Covering the Qana 'Massacre' 1996: A Case of Contextual Objectivity

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Abstract

This article is part of a larger qualitative study that investigates the Lebanese journalism culture and performance in relation to the Israeli forces' operations against Lebanon and their encounters with the Lebanese resistance between 1996 and 2000. News values and objectivity are key aspects of the culture that this paper explores. It is a story about journalism told by a journalist, yet one who uses academic tools to narrate her story and the story of her fellow journalists. The article presents part of the author's own story - an ethnographic account of Tele Liban's coverage during the 1996 'Grapes of Wrath' operation, as Israel then called it. The performance of Tele Liban journalists during this period will be presented and examined in relation to journalistic norms of objectivity, neutrality, balance and truth. This paper examines what might be identified as alternative ways of understanding reporting wars and conflicts and argues that in this particular situation, reporting was a case of contextual objectivity.

Keywords

objectivity; contextual objectivity; neutrality; news values; war reporting; ethnography; Qana; Lebanon

Introduction

> *On April 18 1996 I was there.*
> *Children, women and old people lay in dozens, beheaded and eviscerated…One hundred and six innocent souls were crushed. I remember how drastic and horrendous the scene was. I remember the villagers of Qana shouting at the camera, waving their hands in every direction asking us to film and tell the world what the Israeli army had done to the innocents, to their loved ones* (Harb, *BBC News*, 31.07.06).[1]

[1] These memories have remained with me ever present, even years after the massacre took place, becoming part of my collective memory as a Lebanese citizen and as a journalist.

Israel occupied South Lebanon between 1978 and 2000.[2] In April 1996 the Israeli army launched a massive assault on the country aimed at uprooting the Lebanese resistance, mainly the Shi'ite movement, Hizbullah (the Party of God), committing what were described as massacres and causing massive destruction across the south. For 16 days I was positioned in the south reporting the Israeli assaults for the Lebanese state-run TV, Tele Liban (TL). The live broadcasting of images of the dead helped bring the Lebanese people together as a collective, but it was not until the war ended that I realized how the role I and my colleagues played was perceived as 'heroic' by the Lebanese media and among the Lebanese people. Being 'heroic' was not inimical to the idea that our coverage was also said to be 'professional'. This was a tribute mentioned by many commentators, including the late journalist and writer Samir Kasir[3] who described the performance of TL during the April 1996 events as highly professional and 'TL as a public service' station in an article in the French magazine *L'Orient Express*, published in May 1996.[4]

This 'act of professionalism' is still remembered as such until now, and there emerged a sense that the journalists involved were proud of the 'objective coverage' at the time. Nonetheless, the most poignant question for me afterwards was, what kind of objectivity were we adhering to and how did we deal with journalistic norms of neutrality and balance? Additionally, what form of objectivity can journalists reporting war achieve when their country and nation is under threat? This paper is part of a larger qualitative study that investigates Lebanon's journalism culture and performance during Israeli operations in and attacks against Lebanon and their encounters with the Lebanese resistance between 1996 and 2000.

Methodological and Theoretical Approach

News values and objectivity are key aspects of the culture that this research explores. Journalists' quest for truth and facts are often discussed in the

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[2] On May 25, 2000, Israeli troops completed their withdrawal from the majority of the occupied territories in South Lebanon, keeping a small piece of disputed land called the Shebaa farms. Israel claims it is Syrian land and Lebanon says it is Lebanese land. Syria says it is Lebanese, but has not supplied the United Nations with any written documents on the issue yet.

[3] Samir Kasir was assassinated on June 2, 2005, in a car bomb attack in Beirut.

[4] Fouad Naim (TL chairman between 1993 and 1996) anticipated that TL would receive positive feedback from the Lebanese audience and critics. He praised TL's journalists and employees' performance and regarded television news as a 'public service'. He told the author in an interview in 2004 that the role of any media institution was to follow such a quick and effective response to events.

literature in tandem with journalistic norms of objectivity, neutrality and balance. I will present Lebanese journalists' interpretations of these values while giving prominence to the ongoing discussions on the validity of the understanding of objectivity that some scholars in the West advocate (Campbell 2004).

This paper tells part of my experiences as a reporter covering those events – it is an ethnographic account of TL's coverage during what Israel called the 'Grapes of Wrath' operation. To aid the structure and flow of the narrative, the paper comprises a *reflexive narration and analysis* of the events of 16 days of TV coverage of major military incursions.[5] The performance of TL journalists, including my own, during this period will be presented and examined in relation to prevalent journalistic norms of objectivity, neutrality, balance and truth. As a *self-reflexive fieldwork account*, this paper contains first-person narration as it is a personal diary of the April 1996 events. It is aided by the transcription and translation of prime time TV news archives and press clips as well as interviews conducted with most of the TL journalists and administrators who were directly involved in the April 1996 coverage.

Drawing on the theoretical framework of journalism culture, this paper outlines the news values and norms that characterized the work of the Lebanese journalists in their coverage and the impact of the historical, social and political context on the way they operated and the rhetoric they used. Out of necessity, the ethnographic tale of TL journalists' coverage and performance is narrated retrospectively. It is a *retrospective ethnographic study* that allowed me, as a researcher, to distance myself, look critically at, and reflect on earlier events and performances in which I was a participant. In doing so, I was able to judge my performance by trying to match what I had learned about being an 'objective reporter' and what I had actually achieved in reality. I equally had to assess my colleagues' performance to try to identify the trends and norms of their journalistic conduct in reporting military conflicts with Israel. This paper thus looks into what might be identified as alternative ways of understanding and reporting conflicts.

News Values: Professionalism and Objectivity

Journalistic norms of objectivity, neutrality and balance are the key aspects of conflict coverage this paper explores. In what follows, I outline some ongoing debates and discussions around these norms and focus on alternative views of

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[5] The narration is based on 40 hours of TL prime time news between April 11, 1996 and April 27, 1996.

the traditional understanding of objectivity. To start with, the concept of objectivity assumes the possibility of genuine neutrality, of some news medium being a clear un-distorting window, though it can never be so (Fowler 1991). Campbell (2004) notes there is a distinct body of criticism of the Western news media's attachment to objectivity (Pavlik 2001; Bell 1998; Hall 2001). Campbell divides this body of literature into three kinds.

> First are those who decry objectivity on grounds of it being an impossible goal... Second, are those who regard objectivity as undesirable regardless of whether it can be achieved or not... Third and perhaps the most recent school of thought, are those who decry objectivity on the basis that technology has made the concept unnecessary and redundant (Campbell 2004: 160-1).

The most relevant among these three categories in relation to this paper and the broader research lies within the second category Campbell identified. Martin Bell, the former BBC war correspondent, explains this as follows: 'I am no longer sure what 'objectivity' means: I see nothing object-like in the relationship between the reporter and the event, but rather a human and dynamic interaction between them' (Bell 1998: 18). Kate Adie, former BBC chief news correspondent (1998: 44 cited in Allan and Zelizer 2004: 3) questions the concept of objectivity when covering wars, but does not label it. She argues that 'the very nature of war confuses the role of the journalist...' and that, in having to face the realities of conflict, 'any belief that the journalist can remain distant, remote, or unaffected by what is happening tends to go out the window in a hurry' (ibid). Adie admits that 'when faced with the consequences of battle and the muddle of war... I don't have the answers, but I keep on asking questions: I was there to witness ...to repeat what I hear, to observe the circumstances, note the detail, and confirm what is going on with accuracy, honesty and precision... (Witnessing was) the only way you can stand by your words afterwards, the only guarantee that you can give your listeners, or viewers, or readers. You saw it; you heard it; you are telling the truth as far as you know' (ibid: 5).

According to the Lebanese journalists of Tele Liban interviewed for this research, being an eye witness committed to telling the truth and reporting facts was how they saw their performance during the coverage of the Israeli escalation of attacks against Lebanon. This view mirrored my own interpretation of my conduct during my years of war reporting though my and my colleagues' sense of citizenship and patriotism influenced the way we covered these events. As Allan and Zelizer (2004: 5) point out, these feelings call into question perceptions of how best to conduct oneself as a reporter in general and as a war reporter specifically. Campbell (2004: 153) put it clearly: 'In Western nations, the principle of objectivity traditionally stands as a fundamental cornerstone of journalistic professionalism and integrity'. I was taught

that objectivity meant I should adopt a position of detachment, rather than neutrality, toward the subject of reporting. In reality, there was a sense of an 'absence of subjectivity, personalized involvement, and judgment' (El-Nawawy and Iskandar in Allan and Zelizer 2004: 320).

This dilemma haunted me while I was trying to find a way of theorizing and framing my own wartime experience. Biographies of war correspondents, such as Jeremy Bowen (2006), Robert Fisk (2006), Fergal Keane (2005), Kate Adie (2002), Martin Bell (2003) and John Simpson's (1999) book on the war in Kosovo, helped to alleviate my anxiety to a certain extent, as did Allan and Zelizer (2004) who believe a distinction should be drawn between 'patriotism and militarism' in the work of a war reporter. They argue that this is central to the problems of this profession, noting that a reporter's sense of national identity needs to be considered 'in a way that sheds light both on how it can underpin journalism's strength, while simultaneously recognizing the constraints it can impose of the integrity of practice' (Allan and Zelizer 2004: 4). However, 'war reporting reveals its investment in sustaining a certain discursive authority—namely that of being an eyewitness' (ibid).

As I continued to struggle with these issues, the atrocities of September 11, 2001, took place. Arab satellite channels, notably Al-Jazeera, entered the international news market through their coverage of the war on Afghanistan in 2001 and the war on Iraq in 2003, and were criticized by both the American administration and the British government for not being 'objective' in their reporting (Harb and Bessaiso 2006). At that point, the concept of contextual objectivity floated to the surface in academic circles (El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002; Allan and Zelizer 2004). The notion of contextualization was seen as a correction to some of the limitations related to the notion of objectivity.

> Contextualization demonstrates a situational position, a way by which collectivism among participants within the same 'context'— whether cultural, religious, political, or economic— is realized and engaged. It is precisely this contextualization that aggravates and complicates the pursuit of "objective" coverage within the news media setting. Contextualization further confuses attempts at even-handedness and efforts to cover all sides of a story. Particularly in times of war, it is the context within which a reporter operates that makes communication with the 'enemy' unacceptable (El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2004: 320).

The two scholars relate contextual objectivity to the audiences the media is reporting on and reaching, and 'the necessity of television and media to present stories in a fashion that is ...impartial yet sensitive to local sensibilities' (El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002: 54), but they make it clear that neither objectivity nor context should be the sole priorities in reporting or writing news.

In fact, they note, the exclusivity of either is dismissed and one is placed in 'the gray area in-between the two where fairness and balance are situated' (ibid: 321). Bernard Roshco in his piece 'Newsmaking' (quoted in Tumber 1999) speaks of three aspects of timeliness to be conceived when a certain news story is considered for publication or broadcasting.

> For an item of information to be timely, in the sense employed here, requires the conjunction of: (1) *recency* (recent disclosure); (2) *immediacy* (publication with minimal delay); (3) *currency* (relevance to present concerns). To speak of news as timely information, therefore, is to imply the existence and interaction of a news source, a news medium, and an audience (Roshco 1999: 18).

The importance of immediacy and recency were acknowledged by the journalists and editors interviewed for this paper as necessary to gain public attention, but the main concern of the paper is the concept of currency, which supports the argument of contextual objectivity. Looking at the bigger picture, Schudson (1995) argues that news is produced by people who operate in a cultural system within what he describes as 'a reservoir of stored cultural meanings and patterns of discourse' (1995: 14). News is a form of culture that 'incorporates assumptions about what matters, what makes sense, what time and place we live in, what range of considerations we should take seriously' (ibid). Similarly, Fiske (1987) makes it clear that news can never give a full, accurate, objective picture of reality, while Cottle states that 'in-depth study of news producers, their cultural milieu and professional domains could help to explain the dynamics and determinants of news output' (Cottle 2003: 16).

The debate on objectivity hails back to the 19th century when objectivity was first identified as a key aspect of professional American journalism and as a 'cornerstone of the professional ideology of journalists in liberal democracies' (Lichtenberg in Curran and Gurevitch 2000c: 239). Soloski (1997) assumes that objectivity is the most important professional norm for journalists in the US and asserts that objectivity does not exist in news stories as such, but in the behavior of journalists:

> Journalists must act in ways that allow them to report the news objectively. For journalists, objectivity does not mean that they are impartial observers of events—as it does for the social scientists—but they seek out facts and report them as fairly and in as balanced a way as possible (1997: 143).

The emphasis on objectivity as a professional norm for American journalists, in particular, has been dismissed later by scholars when discussing certain circumstances where 'the media were deemed to be partial', such as during war when not showing support for their countries' war efforts might seem 'inappropriate' (Williams 2003: 126). Schudson refers to journalists' self-consciousness about the risks to national security of reporting and publishing

at the height of the cold war. This was transferred into a wave of patriotic fervor in the wake of September 11:

> After September 11, 2001, however, American journalists individually and collectively shared in a wave of patriotic fervor and a deep sense of vulnerability. This led to some serious self-criticism about news stories that detailed the flaws in airport security, the vulnerability of subways to terrorist attack, and the technology of crop dusting. When reporters and editors begin to reasonably imagine that their audiences include mass murderers who seek to inflict as much damage on the country as they can, these journalists, too carry out their work on a wartime footing (2003: 164-5).

Noha Mellor, in *The Making of Arab News*, sees objectivity as presenting two opposing opinions is beside the point as it assumes that 'one of the two opinions is misleading or false, because then the media would be helping to promote this opinion' (Mellor 2005: 89). The claim of ultimate 'objectivity' is, therefore, arguable as it is also bound by the cultural and social contexts within which journalists operate. These cultural and social aspects are mostly recognized in what Knightley (2000) calls 'the distinctive genre of war reporting' within which the work of the Lebanese journalists under investigation here falls.

Reporting the April 1996 Lebanon War: Tele Liban Coverage

This paper's story starts on April 11th 1996 when an Israeli bomb hit a yard near Beirut international airport. On that day, Israel also bombarded the southern suburbs of Beirut for the first time since 1982 and launched an aerial bombardment on several positions in South Lebanon. According to Fouad Naim, chairman of TL (1992-1996) and Aref Al Abed, TL's head of news (1993-1997), the scale of bombardment and the 'intimidating statements' by Israeli officials to target the newly reconstructed infrastructure in Beirut and adjacent cities meant that these attacks were unlike previous smaller-scale ones.[6] On the third day of the Israeli operation an 'outside broadcast' van with an anchor-producer, a reporter, a cameraman, a director[7] and two members of the technical team headed south to Sidon. Fouad Naim said the motives for this decision were merely professional and the people who were chosen to carry out the coverage were also chosen for merely professional reasons:

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[6] Interview with author, 2004.

[7] The first team which headed south consisted of anchor-producer (Zahera Harb), a reporter (Nadine Majzoub), a cameraman (Mahmoud Jalloul) and a director (Safi Al Aris).

> With an event like this, even if it had no patriotic aspects or national connotations to us as a company, I would still have taken the same decision to offer our audiences a full and detailed coverage. If we were operating in a different country and an event like this takes place I would have given it the same priority. If I was still the head of Agence France Press in the region, as I used to be, and this happened in Lebanon or even in Israel, if the Lebanese invaded Israel and I was in Tel Aviv I would have made the same decision. The bonus for us here was that we were part of this nation. The attacks were affecting us and our own people's lives (interview with author, 2004).

Naim was referring to the newsworthiness of these events which correlates with notions of *recency*, *immediacy* and *currency* that Roscho (1999) talks about in the quote above. The afternoon developments of what we called the 'Israeli aggressive operation' against South Lebanon were covered live, minute-by-minute from Sidon. Among the stories we broke that afternoon was that of the Mansouri 'massacre'. A missile hit an ambulance carrying fami- lies escaping the fire towards a safer place, a few meters away from a UN check point near Mansouri village. This attack was accompanied by an Israeli announcement of their operation code name 'Grapes of Wrath'[8] (Ashi, TL news, 19.30, 13.04.96).

I remember that evening to this day: I was furious, angry and sad, but tried to remain as calm as I could while presenting the story to the Lebanese audience. Being 'professional' meant I should describe all aspects of what I called 'the Israeli aggression' against civilians and powerless villagers. Journalistic professional norms of objectivity and neutrality did not necessarily collide with my sympathy for the victims. Bringing the factual images to my audience and pin-pointing the scale of the Israeli operations were my main considerations at the time. I was clearly on the side of the victims. However, it was not just that day's events that guided my position, but also memories of Israeli attacks against Lebanese and Palestinian people (Cooley 1973; Friedman 1998; Said 2001; Fisk 2001; Picard 2002) some of which I lived through before I became a journalist. A critic would say our coverage was not 'impartial' and that the 'truth' we were seeking was 'positioned' as no attempts were made (or even considered) to interview Israeli officials or spokespersons to provide 'balance' in journalism speak. However, in our defense, Lebanese journalists were operating within a certain political and legal context - Lebanese laws prohibit contacts between Lebanese citizens and Israelis, including journalists. Thus, we

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[8] The Israeli government code-named its operation after the famous novel of John Steinbeck 'Grapes of Wrath' relating rhetorically to its operation with the theme of 'fighting for existence'.

were using sound bites and statements they had given to international news agencies. Besides, talking to the enemy was seen as an act of treason.

TL became the voice of the southerners: those who stayed and those who escaped and took refuge in other parts of the country. Hospitals, civil defense centers, aid organizations, government officials, Lebanese army leadership and resistance leaders were treating TL as a nationwide communications channel. We set up a small radio-monitoring unit in Sidon to follow news broadcasts from Israeli's Arabic radio station and that of the Israeli proxy militia's radio station - Lahed militia. Both were running warning communiqués to the inhabitants of South Lebanon to evacuate their villages within a certain time and making threats that the Israeli army would raze the villages to the ground (Communiqué No. 4, Lahed Radio, 13.04.96). We wanted to make sure that people were aware of these attempts, so we would broadcast the communiqués and then report how people were not responding to Israeli pressure.

There was no editorial guidance on how and what to report from the field. It was up to the producer-anchor in Sidon to decide where to send camera crews. During the 16 days of military operations the producer-anchors were guided by events and all producer-anchors who operated from Sidon interviewed for the broader study emphasized the fact they did not need any guidance on what and how to report. They were aware of what rhetoric to use and were functioning with the historical, political and legal aspects of the long-standing conflict with Israel in mind. One example of how certain events dictated air time priorities was the Mansouri village massacre near Tyre. Reuters reporter and camerawoman in South Lebanon Najla Abou Jahjah was filming an ambulance going by when an Israeli helicopter hit it with two missiles. A few seconds later, she filmed a father carrying two heavily bleeding children in his hands calling for help. Abou Jahjah focused her camera on a little girl full of dust and blood calling her aunt in a low weak voice. Her footage was broadcast unedited on TL from Sidon and by the evening Reuters decided to release it. Images like these helped unite the Lebanese people against the Israeli military machine and achieve solidarity among the public.

Mervi Pantti and Jan Wieten (2005) describe how the media play an important role in managing emotions, arguing that the 'media can, for instance, actively contribute to turning a climate of anxiety and fear into one of restored morale and unification' (Pantti and Wieten 2005: 304). Kitch (2003), in a study of American news magazines' reporting of September 11, says that the story of September 11 was 'not of terror, death, and destruction, but one of courage, redemption, and patriotic pride' (Kitch 2003: 222). Thus, coverage transformed the negative feeling of fear into the positive feeling of courage and patriotism. This is what happened with us.

Reporting Accurately

On April 14, 1996, we opened the airwaves for refugees who wanted to send messages to their families or ask for aid and supplies as part of our national, and not only professional, responsibility toward our people. Nadine Majzoub explains:

> I tried to cover villages' bombardment as it was happening. I was always looking for the strong and expressive shots. Personally, I did not use emotional words, shots most of the time were more expressive. And I always thought that telling what was really happening with a good shot (image) is better than using emotional and subjective words. I focused on one thing: a war was going on and the viewer had the right to see what was happening. Our main concern was to be accurate and communicate the true nature of the Israeli aggression (interview with author, 2004).

Nadine, like others, insists her performance was guided by journalistic professionalism, but admits focusing on certain images that would reveal 'the Israeli aggression'. For her, objectivity means being factual, but her comment reveals the difficulty of detachment from the contexts of reporting. Similarly, the difficulty of detachment, especially when civilian victims are involved, was expressed by other war reporters, like Kate Adie (1998) and Martin Bell (1998), as mentioned above. The importance of images as an effective tool to pull the nation behind the people of South Lebanon was recognized by all reporters and producers and all the material gathered on their daily tours and visits to villages, towns and cities would run live without editing. When human casualties or brutal destruction were involved, the images were broadcast without editing, even on prime time news, which would often be extended from the normal 30 minutes to an hour to two, and sometimes three, for this purpose. It is worth noting that Lebanon's broadcast media at that time were still operating without any regulations. The press charters or codes were too old to apply to broadcasting or even printing images of dead bodies[9] (Boulus 1995; Dajani 2001).[10] All journalists interviewed for this research believed that by broadcasting such graphic images they were communicating the real situation on the ground. This is a situation similar to what Durham and Singer (ICA conference 2006: 6) refer to in their analysis of journalists' coverage of

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[9] As mentioned above, the Lebanese press code was ratified in 1974, a year before the civil war started in 1975 and lasted for 15 years.

[10] The Lebanese civil war started on April 13, 1975 and ended in November 1990.

Hurricane Katrina which they call a 'shared interpretation of reality within the larger social context of the news environment'.

Soon after we started live coverage we began receiving phone calls from besieged villagers informing us of what was happening in their villages. They became our 'citizen journalists', keeping us informed of what was going on and what they needed in terms of aid (TL news, 19.30, 14.04.96). Meanwhile, the Israeli attacks on the fourth day of the 'Grapes of Wrath operation escalated, as did what we called 'the resistance retaliation' by Hizbullah and other resistance fighters. News priority was given to the Lebanese casualties of Israeli attacks and the 'resistance' rockets fired at Israeli settlements in the north. The Israeli side of the story was not absent from our coverage as we gave air time to their military and political statements, though we called these 'hidden barbaric intentions' since we viewed Israel as an 'enemy state'.

The Message: We Are the Victims

On the fifth day, the Israeli army issued a warning to the people of Tyre and the villages surrounding it to evacuate their homes. We filed reports on how people were surviving, followed by images of a UN convoy carrying food supplies to besieged villagers near the city. This convoy was hit by Israeli shelling in an attempt to prevent the convoy from reaching its target. In a sign of national solidarity and support for the resistance, Lebanese Prime Minister at the time, Rafik Hariri[11] made the following statement:

> Israel occupies our land and there is a resistance to this occupation. If we agree or we don't agree with the resistance political line or history or relationships,[12] that has nothing to do with the fact that our land is occupied. It is the occupation that created the resistance....No prime minister of Lebanon agrees to deprive the resistance of its weapons as long as Israel is occupying our land. Israel is reinforcing Hizbullah by maintaining the occupation (Hariri in TL news, 19.30, 15.04.96).

On April 17, a TL crew entered two besieged villages along with a UN convoy bringing in food, milk, water and medical supplies. I was the reporter who accompanied the convoy from TL and to my surprise the besieged families in Bute Al-Siyyad recognized me and were concerned about my safety more than theirs. One little detail made me realize how much these people

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[11] Hariri was assassinated in a car bomb in Beirut on 14 February 2005. Iskandar explains in his book *Rafiq Hariri and the Fate of Lebanon* (2006) how Hariri invested his personal relations with the world leaders to support the Lebanese cause.

[12] This refers to Hizbullah's relations with Iran (Hamzeh 2005).

were connected with us when they noticed that I had not had time to change my clothes for three days. After seven days of coverage, a promotion for TL's live coverage from the south carried the slogan 'TL, compassion'. It was broadcast to say: 'We are not detached from people's suffering and we are on the people's side. We sympathize with them and try our best to be of help to them'. We were not neutral. Our audience did not expect us to be neutral, but expected us to be objective in telling the truth - a clear case of the 'contextual objectivity' introduced by Iskandar and Nawawi's (Allan and Zelizer 2004: 320) and discussed above.

Qana Massacre 1996: A Question of Contextual Objectivity

One headline dominated the news coverage on of April 18, 1996: 'A day of massacres from Nabatiyeh to Qana'. I was at Najem hospital in Tyre investigating the ambulance massacre for the weekly current affairs show I was co-producing and co-presenting with Zaven Kouyoumdjian, *Khamseh ala Sabaah* (Five over Seven). While I was interviewing the director and owner of the hospital, a nurse interrupted the interview to tell us they had received an appeal for help from the UN headquarters in Qana. Israel had bombarded the compound and the human casualties were massive. Minutes later, injured people started arriving. The scene at the hospital was horrendous; I was not even able to keep up with counting the injured.

When we arrived in Qana, the scene was even more horrific. When the villagers saw us, they started shouting, waving their hands in every direction asking us to film and to tell the world what had happened. They guided us to one of the containers where the villagers were sheltering. There, we stood in the middle of the shattered bodies of women, children and the elderly. We then only heard the voices of the rescuers asking us to film, to record the images and transmit it to the world. When we left the container, the foreign and local reporters had arrived and most were crying along with their cameramen. Some of the UN soldiers were weeping too. When we approached them, they had one word to say: 'Massacre'. I used that word in my report to emphasize the meaning of what had happened (Harb, TL news, 19.30, 18.04.96). The report ran uncut on air from Sidon. According to Ahmad Hindawi, APTV's operations manager at the time, no one knew the scale of the massacre in Qana:

> I was at the TL center in Telet Al-Khayat [in Beirut] standing by the set linked to the satellite station in Jouret al Balloot [North of Beirut] preparing to send TL's exclusive footage from Najem hospital to the London bureau, when TL broadcast the images of the massacre from Qana. I took TL's permission and plugged their

> live footage to the set connected straight to our bureau in London. The whole newsroom in London was in shock, as I was told. (Interview with author, 2004).

The nation was in shock and we, the journalists, were part of the nation. We did not need to do much or say much to express the cruelty of the aggressive attack that hit Qana. The Qana massacre added to the growing feeling among all Lebanese that the nation was under unjustified attack by a huge military force, which was already occupying 10% of Lebanon (*Assafir*, 19.04.96). Stories and memories of previous attacks committed by the Israeli army in Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon were brought up in our coverage, making historical links and comparing what happened in Qana to what happened in Deir Yassin massacre, in Baher Al-Bakar and Al-Haram Al- Ibrahimy[13] (Awada, TL news, 19.30, 18.04.96).

If being balanced was a dilemma for foreign reporters covering a war far away from home, how it would be like for reporters like TL reporters (including myself) who had been reporting a war taking place in their own land and affecting their own people. One hundred and six civilians died in Qana and more than 200 were injured. TL Chairman Fouad Naim, head of news Aref Al-Abed and the ten reporters and producer-anchors who operated from South Lebanon assured all there was no exaggeration in the coverage. For Naim, it was 'the propaganda of the truth':

> We were not hiding anything. On some other occasions we emphasised and highlighted the aggressive nature of the attacks because it was happening on our land and affecting our own people. But with Qana what the Israelis were doing did not need exaggeration. I believe what we did was reflect the reality of the attack. We were showing the images of destruction and massacres as they were. In covering the Qana massacre, I believe we were completely objective; we did not need to decorate the coverage with any national slogan or metaphor, because the images were talking for themselves (interview with the author, 2004).

TL journalists interviewed for this study said no one told them what to say or what not to say: all were guided by their cultural, social and political backgrounds and by their professional expertise. Kandeel-Yaghi, in an interview, had this to say:

> We felt under attack. It was a war targeting our families, relatives and friends. We were feeling the urge to defend them. Being a citizen of this country meant that we as journalists and the people of south Lebanon were in one battle, the battle of defending our nation. One thing was clear to us; you could not be neutral in your feelings towards your nation (interview with author, 2004).

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[13] Massacres committed by the Israeli army against the Palestinians in 1948, 1956 and 1992.

Reflection

Some of the memories encapsulated in this paper brought many tears to my eyes, as if the events were taking place now and not so many years back. I remembered the emotional distress and frustration, and later anger, I felt on witnessing the death of innocent people. For 16 days, I and other journalists tried to be the voice of the victims or that was what we felt at the time. Now, I realize that objectivity as a journalistic norm, and especially in covering wars, could hardly be an absolute measure of conduct. The way we, the Tele Liban journalists, interpreted objectivity was reflected in our coverage even though we were emotionally involved with what was happening. Our notion of 'objectivity' could not but have been influenced by the cultural, national and social contexts within which we were operating.

Journalists, this paper has shown, cannot be totally detached when covering a war that involves their own country. In their own words, as in my own reflections on my conduct, Lebanese journalists could only identify themselves as members of the nation; they sympathized with their fellow citizens and were emotionally involved. Partisanship in TL journalists' commentaries became clearer in the wake of the Qana massacre. It was a case of 'propaganda of the truth'. Looking at it retrospectively and from a distance, this was also a 'positioned truth', a 'truth' told through the eyes of one side of the conflict, which none of us saw as such in those days. It was our version of the 'truth', which then—because it was believed in so fervently, because it was lived and embodied in the daily encounters with human suffering—came to seem to be an 'objective truth'. We were all driven by our experiences as Lebanese citizens over the course of a lifetime as well as by the necessity to report the scale of the Israeli offensive.

There was no orchestrated or managed campaign. Journalists were acting upon their own beliefs and ideas. Thus, the shared ideas and ideals, the shared experiences, the shared threat, the interpersonal relationships all produced a consistent and common approach, which became deliberate in terms of personal commitment. Our coverage was factual. We did not fabricate news; we did not deceive our audience. The images spoke for themselves. As discussed earlier, ultimate objectivity was actually unachievable as journalists are affected by the historical, cultural, social and political context they operate within. Objectivity is contextual.

However, looking back at my performance, I realize that my reporting was affected by the experiences I witnessed at the time. As a journalist I went 'native', in the anthropological and ethnographic sense, and, as anthropologists have come to understand, objectivity and distance are impossible in such

a context, where the only truth is that which is positioned or contextual. Impartiality in such circumstances is more difficult to maintain. The 'contextual objectivity' that the Lebanese journalists adopted when covering military incursions by Israeli forces in South Lebanon could relate to war reporting in general – and can be generalized to that.

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11/04/96	Presenter from Beirut Studios: Tony Salameh;
13/04/96	Presenter from Beirut Studios: Souad A Ashi; Presenter-Producer from Sidon: Zahera Harb;
14/04/96	Presenter from Beirut Studios: Naeemat Aazouri; Presenter-Producer from Sidon: Zahera Harb;
14/04/96	Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, Interview with CNN correspondent Brent Sadler (Re-broadcast)
15/04/96	Presenter from Beirut Studios: Souad Al Ashi Presenter-Producer from Sidon: Zahera Harb
16/04/96	Presenter from Beirut Studios: Souad Al Ashi Presenter-Producer from Sidon: Zaven Kouyoumdjian
17/04/96	Presenter from Beirut Studios: Neemat Aazouri Presenter-Producer from Sidon: Zaven Kouyoumdjian
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