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Framing of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in thirteen months of *New York Times* editorials surrounding the attack of September 11, 2001

Kurzfassung: Ziel der vorliegenden Studie ist es, zu untersuchen, wie sich nach den Terroranschlägen des 11. September und der Erklärung eines globalen Krieges gegen den Terrorismus durch die US-Regierung das Framing internationaler Konflikte in amerikanischen Tageszeitungen verändert hat. Gegenstand der Untersuchung ist die Gewalt in Palästina/Israel, die lange Zeit hindurch im Zentrum internationaler Aufmerksamkeit gestanden hatte und rhetorisch mit dem Terrorismus in Verbindung gebracht worden war.
Fragestellungen der Studie sind u.a.: Wie hat der Terroranschlag auf amerikanischem Boden die Qualität und Quantität der amerikanischen Medienkommentare zum israelisch-palestinensischen Konflikt verändert? Welche Schlussfolgerungen ergeben sich daraus bezüglich der Art des Framings internationaler Konflikte, die mit politischen Zielen und sozio-kulturellen Interessen der amerikanischen Politik zwar rhetorisch verbunden sind, die aber keine direkte militärische Beteiligung der USA einschließen? Wie weitreichend sind die Effekte eines derart einschneidenden Ereignisses, und worin bestehen sie?
Medienwirkungsforschung, sozialer Konstruktivismus und die Theorie des Framing bilden die Grundlage der Studie, die davon ausgeht, dass die von den Medien verbreiteten Nachrichten nicht ohne Wirkung auf die Rezipienten bleiben und dass signifikante Veränderungen der Medieninhalte eine Veränderung der Art und Weise nach sich ziehen, wie das Medienpublikum die Welt versteht. Gegenstand der Studie sind jedoch nicht Medieneffekte, sondern die semantischen und narrativen Elemente des Medieninhalts, welche Bedeutungen konstruieren und transportieren.
Editorials und Kommentare der *New York Times* aus dreizehn Monaten bilden die Datengrundlage der Studie. Obwohl die Framing-Forschung zumeist die Nachrichteninhalte fokussiert, bieten die Kommentare auf der Meinungsseite einen wichtigen Zugang zu den dominanten Frames einer Zeitung, weil sie den öffentlichen Standpunkt der Zeitung zum Ausdruck bringen und einen Kontext für die Dekodierung der Nachrichten herstellen.
Die Ergebnisse der Studie zeigen, dass der Anschlag vom 11. September zwar keinen Einfluss auf die Häufigkeit hatte, mit welcher die *New York Times* Kommentare zum palestinensisch-israelischen Konflikt veröffentlichte. Der Anschlag und andere dramatische Ereignisse während des Untersuchungszeitraums veränderten jedoch den Bezugsrahmen, unter welchem die Diskussion geführt wurde. So stellte die Meinungsseite der *New York Times* den israelisch-palästinensischen Konflikt in den ersten Wochen nach dem 11. September vornehmlich in den Kontext der eigenen strategischen Interessen der USA. Dieser Effekt war jedoch zeitlich begrenzt. Über den gesamten Untersuchungszeitraum konstant blieb dagegen das unterschiedliche Framing der beiden Konfliktparteien. Im Großen und Ganzen tendierten die Editorials der *New York Times* dazu, die Palästinenser zu depersonalisieren und sie eher als Gewalttäter darzustellen denn als Opfer. Israelische Gewalttaten wurden dagegen bevorzugt in einen Bezugsrahmen von Recht und Ordnung gestellt, und das persönliche Leid der israelischen Opfer bildete häufig den Kontext, in dem die regionale Gewalt diskutiert wurde.

Abstract: This study sought to determine whether U.S. newspaper framing of international conflict shifted following the Sept. 11 terrorist attack and the U.S. government's initiation of a global war on terrorism. Palestinian/Israeli violence, long a focus of international media and scholarly attention, has been rhetorically tied to terrorism and is the topic of this research.
The questions motivating this study include: How did the terrorist attack on U.S. soil alter the nature and/or quantity of U.S. media commentary about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict? What does this commentary suggest about the nature of U.S. media framing of international conflict that is rhetorically tied to U.S. policy objectives and socio-cultural interests but does not involve direct U.S. military intervention? How far-reaching are the effects of a cataclysmic event on media framing, and what are they?
Media effects theory, social construction theory, and framing theory are primary foundations for this study. Thus, media messages are presumed to affect the audience, and significant changes in media content are presumed to alter audience understanding of the world. However, this study looks not at the effects of media coverage but at the semantic and narrative elements of media content (the frames) that construct and transmit meanings.
A close qualitative reading, supplemented by limited quantitative descriptions, of thirteen months of unsigned editorial comment in The *New York Times* provides the data for this analysis. Although much framing research focuses on news content, editorial-page commentary is a useful bellwether of a newspaper's dominant frames because unsigned editorials express the newspaper's public stance on issues and establish a context for reader decoding of news stories.
This study found the attack of Sept. 11 did not influence the frequency of *New York Times* editorial comment on the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. However, this and other dramatic events during the period of study altered the dominant frame of reference for this discussion. Thus, in the weeks immediately following the Sept. 11 attack, the *New York Times* editorial page was more likely to frame Israeli/Palestinian conflict in terms of U.S. strategic interest in the region. Such effects were temporally limited. However, editorial framing of the two parties to the conflict consistently differed throughout the period. In general, *New York Times* editorials were likely to depersonalize Palestinians and frame them as aggressors rather than victims. Commentary on Israeli acts of violence, in contrast, often favored law and order frames, and the personal suffering of Israeli victims frequently provided the context for discussion of regional violence.

1.   Introduction

The world changed for U.S. citizens and residents on Sept. 11, 2001. When two commercial planes plowed into the upper floors of the twin World Trade Center towers in New York City at about 9 a.m. eastern time, the inhabitants of the most powerful nation on the globe began to recognize their own vulnerability and their connection to the rest of the world. The attack not only killed hundreds and toppled two symbols of U.S. financial leadership and strength; the event challenged the perceived invincibility of the nation's borders. As one newspaper headline proclaimed, Sept. 11 marked the advent of a "new world order."[1]

The attack stunned the nation not because the United States is a stranger to violence. Indeed, some U.S. streets and neighborhoods are among the most dangerous in the world. And terrorism had touched the United States before. Certainly the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, which killed 168 people, and the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center alerted a secure and complacent populace to the potential for indiscriminate violence against innocents on U.S. soil. But nothing prior to Sept. 11 had so clearly awakened U.S. residents to the inability of their government to protect them from international terror.

No events prior to Sept. 11 created widespread fear among the nation's residents. The magnitude of the attack and the apparently massive failure of U.S. intelligence to forewarn a tranquil nation irrevocably altered the country's self-image. In some sense, then, the United States joined the rest of the world on Sept. 11, 2001. On that date, global terrorism and violence reached the shores of the nation.

The events of Sept. 11 also created a natural experiment in which to study the possible effects of major news events upon newspaper framing. This research examines one elite U.S. newspaper's framing of international violence and terrorism through its unsigned editorial-page commentary about Palestinian/Israeli conflict before and after this "critical discourse moment," as Gamson (1992) has called the cataclysmic events that tend to galvanize public attention. Framing analysis examines the interaction between news discourse and the construction of public understanding of issues (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Media accounts constitute an increasingly important source of citizen knowledge about public affairs and international issues and contribute significantly to the social construction of reality. While most Americans rely on broadcast media for the bulk of their international news, scholars suggest that print media's greater scope for comment and analysis (critical to framing) affects the salience of issues, the agendas of opinion leaders and public policy makers, and the attitudes of the public (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002; Jordan, 1993; Brody, 1984; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Scholars repeatedly have studied framing in the *New York Times* and on its editorial page because of the newspaper's prestige and its role in shaping national and international opinion (Mueller, 1973; Baker & O'Neal, 2001).

This initial study focuses on framing in *New York Times* editorials, which embody and publicly articulate the newspaper's official positions and establish the newspaper's tone and character (Daugherty & Warden, 1979). Other studies have examined prestige newspaper editorials as the key to American newspaper framing of the Middle East (Wagner, 1973; Daugherty & Warden, 1979; Trice, 1979). Framing in newspaper editorials is significant because editorials signal the importance of topics to the public (Leff, 2000). However, scholars do not agree on whether the frame of reference established in editorials represents a "seamless continuation" (Chomsky, 2000) or differs significantly from the framing found in news content (Gilboa, 1987). Future research by this author will examine the *New York Times*' news framing of Palestinian and Israeli issues and events during this same 13-month period to explore this question.[2]

This analysis of New York Times' editorial framing of Palestinian/ Israeli conflict contributes to knowledge about media framing and media influence on international misunderstanding, intolerance, and violence. Research into the framing of this conflict in the year 2001 begins to assess whether the post-Sept. 11 reality in the United States affected the national media's framing of international violence and terrorism particularly as related to the Arab and Muslim world. This initial study affords rare insight into the nation's portrayals of foreign terrorism, violence, and peoples at a critical point in the United State's history of terrorism.

2.   Framing

Whereas positivists assert that only one fixed, empirically knowable reality exists, this study assumes multiple and varying realities are constructed through discourse (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Holzner, 1968; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this view, media – like all texts – "powerfully summon and propagate the social orders in which we live" and help shape the reality

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1.   Bangor Daily News, Sept. 12, 2001.
2.   A Proquest search identified 2637 *New York Times* articles including either "Palestin***" or "Israel*". Nearly 49 percent of these articles are news stories.

individuals construct for themselves (Stillar, 1998, p. 1. See also Parenti, 1993; Bennett, 1983). While reality construction is a complex and interactive process, newspaper content conveys explicit and implicit judgments that create a "coherent whole" and attribute a specific meaning to discrete facts through the definition of news, selection of sources and facts, and use of various semantic devices (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 55; Domke, 1997; Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1989; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; Parenti, 1993; Van Dijk, 1991; Tuchman, 1978; Goffman, 1974). Media framing determines the relevance of information and establishes a context for comprehension (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes & Sasson, 1992; Gamson, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). In this way, frames influence what people think about and how people understand the world around them (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

While abundant research suggests that journalists do not intentionally bias their news stories toward specific interpretations, newspaper editorials are inherently subjective and are intended to adopt a particular interpretation of events and to persuade readers (Van Dijk, 1991; McQuail, 1994; Itule & Anderson, 1997). Yet, the structural, professional, and organizational pressures that incline the media toward certain news frames also affect editorials (Liebes, 2000; Ghanem, 1996; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Van Dijk, 1991; Gitlin, 1980; Hofstetter, 1976). Shared values and practices throughout a nation's media lead to common frames (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Ghanem, 1996; Gamson, 1992; Hofstetter, 1976). Dependency on government sources encourages media to privilege the government's construction of key issues and events (Wolfsfeld, 1997b; Paletz & Entman, 1981; Gans, 1979; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Additionally, the need to condense and simplify voluminous material and the strong orientation toward crisis coverage draw the press away from complex historical context or abstract frames (Wolfsfeld, 1997b, p. 153).

The well-documented tendency for media to legitimate some groups and perspectives and to de-legitimate others is condoned in editorial opinion (Wolfsfeld, 1997b; Gurevitch & Levy, 1985; Steuter, 1990; Tilly, 1978). Editorials – to a greater degree than putatively objective news coverage – are likely to reflect the media propensity to embrace the official national government perspective and to favor those with political and economic power (Schlesinger, Elliot & Murdock, 1984). Moreover, editorials may be expected to emphasize the tendency for U.S. media "coverage of terrorism news [to] bear a remarkable resemblance to many sentiments common in U.S. foreign policy, and, indeed, conservative North American political culture" (Steuter, 1990, p. 274).

Yet the role of the media in international conflict is neither simple, nor clear (Noakes & Wilkins, 2002; Wolfsfeld, 1997b, 2001; Gamson, 1992). Noakes and Wilkins (2002) argue that media coverage of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict increases in response to dramatic events and framing varies with expressed U.S. government attitudes (See also Daugherty & Warden, 1979). Weare, Levi and Raphael (2001) found newspaper editorial opinions were tied to newspaper corporate interests. Similarly, Wolfsfeld (2001) found media alternately promote or challenge government positions depending upon the media institution's level of autonomy and resources (p. 60) and its self-perceived role (1997b). He suggested media adopt either a "law and order" frame or an "injustice and defiance" frame depending upon where media cast themselves on a continuum of the following four key roles:

1. Aggressive Watchdog of government (power corrupts frame);
2. Advocate of the downtrodden (brutal repression frame);
3. "Semi-honest Broker" (responsible citizen frame); or
4. "Faithful Servant" parroting government (law and order frame) (p. 69).

Studies of the role of the media in Arab-Israeli conflict suggest media rarely report the conflict neutrally. Gamson's (1992) study of media coverage of nine "critical discourse moments" in the Arab-Israeli conflict identified the following five major frames:

1. Strategic Interest (the story is not the conflict itself but rather the importance of the region in a "global chess game");
2. Feuding Neighbors (the conflict involves a destructive cycle of attack and retaliation in which the true victims are the innocent bystanders);
3. Arab Intransigence (Israeli victimization; Arab zealots intent upon destroying the state of Israel fuel the conflict);
4. Israeli Expansionism (Arab victimization; Israel is a Western-supported colonial power intent on oppressing the indigenous people and extending the reach of racist Zionism); and
5. Dual Liberation (justice; compromise is the only just solution because both sides have a historical claim on the land and a right to self-determination and safety).

Gamson (1992) found the conflict-oriented frame of Feuding Neighbors and the U.S.-centered Strategic Interest frame dominated an exhaustive media sample. The two injustice frames and the justice frame were much less frequent and appeared to the exclusion of each other. Wolfsfeld (1997b) explained the absence of competing justice or injustice frames as the logical result of media goals of clarity and simplicity. "The fact that the news media only allow for one injustice frame at a time is in keeping with its need to tell simple stories. It would, after all, be quite confusing to have two sets of victims" (Wolfsfeld, 1997b, p. 150).

Liebes (1992) found that U.S. news coverage of Israeli/Palestinian conflict poses fewer moral dilemmas and constraints upon U.S. journalists than would coverage of a conflict directly involving U.S. soldiers, U.S. territory, or U.S. interests. The relative remoteness of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict reduces the tendency for U.S. journalists consistently to minimize the costs and accentuate the benefits of government actions in which the U.S. military is engaged (Liebes, 1992). In addition, in U.S. coverage of the intifadeh, "the effort to present 'balanced' coverage result[ed] in greater attention being paid to the weaker side" (p. 48). Finally, two recent studies found that media criticism of government policies is most likely when policy makers lack consensus (Jakobsen, 2000; Robinson, 2000).

Research then suggests that – given U.S. non-involvement in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and the government policy for a negotiated peace in the region – media would generally

- Increase coverage in response to specific events in the region and following Sept. 11,
- Support the weaker side in times of crisis, and
- Function as neutral Brokers of information (Liebes, 1992; Wolfsfeld, 1997a; Robinson, 2000).

However, the United States has actively supported the state of Israel for more than half a century, Americans identify strongly with Israelis (Christison, 1997, 1998a, 1998b), and the U.S. government has labeled certain acts of violence in the region as terrorism. Accordingly, the author anticipates that:

H1: The New York Times will behave as if the nation is directly involved in conflict and will adopt the Faithful Servant role;

H2: New York Times' editorials will favor the Feuding Neighbors and Strategic Interest frames to reflect U.S. concerns; and

H3: Competing justice/injustice frames will not appear.

3. Method

To evaluate the framing of violent Israeli/Palestinian conflict, this analysis employs a close reading of editorials appearing in the leading elite New York City newspaper, the *New York Times*, during the thirteen-month period surrounding September 2001. Every editorial from March 2001 through March 2002 referencing Israel or Israelis and Palestine, Palestinian, or Arab was included in the analysis. The study involves 34 editorials, or an average of roughly one editorial every week and a half.

This critical framing analysis provides both quantitative data on the frequency and nature of *New York Times* editorials on Palestinian and Israeli issues and systematic qualitative analysis of the editorial discourse about these two nation states and their interactions. Although the focus is on editorials rather than news content, the analytical approach borrows heavily from the work of Gamson (1992), Liebes (1992), and Wolfsfeld (1997b). First, editorial titles, which cue readers to the topic and the angle adopted, are treated as a distinct discourse unit (Van Dijk, 1988). Each editorial is categorized into one of seven frames based on the dominant frame of the editorial taken as a single unit. In addition to the U.S. Strategic Interests frame, three justice frames and three adversarial frames are considered. The justice frames encompass 1) Israeli Need for Justice (Arab Intransigence), 2) Palestinian Need for Justice (Israeli Racism), and 3) Dual Justice. The three aggression frames are: 4) Israeli Aggression, 5) Palestinian Aggression, and 6) Feuding Neighbors.

Rich descriptions of *New York Times* editorial commentary are supplemented by discussion of the numerical distribution of editorials within and among framing categories. Although the number of editorials within categories in this study is too small to offer statistically significant results, the quantitative analysis provides valuable guidance on relative editorial emphasis. Framing mechanisms including excising, sanitizing, equalizing, personalizing, demonizing, and contextualizing are discussed (Liebes, 1992). The media role as Watchdog, Advocate, Broker, or Servant is explored.

This work establishes the baseline (a sort of elaborate pretest) for a broader multi-national examination of news media framing of Palestinian/Israeli conflict in news and editorial content in prestige newspapers, government documents and public statements, and public opinion polls in several countries.

4. Results and discussion
4.1 Frequency and Title Focus of Editorials

On average, 2.6 editorials on Palestinian/Israeli conflict appeared in the *New York Times* each month of the 13-month period under study (See Figure 1). The apex of commentary was March 2002, with six editorials on the topic, and the nadir was September 2001, with none. From July through September 2001 only three relevant editorials appeared in the newspaper.
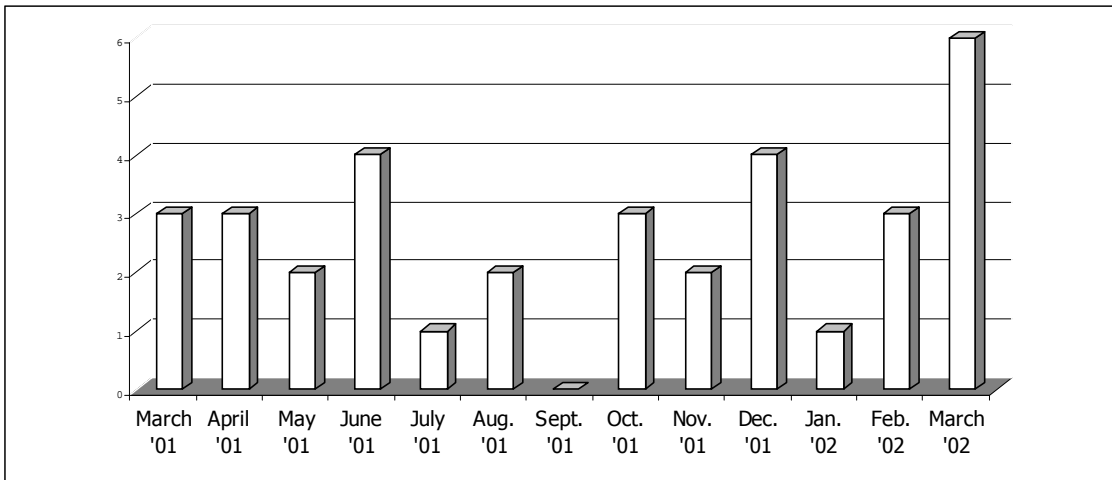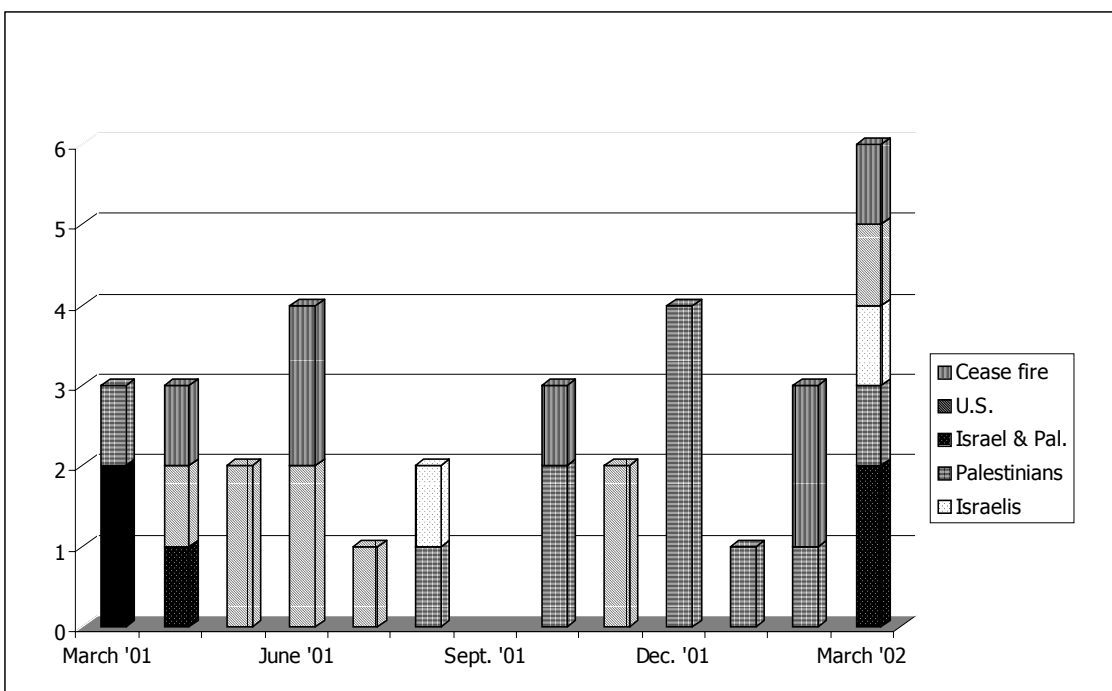
Figure 1:
Frequency of Editorials

Figure 2:
Focus of Editorials

The title focus of editorials ranged from Palestinian or Arab actions to U.S. strategic interests to the stability of calm in the region (See Figure 2). The largest number of editorial titles, more than one-fourth, focused on U.S. strategic interests, pointing readers' attention to the "diplomat balance" needed in the region, the posture of the Bush White House, "America's Mideast responsibilities," and the missed opportunity of the Camp David accords. These editorial titles alternated between recognition of the tactical and the moral incentives for U.S. regional involvement.

Nearly one fourth of the editorial titles focused on Arabs or Palestinians, often equating or conflating the two groups. Titles in this group dealt with Arab "belligerence," "smuggled arms," the Saudi initiative, and the Beirut summit. Commentaries also scrutinized "Arafat's role" and discussed "Arafat's last chance" and the need for "looking beyond Yassir Arafat." The

titles in this group tell two stories. On one hand, Arabs and Palestinians are portrayed as terrorist criminals intent on undermining calm. On the other, Arafat, Arabs, and the Saudis are legitimate brokers of peace.

An equal number (roughly 18 percent) of the editorials took aim at regional violence (Feuding Neighbors frame) or at the cease-fire and peace process (Dual Justice frame) without placing responsibility upon either Palestinians or Israelis. Six titles discussed bloodshed, violence, "the gathering storm" and the "Mideast maelstrom." Six titles also referenced diplomatic efforts and the "peace clock."

The smallest number of editorial titles directed attention to Ariel Sharon and Israeli actions. The vast majority of the nearly 15 percent of editorials in this category discussed Israeli barricades, air strikes, "unwise offensive" actions, and the "limits to force." Consequently, while fewer editorial titles explicitly named Israeli rather than Palestinian interests, Israeli-labeled titles tended to cite concrete Israeli acts and were almost exclusively negative in tone.

4.2 Editorial Frames

Gamson's (1992) study of news frames found that "strong and competing claims about deep historical injustices" did not dominate American media discourse about Israeli/Palestinian conflict (p. 54). Rather, the Feuding Neighbors frame of "fanaticism and the nurturing of long-standing grievances" and the governmental Strategic Interests frame were most common.

The framing presented by the editorials studied here is different. Editorials are distributed almost equally among the seven frame categories, with one exception (See Figure 3). The most notable finding is that none of the editorials impose the Palestinian Need for Justice frame. This absence precludes competing justice frames from appearing (Gamson, 1992). While editorials do discuss Israeli militarism and offensives, Israeli actions are framed as an overreaction or excessive reliance on force to advance a legitimate cause rather than as unjust oppression of innocent Palestinians.
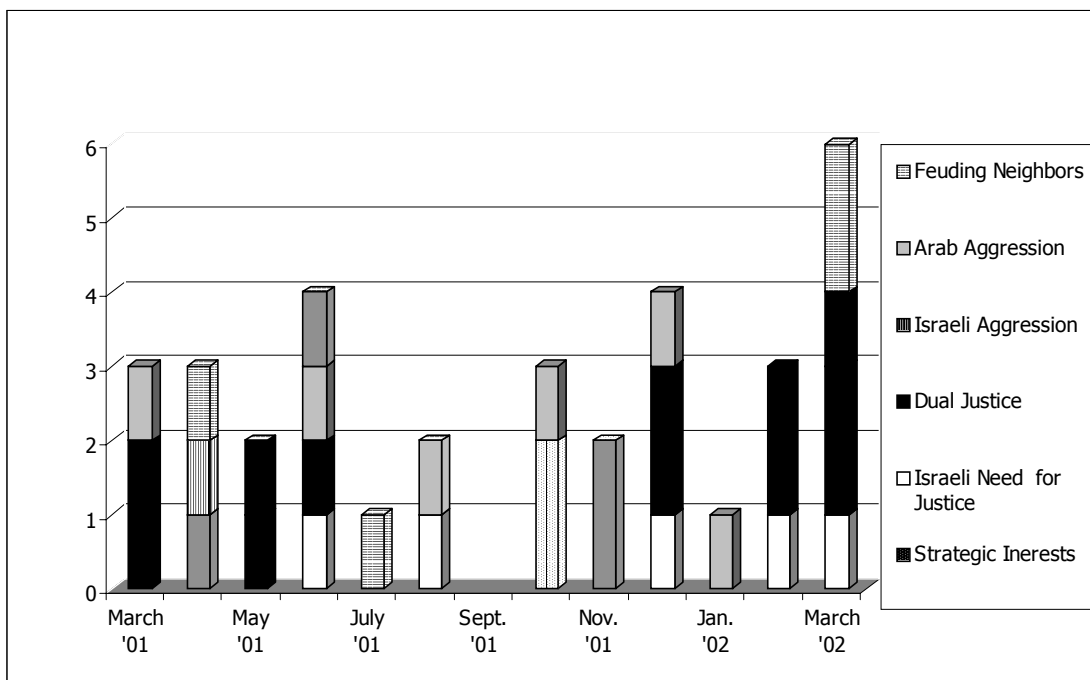

Figure 3:
Editorial Frames

All frames are not distributed evenly throughout the period of study, however (See Figure 4). Strategic Interest stories are sporadic. Adversarial frames appear in 10 of the 13 months, starting from a high in March 2001, declining to a low plateau from July through January 2002, and then rising back to their peak in March 2002. In contrast, justice frames appear in only six months: in May, June, and August 2001 and again in December and then February and March 2002. While frames of aggression create a rather constant backdrop for editorial discussion of the Palestine Authority and Israel, issues of justice and injustice arise episodically, most often in conjunction with external peace initiatives. Justice frames appeared in the context of discussions of U.S. peace negotiations and then later related to Arafat's perceived failures and the promise of the Saudi peace initiative.
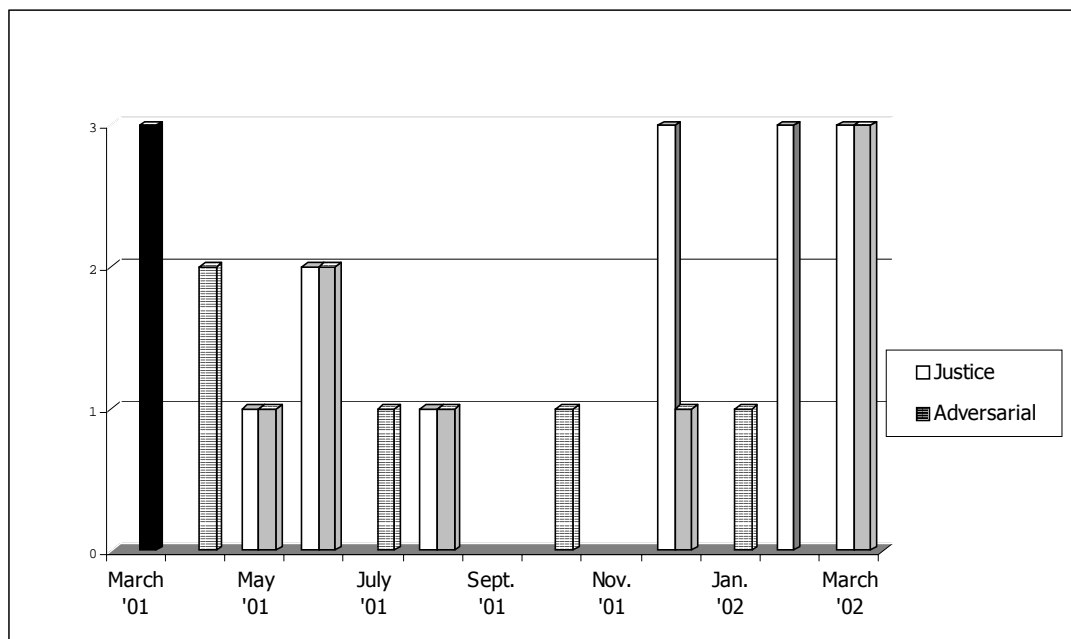
Figure 4:
Total Justice Frames vs. Adversarial Frames

The Strategic Interests frame appears in only three months and dominates only the two months immediately following the Sept. 11 attack. These editorials speak directly to the U.S. desire to achieve peace in the region as a means of advancing the U.S. "war" against terrorism. Similar U.S. interests are evoked peripherally in some editorials commenting upon various peace initiatives, but the "peace" editorials present Israeli/Palestinian conflict not as a pawn of global strategy but as an issue of autonomous significance.

While the Feuding Neighbors frame arises in one-fifth of the editorials, it is absent for six months, from September 2001 to February 2002. In editorials adopting the Feuding Neighbors frame, both sides at times are portrayed as violently harming innocents, but there is a difference. Israeli views included in the editorials often justify their assaults as necessary defense or protection of the safety of their citizens. Editorials also mitigate Israeli culpability by representing "misplaced" Israeli acts as retaliatory and responsive to "brutal" terrorist Palestinian assaults. Ariel Sharon generally is presented as an unwilling participant in the "carnage;" Yassir Arafat is an impotent, unreliable, Janus-faced sponsor of terrorism. These editorials acknowledge a two-sided "dynamic" of violence that "must somehow be broken," but they simultaneously place blame for the "ruinous ordeal" disproportionately upon Palestinians.

The losses and suffering of the Palestinians thus are made acceptable in this body of editorial commentary. Their human costs often are ignored or minimized. Israeli troops – as distinguished from the people of Israel – kill faceless, nameless groups of Palestinians. The number of dead goes unreported. Or when 20,000 Israeli troops "in full battle dress, riding in tanks and backed by fire from Apache attack helicopters ripped their way through large refugee camps," the harm is summarized simply as "more than 160 Palestinians" dead. The human losses from the "destruction of hundreds of houses, the innumerable roadblocks and daily Palestinian humiliation" go unmentioned. Recognition of Palestinian humanity is rare and often backhanded. For example, an editorial denouncing Israeli occupation of Ramallah acknowledges the "victimhood" of the Palestinians but also calls them "Israel haters" and says, "They have not taught their young the virtues of peaceful coexistence."

The humanity of Israel is emphasized and Palestinians simultaneously are de-humanized through descriptions of the human losses incurred by Palestinian suicide bombers. The dominant image is a faceless, unprovoked, Palestinian terrorist engaged in random killing of "Israelis on an almost daily basis." Palestinians murder "a 10-month-old Jewish baby" and pack bombs "with nails and bullets that [tear] through a crowd of innocent teenagers" and leave "Israeli families in mourning." Funerals fill the land of Israel, and the individuals and families that make up the nation suffer unjustly. Israeli rage is understandable if, at times, excessive.

Here the victimization of Israel frame dominates (Wolfsfeld, 1997b). The entire Palestinian population often is defined as suicide bombers. The editorials present Palestinians as a conflagration of hate, a plague of death, a suicide cult, and a

puppet spouting anti-American and anti-Israeli vitriol. Yet the Palestinians are not entirely demonized; they are not evil incarnate. They are poorly led by Arafat; they are fueled by generations of enmity. Arab Aggression frames Palestinians as members of an antiquated, "murderous" caste "consumed by old hatreds," constantly "stoking tensions" with peace-loving Israelis, and intent upon pushing the Jews "into the sea." The Palestinians are terrorist suicide bombers led by a bitter hypocrite who taunts Israel to hide his own ineptitude. Arabs are hateful provocateurs. In one editorial, for example, Syrian President Bahar al-Assad is quoted as saying that Israel is "even more racist than the Nazis."

This sense of injustice against Israel becomes dominant in the Israeli Need for Justice frame. For example, an editorial discussing Sharon's White House visits contrasts Sharon's efforts to resist militants in his government with Arafat's refusal to renounce violence. The editorial notes that Arafat's "strategy of talking peace while waging war is spreading death across Israel."

The Israeli Aggression frame, which might counterbalance the Arab Aggression frame, actually portrays Israel and its leaders as long-suffering, law-abiding individuals who have been provoked into violence. A law and order frame dominates. Thus, an editorial discussing Israeli "trenches, roadblocks, and tanks" barricading the city of Ramallah encourages Ariel Sharon to "strike a reasonable balance" to "ensure the security of Israel." The Israeli military occupation of off-limits zones of Palestinian-ruled areas of the Gaza Strip is called a response to provocations. And in March 2002, the "biggest military offensive in the Palestinian territories since the 1967 war" is "unacceptable" but mitigated by the fact that "no one expects Israel to remain passive."

Counter-intuitively, the Dual Justice frame incorporates many of these same traits into discussion of the "awkward hand [dealt] to both camps." Appearing in only five months, the Dual Justice frame recognizes that both sides have interests that deserve protection. However, the need for Palestinian sovereignty and security is routinely presented as less substantial or legitimate than the same interests of the Israelis. What Israelis deserve, Palestinians are begrudgingly or conditionally granted. Discussions of a just resolution to the conflict emphasize the need for compromise and often treat both nation states with condescending paternalism.

While the impression of unequal harm and asymmetric evil is pervasive, it is not total. Both sides of the conflict occasionally are said to engage in "bloodletting." One editorial speaks of "continuous carnage" and a "cycle of bloodthirsty revenge." An impression of senseless feuding emerges.

An editorial focused on White House efforts to find a successor to Arafat describes the shared plight of Israelis and Palestinians, thrown by destiny "together on a tiny, arid plot of land." This clearly presents the Dual Justice frame, but elaboration of regional historical context is infrequent; more often history does not extend beyond last week or last year. The context that dominates is short-term. Palestinian intransigence and failure to staunch violence are the baseline. Reference to U.S. historical commitment to the security of Israel is more common than discussion of the roots of Israeli/Palestinian conflict. When mentioned, historical enmity, distrust, and violence between Arabs and Israel are not explained; history as told by these editorials begins in 1967 or 1948. Even then, only occasional reference is made to the 1967 war, to an apparently seamless history of Palestinian terrorism, or to "50 years of bitter conflict." This episodic treatment of the conflict deprives the audience of useful tools for meaning construction (Steuter, 1990; Paletz, 1982).

Editorials about Israeli/Palestinian conflict by the *New York Times* do not demonstrate the systematic elimination, or "excising," of one side of the conflict evident in studies of news framing, but they do engage in sanitizing, personalizing, and contextualizing one or both sides of the conflict at various times (Liebes, 1992). The application of these framing techniques is asymmetric. The editorials tend to identify human damage and losses, represent the humanity of the combatants, and contextualize the actions of Israelis more frequently than Palestinians. Israeli violence is the necessary condition of efforts to preserve law and order; Palestinian violence is an act of injustice.

4.3 Quotation

Use of quotes and even paraphrases in these editorials is rare. Yet, the use of sources and direct quotations in *New York Times* editorials frames Israel as the authority and the Palestine Authority as the challenger. The only direct quote attributed to an Arab source during the thirteen months studied is a quote from Syrian President Assad militantly equating Zionism and Nazism. In the only expression of Palestinian views, Ariel Sharon speaks for Yassir Arafat and articulates Arafat's position. Sharon himself is quoted and paraphrased more than any other source. He defines Israel's future course; he pledges to do all he can to advance the U.S. peace plan; he calls Arafat Israel's "bitter enemy;" he is the only one quoted in a piece on the Saudi peace initiative, which he dubs "an interesting idea;" and he says he will "conduct talks" only after the Palestinians have "been battered." While these attributed comments do not portray Sharon as benevolent, even-tempered or consistent, they do present him as credible and powerful. He shares a podium with the White House and U.S. and foreign diplomats. Arafat never ascends that stage. Indeed, Arafat and the Palestinians are left voiceless and powerless, at the margins of debate (Steuter, 1990).

4.4 Media Role

Studies of news coverage by U.S. media suggest the media treat Palestinian/Israeli conflict at once as *their* war and *our* war (Liebes, 1992). The conflict is distant; it does not directly involve U.S. personnel; it does not directly threaten U.S. soil. Yet the Bush Administration is concerned about the effects conflict in the region will have upon his "war on terrorism." And decades-old U.S. support of and alignment with Israel establish greater U.S. identification with Israel than with many other foreign nation states.

The *New York Times* reflects this complicated, or even conflicted, U.S. position in the Middle East. The role of the newspaper, as expressed through its editorial commentary on Palestinian/Israeli conflict, vacillates. While some editorials state the newspaper's long-standing support for U.S. policy in Israel (Servant), editorials also embrace the roles of Broker or Advocate depending upon external events and the editorial's topic (Wolfsfeld, 1997b). Consistent with previous findings on news framing, *New York Times* editorials adopt the role of faithful Servant when they expound on the moral and global responsibility of the U.S. government to become more involved and to direct the resolution of conflict (Liebes, 1992; Wolfsfeld, 1997b). Commentaries about on-going tension or violence in the region Advocate for Israel and succeed in portraying this heavily militarized state as the underdog. Headlines that vilify Arabs strengthen this Advocacy role, but the strong law and order frame in many editorials suggests many editorials actually function to advance U.S. government policies. Thus, many of these editorials may be performing a Servant function. Editorials examining Palestinian/Israeli response to peace plans or cease-fire initiatives and those discussing Israeli military offensives serve a more neutral, Brokerage role. The media Watchdog appears to be sleeping.

5. Conclusions

The findings of this initial study of *New York Times* are inconclusive because of the limited sample size and uncertainty that the frames in news stories would reflect these same patterns. However, this work offers useful avenues to be pursued in future research, and it suggests that several of the author's hypotheses are incorrect. In this study, external events were tied more to frame selection than frequency of editorial comment. More specifically, the premise that editorial commentary on Israeli/Palestinian conflict *as terrorism* would increase following Sept. 11 was not supported by this study. However, external events tended to trigger justice and injustice frames rather than aggression frames. The relative preponderance of editorials incorporating the Strategic Interest frame immediately after Sept. 11 indicates that *New York Times* editorials did tie the conflict to the global anti-terrorism initiative of the United States immediately following the attack. Similarly, an increase in adversarial frames at the time of the Israeli military offensive of March 2002 suggests that some editorial framing responded to external crises.

Despite its wealth and relative autonomy, the *New York Times* editorial commentary rarely critiqued or criticized U.S. government policy. Lack of editorial support for the militarily weaker Palestinians also offers indirect evidence that the newspaper embraced U.S. policy positions on its editorial page. Contrary to this hypothesis, however, overt parroting and support of U.S. government policies in the region did not dominate *New York Times* editorials. While headlines embracing the U.S. Strategic Interests frame were most frequent, the internal frames of editorials did not adopt that headline frame except in the period immediately following Sept. 11 and in discussions of the role of the Middle East in the U.S. war on terrorism, where U.S. interests were most strongly implicated.

Further study is needed to evaluate whether the disappearance of the Feuding Neighbors frame from editorials for the six months following Sept. 11 relates to the preeminence of a Servant role by the *New York Times* editorial page and the newspaper's associated interest in supporting U.S./Israeli/Palestinian cooperation in the fight against terrorism during this period. The reemergence of this frame when regional violence escalated despite increased U.S. efforts to broker peace encouraged continued U.S. engagement in the region while distancing the nation from culpability for conflict. This suggests the Feuding Neighbors frame may reflect a Servant role.

The finding that *New York Times* editorials framed Israeli/Palestinian coverage neither as our war nor as their war also supports this interpretation. Liebes' news framing dichotomy did not apply effectively to *New York Times* editorial coverage of Israeli/Palestinian conflict (Liebes, 1992). Instead, a trifurcated classification that categorizes conflict as "yours, mine, or ours" might be more apt. Under this classification, "our" wars would be wars fought outside national boundaries and without national soldiers but clearly involving significant and/or longstanding national interests or allegiances. U.S. coverage of Israeli/Palestinian conflict falls into this category, and *New York Times* editorial frames reflect the complex and contradictory interests and roles motivating media attention.

This study suggests that "critical discourse moments" such as the events of Sept. 11 are but one in an array of significant factors shaping editorial framing of conflict. Cataclysmic events, national politics, media autonomy and political culture, and societal engagement in the conflict appear to interact with organizational standards and professional norms to determine media frames. Better understanding of this complex relationship is needed.

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