiter dictum of the ruling, Chief Justice Aharon Barak addressed the families' feelings and clarified what he perceived as the legal inevitability of the final outcome of the case:

I am aware of the pain that the families are experiencing. It is hard as a rock. The years that go by in constant uncertainty wound a man's soul. The hostage, locked away in unknown confines, is in a worse state, torn from his homeland. This pain, as well as Israel's highest interest in returning its sons home, was before me at all times... Each day, we carry with us the national and personal tragedies of the missing and the hostages. But as much as their release is of utmost importance, it cannot be done at all costs. Considering the legal framework before us, we cannot correct one wrong by committing another. (7048/97 Plonim vs. Minister of Defense, p. 743)³⁹

³⁹ Soon after this ruling, the Knesset resumed legislation of the Incarceration of Illegal Combatants Law, which sanctioned the conduct.

Such court rulings, apart from granting the families formal legal standing, acknowledged the emotional motivations behind the petitions and were empathetic toward the petitioners. While families' petitions against swap deals have been routinely dismissed, the judges moved beyond legal reasoning into the realm of persuasion, noting the difficulties in reaching a decision contrary to the hopes of the petitioners, and employing a relatively unsophisticated, non-legal language intended for the ears and hearts of the petitioners and the general public. The fact that the petitions were anticipated to fail underscored the importance of those judicial holdings as a venue for dialogue between the court and the petitioners (Scharia, 2008:165), or rather, between the State of Israel and the families.

The October 2011 Shalit judicial holding, which dismissed Almagor's petition, similarly spoke to the victims' families. The holding cited Prime Minister Netanyahu's cabinet speech, where he had requested the approval of the deal. In the speech, Netanyahu evoked his own victim status: Netanyahu's brother, Yoni Netanyahu, was killed in the famous Entebbe operation in 1976. Yoni Netanyahu was the commander of the special army unit that flew to Uganda and released the passengers of a hijacked Air France Tel-Aviv–Paris flight.

Today I bring to the cabinet a resolution that reflects the proper balance between all the considerations. I would not wish to withhold the fact that it is a difficult decision. My heart goes to the families of terrorism victims. I understand their sufferings and their hardship. *I am one of them* [italics mine].

Netanyahu, in his attempt to convey the moral conflict involved in the swap deal, needed to use his own victimhood as a mean to disarm and mollify the victims' families. Their personal experience and pain could not be answered to effectively with the Prime Minister's policy argument; only the Prime Minister's personal experience could balance their arguments.⁴⁰

Comparing coverage of abducted soldiers

The Experience-Argument Scale purports to offer a universal tool, to assess the presence of the personal trauma component in news coverage. In hostage situations, dramatic and anxious as they are, the victims receive the fullest press attention and compassion, in line with the attitudes of other establishments such as the court system, the government and even popular culture. As this chapter has demonstrated thus far, the hostage crisis, in its archetypical version, signifies, for the purpose of the Scale, complete integration between the victims' experience and their argument. The hostages themselves—particularly in moments of visibility (of them and their families) to their home constituencies—gain importance and “press

⁴⁰ This was not the first time that Netanyahu evoked his victim status in discussions of the Shalit affair. While in the context of the announcement of the deal Netanyahu affiliated himself with the dissenting families, throughout the Shalit campaign he affiliated himself with the Shalit family. In the speech that he delivered as a response to the Shalit June 2010 march, he stated that

The State of Israel has always been prepared to pay a heavy price for the release of its hostages. *I know this price firsthand. I lost my brother Yoni, of blessed memory, during the operation to free the hostages of the Air France airplane in Entebbe. I myself was wounded during the operation to free the Sabena airplane hostages at Ben-Gurion airport [italics added]* [ibid, 3.]

desirability" equal to that of the usual cadre of news sources: criminals (here, the terrorists) and officials (here, army officers, intelligence and security senior personnel, etc.).

While this is the basic premise of this chapter, the discussion has focused thus far on the recent history of soldier abductions in Israel. The abducted soldiers phenomenon presented an extreme case of public and press deference, which was rooted, as elaborated in the previous sections, in the place of the Israeli military within Israel's nationhood, as well as the Israeli press's penchant for apolitical campaigns that tapped into the emotional heart of the consensus. These forces came to play in the Shalit case, generating intense pressure to bring to his release at almost any price.

This universal, human phenomenon, of extreme care in the face of victimhood, has of course manifested itself in the coverage of the American press of the various hostage crises that involved American citizens. The TWA hostage crisis, described in the outset of this chapter, demonstrated this well. Yet we need to look beyond the obviousness of press deference to terrorism victims, and contrast the behavior of American news organizations to that of their Israeli peers in a specific context that merits comparison. If, for argument's sake, the hypothesis were that women occupy a meaningfully different place in Israeli and American societies, it would have been helpful to compare press treatment of female terrorism victims in these two countries. But that is not case, whereas soldier-victims do serve this purpose well, among other reasons, because these nations' militaries have different recruiting strategies—

volunteerism vs. conscription—that affect the value systems associated with each military organization.

This focus allows us to move beyond the universal theme of terrorism victimhood into the more complex concept of soldier-victim. While the strong public identification with terrorism victims is tied to the notion that the arbitrary violence inflicted upon them “could have happened to us,” soldiers are one step removed from civilian society. Soldiers belong to a designated group which has voluntarily chosen—to a certain degree—to bear the human risks involved in national conflicts. But while the soldier status can potentially account for some emotional distance from the soldier-victim, Israelis, as elaborated earlier in this chapter, exhibited the opposite—high degree of identification with soldier-victims, felt by Israelis to be victimized children.

Unlike Israeli POW/MIAs, who became household names, American MIAs were never personalized into an individual, symbolic “face,” mainly because of the huge numbers of POWs and MIAs involved, particularly in the Vietnam War—and in every war, in fact. There were some aspects of personalization, such as the MIA bracelets that bore the names of individual missing soldiers, and whose bearers swore not to remove them until they were back or at least accounted for. And there was a substantial core of MIA activists, whom the administration had to placate through Congressional hearings that would bring official closure to the question of the Vietnam POW/MIAs. Nevertheless, there was no single person through whom or for whom the collective anxiety was channeled. Without the emotional impact of

personalization, the MIA problem was mainly discussed as a strict policy issue, involving questions such as the appropriate pressure the U.S. should put on Asian governments in order to achieve access to their war related archives. With time, as these governments were no longer hostile to the U.S., there was no moral dilemma involved whether to hold a dialogue or not, no prisoner exchange to consider, but simply a demand to devote national resources and efforts.

The only case that did seem to merit direct comparison with the Shalit case was the Taliban's kidnapping of U.S soldier Bowe Bergdahl in Afghanistan. Although singular in its long duration (to the date of this writing, Bergdahl has been in captivity for almost 5 years), Bergdahl's name has been, and is yet, unfamiliar to most Americans. But what seemed as a Taliban version of the Hamas kidnapping to Shalit, was later complicated by revelations that Bergdahl, during his Afghanistan service, became gradually hostile to U.S policies and conduct in Afghanistan. The next paragraphs will attempt an explanation for the vast differences in the media visibility of Shalit and Bergdahl in their respective countries, not only because of the different circumstances or their captivity, but also because of underlying, systemic reasons that have to do with the media's different relationship with government.

The kidnapping of Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl

Every nation experiences war and every war involves the capture and disappearance of soldiers. Sgt. Bowe Robert Bergdahl, 23 years old at the time of his

capture, was seized by the Taliban in Afghanistan in June 2009. Soon after his disappearance, his captors demanded a deal in which Bergdahl would be exchanged for 1 million U.S.D., 21 Afghan prisoners, mostly held at Guantanamo Bay, and the female Pakistani scientist Aafia Siddiqui, held in Fort Worth, Texas. To date, no deal has been struck, and Sgt. Bergdahl remains the only known soldier to be held today by anti-American forces.⁴¹ Since his capture, the Taliban has released five videos of him, with the latest released in May 2011. In *No Easy Day*, a controversial book written by former Navy SEAL Mat Bissonnette under the pen name Mark Owen, Bissonnette maintained that the same SEAL unit that killed Osama Bin Laden also raided Taliban posts in an attempt to find and rescue Bergdahl (Owen and Maurer, 2012).

In the first three years following the kidnapping, it seemed that the United States was refusing to pursue a deal, in keeping with its stated “no-negotiation” policy. But in May 2012, Bergdahl’s parents, Robert and Jani, made public the fact that secret negotiations between the Obama administration and the Taliban regarding a prisoner exchange deal had been taking place for a year, and that they involved the release of five Taliban prisoners. Moreover, the talks were part of a U.S effort to work toward a peace agreement that would stabilize Afghanistan in the volatile time following the completion of the U.S. withdrawal, expected in 2014.

⁴¹ While according to international law Bergdahl is a POW, the Pentagon, according to *Time Magazine*, officially abandoned the POW title altogether, classifying abducted personnel as “Missing-Captured.” See Mark Thompson, “Pentagon: We Don’t Call Them POWs Anymore,” *Time U.S.*, May 17, 2012.

In the interviews in which Robert Bergdahl revealed the negotiations, he also expressed, for the first time, frustration with the Obama administration. To the *New York Times*, Robert Bergdahl said that

he was frustrated by the lack of progress on the talks, which he believes are stalled because the Obama administration is reacting to pressure from Congress in an election year not to negotiate with terrorists. “We don’t have faith in the U.S. government being able to reconcile this,” Mr. Bergdahl said.⁴²

Up to that point, the Bergdahls kept silent per the request of the administration. The shift from the initial quiet cooperation with the well-intended government, to frustration and public accusations of government incompetence, has been the pattern of behavior of Israeli families of abducted soldiers. It took the Shalit family a similar period of time of approximately three years, to shift from acquiescence to public, angry pressure.

The May 9, 2012 *New York Times* story that broke the news on the U.S.-Taliban negotiations was also the first to raise the dilemma of whether to “negotiate with terrorists” or not. But it did so only indirectly, through Robert Bergdahl’s accusation that the Obama administration was stalling the talks as a political offering to a negotiations-averse Congress. The *Times* did not elaborate on the view that opposed negotiations, neither did it provide a source to clarify that position. By that, the *Times* gave the upper hand to the pro-negotiation position, and particularly to the

⁴² Elisabeth Bumiller and Matthew Rosenberg, “Parents of POW Reveal U.S. Talks on Taliban Swap,” *The New York Times*, May 9, 2012

voice of the Bergdahl family, whom *New York Times*' reporter Elisabeth Bumiller interviewed in its home in Idaho.

The *Times* also reported on Robert Bergdahl's independent initiatives vis-à-vis the Taliban:

Mr. Bergdahl said that he had started to deal directly with the Taliban by e-mail in recent months, initially through a "contact us" tab on a Taliban Web site, but then through a member of the Taliban he believes has knowledge of his son's circumstances. Mr. Bergdahl said [...] that he had told them [the Taliban] that their videos of his son have had little impact on the American public and that it would be more effective to direct their appeals to Mr. Obama. "I told them I am doing what I can to see that the president understands this issue," Mr. Bergdahl said.

The disclosure of the U.S.-Taliban negotiations came with another disclosure: that the *New York Times* had actually known for some months about the talks but withheld the information by request of the administration and the Bergdahl family. The press's cooperation in monitoring the release of information for the sake of the abducted soldier has been characteristic of the American press. To name the most highly debated U.S. example of recent times, the U.S. and the foreign media had all cooperated with a request by the *New York Times* for a complete media blackout with respect to the Taliban's 2008 abduction of *New York Times* reporter David Rohde. As for Israel, as elaborated earlier in this chapter, reporters withheld potentially damaging information (so long as *they* believed it to be damaging and as long as it was not published in the foreign press). But while the Israeli government wished that Gilad Shalit would vanish altogether from the news coverage so that the Hamas would not

recognize his “importance” and raise their demands, Israeli reporters did not meet that expectation at all, and the coverage virtually screamed for Shalit’s release.

Bergdahl family’s short-lived media blitz

That same May of 2012, the Bergdahl family went for a media offensive. Launching their campaign seven months after the internationally acclaimed Shalit campaign culminated in Gilad Shalit’s release, they were undoubtedly encouraged by that campaign’s sweeping success. Moreover, once the U.S. was holding negotiations with the Taliban, the family’s campaign had a concrete purpose, which was to put pressure on Washington to bring the negotiations to fruition. In Israel, the point of the Shalit campaign was exactly that. The campaign came to life because the Israeli-Hamas indirect negotiations were not sufficiently robust in the family’s view, and it needed to press the Netanyahu government into making more concessions and finalizing the deal.

The Bergdahl family’s media strategy was similar to that of Shalit’s family, and it was no doubt inspired by it. Aside from their public revelation of the fact that negotiations with the kidnappers were taking place, the parents, who were described as intensely private, began to make themselves familiar to the American public. They began to agree to interviews and tell their personal stories, describing Bowe, his

home-schooled childhood, his athleticism and his gentle nature.⁴³ The emphasis on his good spirit and naiveté echoed Gilad Shalit's similarly endearing public persona. In May 17, 2012, *Time Magazine* featured a story about the Bergdahl family, accompanied with beautiful, melancholic photos, taken by renowned photojournalist Christopher Morris, of Jani and Robert Bergdahl in the bucolic Idaho landscape.⁴⁴ But the Bergdahl's campaign was short lived, as only a few weeks following its initiation, major publications were suddenly retelling Bowe's abduction story, adding details that tainted his reputation, and in particular, his patriotism.

Questioning Bergdahl's loyalty

In June 2012, less than a month after the Bergdahls began their high-profile campaign, *Rolling Stone* magazine published an investigative piece by Michael Hastings, which shed a new light on Bowe Bergdahl in a way that for some people reduced the U.S. motivation for negotiation. Hastings claimed that Bowe Bergdahl had left his army post voluntarily because he was appalled by U.S behavior in Afghanistan. As evidence, Hastings cited an email that Bergdahl sent to his parents the night before his disappearance, and in which he described his unit's indifference to Afghan suffering, concluding that 'the horror that is America is disgusting.'⁴⁵ In light of Hasting's account, the attempts by Bergdahl's father to initiate a direct

⁴³ Elisabeth Bumiller, "Idaho's Recruit's Unlikely Path to Life as a Taliban Prisoner," *The New York Times*, May 14, 2012.

⁴⁴ Nate Rawlings (2012), "America's Last Living POW: Christopher Morris Photographs a Family in Waiting," *Time Magazine*, May 17th, 2012. Available at: <http://lightbox.time.com/2012/05/17/pow/#end>

⁴⁵ Michael Hastings, "America's Last Prisoner of War," *Rolling Stone*, June 7, 2012.

dialogue with the Taliban could easily be interpreted as excessively amenable to the Taliban.

The *Rolling Stone* piece was not the first to raise these suspicions against Bergdahl. *Fox News* had previously questioned the circumstances of Bergdahl's disappearance, including the claim that he was a deserter. Fox went even further to report that it learned that Bergdhal had converted to Islam and joined the Taliban cause. Fox based the report on interviews with one of Bergdhal's captors, an unidentified Taliban commander.

The Rolling Stone scoop was immediately picked up by news agencies and the majority of print and digital news media. The *New York Times* not only reported Hastings' version on the events, but also repeated his assessment of the diminished chances for a prisoner exchange deal. There were people in Congress and the Pentagon, Hastings said, for whom Bergdahl was a deserter and even a traitor, and who objected any effort to release him.⁴⁶ Six months later, in October 2012, the Obama administration announced that the negotiations—which were a part of a larger attempt to conclude a peace accord between the Taliban and the Afghan government—failed, and that the parties were not expected to resume them before the completion of the American withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014.

⁴⁶ Mark McDonald, "New Report Says Captive U.S. Soldier Left His Post Willingly," *The New York Times*, June 13, 2012.

In this respect, the Bergdahl case bears similarities to the hostage taking of Jeffrey Schilling by the Muslim Philippine-based guerilla group Abu-Sayyaf in 2000. Schilling was an American citizen, but the circumstances of his kidnapping were odd, as he was in fact visiting the Abu Sayyaf camp with his Philippine wife, who was a cousin of an Abu Sayyaf member. During the eight months of Schilling's captivity, the U.S. media coverage of his plight was modest compared to the other hostage situations that Abu Sayyaf was constantly and consistently orchestrating. First, Abu Sayyaf's habit of kidnapping foreigners for the ransom that would finance their operations had eventually scared the foreign media away and prevented close coverage of the situation and proper investigation of the circumstances of Schilling's captivity. Second, Washington kept a very low profile and hardly made any statements on Schilling, partly because it was uncertain about his victim status. The media followed suit, and in the absence of any Administration-generated items, or the ability to verify or disprove Schilling's collaboration with Abu-Sayyaf, it hardly covered the story (Nacos 2007).

This turn of events in the Bergdahl case in mid-2012 obviously affects the validity of the comparison between the Bergdahl and the Shalit cases. Bergdahl's questionable loyalty denied him the victim status and with it, any chances of a massive Shalit-like public campaign. It is yet helpful to use the Bergdahl case for comparative purposes if we limit it to the time period beginning in his disappearance in 2009 until the *Rolling Stone* story in mid-2012. Indeed, it is possible that the relatively low-key coverage during those three years was partly related to the already existing suspicion that Bergdahl had contributed one way or another to his own

captivity. But while the validity of the comparison to Shalit may be limited, this is still case of an American soldier held by a hostile organization who disseminates videos of the hostage pleading to get out.

Coverage of the non-controversial period of Bergdahl's captivity

A search of the *New York Times* archive⁴⁷ reveals that during the relevant three years period, the Bergdahl story generated a total of 28 stories, including coverage of the videos that the Taliban released featuring Bergdahl. Given this modest figure, it is tempting to draw immediate conclusions from Israel's national hysteria over the fate of Shalit and the American media's relative disregard of the continuing suffering of Bergdahl and his family, and there were some commentators who did just that, claiming that Americans did not "care" as much about their soldiers.⁴⁸ But that is definitely not the point. The Shalit family, after its initial three years of silence, ran a formidable public campaign, employing Israel's top publicists and organizers. The Bergdahls, on the other hand, similarly kept a very low profile for three years, but just as they were initiating their media offensive, the story broke that Bowe Bergdahl was somewhat accountable for his own captivity, and again the Bergdahls resumed their silence. So one plausible answer to the claim about the American "indifference" is that Shalit was backed by an organized, massive campaign, while Bergdahl was not.

⁴⁷ Proquest search dated February 5, 2013.

⁴⁸ See for example Yochi J. Dreazen, "Why Do Americans Care So Much less About Captured Troops Than Israelis?" *The Atlantic*, October 19, 2011.

The interest, however, lies in the similar dynamics of the families' activism, from three years of silence to heated pressure. It is here that we are faced with an important distinction between U.S and Israel foreign policies, one that has had a tremendous effect on the media coverage and the public discourse, which in the Israeli case brought the issues back to policy making level. Until the Bergdahl case, the U.S. held onto its policy of no negotiations with captors over captured soldiers, and no compliance with demands of either ransom or prisoner exchange deals. If negotiations were held, they were kept confidential in order to appear consistent with the stated policy. As long as negotiations were not a formal, viable option, there was no point in massive coverage of abducted soldiers, because in terms of the basic characteristics of news, *nothing was going on*—the captors were making demands, and the U.S. refused to consider them. And it was not only that journalists had no developing story to report—government too had all its reasons to keep stories of abducted soldiers far from the media radar. If there were any indirect negotiations, the U.S. government would not want to publicize them for the same reasons that were cited by the very few opponents of the Shalit campaign, namely the wish to prevent the captors from realizing that the deal was a high priority worthy of considerable sacrifice. Moreover, the U.S. government was generally not eager to publicize the ongoing, grinding nature of the Afghanistan war in *any* way. Promoting news about immoral enemy conduct only inflamed the public (to some degree), and hastened the war opposition. From the administration's point of view, less news about Afghanistan was better.

The Shalit campaign and the massive Israeli coverage came about because negotiations were known to be taking place. Even if, hypothetically, the government

had refused to negotiate for Shalit at all, it would have still made perfect sense to mount the Shalit campaign because it was a well-known fact that the Israeli government *did* conventionally negotiate, so that when it didn't (or at least said it didn't), it was worthwhile to try to force it to. As described earlier in this chapter, throughout history Israeli leaders time and again waived the “no-negotiation” principle. Since the Jibril Deal in 1985, and with the exception of the Arad incident, every abduction crisis began with the government's total rejection of the captors' demands, and ended several years later with the acceptance of most of them. A campaign like the one led by the Shalit family would not have been as forceful, and perhaps would not have any point at all, had it faced an administration with a consistent no-negotiation-over-soldiers policy.

Israeli journalist and commentator Raviv Drucker, who wrote about Bowe Bergdahl in his blog as an illustration of the different policies of Israel and the U.S., rightfully noted that in Bergdahl's case, the Taliban demands were relatively modest—the release of 21 detainees, ultimately reduced to five Taliban leaders—compared to Hamas's achievement in the Shalit deal, which was the release of 1027 prisoners. The Taliban's bargaining position, he argued, took under consideration the U.S. no-deal policy.⁴⁹ Moreover, Bergdahl's family published on May 6, 2011 a taped YouTube appeal directed at the Taliban⁵⁰ precisely because the rules of the game—no bargaining—were, at the time, very clear, and the Bergdahls had no option but to act independently.

⁴⁹ Raviv Drucker's blog post “The Shalit Case – The American Version” is available at: <http://israblog.nana10.co.il/blogread.asp?blog=394281&blogcode=11482261> [Hebrew]

⁵⁰ Robert Bergdahl's appeal to the Taliban is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJmmZQ3byKQ>

The U.S. no-negotiation-over-soldiers principle

While it is too soon to assess the Bergdahl case historically, it may as well be the first case in which the U.S would be known to have conducted negotiations with a militant group for the release of a soldier-hostage. For its part, the administration has put the Bergdahl negotiations in a larger context, claiming them to be a component in an attempt for a peace agreement between the Taliban and Hamid Karzai's Afghan government. The release of Afghan prisoners from Guantanamo, had it taken place, could thus be construed, from Washington's desired perspective, as a "peace building measure" rather than a fulfillment of the U.S. part within a prisoner exchange deal. This way, the "no-negotiation" principle would not be deemed broken.

The "no-negotiation" principle, to which the U.S. government generally adhered (if it did negotiate, it was a tough negotiator, offering very little in exchange for captured Americans) and to which the Israeli government did not, is key to understanding the different coverage that the issue of abducted soldiers received in the U.S. and Israel. In the U.S., the government's long silence translated into meager coverage by a cooperative press, while in Israel, the much higher prospects of negotiations and release flamed hopes and provided a sense of purpose for both campaigning and vigorous coverage by journalists who did not feel committed to the government line.

A short survey of hostage crises involving U.S. citizens from the past 15 years demonstrates that they all adhere, at least publicly, to the formal U.S. “no negotiation” policy. Historically, the U.S. “no-negotiation” doctrine became even more rigid following Israel’s successful Entebbe operation in 1976, as well as West Germany’s release of the passengers of Lufthansa Flight 181 in October 1977, inspiring President Carter to order the creation of the Delta Force (McAlister 2002).

A typical example for the “no-negotiation” policy was the Dos Palmas kidnapping of 2001, in which Abu Sayyaf raided the Philippines Dos Palmas resort and kidnapped 20 people, among them three American tourists. Four months later Abu Sayyaf beheaded one of the American hostages, Guillermo Sobero. Although U.S. citizens were involved, it was the Philippine government that negotiated with Abu Sayyaf and paid ransom, although the hostages were eventually freed through a Philippine army raid (except for the hostage Martin Burnham, who was killed during the rescue operation).

Another case, from another part of the world and a different context, was the kidnapping of *Christian Science Monitor* reporter Jill Carroll by an unidentified Iraqi group in Baghdad in January 2006. Her captors demanded the release of all Iraqi female prisoners from U.S. custody, but the U.S. refused. Carroll was held for two and a half months, until she was freed without explanation. During the time of her custody, the U.S. freed five Iraqi female prisoners, but the U.S maintained that the prisoners’ release was the result of a standard review, not a concession to Carroll’s kidnappers.

When *New York Times* Pulitzer Prize winning reporter David Rohde and his Afghan fixer Tahir Ludin were kidnapped by the Taliban and held near the Afghanistan-Pakistani border in November 2008, their kidnappers demanded the release of 15 Taliban prisoners being held in Guantanamo and Afghanistan, as well as a ransom of \$25 million. According to the *New York Times*, it did not pay any ransom,⁵¹ and Rhodes and Ludin eventually and famously escaped after seven months in captivity, but *New York Magazine*, in an investigative piece intended to shed light on a remarkable hostage drama that the *New York Times* succeeded in keeping largely secret, argued that while the *Times* indeed did not pay any ransom, it had offered to pay \$1 million. Eventually, according to one source (cited by *New York Magazine*), money was paid as a bribe—although it is unclear who paid it, and it was not necessarily the *Times*—to Rohde’s guards, in order for them to enable a rescue operation. The operation never took place, but it is possible that the bribes eased Rohde’s and Ludin’s escape.⁵² The U.S government has so far not been associated with any ransom or bribe in this case.

And only recently, in January 2013, the U.S. “no negotiation” policy was again put to the test as a group associated with Al-Qaeda took over the more than 800 Algerian and foreign personnel of the In Amenas gas plant in Algeria, including seven American citizens. The hostage crisis, dubbed the Sahara hostage crisis, lasted four days, and ended with an Algerian military raid in which all 32 terrorists were killed and most of the hostages were freed. Approximately 40 hostages died during the crisis

⁵¹ For an account of the negotiations for Rhodes’s release, see Ben Arnoldy and Dan Murphy, “Before David Rohde Escaped, a Flurry of Efforts to Win His Release,” the *Christian Science Monitor*, June 21, 2009.

⁵² Matthew Cole, “The David Rohde Puzzle,” *New York Magazine*, January 22, 2009.

and the rescue operation, and while it is unclear how many died in the hands of the terrorists and how many were killed by Algerian forces, the price of the aggressive rescue operation—Algeria was criticized for not using available surveillance technologies that could have decreased the death toll⁵³—was undoubtedly very high. Algeria refused to negotiate with the terrorists, as did the U.S, which stated unequivocally that it did not negotiate with terrorists.⁵⁴

The popular argument ties the U.S. “no-negotiation” policy with regard to abducted soldiers to the fact that service in the U.S military is characterized as voluntary and professional. In terms of the Shalit vs. Bergdahl comparison, Shalit was the child who had been drafted as all 18-year old Israeli teenagers are, while Bergdahl chose a professional, military-job path, which involved the taking of a calculated risk. The argument that Israelis engage in exchange deals because the Israeli army is deeply intertwined with Israeli life while the U.S. army is not, requires some elaboration and re-assessment.

Volunteer vs. conscription army

In order to understand the value system that is associated with the U.S. army, and how it affects the general perception of soldiers and soldier-victims, we need to

⁵³ Adam Nossiter and Eric Schmitt, “Algeria Defends Tough Response to Hostage Crisis As Toll Rises,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 2003.

⁵⁴ Chris McGreal, “U.S. Confirms One American Hostage Killed in Algeria Attack,” *The Guardian*, January 18, 2003.

acquaint ourselves with the various arguments surrounding the question of civic participation in state-mandated public service. At one extreme is the current all-volunteer army model, which has existed in the US since 1973, and at the other the conscription model (as in Israel), while various types of mandatory, non-military, national service duties fall in between.

Proponents of the conscription and national service models come mostly from a communitarian point of view. They argue that collective mandatory service contributes to social cohesion, enhances public mindedness and fosters greater acceptance of minorities' rights. “‘It’s hard to imagine,’ said Robert Putnam in a 2008 interview for *The American Interest*, ‘the civil rights revolution without it having been preceded by World War II [fought by draftees], even though I recognize that the U.S. armed forces were segregated during the war. It wasn’t a direct consequence, but the pervasive notion that we’re all in this together’ was a contributing factor in the background to the civil rights revolution.”⁵⁵

Proponents of the mandatory service model have argued that having an army of draftees would make national leaders less likely to rush into ill-advised wars because their own children could be swept into them—the generally lower-income and lower-status soldiers of an all-volunteer army have less political clout and may be seen as more expendable. Another common criticism of the all-volunteer army has been its contribution to the perpetuation of inequalities. Michael Sandel (1998) argued that

⁵⁵ Bowling with Robert Putnam, *The American Interest*, Vol. 3 (3), Jan-Feb 2008.

the difference between conscription and the volunteer army is not that one is compulsory, whereas the other is not; it is rather that each employs a different form of compulsion—the state in the first case, economic necessity in the second. [...] If military service is just another job, why should the employer discriminate in hiring on the basis of nationality? Why shouldn't the U.S. military be open to citizens of any country who want the work and possess the relevant qualifications?

On the other hand, as the case of the Vietnam War proved, a draft could also be conducted on an unequal basis. The anger of the anti-war movement was also directed at the discriminatory draft, cultivating the persistent myth that only the lives of the socially and economically inferior were put at risk, and that the soldiers returning home were “spat upon” because they were of “low class.”

Richard Posner defended the all-volunteer army, which he preferred to call “a professional army.” Posner (2003) was concerned with the deprivation of liberties that the conscription model entailed. Answering Sandel, he argued that “the state that asserts an unlimited right to the enforced labor of its people is not participatory, it is despotic.” He dismissed Sandel’s argument, that army personnel are economically “coerced into service,” as “far-fetched.”

Meanwhile, the U.S. military has been becoming increasingly “professional” by adopting corporate standards and practices. It continues a trend that Charles Moskos, a military sociologist, identified more than twenty years ago, when he argued that the U.S. army had been shifting away from an “institutional” model into an

“occupational” model (Moskos, 1988). As an “institution,” the army derived its legitimacy from “national” norms such as “honor” and “duty,” and the collective interest of the institution surpassed that of the individual soldier. The transition into the “occupational” model meant that the army derived its legitimacy from the non-normative rules of the free market, namely supply and demand, and that the self-interest of the soldiers was paramount.⁵⁶

Christopher Dandeker (1994) explained the “corporatization” of Western armies in broader terms than the practical free-market efficiency. Armies of Western, developed states had to respond to the changing priorities of civil society. These priorities were increasingly fluid, as national interests were no longer as clear as in the old “us vs. them” Cold War dichotomy.

In this uncertain and turbulent world it is more difficult than ever before to identify where one’s international interests lie and thus what appropriate mix of military and non-military (economic, diplomatic) security instruments should be developed, what missions should be allocated to armed forces and what force structure is most appropriate (pp. 639-640).

Dandeker suggested a re-consideration of the role of the army in a globalized world. He predicted that Western armies would increasingly engage in internal conflicts of other, less developed nations worldwide. As the Balkan wars have

⁵⁶ In practice, the occupational model entailed clearer separation between the soldiers’ work and their private and social lives, higher pay, monetary incentives for high-skilled professionals beyond their basic compensation and the employment of civilians. The occupational trend, argued Moskos, followed the inevitable lines of the most salient shift in Western sociology of the past two centuries, from the collective to the individualistic, from traditional authority to rational-legal authority, and from a normative order to economic functionality (Moskos 1998, p. 60).

tragically shown, regional, sub-national movements could challenge nation states, triggering a spiral of genocides and humanitarian crises. This dangerous breakdown of nation states (Syria is a current example) required Western armies to engage in international policing and peacekeeping missions, and resolve situations where the U.S. and the other Western powers' interests were not easy to discern. This uncertain reality meant that Western armies would be increasingly "smaller, busier and more flexible and a critical force multiplier will be effective intelligence about security risks as well as superiority in command, control, communications and intelligence (C3I) to be gained by advanced technology." (p.646)⁵⁷

Does the corporatization of the army bear on the distance between soldiers and civilian society? Going back to the popular question of whether the U.S "cared less" about its captured soldiers in a way that made it more prone to a "no-negotiation" policy, Posner dismissed any negative effect a volunteer army might have had on the status of the soldiers:

No American was heard to say that since our soldiers are paid to risk their lives, we should regard the death, the wounding, or the capture of them with the same equanimity with which we regard the occasional death and maiming of race car drivers, lion tamers, and mountain climbers.

Indeed, American soldiers' public esteem remains intact and is not reduced by pay. The concern for "our troops" in times of armed conflict has been and remains

⁵⁷ Another connection between the "professionalization" of the army and the corporate environment was that the army needed to show, for recruiting purposes, that army skills were easily transferable to the civilian world (Dandeker 1994:646).

genuine and intense. This chapter's argument has more to do with the extreme Israeli experience, exacerbated by populist journalism, than with an alleged moral American weakness. Indeed, some would say, as Israeli journalists Raviv Drucker and Shimon Schiffer have, that the moral weakness here lies with Israel. This chapter argues that the universal army service in Israel is an important part of the explanation of the overwhelming power of the Shalit phenomenon (as well as the less-successful campaigns that preceded it, such as the Arad campaign). The shared army experience, and the nation-wide identification that it engenders with families of abducted soldiers, is the social imperative for the government's compulsion to negotiate for the release of abducted soldiers. The compulsion may be benevolent, portraying the government as responsive to popular wish, but it should be also perceived as purely political. Indeed, the Shalit issue may have become an electoral issue for Benjamin Netanyahu, who already knew that in the subsequent elections he would be seeking to win—as indeed, in 2013 he won—a second term as prime minister.

A conscription army is fully immersed in society in a way that makes it an integral component of the Israeli life cycle, for better and worse. The army is not a mere symbol of solidarity and nationhood, it does not “represent” Israel the way the U.S army “represents” it, but it is a mechanism that exercises national solidarity and social cohesion on a tangible, day-to-day basis. This is indeed a fundamental, systemic cultural difference between these two societies, as heterogeneous as they both are. The shared army experience, which transforms every civilian into a soldier and later a veteran, creates deep identification with soldiers, and particularly, those in dangerous situations. In this respect, the argument that Posner is refuting (namely, that

Americans “don’t care”) is not the argument presented here. Posner is right in saying that no one can seriously argue that U.S. soldiers suffer from public indifference because they are paid to do their job. The U.S army does not suffer from a lack of respect from the American public. The point here is, however, that by comparison, a conscription army can elicit an overwhelming public reaction to situations of soldiers at risk that can be, and have been regarded as, disproportional or hysterical. A substantial part of the international press coverage of the Shalit deal was the attempt to explain the oddity of the imbalance of the exchange. The curiosity and awe were reflected in headlines such as CNN’s “Why Israelis Believe One Soldier is Worth 1,000 Palestinian Prisoners.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Peter Wilkinson, “Why Israelis Believe One Soldier is Worth 1,000 Palestinian Prisoners,” *CNN*, October 18, 2011, available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/10/17/world/meast/israel-prisoner-swap-explainer>;

Chapter 4

Victims and the Overarching Conflict

The complex trauma of losing a family member to an act of political violence can bring about a fundamental shift in the personal and professional lives of these secondary victims. Apart from the tremendous challenge of dealing with their own grief, these victims' predicament is the result of a political situation, which violently permeated their life and which they cannot ignore or separate from their tragedy. Their need to understand and give meaning to their loss often compels bereaved family members to become familiar with the details of the conflict and develop coherent opinions on the geo- or ethno-political crisis that so profoundly affected their lives. They are further compelled to consider ways to prevent future attacks, whether by means of promoting peace or by retaliation or even annihilation of the perpetrators. At times, the public expects them to become involved.

This chapter examines the interaction of the news media with family members and families' organizations that actively promote regional or world peace and the enforcement of human rights. They do so under the banner of saving other families,

whoever and wherever they are, from a similar fate. It examines the news reaction to these ambitious groups and individuals, who risk being labeled “unpatriotic” or “naïve” as they reach out to people and communities often deemed by their own communities to be “the enemy.” Specifically, the groups that this chapter illustrates form personal and working relations with civilian victims of “the other side,” their message being: If we, who paid the heaviest price of the conflict, are able to connect with “the other side” and work to protect the basic rights of the “other,” then everybody else can.

Of course, not all victims groups who form on the basis of shared terrorism victimhood are necessarily “peacenik” organizations. In Israel, as this chapter will later illustrate, terrorism victim organizations were traditionally “hard liners” until the late 1990s. And in the U.S., 9/11 family members, including Debra Burlingame—who was also the moving force behind “Take Back the Memorial,” discussed in Chapter 2—formed “9/11 Families for a Safe and Strong America,” an organization that promoted neo-conservative approach to anti-terrorism, and in particular, the pre-emption doctrine. However, I decided to focus on those organizations that strive for peaceful measures in violent times, because their coverage is hard-won compared to the coverage of the hawkish family members. Peace and human rights family organizations struggle on the right end of the Experience-Argument Scale, where their tragedy provides limited validity to their claims. Hawkish families, on the other hand, operate in the more “concrete” anti- and counter-terrorism “middle” area of the Scale, as they oppose the early release of perpetrators or a prisoner exchange deal, or call for concrete security-related conditions within peace negotiations. This chapter is about

the right end of the Scale, where family members are not always deemed newsworthy and where their moral authority is sometimes questioned.

Terrorism victims' peace organizations

Jim Potorti worked on the 95th floor of the World Trade Center North Tower, and perished on September 11th, 2001. His brother, David Potorti, co-founded September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, an advocacy group seeking peaceful alternatives to war and terrorism. In the book that he wrote about Peaceful Tomorrows' formative years, *September 11th Families for peaceful Tomorrows: Turning Our Grief into Action for Peace* (2003), David Potorti described his own reasons to work for a cause which was not too popular in the revengeful climate following the events of 9/11:

I frequently ask myself about the work of Peaceful Tomorrows: Does it matter? Does an act of solidarity with a Muslim group, a gesture of kindness to a kid in Afghanistan, or a show of unity with Japanese atomic bomb survivors really mean anything? Who benefits from those connections? And what changes?

The answer is, in most cases, is *me*. I change. And in doing so, I begin to achieve the change I want to see in the world. This is a concept I can wrap my brain around, even as I struggle to imagine how I can possibly make a difference in a world where force so thoroughly dominates our lives and our imaginations.

The personal motivation to establish and join victim-based human rights organizations comes not only from a sense of moral commitment. Activism can also

fill the emptiness, the lack of sense of purpose that bereavement entails. This is how Ben, an Israeli bereaved father, described his joining the Israeli-Palestinian organization The Parents' Circle:

I was told [by a Parents' Circle member] that at the end of the month there was a weekend seminar and she invited me to come. I told her: you don't know me and I don't know you. What peace are you talking about? With whom? With those who murdered my daughter two months ago? I gave in and went to Neve-Shalom [the Parents' Circle meeting place near Jerusalem] on a Thursday. I met a group of bereaved parents, Israelis and Palestinians. Meeting them gave my life meaning and working together with them gives me a reason to get out of bed every morning.

The current victim-based peace organizations worldwide work independently in their respective countries, and are also united through international networks, which provide them opportunities to meet and collaborate. In the UK, Building Bridges for Peace⁵⁹ promotes the relationship between a daughter of a British MP and the IRA member who killed her father. The two make joint appearances in conferences and in the media worldwide as personal examples of reconciliation. In Algeria, Djazairouna is an organization of victims of the 1990s civil war that took the lives of more than 200,000 civilians. In Italy, Memoria Condivisa was established by family members of victims of neo-fascist terrorism (such as the 1980 Bologna Massacre), concentrating on remembrance of the victims as well as peace education. And in Japan, Nihon Hidankyo represents survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atom bombings, advocating for a global ban on nuclear weapons.

⁵⁹ The Building Bridges for Peace website is available at: http://www.buildingbridgesforpeace.org/about_us.html

Broadly speaking, victims' organizations are a relatively new sociological and political phenomenon. Victims' organizations have developed together with and as a result of the development of the concept of victims' rights, and in particular, *secondary* victims' rights. These rights included, for example, family members' participation in the sentencing phase of the criminal trial and monetary compensation. In her study about the depiction of victims in crime reporting, Rentschler (2011) argued that victims' personhood began to appear as a component in crime reporting only three decades ago, as victims' organizations raised awareness of the meaning of victimhood, its expansion to the victim's close family circle, and the needs that victimhood entailed, such as protection from the potential re-victimization effect of criminal proceedings. Victimhood has elevated as a legitimization for "standing" not only in the legal but also in the moral sense.⁶⁰

Victims' organizations have been also responsible for major advances in the U.S. criminal justice system. For example, they have succeeded in criminalizing specific behaviors such as child abuse and drunk driving. The history of crime reporting has been parallel to the history of victim activism. In the past, reporting was focused on the criminal act and the perpetrator, and the habit of depicting the victims' life or including the victims' family in the story did not exist. The acknowledgement of families as secondary victims and their high visibility within crime stories are a late

⁶⁰ Note, for example, this *New York Times* story about the gangster Whitey Bulger's trial in Boston: "I feel that I've been choked off from having an opportunity to give an adequate defense," [Bulger] declared. 'It was in some ways a surprising choice of words, given that the court had heard testimony that Mr. Bulger had strangled two women.'" Katharine Q. Seelye, Bulger Declines to Testify, but Gets Something Off his Mind: 'This is a Sham.'" *New York Times*, August 2, 2013: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/03/us/james-whitey-bulger-trial.html?smid=fb-share>

development that is commensurate with, as well as a contributor to, the ascent of victims' organizations.

Rentschler also explained the developments that allowed victims' family members to become legitimately recognized co-victims of crime, for which terrorism certainly qualified. During the 1980s, psychiatric definitions of victimization changed to focus on the subjective experience of psychological distress, rather than on the occurrence and circumstances of the victimizing act of violence. Co-victims, Rentchler wrote, "experience the traumatic, grief-ridden dimensions of crime as the caregivers of wounded primary victims, as the bearers of primary victims' testimonials to their experiences of crime, as witnesses to crime's aftereffects, and as dependents of or providers to the primary victims" (p.9). As we examine the pertinence of family members' claims through the Experience-Argument Scale, we relate to these same capacities of family members because they serve as factors of proximity. As the primary victims have died, the survivors and the victims' families remain closest to the terror experience.

When journalists encounter family-members-turned-human-rights-activists/pacifists, they need to strategize their reporting in a way that addresses a variety of social factors and assumptions. Conflicting elements include the revered place of the victims within society and the moral weight they carry, the fact that these are ordinary folks with no relevant education or professional credentials pertaining to the critical foreign policy issues that they advocate, the seeming loftiness of their ideas and their insistence on benevolence at a time of raging, cyclical violence and a

climate of fear, and finally, the generally deep sense of conviction held by the victims, a conviction reserved for people who have found in their political mission a renewed sense of purpose. Clearly, there is also a certain man-bites-dog element at play:

"Although they lost relatives, they don't believe in war."

This chapter studies two victim-based peace organizations, one in the U.S. and one in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. In the U.S., it is September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows,⁶¹ and in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, it is the joint Israeli-Palestinian Parents Circle Family Forum.⁶² These organizations are similar in that they both believe in the advancement of reconciliation and peace through their members' direct, intimate interaction with the civilian victims of the "other side," and by making these personal connections publicly known as inspiring evidence for the possibility of peace. These organizations are also similar in the challenges that they face, particularly the accusations of treason. The Parents Circle, to give a particularly extreme example, once faced criticism for bringing a bereaved Palestinian man, whose brothers were killed by the Israeli army, to speak with Israeli students—the accusation being that as the brother of Palestinians who were suspected of terrorism, this bereaved member, and therefore the entirety of the Parents Circle, was "related to terrorism."

Advocacy groups need a continued and critical mass of member motivation. In order to survive, they also need a long-term vision and confidence in their ability to

⁶¹ The Peaceful Tomorrows website is available at: <http://www.peacefultomorrows.org/>

⁶² The Parents Circle website is available at: <http://www.theparentscircle.org/>

create change. These are all hard to sustain. Many of the families' groups that formed after 9/11 for various causes disappeared after several years, whether because they had specific short-term goals that they either achieved or not (such as a particular design of the 9/11 memorial) or because the organization's internal energy waned. The Parents Circle and Peaceful Tomorrows have been quite successful in overcoming these challenges, and they have both been around for a remarkably long time. Their endurance is particularly notable given their ambitious, and occasionally Sisyphean, mission of promoting peace through personal encounters with civilian victims of their own nation's acts of violence. The Parents Circle has been active for 18 years, and Peaceful Tomorrows has been active for 11 years, allowing for an examination of the effects of time on their work and their influence, as well as on the values and moral judgments that the press assigned to their complex image of terrorism victims and political activists.

September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows

The beginnings of peaceful Tomorrows were rooted in the disparately experienced and yet shared feeling of 9/11 family members, in the days and months that followed the attacks, that they disagreed with the official U.S response to the attacks. They resented, individually, the militaristic, retaliatory and pre-emptive approach, and particularly the fact that it was waged in the name of their loved ones. For them, the 9/11 attacks were a heinous criminal act, and as such called for a joint, multi-national intelligence effort to capture the remaining perpetrators and their collaborators, later to be prosecuted by the international criminal system. These

family members, who were initially voicing their opinions disparately in newspaper op-eds, human rights websites, open letters to President G.W. Bush or simply in private communications with their friends, were fully aware that they were swimming against the tide of public enthusiasm for a war, but gradually connected with like-minded family members to ultimately form Peaceful Tomorrows.

Phyllis and Orlando Rodriguez, who lost their son Greg, a Cantor Fitzgerald employee, sent President Bush on September 17th, 2001—merely a week following the attacks—a letter. It said in part:

Your response to this attack does not make us feel better about our son's death. It makes us feel worse. It makes us feel that our government is using our son's memory as a justification to cause suffering for other sons and parents in other lands. It is not the first time that a person in your position has been given unlimited power and came to regret it (Potorti 2003, p.24).

Another family member who was immediately moved to action was Rita Lasar. Lasar's brother, Avrame Zelmanowitz, famously and heroically refused to leave behind his paraplegic co-worker, and perished with him in the collapse of the North Tower of the World Trade Center. On September 17th 2001, the *New York Times* published her letter to the editor:

It is in my brother's name and mine that I pray that we, this country that has been so deeply hurt, not do something that will unleash forces we will not have the power to call back.

Amber Amundson, the widow of Spc. Craig Amundson, who perished at the Pentagon, published in September 25, 2001 an op-ed piece in the *Chicago Tribune*:

Craig would not have wanted a violent response to avenge his death. And I cannot see how good can come out of it. We cannot solve violence with violence. Mohandas Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye only makes the whole world blind." We will no longer be able to see that we hold the light of liberty if we are blinded by vengeance, anger and fear. I ask our nation's leaders not to take the path that leads to more widespread hatreds--that make my husband's death just one more in an unending spiral of killing.⁶³

And Colleen Kelly, a devout Irish Catholic whose brother Billy died in the World Trade Center, wrote to Thomas Gumbleton, a Detroit bishop committed to non-violence:

One stumbling block seems to be the lack of choices given the American public concerning our response to 9/11. Our country sees no other way because we have been presented with no other way. This is my urgent request of the bishops: Can you begin a discussion of the other way, Christ's way? (Potorti 2003, p.49)

The first occasion on which the soon-to-be founding members of Peaceful Tomorrows met was the November 2001 "Walk for Healing and Peace" from the Pentagon to the World Trade Center. The organizer of the Walk was Voices in the Wilderness, an organization committed to ending the economic sanctions on Iraq. When Voices in the Wilderness members came across 9/11 family members' online

⁶³ Amber Amundson, "A Widow's Plea for Non-Violence," *The Chicago Tribune*, September 25, 2001.

anti-war statements, they invited them to join the Walk. David Potorti was there, as well as Craig Amundson's brothers Barry and Ryan, and Colleen Kelly.

Their first project, as a group, although not formally yet as Peaceful Tomorrows, was a collaboration with the San Francisco-based organization Global Exchange, for the purpose of visiting Afghanistan and connecting with civilian Afghan victims. Global Exchange initiated programs that served as "reality tours," facilitating personal interactions between people from different countries and cultures, and the U.S.-Afghan victim connection seemed particularly unusual and politically significant. In January 2002, merely three months after the launch of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, four core soon-to-be-members of Peaceful Tomorrows visited Afghanistan: Barry Amundson's partner Kelly Campbell; Rita Lasar; Derrill Bodley, a college music professor who lost his daughter Deora on 9/11 in the United Airlines 93 crash in Pennsylvania; and Bodley's stepdaughter, Eva Rupp.

In their week-long visit to Afghanistan, the group visited civilian victims of U.S bombings in their villages and homes, creating intimate encounters that were nevertheless accompanied by heavy press presence. The purpose of these personal connections, based on a shared loss, was to raise awareness of the human toll of the war and the immediate need for a U.S. federal fund that would compensate the victims and help them recuperate.

Soon after their return from Afghanistan, on February 2002, the family members officially launched September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows. Together with Global Exchange, they published *Afghan Portraits of Grief: The Civilian/Innocent Victims of U.S. Bombing in Afghanistan*—a reference to the *New York Times'* special 9/11 obituaries section “Portraits of Grief”—which was aimed at humanizing the individuals who were killed or maimed or who lost family members in the U.S air attacks. The report laid out the casualty rates and the circumstances of the deaths of hundreds of Afghans, and told the individual stories of a selected sample of victims and survivors, in brief, informal, human-interest-focused items similar to that of the *New York Times* Portraits of Grief series.⁶⁴

With time, Peaceful Tomorrows' agenda broadened. While the organization's members never took a leading role in the antiwar movement, they nevertheless attended all major mass demonstrations and some even committed acts of civil disobedience in Washington D.C. And as the legal saga concerning the appropriate framework in which to adjudicate the alleged Al Qaeda detainees was unfolding, Peaceful Tomorrows members advocated for the protection of the detainees' basic rights. They supported the framework of federal—rather than military—trials, because military trials, they argued, imposed limitations on the accused's legal defense, and particularly given the unprecedented, first-of-its-kind military commission framework which was established to facilitate the 9/11 murder and terrorism trials. Peaceful

⁶⁴ The Afghan Portraits of Grief report is available at: <http://peacefultomorrows.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/AfghanPortraitsOfGrief.pdf>

Tomorrows also joined the call for the closing down of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp.

Peaceful Tomorrows and the press: the de-politicized language of victim advocates

The beginnings of Peaceful Tomorrows were accompanied by an enthusiastic press. When the joint Global Exchange and soon-to-be Peaceful Tomorrows delegation arrived in Afghanistan in January 2001, hordes of journalists, from the U.S. and the international media, waited for them in the airport and continued to follow their visit. This was how Potorti, who has had a professional background as a print journalist and a television marketing producer, perceived the great interest in the group and its potential public influence:

There was no denying it: This was a unique story, one that went against the grain of conventional wisdom and, some might suggest, common sense—people whose families had been ripped apart in the worst act of terrorism on U.S. soil had just arrived in the alleged back yard of the terrorists. They were here, in person, to break bread with their counterparts—civilians who had lost family members in the crossfire. If the U.S was reluctant to question the efficacy of the bombing campaign, or the public's support of it, the arrival of the delegation created an opportunity to examine those issues from a variety of new angles. (2003:61)

Indeed, this could have been an apt opportunity for the press and the U.S. public to witness the consequences of the heavy bombings and weigh the war's human toll against its intended benefits. But did the American press seize on this

opportunity? Were the portrayals of grief and devastation accompanied by any meaningful policy debate? Not at all.

As we come to analyze the press coverage of Peaceful Tomorrows and the messages that the organization conveyed, or that were associated with it, in the news media, we must first lay out the two most basic goals of the organization at its outset. The first was a clear and unequivocal objection to U.S. military involvement in the countries that were assumed to harbor terrorism. This was the common theme of the founding members' individual public statements, which brought them together. When Peaceful Tomorrows announced its establishment in February 14, 2002, this conviction was stated loud and clear:

We believe that our country's single-minded rush to war has been made without proper consideration of the long-term consequences of our safety, security, and freedom of ourselves, our children, our grandchildren and our counterparts around the world. (Potorti 2003:83)

The second early goal of the organization was a more realistic and practical one. With the U.S. already involved in Afghanistan, the damage to the civilian population there was a reality to contend with, and Peaceful Tomorrows sought to establish a U.S. victims' fund that would help the Afghan victims recuperate and recover their losses.

But it was this early on in the game that Peaceful Tomorrows members realized that the media would be interested in them only as long as their arguments were limited to a seemingly “moral” rather than “political” line of opinion, and that in order for them to remain relevant, they would have to tone down their criticism of U.S. foreign policies.

Their strictly anti-war message, in the U.S. political climate of 2002, was soon found to be out of line for most mainstream media as well as mainstream public opinion. And the Afghanistan trip proved that for some news organizations even a story about Americans meeting Afghans was by itself too “political” in the first place. A *People* magazine reporter in Afghanistan told the delegates that the magazine’s editor decided against the story:

So they ended up doing a story on the Lion at the Kabul Zoo—which seemed a little bit ironic, because it’s supposed to be ‘People’ magazine. Here we are, a people-to-people delegation, and they do a story on a cuddly lion, which actually died several days later (Kelly Campbell in Potorti, 2003:68)

Those U.S. news organizations that did cover the visit concentrated on the human aspects of the meetings and remained there. The stories described many tears and mutual declarations of empathy and camaraderie between the victims of the two warring sides. Surely, the victim-to-victim bond was, of course, a conscious and a somewhat planned *mise en scène*, intended to stir the emotions and by that, ignite the political debate. But the coverage mostly remained on that personal level.

Of the two issues that Peaceful Tomorrows cared about, only one could be sometimes understood in “moral,” media-friendly terms, and that was the plea to compensate the Afghan victims of the U.S bombing campaigns. Indeed, it was also a political issue, and the Bush administration rejected it fearing that it would set an expensive precedent that would later apply on the victims of the much bloodier battles in Iraq. Nevertheless, it was an argument that could be construed in “moral” terms—we unintentionally harmed civilian and therefore must compensate them—so the media were able to accommodate it.

The *New York Times* coverage of the Afghanistan visit, for example, followed these lines. It took the form of an emotional portrayal by Mark Landler of a meeting between Rita Lasar and an Afghan victim, Amin Said.⁶⁵ Said had lost his newly wed brother and sister-in-law in an air raid that had destroyed their home in November 2001. The encounter of Lasar and Said was described as somber, as the two told each other their personal stories, acknowledged the friendship that their shared fate created and expressed mutual respect for each other. But when their discussion—according the Landler’s piece—developed to touch upon the circumstances of the conflict, Said happened to actually agree with the American cause, and Lasar, who was later to be arrested for acts of civil disobedience protesting the war, was described as opposing the war but not making a reasoned argument for her position. It seemed that Lasar intuitively realized that it would be odd of her to express harsher criticism of U.S policies than the Afghan host who was the victims of those policies, and so she chose to speak only of the need to help her fellow victims in Afghanistan:

⁶⁵ Mark Landler, “Sharing Grief to Find Understanding,” *The New York Times*, January 17th, 2002.

When the story-telling was finished, Mrs. Lasar and her hosts talked about the violence that had brought them together. Amin Said said he understood why the United States had bombed his country. "This action was taken to destroy a very cruel terrorist force based in Afghanistan," he said. "It was not just to compensate for the death of people with more people."

Mr. Said said he forgave the pilot who dropped the errant bomb. He said he suspected the military was trying to hit a nearby house where a senior Taliban official was known to be hiding.

For her part, Mrs. Lasar has deep misgivings about the continued American bombing of Afghanistan. She said she would like to meet Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, who plans a stop in Kabul, to express those doubts. "In my brother's name, I would respectfully request he make a real effort to help individual Afghan people," Mrs. Lasar said.

This story exemplified what Eliasoph (1998) termed "political evaporation," namely the process by which "grassroots" advocates choose to avoid political language that pertains to contested government policies, and instead, construct their arguments as coming from a strictly personal point of view. Political talk is considered in the U.S. to be a kind of "dirty" talk. It puts the speaker at risk of being rejected as "partisan" by those who identify themselves with the political opposition. It is strategically better, as well as morally superior, to speak from pure self-interest. There is a noteworthy oddity in Eliasoph's thesis: while selfishness is generally considered a negative trait, it is better to speak in terms of one's concern for her health or property, than to express "big ideals" or criticize U.S institutions, whether government or corporations. In other words, selfishness, in the sense of protecting oneself, is more appreciated than public mindedness. Selfishness, which proclaims actual or possible victimhood, provides legitimization for "standing."

Eliasoph identified the phenomenon of “political evaporation” when she researched advocacy groups such as anti-drug and environmental organizations. She found a profound gap between the terminology that the activists used “backstage,” namely among themselves or in intimate settings, and the terminology they employed in public, either in large settings or in the media. “Backstage” they were criticizing corporations and political institutions and speaking of the root causes for problems. But publicly, none of that criticism appeared, and instead, they were expressing concern for the safety and well-being of their families and close communities, a narrative strategy that Eliasoph termed “mommism.”

At each step in the broadening of the audience, the ideas shrank. In a strange process of political evaporation, every group fell into this strictly patterned shift in discourse: what was announced aloud was less open to debate, less aimed at expressing connection to the wider world, less public-spirited, more insistently selfish, than what was whispered.

Peaceful Tomorrows’ arguments were also personal, when they described their mission as a way to honor the memories of their loved ones. At first glance, Peaceful Tomorrows may seem different from the groups that Eliasoph examined, because Peaceful Tomorrows did speak in a public-spirited way, calling for American responsibility for the civilian victims of the conflicts that the U.S was involved in. And yet, under the media spotlight, they were careful not to harshly criticize the administration. Peaceful Tomorrows members were very consistent in explaining their motives as personal, and arguing that they wanted to associate the memory of the family members that they had lost with positive, constructive, benevolent values.

Explaining her commitment to help the Afghan victims, Peaceful Tomorrows member Kelly Campbell wrote:

It is only when we recognize and begin to act on the knowledge that we are truly one human family, that we can bring honor to those who died while the human family was still learning this lesson (Potorti 2003:123)

Another Peaceful Tomorrows member, Kristina Olsen, was a musician who gradually assumed the role of performing musical numbers in the various gatherings and events that the organization initiated. This is how Olsen, who lost her sister Laurie on 9/11, explained her motivation:

It became clear to me while singing in an outdoor festival on September 15th that I would need to commit myself to the music that I have been given in order to send the message of love, understanding and hope to the world, to help bring healing and peace to other people's hearts as well as my own. I remember how this knowing had washed over me that day, that I was being called to do this in Laurie's memory because she had embodied all of these elements of love and understanding in her own life. She had lived them, and now I was reflecting them back to the world through music sung in her memory. (Potorti 2003:206)

In essence, the protection of the "memory" of the victims, and the concern that this memory would be imbued with their chosen set of morals, is no different than the concern of the groups Eliasoph describes for their families and their close environment. In both of these advocacy strategies, there was a physical or virtual "asset" to be preserved and protected: the health of living family members, the moral

legacy of the deceased, the home. David Potorti acknowledged his choice to “de-politicize” his message in an email interview he gave me in October 13, 2006:

I think we have been least effective when our work is viewed as being about “politics” or “partisanship.” [...] And we have been most effective when our campaigns have focused on more generic human issues, such as the “unknown civilians killed in war,” or “circles of hope” that honor the dead without resorting to slogans or partisan banners. When giving speeches, the best way to lose an audience is to give the appearance of being partisan, so that’s something I’ve always avoided studiously.

As it happened, the first *New York Times* story that mentioned Peaceful Tomorrows by name was not a story about the war. Dean E. Murphy’s May 26th 2002 story, “Beyond Justice: The Eternal Struggle to Forgive” was a think-piece about the place of forgiveness in the personal, religious and political realities of contemporary times. Discussing the seemingly extreme option of forgiveness of the perpetrators of 9/11, Murphy interviewed Peaceful Tomorrows’ member Rev. Myrna Bethke, a Methodist minister, who said that forgiving her brother’s killers freed her to live again. The context here was the victims’ moral range, and the question of the personal motivation for, and the consequences of, granting forgiveness to perpetrators. To be sure, Peaceful Tomorrows would later reappear in the *New York Times* in its capacity as part of the anti-war movement. But that would only happen in 2003, following President’s Bush’s famous “Mission Accomplished” declaration, and the admission of the U.S. government that the fighting in Iraq was far from over.

In the media climate before and during the military deployment in Afghanistan and Iraq, Peaceful Tomorrows' de-politicized campaigns were commensurate with the news media's own reluctance to question the necessity and efficacy of war (an attitude which brought to mind the warm media reception of relatives of murdered victims who supported parole or opposed the killers' death sentences). In a way, the family members and the media shared a bond of "political evaporation." In the example of the Afghanistan visit, the experiences and arguments of the U.S. family members were accommodated within the U.S. media because they were mutually devised—by Peaceful Tomorrows members as well as by the press itself—in a way that would not put them in too stark of a conflict with the government view of the war.

Peaceful Tomorrow's occasional self-censorship could also be theorized using Noelle-Neumann's "spiral of silence" (1984). People who held minority views, posited Noelle-Neumann, were reluctant to share them with people they didn't know, mostly out of fear of being ridiculed or ostracized. And once when they experienced a negative response, those holders of unpopular views became even more hesitant, culminating in the potential disappearance of certain opinions from view. While Peaceful Tomorrows' members were never completely silenced, their persistent tension with mainstream media led them to focus their efforts in face-to-face talks in venues such as community halls and churches, where the audience was prepared to listen and much more sympathetic. Potorti recognized that shift:

At the very beginning, the media sought out family members of 9/11 victims quite simply to learn what their experiences had been, who they had lost, and to get the "human story." But they never seemed to be interested in our views

about the morality of the war in Afghanistan, or about other things being done in our names as a result of the attacks. We were invited to speak in literally hundreds of places, including schools, places of worship, and larger peace and justice gatherings, to such an extent that we couldn't fill all of the requests. These venues tended to be more receptive to our personal views.

When the press fails to offer alternative policy options

In their book *When the Press Fails*, Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston (2007) suggested that the U.S. press behavior during the run up to the Iraq war, and during the war as well, was one of “groupthink,” where there was one, uncontested, dominant view of the necessity of war and later, of its presumably well intended execution. The press, they argued, became too close to power, too reliant on government sources. Having no official sources to challenge the “weapons of mass destruction” hypothesis, the press, which lost its investigative impulse, accepted it as true. The press’s passivity also reflected the “groupthink” mentality of the political system as a whole, and in particular, the dysfunctionality of the Democrats as an opposition party. It is no wonder, then, that when the press accommodated Peaceful Tomorrows it was in their capacity as bereaved family members who in the name of compassion, reached out to those affected by the “collateral damage” of the “just wars” that the US was conducting.

The press’s reluctance to accommodate the policy option of a non-militaristic response to 9/11 was strongest in the first days and weeks following 9/11, as it was demonstrating an emotional range that ran between the grief of survivors, family members and New Yorkers, and the patriotic, masculine sentiments projected by the

White House. Those family members whose instinctive response to 9/11 was a rejection of the retaliatory response found their opinion to be unpopular to the point of sometimes being censored. Of course, they weren't the only ones. In the post-9/11 public atmosphere that Chapter 1 described, and which was typical of a nation mentally preparing for war, many commentators were criticized, and occasionally fired, for making anti-patriotic statements. The most memorable incidents were Bill Maher's suggestion that the U.S. unlike the terrorists, was cowardly because they were in the planes while the U.S. was firing missiles from afar, and Susan Sontag's *New Yorker* commentary in which she, too, refused to call the terrorists cowards.⁶⁶

In this respect, Peaceful Tomorrows was swimming against the tide, and the tide included not only a government-compliant press, but also the American public, which was swept by sorrow and anger and wanted to believe that a strong U.S. could eliminate the brutal regimes that were, as one tended to believe, associated with Al-Qaeda or at least equipping themselves with weapons of mass destruction. These beliefs persisted long after the 9/11 Commission and the Senate Intelligence Committee reports had refuted these claims. For example, an April 2004 survey found that 80% of Americans believed that Iraq had, at the outset of the war, weapons of mass destruction, and 70% associated Iraq either with Al-Qaeda or with operational assistance to the 9/11 attacks.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Susan Sontag in "The Talk of the Town," *The New Yorker*, September 24, 2001.

⁶⁷ Program on International Policy Attitudes, "American Continue to Believe Iraq Supported Al-Qaeda, Had WMD," April 2, 2004. Available at: http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/international_security_bt/100.php?nid=&id=&pnt=100

In November 2001, a group of future core members of Peaceful Tomorrows participated in the Washington D.C. to NYC Walk for Healing and Peace, mentioned earlier in this chapter as the occasion in which they have first took action and met. The Walk's final destination was Union Square, where the group held a vigil. The following morning, the *New York Times* published a photo of the group, but the photo was cropped in a way that left out the signs that they were holding, such as "*Our Grief is Not a Cry for War*," "*Break the Cycle of Violence*," and "*Justice, Not a Just War*." The photo was located within the *Portraits of Grief* section of the paper rather than within the news section, framing the vigil as an act of pure remembrance, and not as a political event.

Ultimately, as within a "bond of political evaporation," the family members' Afghanistan message was often times conveyed, by all parties involved, in a way that was not in disagreement with the establishment view on the Afghan victims as collateral damage. It was acceptable for 9/11 family members to say they were sorry for the Afghans' losses, as it was okay to suggest that the Afghan victims deserved compensation. Both these messages did not conflict with the collateral damage concept and even lent it the moral, compassionate stamp of 9/11 victims. But it was unacceptable—from the press's point of view—to imply that the U.S was carelessly attacking civilians or to call for a cease-fire, as it was unacceptable for a story to include a reasoned explanation by a family member why the bombings were unlikely to enhance U.S. security interests and therefore, why the war was wrong.

As this chapter will further illustrate, there were times when Peaceful Tomorrows' members did find the courage to attempt and convey their detailed anti-war perspective. But in these instances as well, not only that an intolerant press was practicing the government line, it was also expecting from them, as victims, to remain in the more simplistic human level, rather than the complex, expert-only, policy level. Elaborating on the "political evaporation" of the public activist discourse, Eliasoph described how "instead of portraying activists as politically concerned citizens with possibly useful policy suggestions, reporters presented local activists as simply worried about their own health, children, and finances." (p. 213). The same trend applied here, where the press presented Peaceful Tomorrows members as sensitive, perhaps somewhat weak individuals who could not accept the idea of the inevitable human toll of a just war, rather than sophisticated commentators on the issue of U.S. security interests.

This approach characterized the *New York Daily News* coverage of Peaceful Tomorrows 2002 Afghanistan visit. The piece, "*Victims' Kin Share Grief in Kabul*," described the U.S. visitors' purpose as strictly humanitarian.⁶⁸ The group's members' ideas shrunk in this piece to polite, almost childish, gestures toward the Afghan victims. And, as elsewhere, the question of whether so much "collateral damage" was justified remained unasked. Rita Lasar was quoted saying that she wanted the Afghans "to know that Americans care about them and that we're sorry," "And if they don't believe us, I'm going to convince them," without mention of this opinionated woman's opposition to the bombings or the war. Derill Bodley was quoted as saying

⁶⁸ Corky Siemaszko, "Victims' Kin Share Grief in Kabul," *New York Daily News*, January 16, 2002.

that he was there “to heal—and to be healed,” and that it was “a privilege to be here and share our experiences.” Eva Rupp received the last quote: “We want to show respect for a community that has also suffered.”

Interestingly, despite being filled with expressions of empathy and kindness to the Afghan people, the *Daily News* piece itself did not provide a single example or name of an Afghan person that the U.S. delegation met. Similarly, the facts and circumstances of the Afghan victims—such as the collateral damage statistics—were completely absent. And finally, there was no mention of the delegations’ immediate cause, which was the federal fund for the Afghan victims.

To be sure, this was not necessarily an act of press censorship, but most likely a demonstration of the “bond of political evaporation.” The delegates themselves knew that their newsworthiness lay in their unexpected empathy toward the victims of the nation that bred their relatives’ murderers. They were perhaps practicing what Tamar Liebes described in her comments to *Avoiding Politics* (2000), which was the possibility that the media were demanding, and receiving, “mommism.” “In that case,” she wrote, “talking as mom *externally* can be labeled as successful strategy rather than as reluctance to talk politics... down-sizing may by functional.” (pp.97-98) Indeed, political evaporation was not only shared by journalists and their activist-sources, it was also reciprocal, or in other words, it was the nature of their relationship.

And indeed, Peaceful Tomorrows occasionally compromised their message, acknowledging the ideological limitations of the news organizations that they were dealing with, or just hoping that their political convictions would somehow emerge, even if surreptitiously. When the Peaceful Tomorrows delegates to Afghanistan were invited to a special Oprah Winfrey show dedicated to Afghan women, they were not surprised that the producer of this entertainment show called and said that

this was not going to be a show where we talk about whether we should have bombed Afghanistan or not. [...] She assured me that we *could* talk about Afghan civilian casualties, and so it seemed like it was worth it. (Kelly Campbell in Potorti 2003, p. 117)

They were surprised later, on June 27, 2002, when they arrived at the studio and

got this really odd speech from a woman telling us they didn't want to get political. [...] They really tried to stop us from saying anything that would be too controversial. So I think all of us were tongue-tied when we got on the show, because we were so afraid that we were going to be saying the wrong thing. Mentally, they'd kind of intimidated us to the point where I was afraid to say anything. (Eva Rupp in Potorti 2003, pp. 117-118)

Rita Lasar decided not to cooperate and announced, a few minutes before taping, that she was not going to go on the show. During the Oprah interview, the remaining three Peaceful Tomorrows members noticed that the footage from their Afghanistan visit, shown simultaneously, seemed to be edited in a way that could be understood as portraying Afghan suffering caused by Taliban violence, rather than by U.S bombings (*ibid.*, p. 118).

Peaceful Tomorrows members got it right when they said that Oprah was en entertainment show and therefore they should have expected the sort of censorship that they faced. In his essay “Why Conversation is Not the Soul of Democracy” (1997), Michael Schudson characterized “democratic” conversation as an uncomfortable circumstance, where conflicting opinions compete and speakers risk their reputations as they debate publicly. Conversation draws its topics from the published, public materials that define the pertinent political issues of the day, namely and mostly the output of the press. Given these criteria, the Oprah Show about the American involvement in Afghanistan could have been an apt opportunity for a “democratic conversation” between concerned citizens to develop. Indeed, democratic conversations, which Schudson termed “problem solving conversations,” did not necessarily have to take place where policy was actually being shaped, but their norms could inhabit any public-minded conversation, in any setting, between concerned citizens who shared a commitment to liberal, democratic norms.

But the Oprah Show failed to meet these standards. The alleged attempt, or rather successful attempt, to conceal Peaceful Tomorrows’ critical viewpoint from Oprah’s viewers, and instead, tailor the conversation to the show’s narrow political framework, was in essence an attempt to bury the “uncomfortable” component of the conversation, and turn it from a daring “heterogeneous conversation” to the more convenient “homogenous conversation” between like-minded people (Schudson 1997:301). And that meant that while the Oprah Show presented itself as a serious participant in the national debate about important foreign policy issues at crucial times, it was de-democratizing in its reluctance to grant its participants the basic,

democratic freedom to disagree and to give one's reasons. "Democracy creates democratic conversation more than conversation naturally creates democracy," argues Schudson (1997:306). Here, democracy remained at the studio's doorstep, and the conversation lost its merit.

The Oprah Show incident could also be theorized through the more generous, or less critical, prism of Hallin's "spheres" (Hallin 1986). It was not that democracy was absent from the show, but that the show's commitment to its viewers was that it would never steer away from the "sphere of consensus". In the sphere of consensus, U.S. soldiers were the "good guys." They were conducting a just war, contending with the Evil Axis and replacing dictatorships with democracies, to the cheers of liberated citizens. In the sphere of consensus, the U.S was lauded for conducting a "clean" operation, using "precise bombs" that hit only evil-doers and did not involve collateral damage.

As the enlarged sphere of consensus covered almost everything that had to do with the war, the sphere of legitimate controversy shrank. The minimized sphere of legitimate controversy, reflecting the absence of dissenting voices in government, focused on war tactics rather than on questions of justification. The limited scope of debate also defined the exchange between Peaceful Tomorrows and the news media, hiding from light the full depth of the organization's convictions. And occasionally, the idea that there could be 9/11 victims who were opposing the war positioned them in the "sphere of deviance," a place reserved for peculiar or rejected views. This was

particularly true with respect to conservative news organizations, as this chapter will further demonstrate.

While an analysis of the relative pervasiveness of political talk in the Israeli media culture will follow later in this chapter, it is worthwhile to examine Liebes's suggestion that political talk in the U.S. is limited compared to Israel because the U.S. media do not offer truly different ideological or policy positions for the citizenry to choose from, consequently making the political debate redundant (Liebes 2000:101). At first glance, this is an appealing argument, especially when a case like the Iraq war comes to mind, or other cases where the government has not been meaningfully challenged from within. This argument does not apply, however, on issues such as gun control, abortion rights, the death penalty or gay marriage, where a full and nuanced set of options does indeed exist and finds its reflection in the news media discourse. Moreover, the gradual splintering of the Republican Party exposes the current fragility of the two-party system as a forum for meaningful debate.⁶⁹

When victims try to talk politics

Since war is a paramount political issue, probably *the* paramount political issue, one would expect that the debate for and against the war would fall into the press's "sphere of legitimate controversy," and be treated accordingly, using the journalistic mechanisms of fairness and balance (Hallin, 1986:117). But in late 2001

⁶⁹ Ron Fournier, "Republican Leaders Worry Their Party Could Divide in Two," *National Journal*, February 14, 2013.

and until 2003, anti-war talk was marginalized and pushed to the sphere of deviance.

At that time, some Peaceful Tomorrows members refused to cooperate with the process of “political evaporation” and decided to take a public stand against the war, despite the risks involved in expressing such an unpopular view. When David Potorti prepared to appear in *The O'Reilly Factor* in December 19th, 2001, he knew that he was entering an enthusiastic stronghold of the Bush administration’s War on Terror, and his state of mind was that of “having nothing left to lose.”

His brother was dead. His family would never be the same again. Why not take a stand against the war, even if he wound up looking stupid and got phone calls from crazy people? The tragedy had given him, and the others, a kind of freedom. (Potorti 2003:56)

The show aired merely three months following 9/11. The nerves were still raw, the memory too fresh, and family members were at the protective heart of a loving consensus. O'Reilly, facing a 9/11 victim whose views, coming from someone else, would have been brutally written off as blasphemous, was relatively courteous to Potorti. Potorti, for his part, had an opportunity to express a minority viewpoint that otherwise would have been missing altogether. But O'Reilly courtesy went only so far; he refuted Potorti's objections to U.S. violence with a comparison of the Taliban to Hitler, arguing that just as the Germans allowed for the rise of Hitler, so did the Afghans allow for the rise of the Taliban and therefore deserved punishment. “You need to rethink this,” O'Reilly said, positioning Potorti outside the limits of the show's acceptable political boundaries.

The news media's marginalization of the opposition to the war was not reserved to right-leaning cable news channels. At that time, during the run-up to the Iraq war, there was no substantial dissent within U.S. policymaking elite, and therefore no establishment-led dissent to occupy the sphere of legitimate controversy. And while Peaceful Tomorrows members were granted media access because of their special victim status, they fared no better in news venues outside *Fox News*, and experienced harsh criticism almost everywhere. When Peaceful Tomorrows' Kelly Campbell appeared on *CNN* on September 29th, 2002, Wolf Blitzer resisted her ideas in a manner not far from that of Bill O'Reilly:

Blitzer: I am trying to find out if you're just a pacifist or if there's a serious issue here that you're trying to consider.

Campbell: We believe that war is not the answer...

Blitzer: So it's basically a pacifistic position: You don't see any justification for war under any circumstances.

Campbell: I think particularly under these circumstances, a war resolution is not justified right now. I think we need to start with the UN, I think we need to start sending in weapons inspectors, seeing what happens. If they're not in compliance, come back, move it to another level. We're very concerned right now that this is being used for political ends, and that they're pushing through these votes before the election, but this is not something that needs to happen right now, this needs to be carefully considered...

Blitzer: Three thousand people were killed on September 11, and there are thousands and thousands of family members who have suffered. You have, what, thirty to fifty people so far who have come out and supported you, which is a tiny, tiny percentage of the family members. So basically you're only representing a minute fraction of all the victims' family members... (Potorti 2003:182).

Peaceful Tomorrows' challenges became ever harder in early 2003, as the U.S. was mentally and otherwise gearing up towards the approaching Iraq invasion. On January 5th, 2003, merely two months before Operation Iraqi Freedom, a Peaceful

Tomorrows delegation visited Iraq in order to highlight the humanity if the Iraqi people and to personally demonstrate the possibility of a non-violent dialogue. During this highly controversial trip, which was accompanied by a Saddam Hussein government minder, the delegation was presented with the consequences of the economic sanctions, such as the lack of medical supplies, and met with civilian victims of the Gulf War. Soon after their return, on January 15th, delegation members appeared as guests on CNN's *Connie Chung Tonight*. In this interview, the delegates got an opportunity to send their message across quite extensively. They explained that they were concerned about U.S violence leading to increased extremism, that the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq needed to be verified, and that the U.S should have no interest in a regime change *per se*. Chung, in her typical style, asked them pointed, accusatory questions:

Kristina, some people would think what you have done is not only bold, but they might even call it unpatriotic. Can you explain your mission? [...] Couldn't this be perceived as aiding the enemy?

...But you weren't allowed to go just anywhere you wanted to go, right? I think that, by having handlers or guides or escorts, that people would say, well, you were just pawns of President Saddam Hussein.⁷⁰

When I asked David Potorti how he felt about speaking against the war in public and whether he was censored, he said:

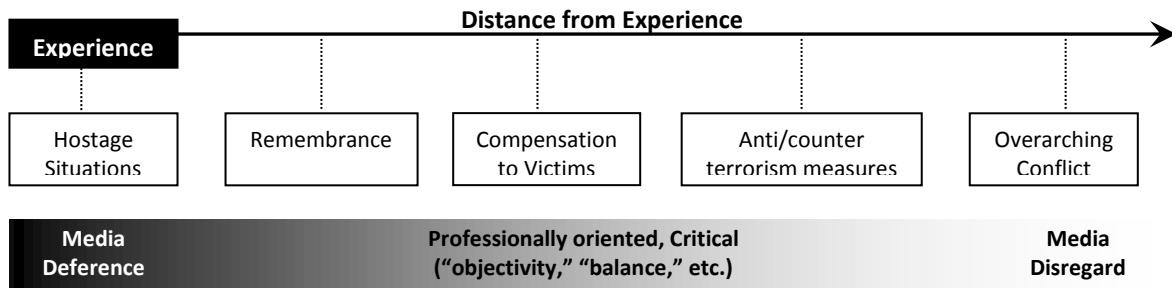
I can speak to a couple of my own experiences, which were less about being "censored" per se as being "used" as props in people's narratives. I was interviewed by a conservative radio station in San Diego which seemed to be sympathetic, but ultimately turned my mike off while the host talked about how commerce and business connections were the answer to dealing with these Muslims who live in tents and would just as soon cut his throat as have a conversation with him. I was interviewed at Ground Zero by an NPR reporter,

⁷⁰ CNN's *Connie Chung Tonight*, aired January 15, 2003, 20:00ET. A transcript is available at: <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0301/15/cct.00.html>

but the resulting interview seemed to have no point of view, which I think is a requirement for them.[...] I felt treated more like a prop than a person.

The marginalization of Peaceful Tomorrow's anti-war messages between 2001 and early 2003 positioned them at the right-end side of the Experience-Argument Scale, where victims had relative difficulty gaining media access or having their message received by journalists as socially acceptable, important or true. I termed that end "Media Disregard," because there was a component of ignorance there, which was either directed at the victims, who were ignored in the sense of being denied media access, or in the case where they did achieve access, ignorance was directed at their message, which was then dismissed as irrelevant, out-of-touch or unsubstantiated.

The Experience-Argument Scale



Peaceful Tomorrows suffered from the confluence of two factors that played against its anti-war endeavors: the first was the general reluctance of the press to accommodate an anti-war perspective while the country was "rallying behind the troops"; the second, which was well reflected in the aforementioned television

interviews, was the press's difficulty making a conceptual connection between the victims' experience and their war opposition. The 9/11 victims' identification with the pain of unknown populations in the third world who were perceived as haters of the U.S, did not necessarily hit a nerve. Furthermore, Peaceful Tomorrows' concern over the war's human toll did not register as a reason to avoid war, but as a reason to insist on the cautious employment of weaponry. Despite the fact that Peaceful Tomorrows members spoke intelligently about the war's core issues such as the risks involved in Saddam Hussein's rule, they lacked the aura of military or academic expertise that characterized the mainstream, heady policy debates.

When I asked David Potorti, in an April 2013 email interview—this was after he had already left Peaceful Tomorrows for personal reasons—to reflect on the group's achievements, he wrote:

What the group did, in my opinion, was poke a few holes in the darkness and let a little light in, briefly. We forced the media to go "off message" and acknowledge, with great resentment and anger, that there were people with alternative views beyond what the government was dictating. But we didn't, again in my opinion, accomplish anything in terms of changing how the government operates or how the media operates.

Peaceful Tomorrows' anti-war message seemed too far removed from their own victimhood to establish an immediate, persuasive message. And when it became apparent that there were no ties between the Iraqi government and Al Qaeda, and when the other stated cause of the war—the alleged existence of weapons of mass destruction—was proven false and belatedly acknowledged as such by the Bush

administration, then the only U.S motive left to justify its deployment was the will to free Iraq from Saddam Hussein's rule and to democratize it. The context thus shifted to Iraq's geo-political Middle East status and to the future of internal Iraqi politics vis-à-vis the interests of the U.S. Given these dominant, new perspectives on the war, the U.S involvement in Iraq no longer had any meaningful connection to the events of 9/11, and 9/11 victims were pushed even farther away from these critical foreign and military policy media debates.

It was this lack of immediate connection between their personal tragedy and the war in Iraq that caused the media to discount, to various degrees, the family members, together with the general reluctance to let any dissent interfere with the news media's self-proclaimed patriotic support of the war. By contrast, however, when Peaceful Tomorrows was involved in issues that were conceptually closer to the events of 9/11, it was much more successful in gaining media access and influence. When President G.W. Bush used Ground Zero footage in his March 2004 republican nomination TV ad campaign, Peaceful Tomorrows (as well as the International Association of Fire Fighters) attacked him for exploiting the memory of the victims for political gains. Speaking of Ground Zero, which was—as detailed in Chapter 2—“their” territory, and of the memory of the victims, which was also “theirs,” and doing that in the news-hyped context of Presidential elections, Peaceful Tomorrows members ignited a media storm. This was an important illustration of the fact that Peaceful Tomorrows, as such, was a capable organization, with the necessary human talent and resources to command media attention on relevant issues, and to make a coherent, persuasive argument.

The Bush Ground Zero ad debate

When G. W. Bush launched his 2004 re-election campaign, the campaign's first television ad included a photo of the Ground Zero site on the day of 9/11, with firefighters carrying a flag draped coffin. Peaceful Tomorrows responded with a sharp rebuke. "Our message to all politicians is 'Keep your hands off Ground Zero'" was David Potorti's quote in *U.S.A Today*.⁷¹ Potorti directed his message to "all politicians," asking them to collectively de-politicize Ground Zero. Peaceful Tomorrow's New York Coordinator Colleen Kelly emphasized the violation of her place of grief in an *Associated Press* dispatch: "It makes me sick. Would you ever go to someone's grave site and use that as an instrument of politics? That truly is what Ground Zero represents to me."⁷² And to the *Boston Globe* she said, "I don't think there is any understanding of how much pain those images cause."⁷³ David Potorti used the media's interest as an opportunity to demand, within that *Boston Globe* story, that President Bush fully cooperate with the 9/11 Commission: "It almost feels like they're messing with my head. [...] We're not ready to move on and think about everything wonderful that's happened since 9/11. I want to know what happened on that day." Both Kelly's and Potorti's statements were personal, employing "mommism" strategies as their topics allowed.

⁷¹ Mark Memmott and Judy Keen, "Bush Accused of Exploiting 9/11," *USA Today*, March 4, 2004.

⁷² See for example: *Associated Press*, Bush Ads Anger Some 9/11 Victims' Relatives; Firefighters Union Calls for Ads to be Pulled; White House Defends Use of Images," *Telegraph-Herald, Dubuque, Iowa*, March 5 2004.

⁷³ Wayne Washington and Anne E. Kornblut, "9/11 Images in Bush Ads Hit Firefighters, Kin of Victims Complain," *The Boston Globe*, March 5, 2004.

While some news stories about the Bush-Cheney ad were careful to “balance” Peaceful Tomorrows with statements of other 9/11 relatives who did not find it offensive (this chapter will soon look closer into these responses), Paul Farhi of the *Washington Post* seemed to have done the best job when he had Peaceful Tomorrows’ Kelly Campbell debate the subjective reactions to the issue:

Kelly Campbell, co-director of a nonpartisan group called Sept. 11 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, acknowledged that some victims' relatives found the ads appropriate. “There's no consensus around this, but for the most part 9/11 families are very sensitive to someone using images of our loved one's death for their own ends,” she said. “And that's what's pretty blatantly happening here.”⁷⁴

Campbell, as her Peaceful Tomorrows peers did, focused her message on the offensiveness embedded in the politicization of 9/11. In their call to separate Ground Zero from politics, Peaceful Tomorrows members were reclaiming their ownership over the choice of values associated with the site, and defining remembrance in *a-political* terms. They objected to the ad not so much because the flag draped coffin created a disconcerting image that forced them to relive the trauma, but more on the basis of their insistence that Ground Zero remain a “clean,” “politics-free” concept. For them, “politics” had the negative context of cynical, self-interest driven politicians, and it needed to be kept out of Ground Zero and never involve 9/11 imagery.

⁷⁴ Paul Farhi, “Bush Ads Using 9/11 Images Stir Anger,” *The Washington Post*, March 5, 2004.

This was not an obvious point of view, of course. One could argue that true democracy relies on a free exchange of ideas and images, and that ideas about and images of 9/11 and Ground Zero had to be included, cited and referred to in any possible way in the name of the cherished right of political expression, particularly given 9/11's momentous political significance. According to this line of argument, not only was the Bush campaign entitled to use that footage, Peaceful Tomorrows also had a similar right to practice its own freedom of speech and argue against that use. In other words, this was the democratic open exchange of ideas at play.

One could also argue that politicization was exactly what Peaceful Tomorrows was doing here, namely using 9/11 as a platform against a political candidate. Paradoxically, Peaceful Tomorrows always feared that it would be criticized for politicizing 9/11, and here it was, directing the same allegation of politicizing 9/11 at the Bush campaign. It is as if Peaceful Tomorrows had an intuitive understanding of the Experience-Argument Scale – they knew that when the discussion was about war and peace, their position would not be welcome, but when they saw an opportunity to attack on their own turf—Ground Zero and remembrance—they used it to orchestrate a political attack (against politicization.)

Aside from their objection to the Bush ad, Peaceful Tomorrows were also advocating de-politicization on another front: they were working on their own a-political self-image, adamantly refusing to identify themselves with any political

party.⁷⁵ In their intense, multi-faceted effort at de-politicization (of both 9/11 and of themselves) Peaceful Tomorrows were playing on a very profound notion in U.S culture, and that was that institutional politics was a “pollutant” to be cordoned off from issues that could be otherwise be regarded as morally “pure.”

When the Bush-Cheney ad debate broke, the administration, together with Republican advisors and Bush supporters, defended the use of the Ground Zero image, but they did so mildly, without invoking a particularly principled rhetoric. When asked about the issue, White House Press Secretary Scot McClellan meant to say that there was nothing immoral in using images of the most important event in recent world history within the world’s most significant political contest, but in his attempt to avoid the word “politics,” he responded opaquely: “September 11 changed the equation in our public policy. It changed forever our world. And the president's steady leadership is vital to how we wage the war on terrorism.”⁷⁶

The notion of “dirty politics” is indeed pervasive, even axiomatic, in the U.S. culture. As this chapter will further argue, the question of one’s legitimacy and confidence in engaging in political talk represents a fundamental difference between U.S. and Israeli cultures, with Israelis accepting political talk everywhere and about everything and not perceiving it as a threat to any purportedly “pure” area of the

⁷⁵ In our March 2013 interview, David Potorti expressed frustration over journalists’ compulsive attempts to identify him politically: “I got to ask a question on C-SPAN at a press event held upon the release of the 9/11 Commission report, and a reporter afterwards seemed compelled to ask me what political party I belonged to, as if he couldn’t make sense of my position as anything beyond a political stance. So I repeatedly had this experience that people didn’t want to be roused from their slumber, and didn’t want to have their closely-held worldviews challenged.”

⁷⁶ *The Boston Globe*, ibid., 9

public sphere, especially not one that is associated with terrorism, also known as *political violence*.

Why do Americans prefer the talk of self-interest over the public spirited talk of rights and policies? Why do they prefer the talk of “local community” over the talk of “society”? Eliasoph argues that “mommism” is more persuasive than political talk, and that the workings of state/corporations/media hegemony make citizens believe that volunteerism offers a more practical contribution to society than activism, and that citizens should leave politics to experts.⁷⁷ While volunteerism has its limits, for some observers, it is a defining element of the American community. While Eliasoph sees “volunteerism” as a poor substitute for more meaningful, adversarial forms of grassroots political activism, Robert Putnam, in his important *Bowling Alone* (2000), laments the shrinking level of that same “volunteerism,” which he does see as the healthy foundation of a functioning democracy. While Eliasoph laments the politically limited “mommyist” jargon, Putnam deals with a larger concern, the steady decline in Americans’ “social capital”—namely, their connections with people whom they knew and did not know—as well as a decline in their civic engagement from the 1980s and on.

⁷⁷ With respect to the general apprehension from political talk, Eliasoph focuses on the historical need of the American political elites to assume the “spirit of unpretentious deflation of puffery,” as opposed to the convoluted and ornate European and Victorian political rhetoric (p. 245). Another explanation follows Varenne (1977), who tied American’s fear of disagreement with the lack of institutions that kept them together. Any membership in public associations was voluntary and fragile, and dropping out was easy, so that a hot debate could easily result in quitting. (Eliasoph p.251)

Schudson (1999), in his historical review of the ideal of American citizenship, refuses to be alarmed by Putnam's diagnosis because, says Schudson, the argument that American civic life is in crisis has been repeatedly heard since the beginnings of the American democracy, including during times—such as the 1950s—which were considered at the time to have been the heydays of civil engagement. Even Americans' growing distrust of government, as reflected in public opinion polls, and disdain toward politics and politicians, is not necessarily a sign of democratic weakening, argues Schudson, as it may as well attest to the success of the American democracy, which facilitates the skepticism that would keep it on the right track of self-examination and improvement. High levels of trust in government, says Schudson, are a bigger cause for concern than low levels, because they are indicative of a dangerously compliant social climate (p. 302). As for the topic of the allegedly disappearing meaningful public discourse, Schudson appreciates the complexities of the increasingly informal conversational style:

On the down side, public talk has clearly grown more harsh, more crude, and more uncivil over the past several decades. On the up side, however, public discourse is more honest and more inclusive of a wide range of persons and topics that the late, lamented “civility” excluded. (p.307)

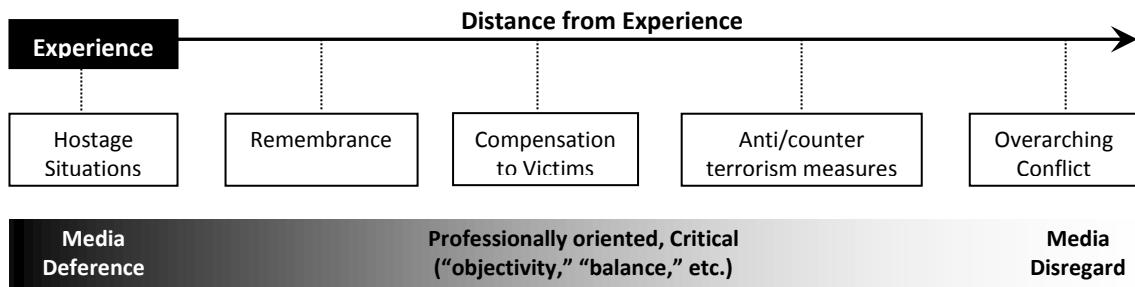
The ideological inclusiveness of which Schudson speaks has, as the limited war-related news discourse of the early 2000s proved, its exceptions. But all in all, the advantages and disadvantages that Schudson refers to in his argument have been part of the complex media experience of Peaceful Tomorrows. On the one hand, the proliferation of media platforms and the increasingly emotion-driven news talk provided them with plenty of opportunities for exposure. On the other hand, honesty

and crudeness sometimes worked against them, as representatives of the political minority, exposing them to offensive attacks that at times, had a detrimental effect on their energy and motivation.

Peaceful Tomorrows' remembrance campaign and the receptive U.S. media

Remembrance belonged to the families, much before the government or the American people. This was why, as Chapter 2 illustrated, acts of official remembrance always had to accord with the families' wishes and sensitivities. Any claims that the families made with respect to remembrance strongly echoed their original experience of victimhood, and as such, commanded attention and respect. Therefore, in terms of the Experience-Argument Scale, remembrance belonged to the reverence side of the Scale. When Peaceful Tomorrows insisted that Ground Zero could not be associated with political advertising, the Bush-Cheney campaign was put on the defensive. The campaign did not remove the ad—there were other 9/11 family members who publicly supported it—but Peaceful Tomorrow's claim was heard loud and clear, and debated nationally and internationally.

The Experience-Argument Scale



On the other hand, three years after 9/11, the sacredness of victimhood began to erode, making Peaceful Tomorrows susceptible to harsher criticism, even in the relative “safe zone” of remembrance. Indeed, they were criticized before, but that was the inevitable cost of dealing with the more conceptually removed topic of war (the Experience-Argument Scale’s “overarching conflict”). Then, Peaceful Tomorrows’ members were mostly criticized for failing to understand the dangers of hostile regimes and for suffering from dogmatic, unthinking pacifism. Now, with respect to the Bush-Cheney ad, the main criticism that they faced was that the organization was a pawn of the political left. In the U.S., as opposed to Israel, political affiliation could be considered demeaning, and when victims’ claims were identified as partisan they could be dismissed on that basis alone. The realization that once “sounding political” the speaker may lose half of his audience was a response to a chilling effect that was largely responsible for the political evaporation of the U.S public sphere.

Peaceful Tomorrows were aware of the danger that “sounding political” posed to their credibility. They knew that their anti-war campaigning positioned them on the left side of the political scale, but nevertheless they made an effort to construct their message in a neutral way that emphasized the humanity of those who were in danger of becoming the next civilian victims of U.S. aggression. And when they initiated their assault on the Bush campaign for its use of the Ground Zero photo, they were consistently generalizing their message, directing it to all candidates. And in 2007, when David Potorti was searched by journalists for comment because Hillary Clinton used Ground Zero 9/11 images in her 2008 presidential campaign TV ads, he replied that he still opposed the use of that imagery within any political campaign.⁷⁸

In my April 15, 2013 interview, David Potorti admitted to making one mistake in the course of the Bush-Cheney ad controversy, a small mistake that was only important in that it revealed the organization’s vigilance, even nervousness, in avoiding any signs of partisanship:

We did have that situation in which we held a press conference to talk about Bush using 9/11 imagery in his re-election ads; the group MoveOn helped arrange the space for the press conference, which was politically a mistake for which we were criticized; we could just as easily arranged the space ourselves, but at the time we weren’t real adept at doing that, so we let them do it for us.

With the high stakes of the presidential campaign, and with the initial reverence to the families slowly dissipating during the passing three years, right wing

⁷⁸ John Gerstein, “Despite Criticizing Bush, Clinton Uses 9/11 in Ad,” *New York Sun*, October 11, 2007. Available at <http://www.nysun.com/national/despite-criticizing-bush-clinton-uses-9-11-in-ad/64404/>

media went on the offensive against Peaceful Tomorrows for being an anti-Bush operative in disguise. The assault's zenith was a March 10th, 2004 *Wall Street Journal* editorial, framed as a "gotcha" piece:⁷⁹

It seems to us that the media that gives these folks [Peaceful Tomorrows] so much free face time and column inches might push the story a bit further to help viewers and readers put this dispute in context. Alas, what a little pushing of our own unearths is that far from disinterested parties, the activists who claim to speak for all 9/11 families are in fact subsidiaries of established anti-Bush forces -- political entities committed to defeating the President this fall. We guess transparency only applies to the business world.

The editorial took issue with Peaceful Tomorrow's relationship with the San Francisco based Tides Center, which supported left-leaning non-for-profit organizations. The connection between the Tides Center and the Heinz family (tied by marriage to Democratic candidate John Kerry) was used to associate Peaceful Tomorrows with the Democratic campaign:

What we have, instead, are politically motivated activists standing willingly as a front organization for the Democratic Party. They've traded on the press's reluctance to question their motives, hoping for a free run to impugn Mr. Bush every time he discusses terrorism from now until the election. Peaceful Tomorrows is hardly alone; scratch the surface and many of the other groups and individuals making a fuss have similar ties.

The News Corp-owned, right-leaning *New York Post* also published an editorial, titled "(Mrs.) Kerry's cash Connection,"⁸⁰ which illustrated the same financial ties between Peaceful Tomorrows and the Heinz family, thereby associating it with the Kerry campaign. This editorial described the Peaceful Tomorrows campaign for the Afghan victims in terms that it could not have used two and a half years earlier,

⁷⁹ "The Politics of 9/11," *Wall Street Journal* (Editorial), March 10, 2004.

⁸⁰ "(Mrs.) Kerry's Cash Connection," *New York Post* (Editorial), March 9, 2004 .

such as the charge that the group was “drawing a detestable moral equivalence between the 9/11 attacks and U.S. bombing of the Taliban” called Peaceful Tomorrows “the fringe crowd that declares itself “offended” by the Bush ads.”

These were exactly the kind of attacks that propelled Noelle-Neumann’s “spiral of silence” and underpinned the general reluctance to “talk politics.” Following the Bush ad media blitz, Peaceful Tomorrows’ media appearances lessened in frequency and in volume. The organization concentrated on face-to-face encounters with citizens’ groups and victims’ organizations, and as this chapter will further argue, their moral authority was in any case dwindling as the memory of 9/11 was losing its emotional immediacy.

The eroding effect of time

September 2006 was a busy anniversary month for Peaceful Tomorrows. They held a convention in Garrison, NY, bringing together terrorism victims from all parts of the world. In Washington, the Eminent Jurists panel on Terrorism, Counterterrorism and Human Rights convened to deliberate on the question of how to confront terrorism without infringing human rights, and its hearing sessions included the testimony of Peaceful Tomorrow’s Adele Welty. Nevertheless, says Potorti, all of these events

went basically uncovered here in the U.S. What we heard from major outlets like National Public radio was that they were profiling 12 ordinary people whose lives had been changed by 9/11 (e.g. they profiled someone who became an atheist)—it was a similar story elsewhere. The political ramifications are simply not part of the story here. The *New York Times* revisited their Portraits of Grief and actually interviewed three of our members, who mentioned Peaceful Tomorrows in their pages—but that was probably our most major coverage this year, but it wasn't really an article about our group. (Potorti, November 2006 interview)

By 2006, the interest in 9/11 family members was fading away. If in 2001 the “Jersey Widows” were able to gather the enormous attention and influence necessary to corner the Bush administration into establishing the 9/11 Commission, in 2006 no 9/11 family member organization could mount anything close to the Widows’ campaign. The devastating singularity of 9/11 made the family members the protagonists of world events for a while, but within a few years others took their place. Potorti feels that the declining interest in 9/11 family members is a symptom of a short historical memory and a declining interest in the events of 9/11:⁸¹

It's been quite interesting to see how the topic of 9/11 has dropped off the radar screens as time as gone by; as a story, we have been replaced largely by military families and people like Cindy Sheehan, which makes total sense (Potorti interview, November 2006).

⁸¹ In an August 2011 *Harper's Magazine* piece, David Rieff offered the assessment that 9/11, and particularly 9/11’s international political ramifications, will be as quickly forgotten as Pearl Harbor’s were: “Can anyone imagine an American rejecting a solicitation to contribute to Japanese relief in the aftermath of the recent earthquake and tsunami because of Pearl Harbor? The idea is preposterous. And yet it would not have been so on December 7, 1951. That war is over, not just in reality but in people’s hearts. And all wars end. The long war against the jihadis will be no exception, unimaginable as that may seem at the present moment.” ---- David Rieff, “After 9/11: The Limits of Remembrance,” *Harper's Magazine*, August 2011.

Indeed, Cindy Sheehan, whose son Casey was killed in Iraq in April 2004, began confronting President G. W. Bush in 2004, demanding explanations for the U.S involvement in Iraq. She initiated numerous sit-ins, most famously the “Camp Casey” outside G.W. Bush’s Texas ranch, as well as marches and demonstrations, and she was arrested occasionally in connection with her protest activities. Sheehan’s moral authority superseded that of Peaceful Tomorrows in that she was a direct victim of the war, searching for justifications for her loss. In the terms of the Experience-Argument Scale, her experience (her loss) and her argument (that her loss was in vain) were intertwined, and as such they commanded deference. Sheehan, dubbed Peace Mom, became a symbol of the anti-war movement. And she became even more prominent as the anti-war perspective was gaining legitimacy in the face of the unfolding Iraqi quagmire, and with the revelations that the information that had supported the Iraq invasion was fundamentally false. It was then, that Sheehan gained support within Congress and within the government-dependent press.

By the time Barack Obama was elected president—Sheehan continued her anti-war campaign throughout his presidency—she was gradually associated with fringe politics and criticized for attacking American values rather than American policies. She was marginalized when she ran as vice-president with Roseanne Barr in the 2012 elections and in any case, her attempt at politics meant a diminishing association with her particular victimhood. And as her argument—to go back to the Scale—broadened to general politics and moved farther away from her experience, she suffered a diminution of her special victim clout and influence.

Peaceful Tomorrows' media experience with respect to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq can be summarized in saying that at the beginning, Peaceful Tomorrows were an appealing source for commentary but also constrained by a message-driven, government-compliant media. By the time that Peaceful Tomorrows' point of view—namely the call for a U.S. withdrawal—entered the government discourse and, consequently, the media discourse, there were already better, more relevant, representatives of the “politics of personal trauma”—parents of fallen soldiers and veterans—to fill Peaceful Tomorrows' position and furnish the anti-war policy arguments with their moral authority.

This chapter will later analyze the Israeli equivalents of 9/11 family members and it will argue, that the reality of routine terrorism in Israel has created a steadier place for the victims within Israeli society, so that as a group, they do not experience dramatic declines in public interest even if the individual attacks are gradually forgotten. In other words, unlike 9/11 family members, Israeli victims are not a group associated with a single event, but a small population whose internal makeup has been constantly changing along with and as a result of recurring violence, but its presence has been constant.

The anti-victimist approach

The slow degradation in the media visibility of Peaceful Tomorrows was taking place alongside their replacement—or rather, the replacement of the entirety of

the 9/11 family member group—with independent commentators who did not practice victim-politics. As Chapter 2 illustrated with respect to the debate on the establishment of Park51 in close proximity to Ground Zero, these new representatives of the “unprofessional,” independent voice have been political bloggers.

The media fatigue toward family members is closely related to the general, growing anti-victimist approach within U.S. sociology and political science circles and, outside academia, in the institutional and media-reflected conservative discourse. The anti-victimist movement’s argument has been that the U.S. was overly responsive to claims of victims and representatives of alleged disenfranchised populations, granting them excessive rights (e.g. Sykes 1992). In this respect, anti-victimism, which calls for personal responsibility instead of finding fault in the social order, is the contemporary reaction against progressive policies such as affirmative action and the welfare system. Advocates of anti-victimism attempt to distinguish between “real” victims and “fake,” self-proclaimed ones, and introduce new “real” victims such as unborn children.⁸² Once victimhood came under attack, argues Cole (2006), its political use became judicious, and the “victim” label was replaced with “hero” or “survivor”.

⁸² Some would perhaps be tempted to argue that this dissertation, which among other things outlines the strengths and limitations of terrorism victims’ moral authority, is somewhat inspired by the legitimacy that the anti-victimist approach has lent to the critical look on victims and victimhood. For the avoidance of doubt, this work is not, and should not be interpreted as, anti-victimist in any way.

9/11 victims, in this respect, have been both the beneficiaries and the victims of the anti-victimist approach. On the one hand, they were initially regarded as “true victims,” in line with the belief system of the anti-victimist Bush administration (Cole 2006:167). The Bush administration portrayed the country as a victim of the terrorist attack, but not as a passive, incompetent victim, rather as a heroic victim who takes charge of his fate. Similarly, the anti-victimist approach described 9/11 victimhood in heroic terms, and assigned the victims with pro-activity as much as the circumstances allowed (the examples of Avrame Zelmanowitz, who perished in his loyalty to his paraplegic friend, or of Todd Beamer’s phrase “Let’s Roll,” come to mind). On the other hand, an application of Cole’s analysis to 9/11 family members also illuminated their limited status, because their “heroism” was temporary. Surly, they began as heroes, enduring their grief. But with time, as family members were awarded compensation, and as spouses remarried, not much of the initial heroism necessarily remained.

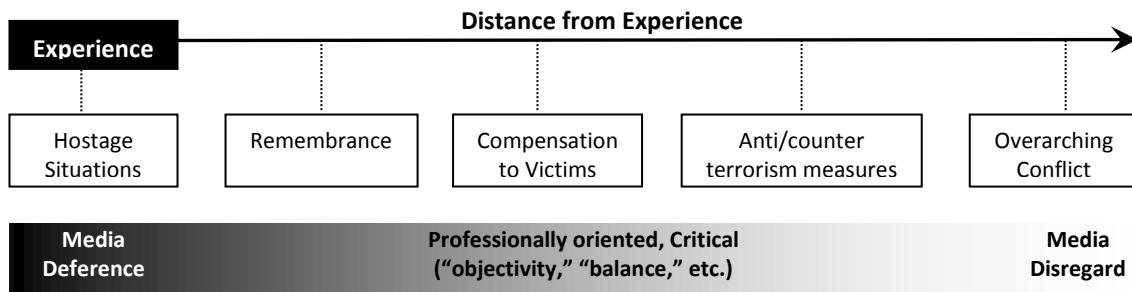
Peaceful Tomorrows and counterterrorism: the 9/11 trials

The Experience-Argument Scale positions victims’ participation in antiterrorism and counterterrorism somewhere in the middle, where routine journalistic practices apply. There, there is no particular reverence toward the victims, and on the other hand, the victims are neither dismissed nor marginalized. The Scale’s middle is neutral toward the victims in the sense that they are usually one side within a “balanced” story. While the issues themselves are of high legal or technical

complexity, they are still closely related to the victims' originating experience and therefore the victims do have a modest claim for participation.

Anti- and counter-terrorism are typical residents of Hallin's "sphere of legitimate controversy," because as the consensus is that terrorism should be fought and punished, government deliberates on the effective, necessary measures. And since inter-government arguments on the appropriate anti- and counter-terrorism strategies always exist, they are reproduced in the media, who broaden the discussion and provide a "human angle" as they include victims who were affected by failures of past strategies.

The Experience-Argument Scale



A typical example of the coverage of families' advocacy in counter-terrorism issues has been the question of which judicial system would prosecute the five alleged 9/11 perpetrators. When President Obama stated that he was deliberating whether to reverse President G. W. Bush's decision to conduct military trials rather than civil

trials, Peaceful Tomorrows called for such reversal. A March 6th 2010 *New York Times* story reported:⁸³

September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, a group of more than 200 relatives of victims of the attacks, issued a statement saying it was “deeply troubled” by reports that Mr. Mohammed, accused of being the mastermind of the attacks, and four accused of conspiring with him, might not receive a civilian trial after all.

“Civilian trials in federal courts have resulted in hundreds of successful terrorism prosecutions,” said Donna O’Connor, a spokeswoman for the group, “whereas military commissions are an illegitimate system that undermines the rule of law.”

The reporting style here is matter-of-factly; it doesn’t question the group’s qualifications or standing in the complex question of what exactly infringes the rule of law in military trials compared to civilian ones. The tone is not emotional at all, not because this is the *New York Times* but because the speaker for the group is identified as an official spokesperson and not as a bereaved family member. Peaceful Tomorrows are presented in the story as just one voice, balanced with others who prefer military trials to be held in the Guantanamo base.

The following paragraphs will concentrate on Peaceful Tomorrows’ attempts at guaranteeing fair trials for the 9/11 alleged perpetrators. Employing the Experience-Argument terminology, we see that the trials resurface the confrontation between victims and alleged perpetrators. The trials bring closure to the events in the form of state sanctioned justice, where the perpetrators are either acquitted, namely dismissed

⁸³ Charlie Savage, “White House Postpones Picking Site of 9/11 Trial”, *New York Times*, March 5, 2010

as unrelated to the events, or convicted and punished for their acts. In any case, the justice system sheds light on the events' facts and their perpetrators' motives, issues that are extremely meaningful to the families, not to mention sentencing, which serves a personal need for revenge. In Experience-Argument terms, the experience is reconstructed in court to examine the alleged perpetrators' involvement, and the families' pain is even a factor in the sentencing phase. So the families are undoubtedly relevant.

But the families do not dominate the legal proceedings. The trial itself operates according to legal reasoning and legal principles as to which evidence is admissible and which is not, which motive is considered criminal and which is not, as well as other rules—appropriate jurisdiction, the right against self-incrimination, the confidentiality of classified evidence that is kept outside of the public proceedings, and the defense's privilege to initiate procedural motions that cause delay. These and other principles might conflict with the families' intuitive sense of justice. But most importantly, unlike remembrance or other issues, which the families dominate, here the families have no decision power over the trial's outcome. In other words, while a monument cannot be erected if its design angers a substantial population of involved families, the court is expected to apply its unbiased judgment according to legal rules and precedents, and not according to the wishes of the families.

It has been hard for some 9/11 families, for example, to come to terms with the alleged perpetrators' fundamental right to state-funded legal defense. The *Miami Herald* shed some light on that conflict in its coverage of a meeting that was held at

the Guantanamo base in January 2013 between family members and a group of defense lawyers. While the reporter, Carol Rosenberg, could not attend the meeting, her post-facto interviews mentioned many tears, shed both by the family members and the lawyers, and also a sense that the families realized that the defense lawyers were acting to benefit the public good.⁸⁴

"But by the end," said Loreen Sellitto, mother of 23-year-old Matthew who also was killed at Cantor Fitzgerald, "I saw them love our Constitution. Their goal is to present a case and defend someone. It's what our country is built on."

The family members that participated in the meeting were identified as individuals and not as members of any organization. The *Miami Herald* report did not mention that Phyllis Rodriguez, identified as the person who initiated the meeting, was a member of Peaceful Tomorrows. This was probably because the story needed to maintain its personal, human dimension intact, and not to involve the political connotations that were already strongly attached to Peaceful Tomorrows, such as their uncompromised insistence on the protection of human rights.

A few days later, a *New York Times* piece about the pre-trial proceedings in Guantanamo noted Rodriguez's objection to the government's censorship of the video feed which transmitted the proceedings from the Guantanamo courtroom to several locations in the U.S.⁸⁵ The military court had just prohibited this censorship, which

⁸⁴ Carol Rosenberg, "9/11 Relatives, Defense Attorneys Share Emotional Meeting," *The Miami Herald*, January 28, 2013

⁸⁵ Charlie Savage, "Judge Stops Censorship in Sept. 11 Case," *The New York Times*, February 1, 2013

was possible due to a 40 second delay in the transmission, and Rodriguez was quoted saying that she was concerned that the trial proceedings were not sufficiently open to the public. Here, again, she was identified by name alone and her association with Peaceful Tomorrows was not mentioned, although Peaceful Tomorrow's website did announce her Guantanamo initiatives under the organization's "Rule of Law" campaign. The media appearance of Rodriguez as a private 9/11 family member rather than as a representative of Peaceful Tomorrows was consistent⁸⁶ and indicative of a mutual interest—of the news media and of Peaceful Tomorrows—to maintain the genuine appeal of a personal opinion, and not to risk any discredit that might come with an organizational, prescribed "message."

The following paragraphs will illustrate the relationship between the Israeli news media and the joint Israeli-Palestinian organization Parents Circle. Like Peaceful Tomorrows, the Parents Circle seeks dialogue between bereaved family members of the two sides of the conflict. Its members bear the same risks of seeming politically radical, unrealistic and overbearing. But to judge from the coverage and from the organization's public relations manager, with whom I have met, the Israeli media have been more accommodating and less judgmental of the organization than the U.S. media have been toward Peaceful Tomorrows.

⁸⁶ See also: Joseph Straw, "Let Monsters Live," *New York Daily News*, January 28, 2013

The Parents Circle

The Parents Circle – Families Forum was established in 1995 by a group of Israeli bereaved family members, led by Yitzhak Frankenthal, whose son Arik was abducted and murdered by Hamas in 1994. The organization members began meeting with Palestinian bereaved family members in 1998, and consequently re-established the organization as a joint Israeli-Palestinian forum. The Parents Circle has two CEOs who serve jointly, a Palestinian and an Israeli, and it brings together more than 600 family members.

The Parents Circle, much like Peaceful Tomorrows, concentrates on educational work, and conducts joint appearances of Israeli and Palestinian bereaved family members before high school students in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. This is unique in a reality where Israelis and Palestinians have no opportunities to meet face to face, except perhaps as Israeli soldiers who guard the settlements against Palestinian aggression—or protect Palestinians from settlers' aggression—or as guards in the checkpoints between Israel, the Palestinian Authority or the Gaza strip. The Parents Circle organizes a summer camp for Israeli and Palestinian children, and also brings together Israelis and Palestinians from similar occupations – doctors, journalists – to help them get acquainted through a “history narrative weekend” session. There, participants tell their personal history within their subjective historical context, not in order to turn the session into a simulation of peace negotiations, but in order to develop some understanding and respect for each other's narratives. Through these sessions, however, friendships form and Israelis and Palestinians develop

working relations. Beyond their wish for Israelis and Palestinians to engage in a continuous dialogue, the Parents Circle works for a practical truth and reconciliation mechanism, such as the one that was instituted in South Africa after the Apartheid.

Like Peaceful Tomorrows, the Parents Circle does not identify itself politically. In Israel, just like in the U.S., concrete identification with a political party is not recommended (it might reduce funding opportunities, to name one reason) and is therefore not typical of not-for-profit organizations. At the same time, and as in the U.S., the general political leaning of the organization is self-evident. The Parents Circle mission statement does exactly that, refraining from political specifics and yet being very clear:

Although the PCFF has no stated position on the political solution of the conflict, most of its members agree that the solution must be based on free negotiations between the leadership of both sides to ensure basic human rights, the establishment of two states for two peoples, and the signing of a peace treaty.

Robi Damelin is the Parents Circle's public relations manager. Damelin joined the Parents Circle after her son David was killed by a sniper in March 2002 at a West Bank checkpoint. Soon after she began work with the Parents Circle she quit her public relations management job. "I couldn't do it anymore. My priorities have changed," she says. Damelin was born and raised in South Africa. She came to Israel in 1967 for voluntary military service and stayed ever since. She strongly believes that Israel and the Palestinians must prepare themselves for the day after peace, where they would need a formal, mutually-agreed closure mechanism similar to the truth and

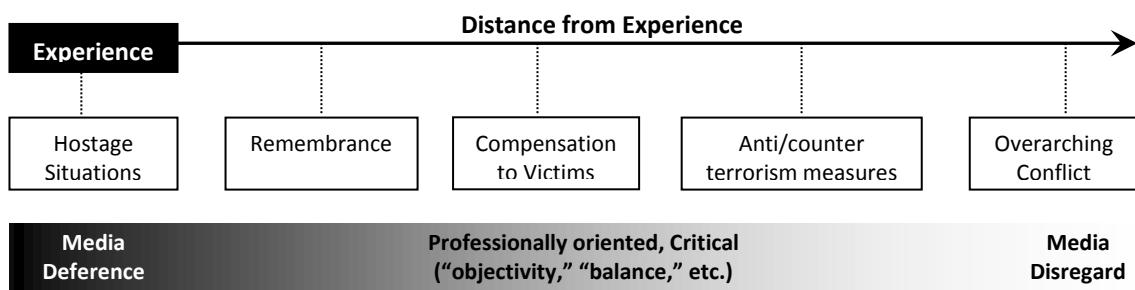
reconciliation process that Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu instituted in post-Apartheid South Africa in 1996.

I interviewed Damelin in Tel Aviv in April 2013. I asked her to reflect on the Parents Circle's media performance, and whether she felt that they achieved their coverage goals. The interview took place after my correspondence with Peaceful Tomorrows' David Potorti, who had professed that it was hard and occasionally impossible to convey messages that were perceived as far-left and therefore not in line with the government position. Surely, by U.S. political standards, the Parents Circle would have had a very hard time entering the mainstream political debate. To give an idea about the inclusive orientation of the group, some of the male Palestinian members of the Parents Circle had served time in Israeli prisons for terrorism-related offences, and turned, after they were released, to peace activism. In the U.S., ex-terrorists would have been probably written off on a moral basis even before a political one, taking down any group that accommodated them. But this chapter will further illustrate how the political spectrum in Israel, and in the media even more so, tends to be wider and more accommodating compared to the U.S. To go back to the question that I presented to Damelin with respect to the Parents Circle's media performance, she replied—and she could not be suspected of lacking critical faculties—that she was happy with the Israeli media. “They don’t cover everything we do,” she said, “but they are kind to us.”

Indeed, if the Parents Circle’s activities were reported regularly, it was most likely because of the great professional esteem of journalists for the personable and

charismatic Damelin. That said, the coverage itself has been inevitably modest, as news about good intentions tend to be. Besides, the essence of the Family Circle as an Israeli-Palestinian interrelations effort occupied the right end, “disregarding” side of the Experience-Argument Scale.

The Experience-Argument Scale



While the fact that bereaved families believed in peace and connected with Palestinian victims was commendable, it was not “important” according to Israeli news criteria. For once, Israeli relatives of terrorism victims had no better claim over the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than the relatives of soldiers who died in the conflict. And the Palestinian members of the Parents Circle did not improve the palatability of the organization for the media, but quite the opposite, as Palestinians were at the bottom of the source-desirability list, facing an alienated Israeli public, if not occasionally hostile. Suffering from the worst starting position in the political discourse, relatives of Palestinian victims had to work very hard to generate attention and sympathy, and they were never sent alone to represent the organization at the Israeli media. If at all, in their appearances in the Israeli media they were always joined by an Israeli peer.

To take the 2007 coverage of the Parents Circle as an example, the organization started that year its summer camp program for bereaved Israeli and Palestinian children, and at that same summer, held a seminar for 90 of its members in East Jerusalem, titled “Knowing is the Beginning.” The seminar, aimed to introduce each side with the other’s narrative, was made possible through financial aid from the government of Japan. These activities were reported in *Ha’aretz* and *Ynet*, respectively, with one report in each. In *Ha’aretz*, the summer camp report consisted of no more than 50 words. In *Ynet*, the conference story was detailed but appeared in the quite out-of-the-way, bottom of the webpage news category of “Activism”.⁸⁷ But the more effective coverage of the Parents Circle activities and ideas came not through the organization’s “direct sale” of its activities to the polite but not over enthusiastic news media, but rather through special projects that became known in other, more creative ways than “the Parents Circle’s latest initiative.”

In 2011, the organization, together with the Peres Center for Peace and the Israeli office of Saatchi and Saatchi, initiated an Israeli-Palestinian blood drive titled “Blood Relations,” in which Israeli and Palestinian members of the Parents Circle donated blood to one another and Israeli and Palestinian hospitals exchanged blood donations. The project itself did not receive meaningful coverage when it took place. However, it became well known when the advertising agency that organized it received an international award from the UN as well as a prize at the Cannes Lions

⁸⁷ Eli Ashkenazi, “Co-Existence Summer Camp for Children of Bereaved Families,” *Ha’aretz*, August 26, 2007; Tamar Dressler, “A Weekend of Grief, Dialogue and Optimism,” *Ynet*, August 2, 2007, Available at <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3442844,00.html>

International Festival of Creativity. The awards were reported both as general news items as well as in business news publications.⁸⁸ The great esteem and pride in having an Israeli advertising agency win international prizes over a peace-related campaign, thereby reaffirming the Israeli ingenuity and cleverness, were happily received by the news media, apparently much more than Blood Relations project itself.

With time, it became clear that this type of “indirect” coverage was in fact the most effective one, and that there were ways to replace the uninspiring general news reports with stories that provided more unique angles in the organization’s activity and in news sections where people were more engaged, be it the business or the art and culture sections. The organization’s public relations effort shifted to the co-production of documentary films about the organization’s members and activities, and was even a partner, together with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), for the production of the drama series *Good Intentions* (2008) for the commercial Channel 2. The series depicted two chefs, one is a Palestinian whose brother was injured by the Israeli army, and the other is an Israeli whose soldier son serves in the West Bank, as they co-appear in television cooking show. After the first documentary film about the organization, the successful *Encounter Point* (2006), which followed the beginnings of the Parents Circle in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, came *One Day After Peace* (2012), which followed Robi Damelin as she traveled to South Africa to meet with the people involved in the truth and

⁸⁸ Adva Cohen, “Israeli Advertising Agency Which Sought Creative Solution to Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Wins UN Commendation,” *Ynet*, April 30, 2012. Available at: <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4222509,00.html>; Shelly Pritzker, “Baumann-Ber-Rivnay Celebrated the Winning of Four Awards in Cannes,” *Calcalist*, June 21, 2012, available at <http://www.calcalist.co.il/marketing/articles/0,7340,L-3574861,00.html> [Hebrew]

reconciliation process, and then *Two Sided Story* (2012), about the frictions and emotions involved in the Israeli-Palestinian gatherings of the Parents Circle.

Apart from the strong emotional effect of films and TV projects on their viewers, the news media, the Parents Circle found, were much more interested in the success and impact of these projects—involving coverage-friendly gala openings, film festivals, awards and special screenings in distinguished international institutions—than in local initiatives such as seminars or conferences. This public relations strategy, which focused on translating the organization’s message into an emotional, nationally or even internationally successful cultural product, has been the Parents Circle’s creative way of overcoming that unfavorable place, the right end “indifference” side of the Experience-Argument Scale, which made it hard for them to occupy the top of the news agenda.

Parents Circle campaigns vs. reactive media

One observation that both Potorti and Damelin shared was their notion of the “utility” that family members had in the media, as they were called upon to fill some sort of needed viewpoint within the coverage. Peaceful Tomorrows, for example, came to the Oprah show because the show’s topic was the suffering of the deprived and politically repressed Afghani people, and Peaceful Tomorrows happened to have just come back from their Afghanistan trip with photos and stories of Afghan victims. But the Oprah show would not go as far as to mention that some of this suffering was

caused by U.S. bombings, and the Peaceful Tomorrows guests ultimately felt that their message was distorted to fit within the world that the show was trying to portray. However, time and again Peaceful Tomorrows members professed that they were willing to take that risk for the opportunity to spread their message, even if partially or covertly.

Robi Damelin also admitted that she often felt used, but not in a negative way, because there was mutual exploitation going on between her and the media and it was, she said, a “two sided game.” However, she did not share the notion that her message was being distorted in any way. I asked her if she felt that the organization was successful in promoting its agenda in the media, and she said that she did, but that it happened more often that Parents Circle representatives were called upon by the press, and less often that they initiated and won cooperation. They were usually summoned, she said, to provide a contrasting view to right wing opinions, often professed by hawkish victims families’ groups. In her PR terminology, Damelin said that the organization’s public exposure was achieved mainly through “reactive media”—media that reacted to current events and sought comment—than through its own media campaigns.

A typical “utilitarian” or “reactive media” situation took place at the Channel 10 morning show on October 14th 2011, four days before the return of Gilad Shalit. The guest panel consisted of three people: The first was Yossi Mendelevitch, a bereaved father. His 13 year old son Yuval had died in a suicide bombing in a Haifa bus in 2003, and three of his son’s killers were on the list of prisoners who were up

for release in the Shalit deal. Robi Damelin was there, as the sniper who killed her son was thought to be bound for release as well (eventually he was not). The third guest was a psychiatrist who specialized in the rehabilitation of POWs. Mendelevitch and Damelin were asked whether they supported the Shalit deal, and they provided the anticipated, opposite views. Mendelevitch warned that released prisoners would return to terrorist activity, and that no country had the privilege of preferring the safety of its soldiers over the safety of the civilian population. The Shalit family, he said, must wait for the time where a military rescue operation would be possible. Damelin said that she supported the deal because “I would release the entire world from prison just to get David back.” While the discussion was cordial, as morning-show discussions tended to be, tensions were high. Upon hearing Damelin’s conciliatory approach, Mendelevitch retorted: “As far as I am concerned, anybody who favors the release of murderers also favors the murdering of Jews.”⁸⁹

The forum that Channel 10 gathered to discuss the Shalit deal was explosive. It brought together bereaved parents from the two far sides of the political spectrum, in an issue that was extremely close to their hearts. During the preparations for the interview, Mendelevitch and Damelin were told to sit together at the desk. But Mendelevitch refused to sit next to Damelin and asked instead to sit across from her.⁹⁰ The show, despite the respectful and somber tone of its hosts, was essentially pitting the parents against each other. It is doubtful whether a U.S news show would ever do that, namely play on the raw nerves of bereaved parents as they are put in a

⁸⁹ “The Morning Show with Orly and Guy”, *Channel 10*, October 14, 2011. The segment is available at: <http://boker.nana10.co.il/Article/?ArticleID=838106> [Hebrew]

⁹⁰ The sitting incident appeared in the documentary film *One Day After Peace* (2012) directed by Miri and Erez Laufer, which followed Damelin at the time that the Shalit deal being finalized and executed.

coordinated situation of direct opposition. The ethics of U.S news would probably consider that setup excessively cruel to the parents, calling for raw, emotional confrontations that tend to explode in Jerry Springer type of shows and not in news programming.

When Damelin spoke of “reactive media,” she meant the media’s search for the victims in issues that belonged to the left and center areas of the Experience-Argument Scale, rather than the issue of “overarching conflict” which was on the right, more indifferent side. When she and Yossi Mendelevitch were called to speak for or against the Shalit deal, they were –again, in terms of the Experience-Argument Scale—somewhere between “hostage situations” and “anti/counterterrorism.” Terrorism victims were always part of the discussion whenever the perpetrators of the acts that caused their losses were planned for release. But here, the collective release of the perpetrators would end an ongoing hostage crisis. The families’ pain in witnessing the release of the prisoners was the major price to be paid for the return of Shalit (together with the feared price of the prisoners resorting to terrorist activity) and therefore the families were sought for comment.

The Parents Circle was often sought for comment for another reason, which has to do with the short history of political appropriation of terrorism victimhood in Israel. Since the mid-1980s, terrorism victims were consistently tied to right leaning claims to toughen national security and resist prisoner exchange deals. Yossi Mendelevitch, for example, has been a member of the Almagor – Terror Victims Association, the organization that vehemently opposed the Shalit deal (see Chapter 3).

Almagor was founded in 1986, and its mission, according to its website, included “representation for terror victims to demand harsh punishment for terrorists, expulsion of suicide terrorists’ families, and demolition of terrorists’ homes.”⁹¹ Indeed, Almagor has constantly filed petitions to the Israeli Court of Justice, asking the court to prohibit any release of prisoners that were involved in terrorist activity. The voice of Almagor dominated the media as the voice of Israeli terrorism victims.

The Parents Circle, found in its present form in 1998, was the first (and so far – the only) organization to connect its members’ victimhood to its claim for peace. For the first time, the media had a source that could “balance,” a source that had an equivalent standing to that of Almagor. Almagor were predominantly active on the “center” area of the Experience-Argument Scale, as its members called for tighter security measures and harsher punishments for convicts. Between 1986 and 2000 they were the exclusive voice of the victims, exerting their moral authority on the military and political milieu that occupied television studios and was sought for print and digital news commentary. So when the media became familiar with the Parents Circle and Robi Damelin, they were called to fill the space that was apparently awaiting them in these same areas of anti- and counter-terrorism.

⁹¹ The Almagor website is available at: http://al-magor.com/en/?page_id=19

Political talk in the Israeli media

Israelis like talking politics, and political talk exists in the public and private spheres. Israeli culture is known to be—and is sometimes romanticized as—a highly politicized culture. This argument is supported by high voter turnout (64.7% of eligible voters voted in the 2013 general elections, a high figure given the low participation of the Arab population)⁹², political arguments transcend the Knesset and find their way into coffee shops, Saturday night Shabbat dinners, and even chats with taxi drivers. According to this romantic notion, talking—or rather, arguing—about politics is in fact a kind of playful pastime.

While it is common to think that Israelis are much more politically involved than Americans, and that Israelis “use political talk the way Americans use talk about sports: to create common ground, with political disagreements only adding to the entertainment value” (Wyatt and Liebes 1995:21), the research data on this question is inconclusive. For example, a comparative survey conducted by Wyatt, Katz, Levinsohn and Al-Haj (1996) posed Americans, Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs questions regarding how comfortable they felt “speaking their minds” in their everyday social environment, and which political actions they undertook, such as attending public meetings, signing petitions or writing letters to government officials. The survey found Americans to be least inhibited discussing politics, with Israeli Jews ranking second, and Israeli Arabs found to be most apprehensive in this respect. As for participation in political action, Americans were first, Israeli Arabs second and

⁹² To compare, voter turnout in the 2013 U.S. Presidential Elections was 57.5% of eligible voters.

Israeli Jews third, except for attendance in demonstrations, in which Israeli Arabs were first, Israeli Jews second and Americans third. The survey was limited, however, in that it did not distinguish between local and national politics. It is likely that Americans were indeed much more involved in the management of their local affairs (this was precisely Eliasoph's criticism), while Israelis—Jews and Arabs alike—were more focused on broader national issues. In any case, these survey findings should have been no less than startling for anyone who shared the routine grievance about the Americans' political apathy.

The perception of Israelis as political enthusiasts has changed over the past three decades, as Zionism developed to and divided into Post-Zionism and Neo-Zionism. As far as Post-Zionism was concerned, the combination of individualism and a globally driven economy came at the expense of Israelis' public mindedness and political edge. Also, the absence of active peace negotiations since the Oslo Accords of the mid-1990s has weakened the Post-Zionist fragments while the Neo-Zionist camp has been content with things as they were. In other words, the diminishing prospect for change in the status of Israeli-Palestinian affairs has made the public debate mute on the most fundamental issue of Israeli politics, the one that has the most effect on both national security and the national budget. At the same time, the rising food and housing prices and the deterioration of living standards of the middle and lower classes ignited mass protests in 2012. The middle class regained its political consciousness, and demanded the break-up of monopolies, government price controls and other reforms aimed at a renewed distribution of wealth. So while Israelis were no less politically engaged today as they were before, their political energy concentrates

on increasing the middle class's living conditions, and on the possibilities of that class to acquire minimal personal wealth.

The different attitudes toward political talk in the U.S. and Israel are rooted in these two nations' vastly different cultural backgrounds. On the most obvious level, Israel has a very small population, which provides individuals with a greater sense of influence. Israeli daily life comes to frequent contact with the country's geo-political problems, both through the mandatory and reserve army service, and also because anti-Israeli violence has been reaching deeper into Israel's cities—whether through suicide bombings, Hamas rockets from Gaza to as north as Tel Aviv, or Hezbollah rockets from Lebanon to as south as Hadera.

Another important factor in the differing legitimacy of political talk in these two societies is their different political systems. Unlike the U.S. two-party system, the Israeli Knesset comprises many political parties, big and small, whose power depends on their inclusion in the ruling coalition. The diversity of opinion in the Knesset means that the institutional political debate is varied, offering more ideological options for the citizenry to choose from (Liebes 2000). Variation invariably also means governmental representation of political positions that if judged by their share of actual public support, would be considered, in U.S. standards, as extreme or fringe. Their presence within the political establishment widens the “sphere of legitimate controversy” on the expense of the “sphere of deviance” and increases the general tolerability for radical views.

Media's hyper-aggressive political discourse

The entertainment value of political talk in Israel can explain certain idiosyncratic program genres on Israeli television and radio. The popular IDF radio station *Galei Tzahal*, for example, aired for almost 20 years the show *Yesh Im Mi Ledaber* ("We Can Talk"), a call-in political program. In the early 1990s, as part of the new competition between the traditional, public Channel 1 and the newly established Channel 2, which was the first privatized broadcast television channel, a new genre of political talkshows emerged almost simultaneously by both channels. That genre, "characterized by the substitution of reporting by argument, the substitution of a sense of unity by conflict, and the sense of the anchor's control by an image of playful chaos" (Liebes 1999), immediately took over Israeli prime time television. The most political one was Channel 1's *Popolitica*, a live talkshow, hosted by a journalist who sat at a round table with a selection of personalities from the top of the news, mostly politicians but also journalists, academics and representatives of interest groups. The host had three regular sidekicks, journalists too, whose job was to opinionate provocatively, to expose the guests' "real" motives and to fuel the already ferocious debate, to the cheers or boos of the loud studio audience present. *Popolitica* had no regard for civil, regulated conversation of the type that Schudson (1997) saw necessary for democratic talk. It was a verbal gladiator match and indeed the discussions tended to go nowhere, with incomprehensible moments of chaotic shouting, and guests announcing that they are on the verge of walking out. The lack of listening on the participants' behalf left no chance for persuasion.

Representatives of radical politics, from both left and right, served *Popolitica* well because they were zealous and because the wider was the gap between the guests, the more potentially hostile was the conversation. And while *Popolitica* and the other political talk shows had left prime time to be replaced, in the early 2000s, with entertainment talk shows of the Jay Leno type, and later with reality shows, *Popolitica* yet remained a symbol of Israel's aggressive political culture. The provocative nature of political talk summoned, paradoxically, the inclusion of minority points of views, to be gingerly bashed. In such a climate, terrorism victims—who could also contribute to the ever-desired emotionality of the discussion—were free to express unpopular views. They could call for peace in the midst of a military conflict between Israel and its neighbors, demand the release of terrorists, or call for the death penalty for convicted terrorists. These were all acceptable within the noisy political discourse in the Israeli media.

The inclusiveness of Israeli political media

In 2011, the Parents Circle faced a potential image crisis, when one of its Palestinian members was identified as a relative of terrorists, rather than a relative of innocent victims of the conflict. The Palestinian member, Osama Abu Ayash, lost his brothers-in-law, Kamal and Tayseer, who had been wanted by the Israeli security

forces and were eventually assassinated.⁹³ Abu Ayash joined the Parents Circle, as he believed that Kamal and Tayseer were victims of the cycle of violence. He perceived the tragedies of Kamal and Tayseer as cautionary tales, because their revengefulness eventually brought to their deaths, whereas the cycle of violence had to be broken. When he was scheduled to speak on behalf of the Parents Circle in Kfar Saba's Rabin high school, the word spread on right wing online forums that a relative of terrorists was going to speak to Israeli children. These children, they said, were soon to become the Israeli soldiers whose duty would be to fight people just like those who Osama was mourning.

But while this story was potentially explosive and damaging to the Parents Circle, it was hardly reported at all. *Ma'ariv* reported on the controversy in its local news section.⁹⁴ The report spoke of some parents who said that they were angry, and that had they known who Osama was they would not have let their children attend his talk, and it included this unusually hostile quote by the right wing Knesset member Michael Ben-Ari:

To identify with families of murderers? This is incomprehensible and insane. What is the logic in this? This is simply a matter of mental illness and an inhuman mutation. These are the murderers of our people that we are talking about, and the principal of this school wants our students to identify with them? I would send a psychiatrist to that principal to hospitalize her.

⁹³ Osama Abu Ayash tells his story on the Parents Circle website, at <http://www.theparentscircle.org/Story.aspx?ID=260#.UYpioYLcs7A>

⁹⁴ Erez Cohen, "Maelstrom in Kfar Saba: A Relative of Terrorists Gave a Lecture to Students," *NRG Ma'ariv*, November 11, 2011

The reporter than posed a question to Ben Ari: “Don’t you think that you are overreacting?” and Ben Ari replied that he was not and continued his tirade. The chairman of Almagor was also in the story, who said that “to compare shahids [martyrs] with dead Israeli soldiers is a diabolical narrative.”

This story, however, was the only story by the mainstream press about the Kfar Saba controversy. No other news outlet picked the story. I asked Robi Damelin why that story remained so small, and she replied that journalists knew that it was just another right wing provocation, not to be taken seriously. It seemed that Israeli journalists found no fault in the pro-Palestinian narrative or in the possibility of learning something from someone whose relatives were wanted and then killed by the Israeli army. But on the other hand, when journalists did chose to report—as *Ma’ariv* did—they had no qualms about citing the brutal language of the Parents Circle’s adversaries from the extreme right. This, again, was another illustration of the inclusiveness of Israeli journalism. An organization like the Parents Circle benefited from the political tolerance of the press, even at the price of suffering the occasional brutal attack. Robi Damelin said that she did not mind anymore what people had said about her—her priorities have changed.

Conclusion

This dissertation began with curiosity over the boundaries of journalistic deference to victims of political violence, not in their vastly researched role as participants or witnesses to the attacks, but in their activist role. It began with the notion that any initial journalistic deference that the victims received in the aftermath of an attack, by virtue of journalism's role as upholding society's dominant myths and values, was likely to dissipate as their victimhood ignited political ambition and political activism, and as they began to operate within the political establishment. There, the press's role was the much less empathetic watchdog role. There, victims risked being suspected of capitalizing on their victimhood in order to achieve political glory.

This dissertation also began with the notion that victims of political violence were perceived and treated differently than other victims. They were different than

victims of diseases, accidents, natural disasters or criminal mass killings, because they were victims of an ideological battle of which they became symbols. The ideological dimension of their victimhood, the heroism associated with their sacrifice (whether they personally demonstrated bravery or not), the fact that the victims were (usually) not soldiers but plain folks with whom the community could identify—all contributed to the special status of the victims and merited deference that was beyond plain empathy for human suffering.

The identification and deference that journalists displayed toward terrorism victims had different shades and different motives. When, for example, the Israeli press exhibited complete identification with families of abducted soldiers, it was sometimes because journalists were genuinely carried away with emotion, as it was sometimes a calculated decision to set aside professional norms and give way completely to emotionalism. The analysis of the Shalit phenomenon in Chapter 3 demonstrated the unprecedented dedication of the Israeli press to the Shalit cause. Israel's mainstream news media collaborated with the campaign to carry out organized campaign activity on a massive scale, such as attaching yellow bracelets to the print edition and sponsoring public registration for the Shalit march. This was beyond journalistic deference—this was a meeting of the promotional needs of both the Shalit campaign and the news industry.

Also, deference had its limitations, and these limitations, which were at the center of this dissertation, varied according to the different matters in which the victims were involved. The shifts from deference to hard-headedness; from taking the

victims' arguments at face value to displaying the methodology of objectivity; from taking the victims' side to offering contradicting views; from an admiring portrayal to indifference and even scorn—all organized into a frame of thought that became the prime conceptual tool that this dissertation offers, and that is the Experience-Argument Scale. The premise of the Scale has been that the victims received media prominence on those issues that were perceived to be in close proximity to the tragic events that had politically empowered them. And the more they diverted to issues beyond the particular attack or its perpetrators, the more the press—as any other institution that operated in the public sphere, such as government agencies—was prone to challenge them, question their motives and doubt their relevance to the policymaking process. The issue that I found to merit the left end of the Scale, which represented the most deferential treatment possible, was the issue of ongoing hostage crises. The experience—captivity—occupied both present “news time” and ”mythic” time, namely the timelessness reserved for national, heroic narratives. In Israel, where the case of abducted soldiers generated angst equivalent to that of abducted children, the press was keeping the story alive even if it prolonged without change for years, treating speculations as facts and futile diplomatic moves as potentially groundbreaking negotiations. In other words, the level of commitment to the plight of abducted soldiers was such that the press was “making up” news where there was none.

This work focused on an analysis of the national press coverage of terrorism victims' political efforts in the U.S. and Israel, an analysis that confirmed the universal applicability of the Experience-Argument Scale, and particularly the

underlying connection that it suggested between the proximity of the issue at hand to the violent act on the one hand, to the press's willingness to accommodate the victims and their positions on the other. Obviously, there were exceptions. For example, the long periods of routine terrorism in Israel had an "equalizing" effect on the status of individual victims, so that "proximity" from the individual attack mattered much less. Israeli victims did not feel the decline in their influence, as time was passing, as their U.S. 9/11 counterparts did, simply because the Israeli victim group had a constant presence in a reality of routine terrorism. When Israeli victims' relatives were advocating for stricter security measures or for peaceful alternatives to violence, it did not matter whether their relatives had been killed five or seven years before, in a Jerusalem market or on a Tel Aviv bus. In a way, Israeli victims have become a small population, where new members constantly joined, and with no particular hierarchy except for the known parameters, some unique to Israel—such as the superiority of victims from certain groups in the population (e.g. Tel Aviv residents) over others (e.g. Jewish settlers in the West Bank)—and some universal, such as greater intolerance to victimized children.

While the Scale offered a way to assess the "media status" of victims based on a universal principle of proximity between the originating experience of terror to the victims' arguments, and while the Scale could be usefully applied on every media system, it was also useful as a departure point for understanding the differences between U.S. and Israeli journalistic cultures. The different attitudes toward victims in the U.S. and in Israel had sometimes to do with cultural differences in the broadest

sense, or with a different political culture, or with journalists' different perception of their obligation to the state or the public.

In a somewhat excessively broad brushstroke, it is yet fair to observe that the U.S. and Israel have different cultures of grief, as reflected in their news coverage of tragedies. Israelis tend to adhere to the Mediterranean stereotype as they wear their emotions on their sleeves. Funerals are commonly shown in the news, and Israelis are used to images of coffins carried in a procession to an open grave, followed by grief stricken family members.

In the U.S., while uncontrolled grief is still considered too private and even too tasteless to appear on the Six O'clock news, there is a steady trend toward authenticity and the display of feeling. Obviously, this has a lot do to with the increasingly informal style of news presentation and the diffusion of the personal style of blog culture into mainstream media. The Obama administration made its contribution to this trend in 2009, when it lifted the ban over media coverage of returning coffins of fallen soldiers.

Interestingly, the appearance of victims as news protagonists is a relatively new phenomenon in both the U.S. and Israel, and their evolution from victims to political activists is even more recent (once the media were interested in them as spontaneous political commentators, their general acceptance as political activists quickly followed). In Israel, the shift from private grief to public grief was

commensurate with the shift from traditional Zionism to Neo and Post Zionism.

During Israel's formative years, characterized by a socialist orientation as well as a post-traumatic, Holocaust-driven, collective paranoia, citizens were expected to make boundless personal sacrifices for the national Zionist cause, and to grieve over their sacrifices quietly and privately. Victims of wars and terrorism received the highest esteem because the living—according to the most common phrase used in remembrance days—“owed” their lives to the dead. To use the phrase coined by poet Nathan Alterman, the victims were “the silver tray on which the Jewish State was served.” The victims “paid the price” of the Zionist ambition and therefore deference to them had the added dimension of gratitude. With the rise of Post-Zionist capitalist and individualist values in the 1980s, the willingness to subordinate one’s life and possessions for the greater interest eroded, as Israel aligned with Western theories of individual rights, underscoring a fundamental right to a long and fulfilling life. The 1982 Lebanon War, considered Israel’s first “war of choice,” was also the first in which questions of justification for the fallen soldiers’ sacrifice arose, shaking Israel’s peace-loving self-image. Since Lebanon, the Israeli "rally around the flag" period became ever shorter, providing an impression that Israelis expected all armed conflicts to end with no casualties on their side.

The political consolidation of the Jewish-religious Neo-Zionist ideology also changed the nature of grief and victimhood. Neo-Zionism, which focused on the Jewish elements of the democratic-Jewish state, was an expansionist ideology of struggle. From a Neo-Zionist perspective, Jewish victims justified the deployment of the Israeli military in the West Bank and continuing control over Palestinian

population. For this ideological but politically concrete purpose, mourning had to be known and public.

Another determining factor over the status of terrorism victims has been the public perception of the might of the perpetrators and the risk posed by the ideology on whose name the attack was carried out. An attack could be considered an isolated incident, associated more with plain criminality than with any serious or compelling ideology. It could, on the other hand, suggest the existence of a powerful enemy whose competing ideology challenged the dominant ideology of the attacked community. A third option would be a terrorist war of attrition, where repeating attacks constitute a new normalcy and do not challenge the political status quo, at least for some time. In any case, the level of the perceived threat to the community's security is invariably tied to the status of the victims. It is most likely that when these words are written, in 2014, Americans identify more with victims of school shootings than with terrorism victims, because the mass murdering epidemic feels "closer to home," and represents a more viable threat to the average American, compared to the threat of international terrorism on U.S. soil.

The U.S. experience of terrorism has been very different from the Israeli one, and in a way that directly affected the social place of the victims. The U.S. experience of terrorism has mostly consisted of cataclysmic terrorism ("New Terrorism"), first the Oklahoma City bombing and then 9/11(the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center did not register as a precursor of a much more ominous threat, and was quickly forgotten). Each of these two incidents was utterly unprecedented and unique but

nevertheless, comparisons of the two victims groups ensued. 9/11 victims have been said to be “higher” in the social hierarchy of victims compared to the victims of the Oklahoma City bombing because they were either New York investment bankers and lawyers or heroic fire fighters. If they were indeed more prominent in the media—a variable which was hard to isolate as these catastrophes were so different in scale—it was also because 9/11 victims were the casualties of international terrorism.

The overarching conflict that was the context for the Oklahoma City bombing was an internal conflict, involving what has been widely considered as a fringe ideology, which lacked the potential of gaining the critical mass of support necessary to challenge the existing political order. The anti-government militias with which Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols associated were not perceived as an existential national threat and the case was considered isolated, associated with lunacy and criminality compared to the calculated, clear-headed intent ascribed to the Al Qaeda perpetrators (even though the latter killed themselves in the attacks while McVeigh and Nichols did not).

The 9/11 attacks were extraordinarily traumatic not just because the death toll was more than 15 times that of the Oklahoma bombing, but also because the U.S. suddenly realized that while it was apparently sleeping, a sophisticated network of international terrorist cells has been developing and training in rogue, underdeveloped countries, practicing a yet unpopular but nevertheless comprehensive ideology that included not only Islamic religious components but also concrete criticism of U.S. foreign policies. Al Qaeda’s competing ideology, represented by the enigmatic and

menacing Osama Bin Laden, seemed to carry the theoretical potential, albeit to an unknown extent, to take hold through systematic indoctrination within entire segments of the international Muslim population. When Al Qaeda resurfaced to strike in 2004 and 2005 in Madrid and London, it did so precisely in order to position itself as a worthy opponent of the U.S. empire. The new world disorder following 9/11, as articulated by President G. W. Bush, had in fact brought the U.S. back to the “us vs. them” mentality of the Cold War. This had a profound effect on the place of 9/11 victims, who have become a symbol of the virtue, bravery and moral superiority that characterized the U.S. in its fight against the Axis of Evil.

In Israel, the Oslo accords-related wave of recurring suicide bombings between 1994 and 1996 generated a news genre of disaster marathons, where the hysterical and uncensored coverage gave particular prominence to the victims at the scene of the attacks. In their hardest time of shock and anger, much of the victims' frustration was directed at the Israeli government, who repeatedly failed to protect them. That wave of terror culminated in the replacement of the Shimon Peres Labor government (Peres was appointed Prime minister as a replacement for Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, following Rabin's assassination in 1995) with a Benjamin Netanyahu right wing government in the 1996 general elections.

The "disaster mode" that characterized the media coverage of the First Intifada resembled the coverage of Israeli military operations in the Palestinian media. The Palestinian media provided extensive coverage of funerals, including footage of dead bodies. The social status of Palestinian victims was much higher than in Israel and in

the U.S., as they were automatically labeled Shahids, namely martyrs. For the same reason, the status of Palestinian victims' relatives in the Palestinian Authority, as Robi Damelin attested with respect to her fellow Parents Circle's Palestinian members, was much higher than the status of Israeli victims within Israeli society. Palestinian family members were considered heroic because they sacrificed most in the struggle for Palestinian independence, and perhaps also because of the place of victimhood within the Islamic belief.

Following criticism of Israeli regulators, academics and media commentators over the bloody coverage of the suicide bombings of the 1990s, Israeli news organizations began to practice more caution and restraint in their terrorism coverage. The routinization of terrorism coverage during the Second Intifada (2000-2005) took the form of a new and elaborate set of professional practices. These did not only involve new standards for news gathering and presentation (such as the limitation on disturbing photos), but also dominated the entire programming schedule, where television producers were in constant readiness to make last minute changes in entertainment shows in order to adjust them to the somber marathon mood. In this "contained" marathon mode, which reflected the fact that terrorism was a feature of Israeli normalcy, the victims held a more mundane, and less heroic, place, and their coverage gravitated toward the personal aspects of their victimhood, without particular interest in their politics. The routinization of terror during the Second Intifada was symptomatic, at the time, of the Israeli-Palestinian political deadlock, and the general hopelessness deemed the victims' political views pointless.

The examination of the appearance of victims in the various capacities that the Experience-Argument Scale offers, highlights differences and similarities in the journalistic cultures of the U.S. and Israeli news media, both with respect to the victims but also with respect to the political establishment on which the victims were attempting to influence. The victims groups that I have researched and that worked for peaceful solutions for the conflicts that engendered terrorism, namely Peaceful Tomorrows and the Parents Circle, met different expectations from the U.S. and Israeli news media, respectively. In the U.S., Peaceful Tomorrows' members felt that the press was trying to compartmentalize them into the pre-ordained position that they were expected to represent. The limited discourse in the U.S. news media in the days before and during U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq allowed only for so called "American" views, which excluded reservations regarding U.S. military intervention abroad. The members of Peaceful Tomorrows, operating in the least deferential, right-end side of the Experience-Argument Scale, learned to strategically cooperate with these expectations. That meant that they occasionally compromised their message in order to gain media access, settling for partial public relation achievements. Another strategic necessity that quickly revealed itself was the need to studiously keep away from political language that could be identified as partisan. Once they chose to speak of U.S. global interests instead of expressing a compassionate wish to prevent the families of the "other side" from experiencing loss, they risked an abrupt journalistic discreditation. Their moral superiority depended on a particular idea of political abstinence. Their argument could go so far as to express human concern, but had to fall short of advocating for any concrete policy solutions identified with party politics.

Peaceful Tomorrows members were not the only 9/11 victims to experience the discursive limitations that American media set at that time. In a famous February 2002 segment from *The O'Reilly Factor*, Bill O'Reilly interviewed Jeremy Glick, the son of a Port Authority worker who perished in 9/11. Glick was invited to the show after he had added his signature to an anti-war ad in the *New York Times*. At the outset of the interview, Glick stated that the U.S. was “responsible for training militarily, economically, and situating geopolitically the parties involved in the alleged assassination and the murder of my father and countless of thousands of others.” O'Reilly's immediate response was: “You are mouthing a far left position that is a marginal position in this society, which you're entitled to.” Clearly, the act of attaching a partisan label to a terrorism victim was detrimental to his credibility, and if Glick could be identified as “political,” let alone as a representing the extreme left on *Fox News*, he could no longer enjoy the protections of his victimhood. O'Reilly continued to say, “I don't think your father would be approving of this,” which was a way of saying that Glick was a traitor, and sending him to exile in the “sphere of deviance.”

But the interview was not over yet. When Glick further mentioned that the U.S. had aided Islamic groups in Afghanistan in order to weaken Soviet presence there, he was moving dangerously deeper into the right-end side of the Experience-Argument Scale, abandoning his privileges as a terrorism victim striving for an end to violence, and assuming instead the position of a regular guy trying to outsmart Bill O'Reilly in a political match. These were the circumstances in which O'Reilly felt that he could afford the following exchange:

O'Reilly: I don't want to debate world politics with you.

Glick: Well, why not? This is about world politics.

O'Reilly: Because, No. 1, I don't really care what you think.

O'Reilly eventually told Glick to "shut up," muttered that he hoped Glick's mother wasn't watching, and finally ordered cutting of Glick's microphone. While this exchange should not be seen as representative of the U.S. news media's treatment of 9/11 victims turned peace or human rights activists, it yet demonstrates that the right-end, "disregarding" side of the Experience-Argument Scale could be brutal for U.S victims. In Israel, if to judge by the coverage of the Parents Circle, the right end side of the Experience-Argument Scale was a safer place for the Israeli equivalents of Peaceful Tomorrows and Jeremy Glick. In Israel, victimhood served as a stronger shield, because of the continuous conflict that generated new victims and kept the victims' authority consistently present and alive. Moreover, In Israel, there was probably no need for the strong shield of victimhood in the first place, because talking politics, even extreme politics, was legitimate and did not threaten to compromise the victims' moral authority. To judge by the experience of the Parents Circle, Israeli terrorism victimhood provided only modest access to the press, but once the cameras rolled—as the Parents Circle's Robi Damelin said—"I'm not a politician. I can say what I like."

That sense of freedom that the Israeli victims felt was also evident when they practiced the politics of remembrance. Israeli terrorism victims could—and did—erect monuments for their lost relatives independently and without obstruction. The

journalistic coverage of their efforts consistently favored their right to mourn in any manner and place they chose, occasionally at the expense of other interests, such as that of property owners for their land to be clear of makeshift monuments, or that of drivers to have their roads clear of visual diversions. But the downside of the Israeli coverage, from the victims' perspective, was that the issue of remembrance interested the news for only a very short time period. Characteristically to the realities of routine terrorism, individual incidents (unless exceptionally deadly) merged within the repetitive line of attacks. A subsequent attack was always more newsworthy than the remembrance efforts related to the previous one.

American journalism was walking down a similar path, increasingly embracing spontaneous displays of victims' grief. This was part of the previously discussed, broader trend toward authenticity, in which the victims were invited to play a more salient role in the design and execution of remembrance projects, and where the projects themselves were more ambitious. Just as the Oklahoma City memorial was the first memorial to "sanctify" the site of a terrorist attack, sanctification went further, beyond the site, to characterize the reverential coverage of the memorialization process in the local Oklahoma press. In fact, the local press identified with the victims to such an extent that it refrained from reporting on internal problems in the victim-led memorial task force. Local papers, for example, kept silent about a major incident in which the task force had fired the architect who was in charge of the planning process, following the architect's objection to the inclusion of victims in the design selection committee. That crisis, had it been reported, could have sparked a meaningful debate over the place of victims in the memorialization process. But such

a debate would have inevitably externalized the doubts over the appropriateness of victims' participation, something that the victims and the local press wanted to avoid. The national press, on the other hand, was much more candid in its coverage of the memorialization process and it did question the sensibility of the decision to let victims lead the project. And when local Oklahoman figures, such as a University of Oklahoma history professor, argued for the over-involvement of the victims, they were accommodated in the national press, while the local press, faithful to the victims, ignored them.

16 years later, the Ground Zero saga also exemplified the moral and political power of American terrorism victims over issues of remembrance. In fact, Chapter 2's review of the coverage of the 9/11 memorialization debates demonstrated that at least until 2004, no claim that family members had made was rejected as irrelevant, unimportant or preposterous. The seriousness and lack of judgment with which journalists approached the victims, joined by the similarly unanimous deference from the part of the New York political establishment, helped the victims gain almost unlimited control over the memorialization process during those early, formative years. It was during that time frame, that a group of 9/11 family members succeeded, within a few months' advocacy work, to derail the International Freedom Center, a museum dedicated to the concept of freedom, despite its already advanced planning phase. The still-traumatized press, engulfed with deference to the victims, not only reported the victims' objections to the IFC uncritically, it even rephrased them in anodyne, non-political terms, leaving out explicit references to the IFC as a liberal, hate-America establishment, and instead, describing the victims' objections to the

memorial as grounded in the worry that the IFC would “detract from the solemnity of the memorial by focusing on geopolitics and on national and international social history.”¹ This kind of journalistic protection was only granted when issues on the left, deferential, side of the Experience-Argument Scale were concerned.

It was during that time frame that the ideological foundations of the Ground Zero memorial complex were cemented. The site, in its present form, was shaped in the ideological image of those victims who achieved dominance at the outset of the memorialization saga. Another dominant feature of the IFC dispute coverage was the confinement of the memorialization debate to three dominant players: the families, the developer of the IFC, and New York officials. Coverage, both in the tabloids and in the quality papers of the likes of the *New York Times*, lacked the informing, educated opinion of memorial designers, historians or even plain New Yorkers. It was as if the press was reluctant to invite opinions that might have contradicted or otherwise offended the family member activist group.

It took a few years for cracks to appear in the wall of journalistic deference to those 9/11 victims who were engaged in remembrance, and for journalists to begin to wonder whether the victims who initially took the lead in the Ground Zero debate were in fact representative of the 9/11 relatives group. With time, the family member activists went through the inevitable process of assuming a political identity, namely being labeled, willingly or not, as partisan. As some of them were identified with the

¹ For example: David W. Dunlap, Pataki Solution on Museum Flies in Face of Planning, *The New York Times*, September 29, 2005.

political right, and some with the political left, their overall politics reached a zero sum game and their overall influence diminished. This was evident in the coverage of the Park51 dispute in 2010, where so many family members contributed their opinion, that none could be considered “representative” of the majority of the family members’ population. The coverage of the Park51 dispute also exhibited the diminishing influence of the victims, not just because their diversity prevented the emergence of a clear victim agenda, but also because time was taking its toll on their relevance. While the tabloids were offering different perspectives of different victims with respect to the Park51 debate, the *New York Times* discounted the victims altogether and replaced them with independent bloggers. By 2010, those family members who remained politically active were “professional victims,” with a clear political agenda that according to American social convention, undermined their moral authority. Bloggers, on the other hand, were overtly political, but their position as influential bloggers has given them the authority of mass popularity.

One strategy that characterized victims’ campaigns across the entire spectrum of the Experience-Argument Scale was the victims' attempts at bringing their advocacy as conceptually close as possible to their personal loss. Even in Israel, where political talk was not likely to downgrade the victims to suspected pseudo-politicians, victims still employed the first person and emphasized the instructional value of their experience. They spoke of the directions that their anger and grief have taken them, of their ideas as victims on the appropriate punishments for the perpetrators of terrorism or on ways to enhance peace or personal safety, all the while distancing their claims from the discourse of conventional politics, or at least,

deducing policy solutions from their personal experience (e.g. "we should build a wall between Israel and the Palestinian Territories so that no suicide bomber would be able to kill other people's children.") In fact, the more the victims' arguments belonged to the right end, "disregarding" side of the Scale, the more they needed to rely on their victimhood. It was precisely because their involvement was least obvious, and their relevance questionable, that they needed to emphasize their victimhood and de-politicize the discourse in order to disarm opponents in issues that were, by their nature, highly political.

In instances of extreme deference, the press, both in the U.S. and in Israel, took an active role de-politicizing the victims' campaigns. In the U.S. the national press depoliticized the statements of those 9/11 family members who were against the institution of the International Freedom Center in Ground Zero. In Israel, the journalistic coverage of the captivity of Gilad Shalit was depoliticized in that it did not analyze in great depths the possible implications of an exchange deal, nor did it identify the positions pro or against the deal in partisan, left vs. right terms. Rather, it was politically evasive, serving mostly as a platform to reverberate the popular wish for Shalit's return through emotional op-eds and extensive coverage of the campaign efforts: Gilad's mock chamber, the 200,000 people march, and so forth. There was also active campaigning on behalf of media outlets. *Yedioth Aharonoth*, for example, provided its readers with a phone number to which they could text message their intention to join the Shalit march, rewarding them by publishing their names in a designated list of participants. The more traditional coverage advocated for hope and hope alone, focusing on the personal tragedy of Gilad, "the Boy," and his family,

calling in the name of military purism to “leave no man behind,” and thus drawing the support of the majority of Israelis, from all across the political spectrum, for the 1027 to 1 exchange deal.

My analysis of the coverage of prolonged detentions of abducted soldiers by hostile organizations also showed that much of the media cooperation that the soldiers’ families received had to do with an unspoken media assessment of the chances that a prisoner exchange deal would materialize. It has been widely accepted and substantiated that the news discourse always reflected the internal governmental discourse, mainly because of the reliance of the press on government sources. The Shalit coverage, however, demonstrated a related point, which was that the press pursued a governmental policy only if it recognized it as possibly viable. Once the Israeli government was known to be open to prisoner exchange deals, the possibility of supporting the Shalit family’s mission also presented itself. In the U.S., the “no negotiating with terrorists” policy with respect to kidnapped American soldiers, which has perhaps changed into willingness to negotiate over the release of but a handful of suspected terrorists,² discouraged the press and explained the relatively low-key coverage of the Taliban keeping of Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl.

This dissertation hopes to offer a new prism with which to evaluate the media presence of activists who practice the politics of personal trauma—namely, people who speak by virtue of a transformative traumatic experience that enhanced their

² According to CNN.com, the U.S. was willing to release five Taliban prisoners in exchange for Bowe Bergdahl. Jim Sciutto, *Source: Missing U.S. Soldier Bowe Bergdahl Seen in Video*, CNN.com, January 16, 2014

thinking and involvement in a specific subject matter and that lends their arguments the special moral authority that is the authority of grief. Such a conceptual tool may be employed in analyses of the media power of all types of victims. The school shootings epidemic in the U.S., for example, calls for an examination of the place of the victims in the national debate over gun control. Is there any particular validity to the policy claims of parents of the assassinated children, or are they heard only as part of the coverage of the aftermath of the tragedy? Are the U.S. media still in search for the voice of the victims in their capacity as commentators, or is the public arena reserved only for officials, experts and pundits, while the plain folks express themselves among friends and in the limited confines of their Internet social networks? To be sure, the role of the "unprofessional" activist is changing as the media landscape changes. For once, the discursive nature of contemporary journalism, which combines traditional reporting with a plethora of reader/viewer participation possibilities, may dilute the presence and effect of victim-advocates.

This work explored the journalistic treatment of victims' involvement in a wide array of issues, but it consciously concentrated on the extreme ends of the Experience-Argument Scale. There, in the left "deferential" end, and in the right "disregarding" end, journalism was in a danger of compromise. Deference could have the positive effect of engendering compassionate policies: The role of victims in the advancement of social values has been undoubtedly profound, and they have been responsible for raising awareness and critically contributing to advancements in social equality, personal safety, governmental protections for the disadvantaged and even in peacemaking between nations. But deference could have adverse effects, resulting in

pro-victim policies that have not been sufficiently debated or were too emotion-driven to be rational. The right, "disregarding" end of the Scale was similarly perilous to journalism. There, journalism was blinding itself to the realities and consequences of political violence. I hope that this work enhances the understanding of journalism's response to the authority of grief of terrorism victims and victims at large.

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