

## **MEDIA DIPLOMACY AND 'PEACE TALK'**

The Middle East and Northern Ireland

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**Abstract** / Assuming that the media were caught 'unprepared', linguistically at least, by the peace processes in recent years; and that the current media discourse is not sufficient to understand, report and interpret such processes, a discourse analysis was conducted of media coverage of the peace processes in the Middle East and Northern Ireland. The results disclose strategies of peace coverage, their structures and characteristics. The analysis of these strategies and its conclusions emphasize the need to update the media research and development agenda, so as to include the creation of a peace-related media discourse.

**Keywords** / news value / peace-framing / ritualization / trivialization / war-discourse

### **The Media in International Relations**

International communications in the 1990s can be characterized by two major developments: first, together with separatist movements and demands (Barber, 1995), the post-Cold War climate has enhanced peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts, such as in the Middle East and in Northern Ireland. Second, the roles of the media in international relations have changed significantly. The traditional chores of gathering and selecting facts, and of constructing, encoding and representing realities (Tuchman, 1978; Hall, 1980) have been expanded. Journalists are not expected anymore just to present the news 'fairly and without bias in language which is designed to be unambiguous, undistorting and agreeable' (Fowler, 1991: 1).

At present, media organizations and professionals participate in international relations, at-large and in the roles of catalysts and 'diplomatic brokers' (Larson, 1986; Gilboa, 1998).

As participants at-large, the media take part in exchanges between journalists, policy-makers and field staff (Gitlin, 1980; Larson, 1988), as illustrated by the television sets in decision-makers' offices and 'situation rooms'; by briefings in official aeroplanes or in sealed compounds, such as in Grenada, Panama and the Gulf War (Andersen, 1991; Servaes, 1991); and by media-accompanied 'secret negotiations' such as in Camp David (1979); Dayton, Ohio (1995); Stormont Castle (1997, 1998); and Wye River (1998). As catalysts, the media provide arenas and resources for international dialog (Larson, 1988; Henry, 1991). They include the shuttling diplomacy

used by US secretaries of state (Kissinger, 1995); the ‘tomahawk diplomacy’ used in the 1998 Kosovo and Iraq crises (*Time*, 19 October 1998); media exchanges (Clinton–Saddam, Rabin/Netanyahu–Arafat/Assad); and media events, such as summit meetings and the signing of peace agreements (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Gilboa, 1998).

As diplomatic brokers, the media conduct, and sometimes initiate international mediation, in ways that often blur the distinctions between the roles of reporters and diplomats. This is illustrated by:

- Participation of the media in diplomatic processes, such as Walter Cronkite’s paternity claim over Anwar Sadat’s 1977 voyage to Jerusalem (Cronkite, 1996; Gilboa, 1998); or ABC’s Ted Koppel’s live-on-air Jerusalem ‘town meeting’, conducted during the Intifada in 1988, and featuring unprecedented face-to-face, Israeli–Palestinian negotiations (ABC News, 1988);
- The crucial role assigned by *Time* to CNN (‘Iranian Diplomacy via CNN’), and to itself, in a wishful Iran–US reconciliation (Fischer and MacLeod, 1998; Khatami, 1998); and work behind enemy lines, such as CNN’s Peter Arnett’s in Baghdad during the Gulf War (Arnett, 1991), Christian Ammanpour’s in Iraq during Operation ‘Desert Fox’ in 1998, or Ecuadorian and Peruvian correspondents, in the war between these two countries, each in the other’s army headquarters.

Thus, the Kissinger diplomacy of the 1970s, elaborated systematically much later (Kissinger, 1995), has confirmed predictions on the emergence of a ‘new diplomacy’, in which traditional diplomatic reticence collapsed under the impact of media development, technological progress and sociopolitical change (Eban, 1983).

## How do the Media Cover Peace?

These developments raise questions on the role of the media in peace processes. A decade after the end of the Cold War, do they still affect the coverage and interpretation of peace processes? How newsworthy are peace-related stories in the media? Have the 1990s caught the media ‘unprepared’ to deal with the fin de siècle peacemaking spirit? In the framing contest of war and peace (Gamson, 1989; Gamson and Stuart, 1992; Wolfsfeld, 1993, 1997; Meyer, 1995),<sup>1</sup> can the media be expected to contribute to current peacemaking efforts? Can they be instrumental in promoting these efforts? How?

In order to explore these questions, a comparative analysis was conducted on how the press covered the peace processes in the Middle East and Northern Ireland. The results indicate that although an embryonic peace discourse is used sporadically, peace is usually framed in discourses that yield higher news value: the discourses of war, of ‘trivialization’ and of ‘ritualization’.

These rhetorical types emerge in the coverage of the 1993–4 Israeli–Palestinian and Israeli–Jordanian peacemaking; the 1997–8 Northern Ireland peace negotiations and treaty; and the 1998 Wye River Israeli–Palestinian negotiations. The analysis leans on a multidimensional methodology:

1. A pre-test/categorization phase, based on randomly selected issues of *Yediot Aharonot* (*YA*) (an evening tabloid in Hebrew that enjoys about 70 percent of the total press circulation in Israel), in the period September 1993 to October 1994, referring to the coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian and Israeli–Jordanian peace processes;
2. An analysis of all issues of *Time* magazine (Atlantic and US Internet editions) during 9 September 1997 to 14 September 1998, referring to the peace process in Northern Ireland;
3. An analysis of all issues of the Israeli English-language daily *Jerusalem Post* (*JP*), in the period 27 September to 3 November 1998 (Internet edition), referring to the Wye River Palestinian–Israeli peacemaking episode.

The categorization phase was a search and confirm process, that started with a general reading of the materials by three judges, who suggested a typology of the major categories (war framing, trivialization, ritualization). Verification of the typology in a more detailed analysis of *Yediot Aharonot* suggested the presence of a fourth category: direct peace coverage. It appeared, however, in too few cases (11), and was disregarded for classification purposes. A systematic analysis of *Time* and *Jerusalem Post* peace coverage, conducted by the same three judges, served to test and refine the categories, so as to produce better specified subcategories.

The categories and subcategories proved to be consistent across cases as disparate as the Middle East and Northern Ireland. They appear to be instrumental in enhancing the news value of peace coverage; and indicate directions for further investigation.

Table 1 describes the total distribution of categories.

### *Framing Peace Coverage in War Discourse*

Framing peace in the discourse of war is the most frequently used coverage strategy. It resorts to a terminology of violence, utilizing several types of materials:

- Symbolic clichés, as in 'Bitter Battle in Ireland . . . fight for a peaceful future . . . Battle for Peace . . .' (*Time*, 27 April 1998); and 'peace provokes all those

TABLE 1

**Total Distribution of Peace Coverage Categories for the Middle East (*Yediot*, *JP*) and Northern Ireland (*Time*)**

	Items	References	War Discourse	Trivialization	Ritualization
<i>Yediot</i>	30	114	43 (37.7%)	33 (29%)	38 (33.3%)
<i>JP</i>	52	188	76 (40.4%)	30 (15.9%)	82 (43.7%)
<i>Time</i>	46	136	53 (38.9%)	27 (19.8%)	56 (41.2%)
Total	128	438	172 (39.3%)	90 (20.6%)	176 (40.1%)

Note: *Yediot* = *Yediot Aharonot*; *JP* = *Jerusalem Post*.

who don't believe in peace . . . ensure that terror does not take root' (*JP*, 15 October 1998);

- Direct quotations of leaders' military discourse, such as 'Anyone who has been involved in armed struggle will do anything to avoid it'; or 'we cannot go on with this ancient blood feud' (*Time*, 20 April 1998); 'terrorism . . . is not . . . solely . . . Palestinian . . . arrest the settlers who have killed Palestinian women and children' (*JP*, 16 October 1998); 'Our Palestinian partners will join us . . . fight terrorists . . . jail killers . . . stop incitement' (*JP*, 25 October 1998);
- Signed copy and editorials, such as: 'The peace process [in Northern Ireland] has hit a roadblock, but . . . holds firm . . . gunmen and bombers . . . have so far held back. Pubs have not been sprayed by gunfire. Taxi drivers have not been killed for venturing into the wrong neighborhoods . . . [but] danger still lurks from dissenting paramilitary groups' (*Time*, 20 July 1998).

Table 2 shows the quantitative distribution of these categories.

### *The Discourse of Trivialization in Peace Coverage*

In the absence of a peace discourse that satisfies dominant news value demands, trivial information and media personalities are upgraded to become news. In the coverage of the Israel–Jordan peace process, the discourse of trivialization included items on the official dinner, where a diplomatic incident almost occurred, when Hillary Clinton and Queen Nur of Jordan showed up in similar gowns. And, 'Supervised by a special Rabbi, the presidential chef did not want to take risks . . . the food for the Israelis came from a kosher deli in Baltimore' (*YA*, 27 July 1994).

In the coverage of the Wye River talks, the information black-out propelled trivialization to new heights. Major coverage items were on:

- Personal relations between arch enemies Netanyahu and Arafat: 'After barely speaking to each other for a year . . . [they] . . . were sharing kosher humous in Gaza and handing each other Cuban cigars' (*JP*, 9 October 1998);

TABLE 2

Structure of War Discourse Framing of Peace Items in Middle Eastern (*JP*) and Northern Irish (*Time*) Peace Coverage

	<i>N</i>	Symbolic Cliches	Direct Quotations of Leaders' Military Discourse	Signed Copy and Editorials
<i>JP</i>	76	34 (44.7%)	15 (19.7%)	27 (35.6%)
<i>Time</i>	53	20 (37.7%)	14 (26.4%)	19 (35.8%)
Total	129	54 (41.8%)	29 (22.4%)	46 (35.8%)

Note: *JP* = *Jerusalem Post*.

- Israeli foreign minister Sharon, who '... said he won't shake [Arafat's] hands' (*JP*, 21 October 1998);
- King Hussein's health: 'chemotherapy-weakened Hussein joked the ... experience had left him with no hair or eyebrows' (*JP*, 25 October 1998); and,
- An Israeli threat of leaving the talks: 'the Israeli negotiating team spent Wednesday night throwing their new Eddie Bauer sweaters into their battered bags ... Netanyahu announced ... the plane was ready, and his wife was packing' (*JP*, 23 October 1998).

The combined role of media personalities as journalists and news items in the discourse of trivialization can be illustrated by the examples mentioned earlier of media work behind enemy lines, or of journalists' participation in diplomatic processes; and by the Israeli press corps' marked presence in the Wye River bumpy process such as in:

*Netanyahu was ... stretching out in the front section of his plush new plane ... 'So what exactly happened these past five days?' a young security guard ... asked ... 'Nothing much,' came the answer from ... eight reporters, two soundmen, a dozen Prime Minister's Office workers, 27 security and one doctor. (JP, 2 October 1998)*

A jovial tone of triviality is also present in *Time's* coverage of Northern Ireland: 'Trimble stormed out of ... a live broadcast because he was about to be electronically linked with a Sinn Fein member'; 'Dining in a sushi restaurant ... Blair repeatedly broke away to confer by telephone with the Irish Prime Minister' (26 January 1998); '[Senator Mitchell] juggled peacemaking with his regular job ... navigating family crises ... brother's death ... wife's miscarriage ... birth of ... first child' (20 April 1998).

The quantitative distribution found for these categories is shown in Table 3.

### *The Discourse of Ritualization in Peace Coverage*

Peacemaking negotiations and ceremonies feature ritual elements, which are willingly adopted by the media, as they carry enhanced news value. The discourse of ritualization appears in isolated cases and in the coverage of entire

TABLE 3

**Structure of the Discourse of Trivialization in Middle Eastern (*JP*) and Northern Irish (*Time*) Peace Coverage**

	<i>N</i>	General 'Gossip'	Media Personalities as News Items
<i>JP</i>	30	17 (56.6%)	13 (43.4%)
<i>Time</i>	27	13 (48.1%)	14 (51.8%)
Total	57	30 (52.6%)	27 (47.4%)

*Note: JP = Jerusalem Post.*

rituals, usually ‘media events’ (Katz and Dayan, 1985; Dayan and Katz, 1992). Isolated elements include symbols and symbolic language; symbolic transition (from war to peace, from enemy to partner); a time dimension (duration of the conflict and of negotiations, marathon sessions); last minute crises; and public opinion measurements, as follows:

### *Symbols and Symbolic Language*

‘People . . . hate the war of hate’ (*Time*, 29 September 1997); ‘The pain of loss of a family member is perhaps the most powerful shared memory of Protestants and Catholics’ (*Time*, 20 April 1998); ‘would (Arafat) be allowed to sit on the UN podium chair . . . [have] . . . the traditional little fete thrown for state leaders? . . . what title . . . chairman of the executive committee . . . president of the Palestinian Authority [?]’ (*JP*, 2 October 1998).

### *Symbolic Transition*

- From war to peace: in Northern Ireland, ‘Protestant unionists . . . [who decorated] . . . Belfast City hall with a giant banner declaring ULSTER SAYS NO, agreed . . . to share power . . . [with] Catholic . . . parties . . . [who proclaimed] . . . BRITS OUT NOW. . .’ (*Time*, 2 April 1998); and
- From enemy to partner: ‘Arafat . . . telephoned Defense Minister . . . Mordechai, President . . . Weizman . . . Barak, Peres and . . . Rabin’s widow, for the New Year’ (*JP*, 23 September 1998).

### *The Time Dimension*

- Duration of the conflict: in Northern Ireland (*Time*), ‘nearly 30 years of sectarian killings’ (26 January 1998); ‘together for the first time in 80 years . . . North and South, Catholic and Protestant’ (1 June 1998); and in the Middle East (*JP*), ‘oldest and largest refugee question’ (29 September 1998);
- Duration of negotiations: ‘over 22 months’ (*Time*, 20 April 1998); ‘first face-to-face meeting in 11 months . . . an hour-and-a-half’ (*JP*, 29 September 1998); ‘12 hours a day’ (*JP*, 8 October 1998); ‘Clinton flew . . . the third time in four days’ (*JP*, 19 October 1998);
- Marathon sessions: ‘Everyone was up most of the night, but nine hours later . . . the deal . . . concluded in a marathon 32-hour negotiating session’ (*Time*, 20 April 1998); ‘the deal was finally clinched at dawn Friday . . . By the time the White House ceremony concluded, there were fewer than 10 minutes . . . before . . . Shabbat’ (*JP*, 23 October 1998).

### *The Occurrence and Resolution of Last Minute Crises*

‘At 3:15 A.M. in Washington . . . Clinton began a 30-minute phone conversation with . . . Mitchell in Belfast . . . eight hours past the deadline’ (*Time*, 20 April 1998); ‘Israeli negotiators threatened to . . . fly home . . . Arafat appealed . . . the plane would take off at 10 p.m.’ (*JP*, 22 October 1998).

TABLE 4

**Structure of the Discourse of Ritualization in Middle Eastern (*JP*) and Northern Irish (*Time*) Peace Coverage**

	<i>N</i>	Symbols	Symbolic Transition	Time Dimension	Last Minute Crises	Opinion Measuring
<i>JP</i>	82	14 (17.1%)	18 (21.9%)	32 (39%)	10 (12.2%)	8 (9.8%)
<i>Time</i>	56	15 (26.7%)	12 (21.4%)	22 (39.2%)	4 (7.1%)	3 (5.6%)
Total	138	29 (21%)	30 (21.7%)	54 (39.1%)	14 (10.1%)	11 (7.9%)

Note: *JP* = *Jerusalem Post*.

*Public Opinion Measurements*

'First time in 80 years . . . North and South, Catholic and Protestant . . . turned out . . . A solid 71% . . . in Northern Ireland and more than 90% in the Irish Republic' (*Time*, 1 June 1998); 'thousands of residents of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, and Habad hassidim gathered to urge him [PM] to refrain from . . . withdrawal' (*JP*, 15 October 1998).

Table 4 shows the quantitative distribution found for these categories.

*The Coverage of Entire Rituals: Media Events*

Like other important gatherings, the signing of peace treaties qualifies as both 'ceremony' (Turner, 1977)<sup>2</sup> and 'media events' (Katz and Dayan, 1985; Dayan and Katz, 1992), which 'intervene in the normal flow of broadcasting and our lives' (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 5), are 'live broadcasts . . . pre-planned and well advertised', 'offer the audience a participatory role', and 'mobilize, electrify and weld together political communities' (Katz and Dayan, 1985: 305–8). Such peace ceremonies and rituals, focused on intensive, repetitive and performative coverage of representative behaviors, result from a coalition of interests between the needs of political personalities and media news value. In the 1998 Northern Ireland peace accord, 'Clinton and the Irish get a mutual boost as peace hopes and a foreign-policy triumph blossom'; and, 'a besieged Bill Clinton is cheered in Ireland for America's role in helping to end the Troubles' (*Time*, 14 September 1998).

Likewise, the media coverage of peacemaking ceremonies and rituals in the Middle East provided the leading characters – Begin, Sadat, Carter, Rabin, Peres, Arafat, Hussein, Mubarak, Clinton, Netanyahu, etc. – with unprecedented popularity. Ariel Sharon, for example, 'could view the appointment [as Israel's foreign minister], as the ultimate vindication from what he considers the calumny of the Kahan Report [which condemned Sharon's conduct in the Lebanon war]' (*JP*, 11 October 1998). Media exposure served to establish or re-establish their international position.

Media events related to the ending of deep and long conflicts enjoy high news value. Rabin and Arafat achieved that in their dramatic historical handshake live on camera. Sharon achieved the same effect, using a 'no handshake

technique': 'Sharon has said . . . that he would never shake the hand of . . . Arafat – a man he says has Jewish blood on his hands . . . when Sharon walked into the dining room . . . Arafat stuck out his chest and saluted . . . but Sharon ignored him' (*JP*, 21 October 1998); 'David Trimble . . . agreed to hold a one-on-one meeting with Gerry Adams, the president of Sinn Fein . . . [he] had stubbornly refused ever to speak directly to Adams because of his affiliation with the violent IRA' (*Time*, 14 September 1998).

Media events can erupt unexpectedly, even in the routine of well-known rituals, so as to increase news value. In May 1994, PLO and Israeli leaders signed in Cairo the first redeployment agreement. A global television audience watched a spectacular setting, a festive audience, the customary speakers and an impressive row of world leaders on stage. It was a media event the world has become accustomed to watch. But it departed from the script when Arafat, staging a typical unscripted media event (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 48–53), refused to sign the agreement. The worldwide audience could then see the ordered world leaders' 'chorus line' disintegrate into embarrassed small groups.

In a gracious 'pas-de-deux', Peres and Christopher floated among them, trying to settle the problem; Rabin and Arafat stood aloof in their corners; and Mubarak went on with his long speech. Clearly confused, and obviously surprised, the media commentators did not conceal their pleasure to get this news value bonus.

### *Direct Peace-Framing*

In the contest of war and peace frames in the media, direct peace coverage – that features non-violent symbols, terms and images of peaceful change, rehabilitation and development – enjoys lower popularity. This type of discourse is not used by the media as extensively as the others. Examples include the *Earth Times*: 'First the Schools and the Children' (16–31 October 1997); the *Washington Post*: 'Swords to Plowshares: Guatemala's struggle'; photo-captions, such as: 'Ex-army explosives expert . . . is learning to be a hairdresser'; 'radio operator for guerrilla units, is learning to raise corn' (8 October 1997); the Louisville, Kentucky's *The Courier-Journal*: 'In Vietnam, focus turns to development' (19 October 1997), as well as *Time*: 'triumph of patience, persistence and cleverness' (29 September 1997); 'war-weariness . . . giving up a little in order to gain a lot' (26 January 1998); 'Giving Peace a Chance' (20 April 1998); 'U2 . . . concert . . . Bono ushered on stage Trimble . . . and . . . Hume . . . the oddest and most uncomfortable couple ever to accept the cheers of 2,000 teenagers' (1 June 1998); and, *Jerusalem Post*: 'a window of opportunity . . . Palestinians . . . Israelis . . . entire Middle East . . . believes . . . summit will be . . . a success' (15 October 1998).

### **Rhetorical Preferences in the Media: An Explanation**

Together with professional constraints, and with difficulty in adapting to change, the preference of war and the framing of peace in the discourses of war,



of trivialization and of ritualization, can be explained in terms of media structure and culture.

The prevailing 'war culture', typical of current media preferences (Kempf, 1999) and of communication research traditions, is compatible with economic structures that increase competition, and demand high ratings. War is more compatible than peace with media news value. It provides good visuals, focuses on heroism and conflict, and emphasizes the emotional rather than the rational. And it satisfies additional demands: a clear time frame; the unusual; the dramatic; personalization; simplicity; action; results (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Bird and Dardenne, 1988; Goldstein, 1994). Moreover, clear-cut polarities, unexpected developments and primordial sentiments are magnified in war coverage, conveying a rich variety of images and voices, Aristotle's 'pity and fear' at their 'best'.

By contrast, peace discourse, that typically features 'talking heads', ceremonial setups and gestures, press conferences, and airport scenes, has less news value. The caption 'Peace can be dull', under Sinn Feinn's president Gerry Adams's photo in *The Economist* (19 September 1998), and slogans such as 'Peace is boring', and 'Peace does not sell', convey the common media professional perception.

International journalism history underscores the preference of war-oriented framing. The Cold War and other pressures led the media to adopt a traditional rhetoric of power as their 'official discourse'. Until the late 1980s, 'peace talk' was tagged communist, 'challenger discourse' and 'adversarial talk', and enjoyed low popularity and entry into the general audience media (Gamson, 1988; Meyer, 1995). This preference is also typical of media research history, which coincides with services rendered by communication scholars to official agencies during the Second World War and the Cold War.

The work of some media research 'founding fathers'<sup>3</sup> was sponsored by the US Office of War Information, the Information Division of the War Department, the Air Force and the CIA (Robinson, 1988; Bruck, 1989).

Although there is no conclusive evidence of a direct and causal relation of war and research efforts, one cannot ignore that most of these scholars founded or joined leading departments and institutes (Rowland, 1983); that studies on the coverage of Vietnam and the Middle East deal only briefly with the Paris and the Camp David talks; and that media studies on Middle Eastern wars have not been matched by peace research.

## Analyzing and Evaluating Peace Coverage Strategies

The use of the dominant war discourse in peace coverage shows an adaptive attitude, and an acceptance of the low news value of peace stories. The appealing touch of trivialization might add some news value to peace framing. But it applies only to certain superficial aspects, and does not allow for an adequate and full treatment of peace. On the other hand, the live transmission of historical ceremonies and events, such as Sadat's visit in Jerusalem, the signing of peace agreements, or the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Peace, dramatizes and personalizes dull materials in an action-loaded style.

Thus, the discourse of ritualization enjoys, like war coverage, higher news value than the other strategies.<sup>4</sup> This is made clear in a comparative analysis of the way the strategies satisfy news value requirements: time and images, heroism, conflict, the emotional, the unusual and results.

### *Time*

The framing of peace in war discourse touches only sporadically upon the past. The discourse of trivialization is basically limited to the immediate present.

Ritualization, in contrast, portrays two significant peacemaking time dimensions: the present, usually portrayed as a 'liminal' phase, a separation from a previous state; and, like in rituals, mostly in 'rites de passage' (van Genepp, 1960), peace is also conceptualized in a parallel future orientation, in a yet unattained 'postliminal' stage (Turner, 1964, 1977).

Thus, the *Jerusalem Post* quotes Netanyahu: 'I'm in no rush to meet Arafat' (24 September 1998); interprets the US position: 'With an unofficial deadline coming up . . . the US is . . . increasing pressure . . . We believe in a sense of urgency and we are trying to instill that' (19 October 1998), and speculates on Israeli expectations: 'a good chance we will clinch a deal at the last minute . . . a signing ceremony is planned for tomorrow morning' (21 October 1998).

*Time* expresses the fears in Northern Ireland: 'for 18 months the talks . . . had dragged on . . . the talks might seem futile . . . giving way to . . . violence' (26 January 1998).

### *The Unusual and the Dramatic*

Also the discourse of ritualization highlights the unusual and the dramatic more and more significantly than the other strategies: the discourse of trivialization does look at the unusual in superficial terms (see earlier the kosher food episode, for example), while framing peace in war discourse emphasizes the drama of war more than the dramatic dimensions of peace (most of the episodes mentioned earlier). On the other hand, the capacity displayed by the discourse of ritualization to gloss contradictions features a dialectic approach; and makes assertions that in other contexts and strategies would be unconvincing or unacceptable. Allowing for a 'legitimized situation of freedom from cultural constraints and social classifications' (Turner, 1968: 581), and for illogical, or potential options, the discourse of ritualization, as in the cases of symbolic transition and last minute crises, is less limited than the other strategies.

### *Drama, Crisis and Disorder*

Due to its multidimensional nature, the tendency of ritualistic peace coverage to focus on crisis and disorder is more accentuated than in the unidimensional scope of the other strategies. So is the tendency to emphasize anxiety and drama.

This is illustrated in excerpts such as: 'Arafat . . . called upon Arab and Moslem leaders to support his planned declaration of independence . . .

Netanyahu [said] that declaring statehood would be a blatant snub to the peace agreements and would lead to their cancellation' (*JP*, 17 September 1998); and 'buried many of the dead and continues to console the bereaved. He . . . knows . . . much pain exists . . . But it was time . . . to extend the hand of friendship to the other side' (*Time*, 27 July 1998).

### *Personalization*

This is another news value requirement featured in the discourse of ritualization, in a stronger way than in the framing peace in the discourse of war. The discourse of trivialization, and more so the discourse of ritualization, prefer concrete personalities rather than abstract ideologies (i.e. nationalism, Zionism), religious affiliations (i.e. Catholic, Protestant) or organizational structures (i.e. movements, states). Personalization is expressed in two forms. One is the listing of dignitaries and their actions: 'Albright announced . . . that she plans to meet with . . . Netanyahu and . . . Arafat' (*JP*, 18 September 1998); 'Netanyahu . . . with . . . Molcho . . . Arad . . . Naveh . . . [will] hold some 20 meetings with the foreign ministers of Britain, Germany, Austria, Russia, Nigeria, China, Mauritania and Egypt' (*JP*, 22 October 1998); and 'Clinton flew into Belfast to a warm welcome from cheering crowds and to celebrate what, despite bombings and burnings, still looks like a major foreign policy triumph'.

*Time's* ritual coverage of Northern Ireland also includes another type of name listing, which is not unlike the Israeli practice of printing and broadcasting the names and pictures of the fallen in battle and the victims of terrorism: 'chiseled onto dark marble headstones are names like Michael Darcy, Ronnie Finley, Heather Kerrigan. Below each is the simple line: "Murdered by Terrorists"' (27 July 1998).

The second type of personalization is a discourse of 'familiarity', as in 'It all depends on what Dennis [Ross, special envoy to the Middle East] reports' (*JP*, 18 September 1998); 'State Department spokesman Jamie Rubin' (*JP*, 24 September 1998); 'The meeting in Albright's suite of rooms on the 42nd floor' (*JP*, 29 September 1998); and in: 'The crowds, laughing and smiling, chanted, "We want Bill! We want Bill!" [Clinton]' (*Time*, 14 September 1998).

Like in the previous example, this news value demand in Northern Ireland features a particularly tragic aspect: 'We are haunted by those three impish faces, smiling out at us from a happy family photograph. The murders . . . are . . . a private tragedy . . . the deaths [are] a turning point in our broader history' (*Time*, 27 July 1998).

### *Simplicity*

While the other strategies need at least some measure of ambiguity (see the case of symbolic clichés in framing peace coverage in war discourse; and the examples of the relations between Netanyahu and Arafat, and of King Hussein's health, in the discourse of trivialization), the discourse of ritualization, like ritual in general, is structured by a well-defined linkage of symbolic units (Turner, 1977, 1986) that helps to order and simplify reality and change. Thus,

‘Clinton called on . . . Netanyahu and . . . Arafat . . . to “break the logjam” . . . “I can give 100% effort [in fighting terrorism], but no one . . . can give 100% result” said Arafat’ (*JP*, 16 October 1998), and: ‘The people of Ireland at war with themselves again, living up to the old cliché that they are happiest . . . fighting’ (*Time*, 27 July 1998).

### *Action and Results*

Also the discourse of ritualization is more compatible than the other strategies with the news value requirements of action and results.

The framing of peace in war discourse focuses on war rather than on peace action and results (for example, the use of quotations from the leaders’ discourse).

The discourse of trivialization emphasizes process – the trivial events that pave the road of peace – rather than product and results. Also the action it deals with is usually superficial (Baltimore deli, sushi restaurant).

The discourse of ritualization allows participants, like in rituals, ‘to maneuver, fight on their own terms, choose the times, places, conditions, and shape of their claims’ (Myerhoff, 1980: 106–7) and expressions. And, like in rituals, media ritualization ‘save[s] face, and convince[s] all parties that matters are in order and in their control’ (Myerhoff, 1980: 107–8).

This is featured in passages such as: ‘[the Americans] expect . . . a momentum, a dynamism to the peace process’ (*JP*, 2 October 1998); ‘the American sprang into action . . . rushed for the Israeli, escorted him over to the Palestinian and had a talk with them both. The understanding reached, the Israeli and Palestinian shook hands’ (*JP*, 18 October 1998); and ‘breakthrough; . . . [Mo Mowlam, Northern Ireland Secretary] . . . was greeted by cheers. The fact that most parties . . . had come away . . . on an optimistic note was all that she and . . . Blair could hope for’ (*Time*, 26 January 1998).

### *Repetitiveness, Performance, Representation*

Finally, the repetitive, performative and representational qualities of the discourse of ritualization, particularly in media events, might enhance the psychological immediacy and social insulation necessary for the mobilization and regularization of behavior toward given goals (Geertz, 1973), and for the effort involved in the transition to a new environment of peace.

## **Conclusions**

The analysis of these strategies indicates that in order to improve media representations of peace, the news value of peace-framing in its contest with war and violence should be enhanced through an updating of media norms and strategies.

The enhancement of peace coverage can be guided by at least two conceptual premises: first, that ‘the promotion of social change [such as peacemaking] . . . has to carve out . . . a sufficiently powerful constitution of supporters . . . a

political base [that] is partly "talked into" existence' and that 'a measure of [its] . . . success is the degree to which people accept, and so make real, these [often wildly imaginary] constructions' (Fairclough, 1995: 179).

Second, it is possible to systematically create discourses in order to organize and give structure to how topics, objects and processes are to be talked about (Kress, 1985).

In realities where the discourses of violence and war, of trivialization and of ritualization serve to compensate for the absence of a media peace discourse, one means for updating and improving media coverage is to include the conceptual and practical development of an adequate peace discourse in the current media research and development agenda. Together with relevant approaches and findings in communications research, the existing strategies, particularly the discourse of ritualization, can be instrumental in such an effort. Finally, a realistic approach to the development of a media peace discourse requires increasing the news value of peace coverage rather than conducting moralistic attempts to change war-oriented media structures and professional codes. 'Marketing' techniques can be adopted to change the 'news value balance' between war and peace news in favor of the latter.

## Notes

1. 'Media frames' have been defined as 'persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual' (Gitlin, 1980: 7).
2. Ceremonial gatherings include elections, conventions and debates; religious processions and pilgrimage; festivals and sports events. Turner (1977) makes a distinction between ceremony, which is linked with stability, 'social stages and statutes', and ritual, which is associated with social transition. Ceremony is a regulatory process (Turner, 1969), in the form of performance, public spectacle or media events, where 'the social drama is an eruption from the surface level of ongoing social life, with its interactions, transactions, reciprocities, its customs for making regular, orderly sequences of behavior' (Turner, 1986: 90). Ritual emphasizes crisis and disorder in periods of sudden or radical change.  
Ritual liminality is future oriented and provides constructive or destructive options for solution. Thus the influence of both on peace processes and its media discourse.
3. Such as in the work of Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert Merton, Hadley Cantril, Harold Lasswell, Irving Janis, Samuel Stouffer, Ithiel de Sola Pool, Daniel Lerner, Wilbur Schramm and others. Also the career of public opinion and media researcher Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in Nazi Germany has been questioned (Simpson, 1996).
4. The study of war discourse might, nonetheless, help identify and evaluate discursive orders, such as the discourses of the 'leaders', 'the victims'; 'specialized political discourse', 'expert discourse', 'scientific public discourse', 'bureaucratic technical discourse', 'survival discourse'; and others (van Dijk, 1983, 1988; Mancini, 1988; Bruck, 1989; Fairclough, 1995; Meyer, 1995). Likewise, the human story and tabloid style of the discourse of trivialization are important for increasing the news value of peace coverage. Thus research of these strategies should not be neglected.

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