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INTRODUCTION: WAR REPORTING AND PROPER DISTANCE

Journalists are faced with an extremely difficult challenge in reporting on a war that affects their own people: it requires a level of professional detachment from the events they cover, while at the same time conveying a sense of closeness with their community. Yonit Levy, one of Israel's most popular news anchors, was accused of expressing what was perceived as excessive sympathy for the enemy in her coverage of the Gaza war. Channel 2, which enjoys the highest number of viewers among Israel's television stations, was flooded with complaints and demands that she be fired. Levy's reporting was perceived as *too far:* she was seen as standing outside her national community. Roni Daniel, Channel 2's military correspondent, on the other hand was criticized by many for being *too close*: his embrace of Israel Defense Force's (IDF) narrative and his eagerness for battle were satirized on *Eretz Nehederet*, an Israeli television show that depicted him, bare chested, with machine-gun bullets strung across his chest and wearing a Rambo-style headband. Daniel represents an extreme case of what Hallin (1986) describes as journalists' tendency in times of crisis to move towards a "sphere of consensus:" reporting events as members of the national community, invoking patriotism, adopting unquestioned binary categories of "us" and "them" and reasserting the dominant national narrative (Peri, 1999; Schudson, 2002; Waisbord, 2002; Zandberg and Neiger, 2005).

How can journalists achieve "proper distance" when reporting on war affecting their own communities? Silverstone (2007) introduced the term "proper distance" as a way for understanding our mediated relationship to the "other"; here I use it to refer to our relationship to ourselves, as a nation, in time of war. I contend that a degree of estrangement - de-familiarization from the

commonsensical national narrative of "us" - is vital, and especially in times of conflict, if journalism is to fulfill its democratic commitment of enabling an understanding of the issues in more complex, inclusive and moral ways. Estrangement describes the process or act that endows an object or image with strangeness; the replacement of the familiar by the strange (Shklovsky, 1991). It is a discursive and aesthetic technique – removing objects from the automatism of perception (Shklovsky, 1991) by making them strange. But it is, fundamentally, also a moral project. The act of distancing the familiar clarifies values and decenters our consciousness (Bogdan, 1992). And while, as Gilroy (2004, p. 78) argues, it "cannot guarantee undistorted perception of the world," estrangement "can still be used to show where overfamiliarity enters and taken-for-grantedness corrupts."

However, estrangement has explosive potential; it can trigger instabilities, tensions, and considerable vulnerability, the case of the Abu-Ghraib photos being a vivid example. The images of the practices of US military personnel in the hidden worlds of Iraqi jails, invited, perhaps forced viewers to see the familiar and commonsensical – our upstanding and humane soldiers – as alien and strange: "our boys" as capable of evil. The photographs were extremely disturbing and unsettling to the Western imagination.

Thus, for the media to engender effective estrangement - encourage a self-reflexive process of introspection and critical discussion - they must constantly strive for the cultivation of proper distance, both close and far, from ourselves. This is not to imply that journalists should give their audiences only what they can immediately digest; the very essence of estrangement is that it destabilizes consciousness. But reporting, especially in war, should also reassure, and at times, console.

How can the media engender effective estrangement at times of conflict? In today's competitive and complex media environment, visibility is substantially expanded: we can access more stories, from more sources, potentially acquiring different visions and achieving distance from the "sphere of consensus" which often governs the national public sphere in time of war. A

fundamental aspect of this "new visibility" (Thompson, 2005) is the ability to have alternative visions of the other and see "the enemy" in its humanity. The online documentary series *Hometown Baghdad*, for example, relates the stories of young Iraqis and their daily struggles to survive under the American occupation. The series destabilizes commonsensical perceptions of the other as depraved, violent, and evil, and as such constitutes a powerful intervention in American national consciousness. Similarly, the visibility of Palestinian suffering during the second Intifada, through regular interviews on prime-time Israeli television, encouraged a more reflexive view of the "other" than the narrative that had governed earlier decades and excluded such images from national screens (Liebes and Kampf, 2009).

Another way of engendering estrangement that is becoming central in contemporary mediated wartime, is seeing how others see us. We are increasingly exposed to multiple storytellers relating our story: from international networks and foreign newspapers to bloggers and citizen journalists. As I have shown elsewhere (Orgad, 2008), international networks provide a potent means through which viewers can gain different visions of their country. During and after conflicts, particularly in small-medium democratic countries, the question of "how the world sees us" is thoroughly discussed in national media (e.g. France and Spain, see Orgad, 2008).

This article examines the opportunities and limits of seeing how others see us through the filter of national media, for cultivating effective estrangement. I use the context of the war in Gaza to analyze how national broadcast media in Israel reported on the international coverage. I show how, on the one hand, the national media's treatment of international coverage cast doubt on commonsensical national discourses and encouraged more critical, reflexive reporting (estrangement), while reinforcing the consensual, reproducing the familiar narrative, and denying alternative voices on the other (attachment).

THE WAR IN GAZA, AND THE MEDIA

On December 19, 2008, after six-months of calm, Hamas resumed rocket attacks on villages and towns in Southern Israel. On December 27, 2008,

Israel responded with operation Cast Lead – the most ferocious attack on the Gaza Strip since the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hamas escalated its rocket attacks on Israel, hitting several major cities: 13 Israelis and over 1,300 Palestinians were reported killed. On January 17, 2009, the Israeli government announced a unilateral cease fire and the following day, Hamas reciprocated, demanding that Israel withdraw its forces from the Gaza Strip within a week.

For the first 12 days of the war, the IDF banned correspondents from crossing into the Gaza Strip, defying a Supreme Court order to let in a pool of reporters. Correspondents were herded onto a designated hill, overlooking the territory, away from the fighting, which frustrated and angered international news organizations. While some pictures were coming out of Gaza from news agencies, such as Reuters and AP, and from networks whose reporters were in place before the war started (e.g. Al Jazeera, the BBC), most reporters were restricted to the Israeli side of the border.

The decision to ban the media from entering Gaza was largely a reaction to Israel's experience in the 2006 Lebanon war when reporters had almost unfettered access to the front lines and were able to project, in real time, pictures from the battlefields. It was claimed that this helped Hezbollah, confused and destabilized the home front, and put soldiers' lives at risk. Thus, the IDF's decision to ban the media from Gaza went largely unchallenged by the Israeli public and reporters, notwithstanding the harsh criticism it engendered among foreign correspondents and countries. While a sentiment of "who cares what the world says" seems to have prevailed among the Israeli public, how the world saw "us" did matter. Discussions in the mainstream Israeli media included ongoing references to international media coverage and to "how we are seen by the world".

The following analysis discusses news pieces broadcast on Israel's two commercial television stations – Channel 2 and Channel 10 - from the beginning of the war to January 19, 2009, two days after the ceasefire came into effect. The 12 news items that were analyzed do not constitute a

complete or representative sample of all reports that discussed international coverage of the war, however, they are illustrative of how the Israeli media interpreted foreign coverage, and shed light on the opportunities and limits to watching how others watch us.

ANALYSIS:
GLIMPSES OF ESTRANGEMENT IN A SPHERE OF CONSENSUS

One item was broadcast on Channel 10 on the second day of the war; however, most of the rest were broadcast after the shelling of the UN school in the Jabaliya refugee camp on January 6, 2009, in which, according to UN reports, 43 Palestinian civilians, mostly children, were killed. This event sparked international condemnation and increasingly critical media coverage of Israel's military operation.

In all the reports analyzed, reference to international – mainly American and European media and Al Jazeera - was made in the context of discussing the Israeli government's public diplomacy ("Hasbara") efforts to cope with the images being shown on foreign networks. All the reports incorporated footage from foreign channels' coverage and/or showed the front pages of foreign newspapers. The footage was often accompanied by voiceovers paraphrasing the content, and sometimes by Hebrew subtitles.

Estrangement

I want briefly to highlight three strategies of estrangement which recurred in the news reports' treatment of international coverage. These are discursive and visual techniques that invite de-familiarization and invoke distance from the way in which events commonly were presented by the mainstream national media.[1] It is important to note, however, that the distinctions among these strategies are merely analytical; their manifestation in the news reports is more messy and harder to distinguish. Also, as I argue later, these elements of estrangement in the reports, existed in constant tension with elements of attachment – ways in which international coverage was used to reproduce and reinforce the familiar, dominant narrative.

REVERSAL

All the international news reports that were shown included footage of human suffering of Gazan civilians: distraught Palestinians in scenes of devastation, weeping women, wounded adults and children, and dead bodies. In some reports, the impact was reinforced by commentary from the Israeli reporter. For example, Channel 10's reporter, Ilan Goren, described Al Jazeera's disturbing pictures of wounded children as "indeed difficult to watch…they show bleeding corpses, massacred children" (December 28). The aggressor in the international footage shown in the Israeli news reports was the IDF; the visual focus was on the military machinery and the destruction and death it was causing; the verbal narrative focused on the military's culpability. By contrast, though unsurprisingly, in the Israeli media the victims were primarily Israeli civilians and soldiers (notwithstanding the increased visibility of Palestinian suffering, Liebes and Kampf, forthcoming). The aggressor, almost exclusively, was Hamas, described as the evil attacking Israeli civilians and endangering its own people, especially children, by using them as human shields (see Keshev, 2009a).

Showing these images disrupts - even if in a limited way – dominant representations of the war (and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more broadly) on national media. It reverses the commonsensical roles - suddenly the main victims are *them*, and the prime aggressor is *us*. It is not surprising, therefore, that its exposure provoked denial, and claims that the images had been manipulated to be used as anti-Israel propaganda. At the same time, this reversal is a potentially important intervention in the national dominant narrative – together with other changes in the representation of "the enemy" (see Liebes and Kampf, forthcoming). Overturning commonsensical roles can create surprise and distance, and demand reflection. It can trigger a call to acknowledge the far more complex and painful reality of war, to admit the human suffering of "our enemy" and to force a recognition of our part in it and our responsibility for its alleviation.

Channel 2's report on January 19 is an example of such a call elicited by the showing of international footage. The report starts with a collection of footage

from foreign networks showing the absolute devastation of houses, and the reactions of civilians returning to this ruin the day after the war ended. Then the report moves to the studio where correspondent Suliman al-Shafi comments: "the pictures we've seen from the foreign networks cannot do justice to the difficult daily reality that the people of Gaza now face." This is followed by interviews with Palestinians returning to find their homes destroyed. The report closes with former high-rank military officer, Eyal Ben-Reuven, in the studio, responding to the international footage shown:

> In this horrid world of war, there are no happy conflicts…Now, after all of this, we should let ourselves feel the pain [of the Palestinians]. We are even allowed to view this horror with tears in our eyes, and Israel, together with the rest of the world, should try to help…We, the soldiers, the commanders, must experience the real the pain of this matter."

This statement (notwithstanding discursive elements of denial, e.g. the use of euphemisms and indirect reference to Palestinians' pain), together with Suliman al-Shafi's comment and interviews with Palestinian survivors, constitute a call to acknowledge the suffering of the other. The reversal offered here by international coverage, seemed to have triggered reactions – including, most unusually, that of a military officer - which challenge the normalized denial of Palestinians' suffering. It invites viewers to entertain a different view of the "enemy," as human beings, and to feel compassion for their pain and a responsibility to help them.

USE OF ALTERNATIVE VOCABULARY

Another way in which the use of international coverage introduces the possibility for estrangement is in exposing viewers to a fundamentally different vocabulary to describe events, from the language they would normally be exposed to. This occurred most vividly after the shelling on January 6 of the UN school. Israeli reports showed international footage of wounded children and dead bodies described by foreign correspondents as "Carnage in Gaza" (Sky News, in Channel 2's report on January 11), "Gaza Offensive" (CNN, in Channel 2's report on January 11); "Panic and chaos and many bodies" (Sky

News, in Channel 10's report on January 10); "School Slaughter" (front page of the *Irish Independent*, in Channel 10's report on January 10), and "murderer…genocide…real massacre" (Hugo Chavez on Venezuelan television, in Channel 10's report on January 8). This contrasts with the major Israeli media's embrace of the IDF narrative, which described the shelling as a response to Hamas launching attacks from the school compound (Keshev, 2009b), and used words such as "bombing," "attack," and "hit," (my translation) to describe Israel's actions. The international version of events was largely rejected in mainstream media coverage (Keshev, 2009b), but presenting viewers with international coverage using a radically different vocabulary and offering a fundamentally different interpretation of the event, was a potentially important intervention in the national commonsensical narrative. It demands some questioning, however limited, of *our* version. And it highlights the vulnerability of *our* truth: we are forced to realize that our story is less stable than we had believed, and to consider, even momentarily, alternative explanations.

Channel 10's report on January 8 is an example of such invitation to viewers to rethink the Israeli version of events, following the introduction of an alternative vocabulary in international news. It starts with a highly estranging exposition of an edited collection of headlines and pictures of bleeding children being evacuated from the chaos, from Sky News, CBS, ABC, and Al Jazeera, and the front pages of the UK *Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph* newspapers, describing "massacre" and "slaughter." The Israeli reporter uses this as a springboard for comparing between the UN school event and what happened at Kana in the 2006 Lebanon war - "an event that transformed Israel from a state operating its army, into a war criminal" - a comparison that increases the estrangement.

GIVING FACE AND VOICE TO CRITICISM
A third way in which the use of international coverage in national news contributes to the creation of distance from the dominant narrative, and presents an opportunity to destabilize Israeli self-righteousness, is in giving voice and face to criticism. The international news footage includes world

leaders, well known intellectuals, citizens, and foreign correspondents criticizing Israel, often harshly. While viewers are used to seeing world leaders and intellectuals criticizing Israel, the angry faces and voices of foreign correspondents and international citizens are less familiar – at least in their centrality during this war. "Israel is hiding the facts by keeping us out" said Dutch reporter Koni Moss in a Channel 2 report (January 11); "the numbers speak for themselves – there are now as we speak 1,000 casualties in Gaza and there are 13 casualties in Israel," BBC Anchor Lyse Doucet criticized Israel in another Channel 2 report (January 14). Seeing the fury on the faces of foreign reporters and hearing their criticism invites viewers to see things through the other's lens, and perhaps, as a consequence, to position their story in relation to that of the stranger.

This call to see things through the foreigner's lens was most effective when the faces and voices were those of citizens across the world. Channel 10's report (January 10), focusing on the diplomatic initiative of the Israeli ambassador to the UK, combined footage from UK news networks with scenes from the London demonstration against Israel's military operation. The demonstrators, aware that they are being interviewed for Israeli television, look directly at the camera to convey their rage to the Israeli audience. This is a rare and powerful moment of estrangement: a call for viewers to view themselves and their story from a distance; to think of themselves as strangers. It is effective because the demonstrators' criticism is not paraphrased by a reporter; it is filmed almost as if the viewers were part of the demonstration and being obliged to face the angry crowd. The critics are not "the enemy" – whose criticism it is commonplace to dismiss and deny. Rather, these are citizens of the west – who we (the Israeli viewers), would like to think are similar to ourselves – citizens of liberal, democratic countries. The camera pulls out to a panoramic view of mass march in the streets of London, with the reporter's voiceover establishing further distance: "From Trafalgar Square to Hyde Park, Israel was looking this week as an absurd history repeating itself."

Attachment

In exposing Israeli viewers to pictures and stories being shown around the world, the national media provided viewers with "glimpses of estrangement:" momentary opportunities to de-familiarize events and gain a degree of critical distance from the convictions governing the national public sphere during the war. At the same time, those opportunities for estrangement were in constant tension with elements reinforcing attachment. Clips of international coverage were often incorporated to reassert commonsensical conceptions of "us" and "them," and to reproduce attachment to a dominant narrative of self-righteousness. Below, I discuss three ways in which the use of international coverage in news reports contained, and in some cases almost erased, the potential of the foreigner's vision for generating a critical questioning of the national commonsensical story.

AESTHETIC DISTANCE FROM THE OTHER'S SUFFERING

Images of Palestinians' suffering from international coverage were discussed almost always in terms of their being tools of anti-Israel propaganda rather than evidence of human suffering. The way the footage was edited – often "jumping" from one brief excerpt of wounded children to another - and the description of images as weapons against which Israel has to fight to gain the world's support, reinforce a distance from the images. Take, for example, Channel 2 reporter's voiceover describing international footage of chaos in Gaza streets: "The pictures coming from Gaza this week are bleeding more and more" (January 11). This description imposes a clear aesthetic (and therefore moral) distance from the reality being documented: it is the pictures that are bleeding, not the human beings within them. It invites the viewers to look at them analytically, rather than as compassionate human beings confronted by distant sufferers. This discursive and visual treatment of the footage of Palestinian sufferers stands in contrast to the portrayal of Israeli victims on national television whose stories received greater length and depth, and a personalized, human interest focus - the implication being that these were *real* accounts of *real* human suffering.

SELECTION, EDITING AND CENSORING

In many of the items, the foreign footage selected mirrored the dominant story in the national media. For example, in a Channel 10 report (December 28), a short excerpt from the BBC was selected, showing interviewer, Peter Dobbie, fiercely challenging the Hamas spokesperson, ending with Dobbie's comment that "everybody knows Israel is not a pussycat when it comes to its relations with Hamas." The BBC, reputed among the Israeli public to be biased against Israel, is shown as Israel's supporter ("Gillerman!" Israeli reporter Goren jokingly praises Dobbie, referring to Dan Gillerman, seen by many Israelis as one of Israel's greatest spokespersons). Though much criticism of Israel was aired by the BBC (including in other parts of Dobbie's interview), the excerpt selected was supportive of Israel's operation. Similarly, a Channel 2 piece (January 1) pertaining to present viewers "a range of reports from around the world," includes a rather selective collection of edited footage from CNN and Sky News, presenting similar stories of destruction in Gaza as a consequence of Israel's killing of Hamas commander, Niza Rayan. While both networks' footage includes images of devastated civilians facing the ruins of their town, the emphasis is on the justification for the suffering and destruction: Rayan was "one of the most… outspoken supporters of the suicide bombings" (Sky News shown in this Channel 2 report) and thus Israel regards the operation as a "major success" (ibid.). These accounts generally mirror the dominant official narrative governing the Israeli media.

Two other editorial choices used repeatedly, contributed to reinforcing familiar perceptions of the war. The first refers to selectivity. Many of the international news images shown were the kind of sterile images Israeli television audiences have become familiar with over the years: studio presenters, electronic maps of the region, long-shots of the Gaza skyline, and smoke plumes. They depict war from a distance. The second refers to the decision to censor images of Palestinian suffering. Channel 10, for example, censored footage from Al Jazeera explaining that the images were *too* difficult to watch. The editorial decision to blur parts of the international footage denied Israeli viewers from seeing pictures they otherwise cannot or did not want to see. While some would argue that this decision was grounded in an awareness of

viewers' moral sensibilities, it can be seen equally as an act of denial, contributing to a sanitization of war.

WATCHING OURSELVES ON OTHERS' SCREENS

A substantial part of the international news footage shown was of Israeli officials appearing on foreign channels. A Channel 10 report on December 28, shows extracts from Defense Minister Ehud Barak's interviews on Fox, CNN and BBC. Barak is seen convinced and assertive, reiterating Israel's official narrative. There are no challenges from his interviewers; no crack in the familiar, automatic, dominant narrative of "our just war." Similarly, a report (January 8) following the shelling of the UN school, which provoked severe criticism of Israel's military operation and block on the supply of humanitarian aid to the civilian population, shows an excerpt from a foreign news channel's interview with President Shimon Peres in which, calmly and confidently, he denies claims of a humanitarian crisis in Gaza: "With Israel providing humanitarian aid there is no problem. It's a false impression." Peres's denial erases the criticism raised in the first part of the report in footage from international networks and newspaper headlines, of Israel's breach of international law and targeting of children and civilians. This denial is further avowed by footage of an interview with the French philosopher, Bernard Henry-Levy, shown after Peres's interview, in which Henry-Levy explains that "Hamas is the malediction of its people." This serves as a powerful confirmation of "our" truth, and denial of "their" claims. Excerpts from the appearances of other officials on foreign channels are along similar lines. Rarely are the spokespersons criticized, rather, this self-referential practice works to reinforce the Israeli public's conviction in Israel's just war and reassure them that Israel's public diplomacy is successful.

CONCLUSION: STRIVING FOR EFFECTIVE ESTRANGEMENT

"Journalism never stands entirely outside the community it reports on" (Schudson, 2002, p. 43) and clearly, should not be expected to do so. At the same time, a proper degree of distance from events, particularly in time of crisis, is vital. The ability to see how others picture us in times of crisis, when visions that differ from the dominant national narrative are scarce and difficult

to accept, presents an important opportunity for gaining this pivotal distance. Yet as the analysis of the Israeli media's treatment of international coverage of the Gaza war has shown, realizing this opportunity is far from simple or straightforward.

In an attempt to consider ways that reporting can better realize the potential for estrangement in times of war, I want to conclude with a news report that represents what I consider as "effective estrangement." The three-minute Channel 2 piece broadcast on January 19, provides viewers with the gaze of a stranger, by using footage from international network coverage. At the same time, it avoids being too critical and invoking too great a distance – a risk that can surface in the act of estrangement, as the case of Yonit Levy illustrates.

The piece opens with the reporter's voiceover: "And now, the pictures we did not see, or did not want to see, or could not see. Today, there is a foreign reporter standing by every house in Jabaliya, showing the world, without censorship, what they are seeing." This rather dramatic introduction, which speaks precisely to the project of estrangement and the battle against denial – acknowledging what we could not or did not want to know – is followed by a collection of footage from BBC, ABC, TVE, CNN and Al Jazeera. Foreign reporters are shown standing amongst the rubble of Gaza, describing the huge destruction and the helplessness of survivors returning to their homes. The editing of these extracts is minimal; the reporting is accompanied by subtitles in Hebrew. The selected excerpts pose critical questions rarely voiced in the Israeli public sphere during the war: the CNN piece suggests vandalism by Israeli soldiers; the ABC reporter discusses accusations that Israel deliberately tried to destroy mosques; Al Jazeera quotes a Palestinian who returns to his home to find his money and jewellery have been plundered, as asking: "What kind of human does this to someone's home?"

The item includes the elements of estrangement discussed earlier, offering Israeli viewers a distance from the narrative of "us," raising critical questions about Israeli soldiers' activities and their consequences for the Gaza population. However, the piece also includes international news reports of

Palestinians criticizing Hamas, thus challenging the dominant construction of Palestinian society as a single entity that supports Hamas. Including footage of Palestinian civilians criticizing both Israel and Hamas breaks down the "us" and "them" dichotomy – both sides are presented as accountable for the war; both sides are called to take responsibility for helping the survivors. The piece's sophisticated use and discussion of international news reports de-familiarizes viewers from the commonsensical narratives and imagery of the war. At the same time it maintains a clear sense of the reporter standing *within* the national community he is reporting on, primarily through the employment of the collective "we." The reporter is the estranger, but fundamentally, he is also estranged, as a member of his national community, by the pictures of international networks. This news report demonstrates that journalism during war can help in effectively cultivating critical distance from "our" truth, however difficult this project may be. It is a goal for which I believe war reporters should strive: to help the public gain a new visibility of *themselves* – constantly considering alternative views and narratives of their country's involvement and responsibility in war, and of the *other* – seeing them as human beings.

Notes

1 Surely, claims about the meanings of these news reports should be complemented by research into audiences' reception and the meanings they make of these texts. This investigation is beyond the scope of this article.

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