

Research Note

Ideological Dimensions of Media Messages in International Conflict

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PREFACE

The 1982 Lebanon war differed from other conflicts by virtue of the extensive coverage that the mass media accorded to both sides. This coverage was criticized throughout the West, and in Norway complaints were directed particularly at the Norwegian National Broadcasting Corporation (NRK), which is a state monopoly. It was with reference to this debate that the Head of Broadcasting, Bjartmar Gjerde, asked the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs to conduct an independent investigation.

The investigation will be used as a starting point for a discussion of the ideological content of terms and concepts — a type of subjectivity quite unconsciously accepted by the receivers and more often than not also by the senders of media messages.

The findings refer specifically to the unfolding of events in Lebanon, but are nevertheless illustrative of problems linked to media reporting of any international conflict.

The findings on this point gave rise to considerable public controversy when the report was published.

For the reader's information a description is given of the research design of the whole study.

I. RESEARCH DESIGN

NRK's predicament

As in other modern wars the media were exposed to deliberate propaganda from

both parties to the Lebanon conflict, who attempted to 'sell' their own version of events. They knew very well that the media picture as finally created would have considerable significance for their fortunes in the conflict; the siege of Beirut is a good example of the importance of world opinion for the correlation of forces in the conflict area itself. American opinion was — and is — naturally most important, but Western opinion in general was also a strategic objective in the media war.

For NRK, as for all other mass media, it was difficult to find the correct approach to the dissemination of news in such circumstances. The problem was aggravated by the sharp cleavage in public opinion, which made it difficult to present an image that all could regard as full and truthful.

Approach

A possible approach to an assessment of NRK's Lebanon coverage is to compare an objective account of 'what really happened' with the picture presented by NRK. This would not, however, be very useful, for the following reasons:

- (1) Such an analysis would easily fall into a kind of complacent hindsight. Our task is to assess NRK's coverage against the background of the correspondents' working conditions and the data available at the time. Besides, the Lebanon war is too recent for historical analysis and scholarly judgement.

- (2) The most important problem is nevertheless that coverage is a matter not simply of presenting more or less well-defined *events*, but also of portraying the participants' *actions*; this demands *interpretation* and *comprehension* and is therefore dependent on context and a frame of reference. Such portrayal demands selection of context and is thus fundamentally *subjective*.

This problem is central to all journalism, but is aggravated by a public opinion that expects NRK not to select facts and contexts on any of the protagonists' own premises. These are to be given equal treatment — even if a divided public will frequently demand that one party's treatment be more equal than others'.

Criticism of NRK is, in other words, based on an assessment of how far subjective selection is undertaken on the premises of one side or the other. We therefore regard 'balance' as the chief media problem and have conducted our analysis accordingly.

We define 'balance' in terms of NRK not identifying with — or opposing — any of the protagonists. An account is 'unbalanced' when it is partisan.

We ourselves may assess NRK's presentation as balanced or unbalanced, but 'balance' will always be a *relative* concept. The public's *perception* of the degree to which NRK is partisan is of decisive importance for clarifying the *extent* of the balance problem. Both disseminator (NRK) and receiver (public) have therefore to be analysed.

The overarching perspective for our study of the media war is that of process — NRK is seen as an active and guiding link in the communication between the antagonists in the conflict area and the Norwegian public. Figure 1 is a schematic presentation of the various parts of our analysis. Roman numerals link topic to text below.

Public opinion surveys can measure *perceived* balance (I). Changes in the public's view of the conflict can then be used to illustrate both *causes* and *consequences*

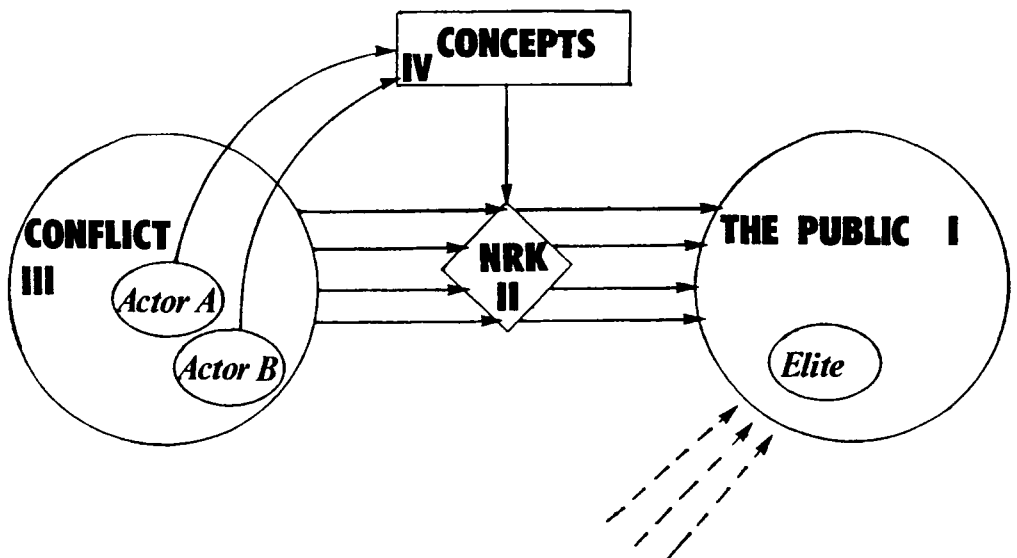


Fig. 1. *The Media War: Process model.*

of differences in assessment of NRK's presentation, at the same time as any criticism may serve to focus the analysis on the Corporation's role as news medium.

In the NRK-conflict nexus (II/III), balance is a process characteristic; the extent to which the medium draws upon sources on both sides of the dispute and selectively covers topics which one side finds either interesting or problematic. Casualty figures are a central theme in the media war — balanced presentation presupposes a continuous and critical testing of both sides' statistics.

Our process perspective means that the main element in the analysis of NRK is not *what* was said, but rather *how* it was said. Concepts (IV) are the bedrock of our organization and interpretation of reality; we understand only to the extent we are able to attach names to objects. If we possess no concept of a thing, we can neither see nor understand it. This applies both to NRK and the public it is meant to serve.

Definition of PLO as 'freedom-fighters' or 'terrorists', of the Israelis as 'occupiers' or 'liberators', will affect the portion of the total context the *journalist* focuses upon, and the public's perception of the reality behind the portrayal.

Method

The most common 'method' hitherto employed in assessment of media coverage of the Lebanon war is the quotation. Excerpts from relevant texts used in the press and broadcasting are cited in support of assertion of balance or bias, and it is left to the reader to study the material and make up his own mind.

The weakness of quotation-techniques is obvious. As long as its champions confine themselves to *excerpts* (as for practical reasons they usually must), they will be just as selective in their docu-

mentation as the journalists they complain about.

In our own investigation of NRK material, therefore, we consider it right and proper to reduce our innate subjectivity by means of the conventional content-analysis methods of the social sciences. This involves systematic quantification according to strict rules and reliability checks. We have made use of opinion polls and elite interviews in our study of 'receiver'-groups; the methodological problems of elite surveys have been thoroughly treated in our earlier work, especially the limitations of non-representative samples and instrumentally determined responses.

It is not the bias of individual items we are interested in, but the overall pattern over a longer period. Individuals and isolated remarks will not, therefore, be the focus of attention; individual statements have been emphasized only as illustrations of a larger pattern that we have uncovered after a systematic quantitative analysis of the material as a whole.

In the first part of the report we analyse the public's perception of NRK. The data base is a national opinion poll of a representative sample of Norwegian men and women, which was asked for its attitude to both the war in Lebanon and NRK's coverage. An opinion poll is an appropriate tool for charting points of view, but not for discussing underlying causes of the reaction patterns revealed. We therefore subjectively selected 'elites', i.e., those who had been active in the debate on NRK's Lebanon coverage.

Bjartmar Gjerde requested that the assessment of NRK be limited to the period from the Israeli invasion to the evacuation of PLO forces from Beirut; i.e., 4 June–31 August 1982. We have further confined ourselves to a study of the radio news broadcast at 18.30 hrs and the main television news programme at 19.30 hrs, investigating all broadcasts on

these two 'slots' in the above-mentioned period.

Limitations

This study is not an analysis of an international conflict, a discussion of what did or did not happen in Lebanon, but primarily an investigation of a media problem.

We could have employed either an intensive or an extensive strategy for assessment of what material was relevant and suitable. (An intensive approach would evaluate all material broadcast in a limited period, an extensive, a selection of material in the entire period.) This study employs the latter strategy, confining itself to the two 'slots' we considered to be the most important contributions to NRK's Lebanon coverage.

Major problem areas in mass media research will not be taken up for systematic discussion, analysis and measurement here, for example the 'gatekeeper' tradition (the processes by which the mass media select some news items and reject others) and the relative impact of pictures and words. Our analysis is restricted to the text. Visual material has been surveyed, but no scientific measurement of use or effect has been undertaken.

Another possible objective might have been an assessment of journalistic professionalism and quality. There is good reason to claim that quality and balance go together, but an even-handed reportage can very well be poor journalism, and contrariwise. We are not, therefore, concerned to award 'marks' to the Corporation's journalists.

We are in no position to pass final 'judgement' on NRK's Lebanon coverage, but will attempt to shed light upon what we regard as an essential problem for the institution in this kind of situation.

Several aspects of the 'balance' issue will be examined, especially the cognitive

frameworks or conceptualizations NRK employs in its dissemination of facts, events and points of view.

For an institution like NRK there is no final solution to the problem of balance, which the Corporation thus simply has to live with. Our objective is to contribute insights and assist NRK to tackle its difficult task as well as possible in future coverage of international conflicts.

II. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The public's confidence in the mass media and perceptions of their trustworthiness are of primary importance for media research. Since the concepts of confidence or trustworthiness (credibility) are a function of the relationship between the media picture disseminated and the reality which that picture is meant to describe, it might be expected that an image that represented reality as accurately as possible would be rewarded with greater confidence. Things are not, however, that simple. In getting to grips with the problem of objectivity, it is just as vital to analyse the characteristics of the 'receiver' as those of the disseminator. The mass media providing the most 'accurate' and comprehensive picture of international events will enjoy the greater confidence, but it is nonetheless necessary to distinguish between different events and circumstances. Affective (emotional) factors affect the receiver as much as the purely cognitive (information and knowledge); this may create a situation where even if the mass media (in principle) provide a 'correct' image, the receiver will not necessarily perceive it as objective, thanks to the interference of the affective component.

In the Middle East conflict the affective component is indeed a disturbing factor complicating the objectivity-confidence equation. This may be illustrated by the contrast with the Falklands war, where

the mass medium that tried hardest to supply the most comprehensive and accurate information would have enjoyed the greatest confidence; the affective component played little role, because the Norwegian people had little knowledge of the dispute and were not emotionally involved. There was thus no rigid pre-conception, but on the contrary a considerable uncertainty as to how to interpret and understand the conflict. 'Heroes' and 'villains' were difficult to identify; confidence and credibility were closely connected to the media's capacity to disseminate information as accurately as possible.

It would be an exaggeration and oversimplification to say that the public were not interested in obtaining an 'accurate' picture of the Lebanese 'reality' — the situation was more complex than that. Cognitive theory is a suitable tool for bringing out the nuances and posing questions designed to shed light on what receiver groups mean by objective news dissemination.

What 'the reality' 'really' was will always remain unknowable. Norway has room for groups with different perceptions and values in a conflict such as the Middle-Eastern, and competing conceptions of reality have developed, none of which may easily be labelled as more 'accurate' than the others. The conflict, moreover, was by no means on the periphery of public interest and knowledge, as was the case with the Falklands. It was, on the contrary, the subject of frequent debate among political elites, which according to cognitive theory would assist the formulation of stable and rigid perceptions; facts from the conflict area would be understood and interpreted within these pre-established frameworks (or competing reality conceptions, as we may call them).

When public opinion is so sharply divided, the emotional side of the problem

helps to make confidence in NRK as a purveyor of news a more complex affair than would be the case in other international conflicts. The affective component has a disturbing effect on the public's ability to make a sober assessment of the Corporation — it becomes difficult to distinguish between 'hard facts' and reports perceived as partisan, lacking in objectivity or verging on propaganda.

This kind of situation is delicate for NRK, as so much more is demanded if confidence is to be retained. Should the Corporation offend an emotionally committed group, even extremely 'sober' and 'neutral' reporting will be perceived as partisan. The cleavage in public opinion creates watchdogs eagerly waiting to see if the institution takes sides. In addition, the demands made on quality of information will increase with the growing expertise of the receiver groups.

Competing value norms — Just or Unjust War?

Our analysis clearly demonstrated the strong correlation between sympathies and antipathies in the conflict and assessment of NRK's even-handedness or 'balance'.

Most of those who opposed Israel's invasion and supported PLO recognition found the broadcasting coverage to be objective and balanced. In a mirror-image pattern, a majority of those sympathizing with Israel, and who opposed PLO recognition, considered that NRK inclined towards Palestinian and Arab points of view. The relatively few who thought the coverage had a pro-Israeli bias were generally critical of the invasion and positive to the PLO. Left Socialist Party voters were the most satisfied with the level of balance and objectivity, Christian People's Party the least; these considered that Palestinian and Arab opinions had been given too much exposure. It is no

	Just war	Unjust war
Balanced coverage		X
Unbalanced coverage	X	

Fig. 2. Connection between assessments of war morality and NRK's coverage.

coincidence that it is precisely these two parties that have taken up the strongest positions of support for respectively the PLO and Israel.

Judgement of war aims (*jus ad bellum*) is closely connected with judgement of the means of warfare (*jus in bello*); if the objective is thought unacceptable, so will the means be. Attitudes to NRK's coverage is, in other words, dependent on our perception of the invasion as a just or unjust war.

Criticism of the Lebanon war is not confined to Norway, but has been strongly expressed even within Israel and may be summed up in the outburst of a prominent Jewish-American: 'These are not my people. This is not our Israel'. Supporters of the war, on the other hand, perceived the mass media as partisan in that they suppressed the alternative view of the crisis.

There has been an extensive debate in the Western press on the mass media's coverage of the conflict. We have made a fairly comprehensive selection of the international criticism and compared it with the complaints and assertions of the Norwegian elite sample — which turned out to be a carbon copy. Discussion of selection, film footage, background material, use of sources and reference to censorship was identical inside and outside Norway. This similarity does not,

however, solve NRK's problem, for it was found that the Western media also differed widely as to balance (e.g. *The New York Times* versus *Le Monde*).

Elites and television

Television, probably the most accessible source of information is also the most important for the general public. The elites, on the other hand, tend to emphasize channels demanding more effort and initiative, and seem to nurture a suspicion of the 'superficial and simplistic' television medium. They dislike both film and the impact they believe it has.

NRK's authority in the public mind explains the considerable influence the institution has on popular attitudes to the conflict. Even if the 'objective' events were the most important factor, the Corporation's transmission of these events would nevertheless have an effect of its own. Emphasis on NRK's significance, however, also serves — indirectly — to champion the need to keep it under surveillance; it is arguable that it is easier to influence the Corporation than other mass media. That the elites are poor guides in this question is demonstrated by the clear connection between their assessment of the relative *impact* of picture and text and their *position* on the conflict.

It might be expected that the elites

would be more sceptical of pictorial material and more enthusiastic about verbal information than the generality. This was indeed the case for the pro-Israeli members, but the opposite tendency was visible on the other side. The elites had strong opinions on the dissemination of words versus pictures, but the results of research into this interesting question are not well-established.

Our investigation shows that audience criteria for balance and objectivity are largely determined by attitudes to and sympathies in the conflict. To put it another way, criteria for objectivity and even-handed coverage are determined by what one holds to be the objective truth.

Balance is the core concept in the elites' assessment of the quality of NRK's reporting, and its frequent appearance indicates that the value (affective) component plays a crucial role. Interviewees are apparently interested in acquiring insight into the Lebanese situation, but are at the same time also vigilant and jealous for NRK to look after their values for them and the value-component seems to be emphasized more than the insight-component.

It is tempting to conclude that the extremists of both sides perceived NRK's coverage as partisan but this would be an oversimplification. We found an asymmetry in that most pro-Arab members of our elite samples saw NRK as balanced, while the more extreme thought it unbalanced. All pro-Israeli interviewees, on the other hand, moderate or extreme, claimed that NRK was highly partisan.

It has been demonstrated elsewhere that dissatisfaction with the reliability of various media increases with distance from the political centre, to either right or left. This pattern appeared in our elite investigation, but with the difference that those satisfied with NRK were not concentrated in the 'centre', but some way out to the PLO side.

Both for the population and elite

sample the clear tendency was for those who disapprove of the invasion to be more satisfied with NRK's coverage than those who support or condone it. This tendency is strongest in the elite sample, for there are the most committed and thus the most consistent in attitudes.

In the population sample, the majority of both camps called the television coverage reliable, but the degree of satisfaction varied considerably and was correlated with attitude to the conflict.

All opinion groups regarded 'balance' as something positive, but what they meant by that tended to be identical with their own subjective notion of the truth.

The elites seemed wholly convinced that all they wanted to hear from NRK was 'the truth', that what they demanded was insight. They wanted to know exactly what was going on, and to be given the most accurate and comprehensive picture possible. At the same time they wanted the side they sympathized with to be put in a favourable light. Herein lies NRK's chief problem — to conserve the values and norms of the receiver groups while simultaneously reporting on events as objectively as possible.

The elite groups present irreconcilable demands to NRK, demanding 'balance', but really meaning a subjectively defined 'truth'. Demands made and advice tendered cannot easily be translated into a programme capable of satisfying Norwegian interest groups. NRK's problem is therefore how to muffle the criticism. One demand made by all groups is for more background material, but this is a matter of journalistic professionalism. What the activists desire is one thing, what the larger public — whom NRK must take account of — might want is quite another. The elite groups were not much concerned with journalistic quality and professionalism. Apart from remarks to the effect that journalists did not check their information well enough, this issue

was rarely touched upon. This is an indirect indication of how strongly value-laden the whole question was for the elite sample — they were more interested in *balance* than in *quality*.

Criticism was largely personal, and not particularly aimed at the nature of the media themselves, or at structural characteristics of the events. The main attack was directed at *pictorial material*, i.e., the impact and influence attributed to film footage. Our investigation shows that the verbal elements in radio and television were more or less identical with respect to bias or subjectivity, but this did not prevent television's taking the brunt of the criticism.

This phenomenon is partly due to the elites' previous negative attitude to television (relative to the general public's), which has been well-documented in several studies and many countries.

NRK's coverage of the conflict was thus seen through the spectacles of already established perceptions of the institution. On several points the criticism was both biased and exaggerated.

Access and spokesmen

The most important result of the investigation was the untenability of the accusation that PLO spokesmen got more air time than the Israeli. On the contrary, Israeli and spokesmen sources were interviewed or quoted at least twice as often as their opponents. It is plain that those who were emotionally involved in the conflict fretted about contributions and interviews they disliked, and consequently got things out of proportion.

Some of the pro-PLO elites had the same tendency, complaining that 'Kåre Kristiansen (Christian People's Party leader) popped up on the screen at least twice a week'. In actual fact, he was only once interviewed on television in the period investigated, and quoted twice.

Information flow

More Israeli than PLO spokesmen were interviewed on television news in the three months of the study.

We found that NRK quoted more than twice as many Israeli as PLO sources. It is fairly clear that the bulk of the information flow from the conflict area came from Israel, accounting for more even than Lebanese, Syrian and PLO sources together.

Casualty figures

The *manner* in which television news used casualty figures (quite apart from questions of accuracy) was regrettable. NRK disseminated the PLO's aggregate statistics, but not the Israelis'; operated with a narrow range of estimates; and strongly commended particular figures and sources. Forty per cent of all television estimates were given without sources.

Radio news supplied aggregate figures from both the PLO and Israel, using a wider range and refraining from commending estimates and sources so dogmatically. Only 11% were unattributed.

Terminology

It is a basic postulate of cognitive theory that we organize and interpret reality with the aid of *concepts* and *terms*; only to the extent that we can label things can we be said to understand them. Concepts may clear the way to comprehension in one direction but close other paths and prevent alternative understandings. If this premise is correct, we would expect journalists to look for information and material that fits the terms or concepts they employ. Definition of the PLO as 'freedom-fighters' or 'terrorists', the Israelis as 'liberators', 'occupiers' or 'genocides' will probably affect the journalist as he focuses on one part of the total reality and ignores another.

We may assert that even if the public has certain attitudes to and knowledge of a conflict beforehand, the (selected) facts and cognitive frameworks it is supplied with through the mass media will have a considerable effect on its final attitudes to the issue. The two parties to the conflict are thus attempting to equip world opinion with two different conceptual filters, containing two competing definitions of the conflict. Should journalists choose to employ neutral terminologies (i.e. terms that both parties employ or perceive as neutral), the public will not be pressed into any particular cognitive framework. If, on the other hand, the journalists confine themselves to the terminology of one side, this will to a considerable extent be the framework into which the public has to fit its factual information.

A central allegation in the elite interviews was that the journalists let their own personal attitudes shine through their reporting of the war. If the journalists did *not* have any definite attitude, were neutral, or concealed their sympathies, we might expect them either to use the terminologies of both sides or to confine themselves for the most part to neutral labels.

If, however, they consciously or unconsciously let their attitudes shine through, we would expect that this could result, *inter alia*, in their employing one side's terminology more than the other's — they will be *partisan* in their use of terms and labels. We have examined all news broadcasts in order to measure this effect.

It should be stressed, however, that it will probably neither be possible nor advisable for a journalist to use 'neutral' terms in his reporting. The nature of the events might make it more correct to use critical or partisan labels.

The terms and concepts Israel and the PLO use to describe or refer to themselves, their opponents and the war add up to two wholly dissimilar and competing

definitions of the hostilities. Both parties are clearly trying to induce world opinion to accept their own definition of the Middle Eastern conflict. Much ground would be gained by the side who got people to think in its own labels; the use of *terminologies* in the mass media is therefore of particular interest.

The interesting questions are therefore three, namely:

- (1) What terminology or conceptual apparatus are the parties to the conflict trying to 'sell'?
- (2) What is NRK 'buying' and transmitting to the public?
- (3) What is the public taking over for its thinking on the conflict?

As regards the third question, no adequate data have been gathered, and the whole issue of media influence is an extremely difficult one, affected by many factors. Our own opinion poll was formulated in terms of closed reply-categories to questions on attitude. A poll taken just after the Six Day War in 1967, in which as many as 74% supported Israel and only 5% the Arab States, contained a question allowing the respondents to defend their views in their own words. The results indicated that most people then operated within Israeli terminology and cognitive frameworks. We have no data on what kind of terminology public opinion thinks in today, but there is much to suggest that whereas it used to favour the Israelis, considerable sections of the Norwegian people now employ labels favourable to the Palestinians. As regards the terminologies of the contestants and the media, however, we have gathered new data.

Israel's or the PLO's terminology is defined here as those terms that *only* Israel or *only* the PLO use officially, i.e., in statements by authorities or the leadership. Such terms will be called 'partisan'. 'Neutral' terms are those which both

parties use officially, or those which both perceive as neutral; even if they are not neutral in a more philosophical sense. Such definitions enable us to avoid a subjective decision on what is neutral or partisan.

It goes without saying that NRK journalists must make use of partisan terms. The interesting question is which terms they choose to make use of in cases where they are faced with two terms, both partisan, or perhaps also a neutral third.

Most of the concrete complaints about NRK's reporting came from pro-Israeli groups. Our analysis of source use, information flow and access, however, shows a bias in Israel's favour. Although this finding should not be minimized, the imbalance may to a considerable degree be blamed on the correspondents' working conditions.

The bulk of the criticism was directed at statements of fact. As we have seen, there were good grounds for criticism of casualty figures, but the discontented groups were also very concerned about particular pro-Israeli arguments and themes which they claimed never emerged on television or radio. Much of this criticism, however, proved untenable.

Many of NRK's critics had a definite feeling that the coverage was subjective, but had difficulties in putting their fingers on where that subjectivity actually lay. Objections were therefore 'diverted' to factual information. Our results show, however, that the chief form of subjectivity was to be found not in concrete pieces of information, but in terminology.

A peculiarity of terminology or vocabulary is that it is a species of bias that may very well be both used and absorbed unconsciously.

Particular examples make poor indicators of this kind of subjectivity, and only systematic quantification over a longer period can disclose general tendencies.

Our results showed a distinct pattern: NRK made great use of partisan PLO labels, while Israeli terms practically never saw the light of day. Although the Corporation also employed neutral labels (those used by both parties), when a journalist was faced with two partisan terms, he consistently chose the PLO vocabulary.

One explanation of these results is that international press terminology builds largely on what we have defined as PLO vocabulary. In the American media, however, a change was visible over the period — in the direction of more *specifically* PLO terminology — as criticism of the war snowballed; this indicates that vocabulary is, despite everything, a 'barometer' for degrees of partisanship or subjectivity.

It was also discovered that when Israeli spokesmen were interviewed, their words were frequently converted or 'translated' into PLO terminology.

As scholars, we cannot get from what NRK's vocabulary actually was to what it ought or ought not to have been. Two interpretations of the findings are possible.

(a) Those who consider Israel's Lebanese campaign to have been *a just war*, will be able to claim that the results of the terminological study demonstrate that NRK disseminated an unbalanced and partisan portrayal. Its vocabulary revealed that its journalists generally sympathized with the PLO, and that this attitude found expression in their reporting. NRK accepted the PLO's definition of the war, while the Israeli cognitive framework was not allowed to reach the public. Terminology also explains why so little critical journalism was applied to the PLO — since it was defined as a liberation organization, NRK was completely blind to the PLO's reign of terror in Southern Lebanon. Worse still, the Corporation indulged in systematic misquotation of

Israeli spokesman so as to distort their meaning and neutralize their arguments.

(b) Those who consider the campaign to be *an unjust war*, on the other hand, will retort that it would not have been reasonable for NRK to have applied a 'balanced' terminology to what was, objectively speaking, an unbalanced event. Objectively, Israel was the aggressive party to the conflict, and therefore the one who most needed to legitimize its actions. In the light of what actually happened in Southern Lebanon, what terms could NRK most reasonably have employed — 'The invasion of South Lebanon' or 'Operation Peace for Galilee'; 'the occupation' or 'the liberation' of South Lebanon? When there were only two labels to choose from, was it not right of NRK to use 'PLO soldiers' instead of 'terrorists'? And when the public is to be told what the letters 'PLO' stand for, was it not right and proper to use the official name 'Palestinian Liberation Organization' instead of 'the terrorist organisation PLO'?

There is little reason to accuse NRK journalists of a consciously manipulative

use of terminology. It is more a matter of their perceiving certain labels in a given situation as sober and natural, others (the Israeli) as legitimizing and propagandizing.

If we compare the preference for PLO vocabulary with the results showing that the information flow favoured Israel, there is good reason to conclude that NRK played an *active role* in disseminating particular interpretations of the Lebanese war.

Whether this was a reasonable assessment in the light of the actual events or an expression of journalistic bias and transgression of NRK's programme rules, is a question to which we can give no definitive reply. We consider, however, that the analysis has clarified the problem in such a way as to make it easier to tackle in the future.

NOTE

¹ Daniel Heradstveit: *The Media War in the Middle East*, Oslo: Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt, 1983. For detailed documentation, see this report.