

Rationalising Extra-Judicial Executions: The Israeli Press and the Legitimisation of Abuse

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ABSTRACT *Focusing on the representation of Israel's policy of extra-judicial executions, which is a blatant violation of human rights, this article discloses how Israel's three major newspapers, Yedioth Ahronoth, Ma'ariv, and Ha'aretz have helped produce, disseminate and reinforce both the rationality and the morality of executions. The article employs the insights of theorists like Michel Foucault and Hayden White to argue that the rationalisation of the execution policy is achieved through what may be described as the discursive production of a pseudo-judicial process. Its major thesis is that in their coverage of executions the Israeli newspapers create a narrative whose major goal is to exonerate the Israeli government from the accusation that it has committed an unlawful act.*

Ten minutes before ten in the morning, yesterday. Masud A'yad (54), lieutenant colonel in Force 17, the Palestinian Presidential Guard, leaves his home in Gaza. He enters his Honda sedan and begins driving up Salah A-Din Street towards Jabalya refugee camp, where his headquarters are located.

A few minutes pass; A'yad continues driving not realizing that someone is following him. Two Apache combat helicopters are gliding in the distance, waiting for the right moment. A'yad passes a mosque. For a moment his car moves away from the other vehicles on the road. This is exactly the moment the pilots have been waiting for. Four missiles are fired at the car. A split second before a missile hits the target, A'yad notices its trail of fire and attempts to slip away, but to no avail. A ball of fire with a deafening noise shoots up above the Honda. A'yad is killed on the spot.¹

These are the opening lines of an article entitled 'The Terrorist was Liquidated from the Air', which appeared in Israel's most popular daily newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* on 14 February 2001. The article notes that A'yad was responsible for a series of attacks against Israel and for smuggling weapons into Gaza, as well as for planning to 'kidnap a senior Israeli official within the next few days'. One also reads that the Palestinian Authority 'was quick to condemn the liquidation', blaming Israel for murdering an innocent person. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, on the other hand, 'praised the liquidation',

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stating that the operation had sent a clear message to all those who are planning to hurt Israelis; the IDF, he said, will hunt them down.

Since the outbreak of the second Intifada Israel has dramatically increased the use of extra-judicial executions in its struggle against the Palestinians, killing a total of 150 people within three and a half years.² Sidestepping the crucial legal dimension of Israel's policy of extra-judicial executions,³ which has been employed in the Occupied Territories and abroad for at least 30 years⁴ and is currently being challenged in the Israeli High Court of Justice,⁵ this article closely examines the representation of these executions in the Israeli written media. While *Yedioth Ahronoth's* portrayal of Masud A'yad's assassination is described in a more suspenseful and dramatic fashion than most articles dealing with Israel's extra-judicial executions, yet it contains many of the disturbing features characterising the depiction of assassinations in the Israeli press – features that shed light on how Israeli newspapers have helped rationalise and thus legitimise government policies since the outbreak of the second Intifada.

A few studies have already demonstrated that since September 2000 the Israeli media, which historically was well known for its critical edge, has turned into a government organ in its reports on issues relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁶ These studies have underscored the dehumanisation of Palestinians in the Israeli press, showing how Palestinian victims are frequently represented as numbers; material losses are depicted as worthless; bombed civilian homes are often wrongfully described as terrorist barracks; and protesters are consistently photographed from behind Israeli lines, from an Israeli point of view.⁷ In *Newspapers Under the Influence*, Daniel Dor analyses the depiction of the second Intifada's first three weeks, arguing that Israeli newspapers presented a one-dimensional and thus distorted sketch of events. The author examines the way articles were laid out, the titles and pictures chosen and their placement in the newspaper, as well as the actual narratives that consistently accentuated certain facts while de-emphasising others. The newspapers, Dor concludes, collaborated with the government's attempt to de-legitimise the Palestinians as peace partners.⁸

This article adds a new dimension to this body of scholarly literature in at least two ways. First, it focuses on the representation of an action that is, according to Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and a variety of Israeli and Palestinian rights groups, a blatant violation of human rights.⁹ Extra-judicial executions, one might add, are also anti-democratic in their very nature if only because they undermine the essential practice of due process and its underlying notion that a person is innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. Decisions are made in back rooms without judicial scrutiny, and the targeted person is not given an opportunity to present evidence in their defence or to refute the allegations for which they are condemned to die.¹⁰ Despite the ongoing criticism voiced by rights organisations against the assassination policy, this article discloses how Israel's three major newspapers, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, *Ma'ariv*, and *Ha'aretz* have helped produce, disseminate and reinforce both the rationality and the morality of executions.¹¹

Second, the article employs the insights of theorists like Michel Foucault and Hayden White to lay bare and analyse some of the more intricate mechanisms that are used in order to accomplish this objective. More specifically, I argue that the rationalisation of the execution policy is achieved through what may be described as the discursive production of a pseudo-judicial process; the newspapers attempt to acquit Israel of allegations that may be raised against it. Echoing Max Weber, I show that ultimately the newspapers rationalise the government's actions in order to guarantee the legitimisation of its authority. Yet, I will argue that, in light of Foucault's lectures on bio-power and governmentality, the rationality of executions is also produced to manage the life of Israeli citizens.

At least two qualifications should be made at the outset. First, the subsequent investigation in no way assumes to be exhaustive or final, but rather an explanatory device that exposes a crucial and troubling subtext promulgated by the Israeli press. To be sure, some of the articles also offer other messages, which at times are in tension or even contradict the major thrust of my claim. Yet this is to be expected considering both that language is always overdetermined and that any given hegemonic system is not homogeneous, but rather constituted by a multiplicity of opposing and, on occasion, incompatible ideologies.¹² Second, my reading of the newspapers is informed by a post-structuralist framework rather than a subjectivist one. Thus, the following analysis tells us less about a group of reporters' and editors' personal motives than about the power relations circulating in Israeli society, which makes it, in my mind, all the more insidious.

Theoretical Background: The Article as Emplotment or Artificial Unity

Examining the coverage of extra-judicial executions in 278 reportage articles which appeared in *Yedioth Ahronoth*, *Ma'ariv*, and *Ha'aretz* (from 9 November 2000, when Israel first accelerated its assassination policy, until 25 November 2001, by which time 47 people had already been assassinated) I noticed that the journalists inserted into the articles both information that is intricately tied to the assassination itself – like the description of how the targeted person was killed – as well as information that is only remotely related to the execution.¹³ Nonetheless, as I was rereading the articles about Israel's extra-judicial executions during this one-year period, I was struck by how similar the narratives describing the different incidents were. One does not need to see Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* to know that when a few people are asked to describe an incident that they have all witnessed or participated in, the stories they relate are often very different. And here we have a case in which numerous reporters describe not one event, but *many incidents*, each article adding a considerable amount of information that has, in a sense, nothing to do with the incidents, and yet the accounts of the more than 30 executions covered by the newspapers are still alike.

This is not to say that there are no differences in their coverage of extra-judicial executions among the three Israeli newspapers, notably between *Ha'aretz*, which can be characterised as a broadsheet, and the two other dailies. These differences are most prominent with respect to the choice of titles and their location on the page and in the paper, the pictures used, as well as the specific words employed to describe the events. *Ha'aretz*, for instance, consistently uses the word 'assassination' [התנקשות] to describe extra-judicial executions (except when it is quoting someone), while *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Ma'ariv* almost always employ the more sanitary term 'liquidation' [חיסולים] and only on rare occasions refer to the executions as 'assassinations'. Also, in its choice of titles, *Ha'aretz* does not adopt 'yellow' captions, the preferred style of the two other newspapers. The titles of the articles describing the execution of Ahmad Khalil As'ad are a typical example: *Yedioth Ahronoth* writes 'Was going to explode a car bomb in Jerusalem – and was liquidated', while *Ha'aretz's* title reads, 'A senior Jihad member was shot and killed in an ambush near Bethlehem'.¹⁴ Yet, despite these and other variations, the actual narratives created by the newspapers are uncannily similar.

In the following pages I employ Hayden White's insights about the construction of narratives to argue that in the articles covering extra-judicial executions the three newspapers tailor the 'facts' to the requirements of the story they wish to convey through the inclusion and exclusion of information, 'the suppression and subordination of certain [events] and the highlighting of others, characterisation, motif repetition, variation of tone and point

of view, alternative descriptive strategies and the like'.¹⁵ White refers to this process as emplotment, convincingly arguing that all historical narratives – under which newspaper articles can also be subsumed – are never a simple reproduction of the events reported on. Citing Claude Levi Strauss's *Savage Mind*, White also claims that 'the "alleged historical continuities" that the historian purports to find in the record are "secured only by a dint of fraudulent outlines" imposed by the historian on the record'.¹⁶ Thus, narrative is not a simple recording of 'what actually happened' since the historian constructs and makes sense of the past through the 'encodation' of events in plot structures – i.e., emplotment – and in this way endows historical events and situations with meaning. The narrative, accordingly, 'tells us in what direction to think about the events and charges our thoughts about the events with different emotional valences'.¹⁷

To complement White, I invoke Michel Foucault who showed how discourse groups 'together attributes which do not have a necessary or natural relationship to one another in order to enable it to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning'.¹⁸ A Foucauldian analysis accordingly suggests that the newspaper articles covering extra-judicial executions are a product of a particular discursive formation,¹⁹ and that they create, in turn, a fictitious or artificial unity between the very limited descriptive account of the actual assassination and a spectrum of additional details, data, figures, records – which can be considered as 'exchangeable information' – that are not directly related to the execution but nonetheless incorporated into the article. This artificial unity is concatenated in the service of specific power relations; it discursively constitutes Israel's extra-judicial executions, imbuing them with both signification and rationality. Foucault's insights thus accentuate the important role power plays in the representation of the extra-judicial executions. By referring to his ideas I do not mean to imply that narrative and discourse can be conflated; if anything, narratives are always a manifestation of specific discursive formations, since the latter constitute the fields of knowledge and institutions that create narratives.²⁰

The Discursive Creation of a Pseudo Judiciary Process

The meaning ascribed to extra-judicial executions, according to a view informed by White's theoretical insights, depends upon the way the story is configured, the choice of one plot structure rather than another. The major thesis this article wishes to advance is that in their coverage of executions the Israeli newspapers create a narrative whose major goal is to exonerate the Israeli government from the accusation that it has committed a wrongful act.

As I will show, it is almost as if the newspapers were staging a trial. The subject on trial, however, is not the executed person, but rather the state of Israel and its policy of extra-judicial executions. The objective is to acquit the state of what may appear to be an unlawful act through the production and dissemination of the rationality and morality of executions. To be sure, the narratives created by the articles covering extra-judicial executions do not actually reproduce the procedure followed by Israeli civil courts, not least because there is no prosecutor, no one to question the legitimacy of Israel's action. Indeed, a trial that has only a defence does not resemble in any way, shape or form what human rights practitioners characterise as a fair trial that adheres to the basic notion of due process. Yet the narratives' objective is, nonetheless, informed by the objectives of a defence trial, for they attempt to vindicate Israel by creating a sense that, given the situation, the assassination was both inevitable and was carried out in a principled manner. In order to accomplish this goal, both time as a chronological progression from one event to another, and the notion of cause and effect must be totally distorted. As we

will see, guilt is established after the punishment, and the targeted person is transformed into a 'ticking bomb' after (and because?) he is already dead.

My argument, however, should in no way be understood to advance some sort of conspiracy theory. I do think – and will attempt to show – that a critical reading of the articles exposes an *intentional* effort to absolve Israel of wrongdoing. Nevertheless, I do not assume that the reporters and editors get together in a room – or even make these decisions separately – in order to decide how to formulate the article so as to exonerate Israel, choosing which information should be included or excluded in order to rationalise the use of executions. The beauty of it is that the reporters absolve Israel with hardly any deliberation and without anyone having to dictate what they can or cannot write. In other words, I employ the word intentional in its Foucauldian sense, whereby power is considered to be simultaneously intentional and nonsubjective.²¹ Since power is a consequence of a series of aims, objectives and calculations, one can discuss the intentions behind the articles covering extra-judicial executions. But these intentions cannot simply be traced back to the decisions of the reporters that wrote them, since the reporters (and editors) are themselves the vehicles of power, not its point of application.²² Journalists are always already within a web of power relations and at the same time the medium of its articulation. Put differently, they themselves are a product of the state's rationalisation process, and at the same time they promulgate and disseminate this rationality through the narratives they create.²³

In the following sections, I closely examine the articles covering extra-judicial executions by isolating and analysing certain components within the narrative that constitutes them. I show the process by which Israel is exonerated, beginning by outlining the way the narrative establishes the targeted person's guilt. I then turn to uncover how the newspapers underscore the pressing need to prevent the person from committing more crimes as well as how they advance the idea that there is no effective way to stop the targeted person other than assassination. Next, I argue that additional components are introduced into the narrative and highlighted in order to produce the morality of executions; not only was the execution necessary, it was also ethical. The articles accomplish this objective through strategies of displacement and concealment. Displacement shifts the discussion about the morality of the execution from the execution itself to its undesired excesses, while a sanitised language is employed to conceal the gruesome effect of the execution and the fact that the action was carried out without due process. Ultimately, Israel is absolved of all wrongdoing since it saves Israeli lives while at the same time carrying out the executions in a moral way. The government's vindication serves both to legitimise its authority and to manage the lives of its subjects who due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are increasingly disgruntled.

Establishing Guilt

After depicting how the execution was carried out, virtually every article attempts to establish the targeted person's guilt. This is accomplished by enumerating a series of Palestinian attacks on Israeli targets, and presenting the person's connection to these incidents as fact, rather than accusation. Moreover, no evidence substantiating the serious allegations is presented. This tactic is extremely effective, not only since most of those assassinated are presented as 'having blood on their hands', but also because many of them are considered to be connected to terrorist attacks that have become part of Israel's collective memory. The attacks on the Dolphinarium discothèque in Tel-Aviv, on Sbarro Pizza in Jerusalem, and on The Park Hotel in Netanya during the Passover meal have a strong resonance in Israeli society, not unlike the impact September 11 has

had on the collective psyche in the United States.²⁴ In order to engender a genuine sense among the readers that the assassinated person was guilty, it is much more effective to link them to an attack that is engraved in the public's consciousness rather than to one of the many shooting incidents that take place in the occupied territories.

Accordingly, it is not coincidental that the list of those responsible for the most atrocious attacks is very long, while less successful attacks do not appear to have as many planners, initiators, instigators, trainers and executioners. It is almost as if an attack's so-called 'success' or lack thereof determines how many people were involved in preparing it. For instance, according to the three newspapers, of the 14 Hamas members who were executed between 1 June 2001 (when the Dolphinarium suicide bombing took place) and 25 November (when this study ended) 7 were involved in carrying out or preparing the attack. Most of these people are blamed for a series of other attacks as well, but the Dolphinarium (and Sbarro Pizza) are squeezed into the list of accusations in one way or another. The fact that the assassinations are carried out over a long period of time helps conceal the repetitive character of the allegations. The following are a number of examples. Jamal Muhammad Mansour and Jamal Salim Damouni, who were assassinated in Nablus on 31 July 2001, are blamed for 'planning the suicide attack' on the Dolphinarium; Abd a-Rahman Sa'id Hamed, who was assassinated in Qalqilya on 14 October, is held responsible for 'being actively involved in planning the suicide attack on the Dolphinarium'; Ahmad Marshud, who was assassinated the following day in Nablus, is blamed for being 'part of the Hamas organization in the city, which is responsible for launching suicide terrorists to the Dolphinarium'; Ayman Halawa, who was assassinated in Nablus on 22 October, is blamed for having 'a major role in Hamas's organization within the city, from which terrorists were launched to suicide attacks on the Dolphinarium'; while on 31 October 2001, Jamil Jadallah was assassinated in Hebron for 'his involvement in a series of attacks among them the Dolphinarium'; and Mahmoud Abu Hanoud was assassinated in al-Fara refugee camp on 23 November and blamed for a series of assaults, among them 'indirect involvement' in the attack on the Dolphinarium'.²⁵ This information is passed on to the journalists by military and government spokespeople without any evidence linking the targeted people to the attacks. The newspapers, nonetheless, cite the spokespeople, sometimes mentioning the information's source in the citation and on other occasions repeating the allegations as if it were some evident fact that needs no reference. Thus, the newspapers effectively take part in exploiting the Dolphinarium and other appalling attacks, which have become defining moments in Israeli collective memory. This helps, in turn, to provide justification for the government's extra-judicial policy.

Each article incorporates some truths, making the undemonstrated issues ring true as well. The terrorist attack at the Dolphinarium discothèque was indeed horrific; Hamas took responsibility for the attack, someone must have planned it, prepared the bomb, etc. However, who exactly was involved in the attack and in what capacity is a much more complicated matter and one that needs to be proved in a court of law. Most Israeli journalists who cover the events in the occupied territories are familiar with the decentralised structure of the military wings of organisations like Hamas; the splitting up of activists into small cells and the total division and disconnection among the cells. Thus, the so-called circumstantial evidence – Hamas perpetrated the attack, the person is a Hamas member, therefore the person is responsible for the attack – that is provided to the journalists by government and military spokespeople does not coincide with the knowledge most journalists have concerning how such organisations function. It is not very likely that a person belonging to a cell in Jenin, another from a cell in Qalqilya and a third from Nablus all took part in planning the same attack. The official statements

Activated; assembled bombs; attacked; carried out; commanded; commanded a squad; commanded a bomb laboratory; connected between; connected to; connected to in a roundabout way; connected to the launching of a squad that meant to carry out attacks; connected to the bombing; created the infrastructure; defined the targets and the strategy; directed; directly involved behind the scenes; directly responsible; engineered; enlisted; executed; familiar with; financed; imparted directives; indirectly connected to; indirectly involved in the attack; initiated; involved in; involved in an attempt to smuggle arms; involved in buying arms; launched; launched the squad; launched suicide bombers; lectured; meant to; participated in; participated in the murder; participated in the attack; placed bombs; planned; played significant role in planning attacks; prepared; recruited; renowned for smuggling arms and drugs; responsible for; responsible for many shooting attacks; responsible for murder; responsible for placing bombs; responsible for preparing; sent suicide bombers; shot; suicide; traded; trained; was part of the organization; was occupied in planning quality kidnappings; was on his way to carry out an attack; wrote.

Figure 1. Terms used to describe the targeted person's responsibility.²⁶

are, nonetheless, printed in what can be characterised as an act of deception. Guilt is never actually established by supplying evidence, but it is, nonetheless, declared.

Declaration of guilt, even of horrendous crimes, is, however, not enough; at least some readers need further persuasion. The newspapers manage to convincingly tie a large number of assassinated people to a given attack by employing several strategies. As mentioned, they link each targeted person to a series of attacks; the time lapse between articles helps conceal the repetitious character of the allegations; and, in addition, they employ an extensive number of adjectives to describe the assassinated person's responsibility. Figure 1 provides a partial list of the terms used to describe the targeted person's responsibility for carrying out terrorist activities. There is the person that assembled the bombs, the one who commanded the bomb laboratory, a third directed the operation, a fourth trained, a fifth financed, a sixth planned, a seventh played a significant role in planning, an eighth was indirectly involved in the attack, the ninth recruited, while the tenth was involved in recruiting, and so on. In this way numerous people can be tied to the same attack.

Along the same lines, the Israeli press adopts the definitions employed by government and military spokespeople, making no distinction between attacks on a civilian population and attacks on military targets. All Palestinian attacks are, by definition, terrorism, according to the Israeli military establishment. Once again, the newspapers repeat the official line, no questions asked.²⁷ The widespread and detrimental ramifications of the equation Palestinian attack = terrorism extend far beyond the scope of this article, but among its many uses, it too becomes a mechanism which helps justify extra-judicial executions. People like Hussein Muhammad Salim Abayat, who is believed to have been responsible for killing three soldiers near Bethlehem in the occupied territories as well as for injuring a border policeman in Gilo, is assassinated, and the summary execution is justified because he is a terrorist.²⁸

The Incarceration/Execution Binary

Other, more nuanced, components are introduced into the narrative in order to establish guilt. Consider one item of information conveyed in the articles covering the execution of Jamal Abd a-Razzek. After describing the way in which Israeli security forces killed Abd a-Razzek and three other Fatah members, *Ha'aretz* reporter Amos Harel continues to note, 'Abd a-Razzek, 30 years old, sat in an Israeli jail for seven years, since 1992,

due to his involvement in shooting attacks and throwing grenades, as a Fatah member, prior to Oslo. He was discharged in 1999 as part of the understandings between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the issue of prisoner release'.²⁹ In *Yedioth Ahronoth's* coverage of the same incident, similar information is recounted: 'Razzek was held in an Israeli prison for seven years, after having confessed to carrying out shooting attacks and throwing grenades at IDF forces, as part of his activities in the Fatah. With his release in 1999, he joined the Tanzim and is considered one of the senior members in the organization'.³⁰ *Ma'ariv's* coverage resembles that of the two other papers: 'Razzek, 30 years old, was imprisoned in Israel from June 1992 up until September 1999 for his involvement in shooting attacks and throwing grenades on military vehicles and buildings in the Gaza Strip'.³¹

It is fairly obvious that the reporters received Razzek's imprisonment record from the same source, most likely the IDF spokesperson.³² However, these reporters obtain a lot of information from many sources and they, together with their editors, decide which news is fit to print; all of them thought that Abd a-Razzek's previous imprisonment was extremely significant. Incarceration, one should note, is in an important theme in many of the articles covering Israel's extra-judicial executions, not just Abd a-Razzek's. During the period examined, *Ha'aretz* covered 30 assassinations and in all but 8 cases it was mentioned that the targeted person had previously been incarcerated. *Ma'ariv* covered 28 assassinations and in all but 9 cases it referred to previous incarcerations, while *Yedioth Ahronoth* documented 25 executions and in 12 cases mentioned that a targeted person had been imprisoned in the past.

After reading these articles one may think that the imprisonment history of those who Israel assassinates is in some way extremely relevant to their execution and, as such, naturally related to Israel's action. The creation, citation and reiteration of the incarceration/execution binary not only naturalises the connection between the two, but, as a Foucauldian analysis suggests, it simultaneously produces the signification of the term execution, a signification that carries with it a subtext which is obviously tied in some way to incarceration.

In the case of past imprisonments, the newspapers appear to be more interested in the subtext that this narrative produces, since the supposed connection between incarceration and execution loses almost all significance once one takes into account that during the first Intifada (December 1987–93) tens of thousands of Palestinians served time in Israeli prisons. Indeed, a large percentage of adult Palestinian males were at one point imprisoned, and this percentage rises substantially if one considers only those men who belong to a political party and were in some way active.³³ But even if this were not the case, in what way does a previous imprisonment bear on a person's assassination? The fact that someone sat in jail at one point in time surely does not mean that they should be executed. Why, then, was this information introduced into the articles?

Before addressing this question, it is interesting to note in this context that in the articles covering the executions personal information about the targeted person is almost totally absent. Other than the assassinated person's age, where he lived, the attacks that he allegedly carried out, and his imprisonment history, little, if any, of the deceased's private life is communicated to the reader.³⁴ Was he married? Did he have children, brothers and sisters? Was he a refugee? Did he have a university degree? What was his profession other than 'being a terrorist'? Did he own a grocery store or was he a teacher? How did the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem affect his life? Had his house been demolished? Was his father beaten by the Israeli military when he was a young boy? This kind of information is not directly related to the extra-judicial executions, although it very well could be incorporated into the narrative that

describes these executions. In the Palestinian press, these types of issues are discussed at length following each 'successful' Israeli operation. They are certainly no less relevant to the article covering an extra-judicial execution than the killed person's previous incarceration and at least theoretically could have been part of the emplotment in the Israeli narratives. All of which suggests that the insertion of a person's imprisonment history into the Hebrew articles is not coincidental; it is directed towards a certain audience and serves a particular political objective.

Browsing through articles covering criminal felonies in the three Israeli newspapers, one notices that in some of these articles a suspect's previous imprisonment is also mentioned, usually after the police arrest a person. It seems to me that in both cases – criminal and extra-judicial executions – the articles not only feed upon, but also help produce a certain type of rationality based on a simple induction: 'The person has a history of sitting in jail – i.e., guilty the last time they were caught – and therefore they are probably guilty this time as well'. In both cases the imprisonment history is introduced not so much due to its internal significance, but owing to the subtext that it engenders. In Foucauldian terms, the artificial binary suspect/previous-imprisonment generates a causal principle of sorts, used in order to convince the reader that the subject is indeed guilty – for the subtext of 'past imprisonment' is 'likely to be guilty'.³⁵

References to past imprisonments also suggest that the detention did not succeed in 'rehabilitating' the person, which has an essentialising effect since it implies that the person is a criminal/terrorist by nature. In the extra-judicial execution articles, the incorporation of past imprisonment into the narrative functions, however, in a somewhat different way than in the criminal articles because it also helps substantiate the claim that another form of punishment may be warranted. The subtext is once again straightforward: 'The person is guilty since he was incarcerated in the past. We have tried imprisonment and that did not work, so in order to stop him from carrying out more terrorist attacks there was really no other way than to kill him'. The transformation of the targeted person into a 'ticking bomb', which I will discuss momentarily, also helps produce and reinforce this rationality. All of which suggests that the incarceration/execution binary helps engender a particular signification to Israel's extra-judicial executions, one that serves the government's agenda.

Obviously, though, this binary does not produce a single signification, but is also always overdetermined. For instance, in those cases where the person was incarcerated in a Palestinian jail, a totally different dimension is introduced into the subtext. Consider the relevant part in the portrayal of Iyad Mahmoud Nayef Hardan's assassination. Hardan, according to *Ma'ariv*,

was released from a Palestinian prison in October, with the eruption of confrontations in the territories. Hardan's name was mentioned on the top of all the terrorist lists Israel handed over to the Palestinians, with a request to arrest them.³⁶ Similar lists were also passed on to the Americans. With his release, Hardan returned to northern Samaria and began organizing extensive terrorist activities, which included attacks inside Israeli territories, as well as shooting attacks and placing bombs in the [occupied] territories. . . . When Israel began its liquidation policy, three months ago, Hardan was put under 'defensive arrest' in the Presidential Guard building in Jenin. He used the building as his living quarter, but was free for all other purposes: he left the jail whenever he wished, held meetings and telephone conversations.³⁷

The article goes on to describe how Hardan left the Palestinian jail in order to make a phone call at a booth just outside the building, and how a bomb blew up in the booth while he was talking. In the depiction of Hardan's assassination, as in many similar articles, the allusion to imprisonment also implies that Israel gave the Palestinian Authority the opportunity to incarcerate the person, but it failed, usually due to its

'revolving door policy'. Israel's action is rationalised not only by suggesting that it had no other alternative, but also by implying that the Palestinian Authority is actually to blame for the execution of the targeted person since it was given an opportunity to imprison them but failed to do so. Simultaneously, one notices how an assassinated person's imprisonment history is invoked to criticise the Palestinian Authority for not doing enough to stop terrorism.

Even this brief discussion underscores some of the charged undertones of the incarceration/execution binary. Surely, though, the production of a single binary cannot, on its own, rationalise and justify Israel's executions, no matter how many times it is repeated. The narrative that provides an event or phenomenon with meaning is usually much more complex and cannot be reduced to a simple set of binary relations. A much more intricate mechanism is at work in the articles covering extra-judicial executions, in which the incarceration/execution binary is but one module. Introducing this example merely served to demonstrate how a small amount of information – often consisting of no more than one sentence within a whole article – is incorporated in order to advance a particular message.

'The End of a Ticking Bomb'³⁸

Following the 1972 terrorist attack perpetrated against the Israeli Olympic team in Munich, Prime Minister Golda Meir authorised the Mossad to assassinate all those who were involved in the bloody assault.³⁹ The Meir doctrine avowed that Israel would hunt and gun down those responsible for killing its citizens. While this doctrine continues to be integral to Israeli policy, its justification – 'having blood on their hands' – has recently been modified. A variety of reasons led Israel to change the way the doctrine is rationalised. It has to do with the more extensive use of extra-judicial executions, the transformation from covert to semi-overt and overt operations, whereby the government publicly affirms its use of summary executions, as well as with the increasing opportunity citizens and rights groups have to legally intervene, both inside Israel, through the High Court of Justice, and presently in the international realm, through the International Criminal Court. Within a courtroom, the idea that someone has 'blood on their hands' does not yet justify assassination, and consequently it became necessary to come up with a more persuasive line of reasoning.

The policy of hunting and gunning down those who 'have blood on their hands' is tied to an atavistic impulse informed by the age-old logic of an eye for an eye. It is considered a method of both punishment and deterrence. The primordial drive informing it – which is no longer considered ethical in most modern societies – was invoked in almost all the articles covering extra-judicial executions up until the assassination of Thabet Thabet, on 31 December 2000. After Thabet's assassination this rationale is suddenly modified and a new dimension is added to it: the targeted person not only had 'blood on his hands', he was also a 'ticking bomb'.

Ha'aretz covered seven assassinations before Thabet Thabet was killed; he was the eighth. In only one case out of those eight incidents is it mentioned that the targeted person planned to perpetrate another attack. By contrast, in 17 of the remaining 22 incidents covered by *Ha'aretz* the assassinated person is said to have been on the verge of carrying out some kind of terrorist attack against Israeli citizens. In the other two newspapers this narrative change is remarkably similar.⁴⁰ For instance, after Iyad Hardan's assassination, 'Security officials stated that Hardan's liquidation prevented a series of ruthless attacks, including a plan to explode a car bomb and suicide bombers in large [Israeli] cities'. Along the same lines, following the assassination of Omar Sa'ade and Taha al-Aruj, Defense Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer is quoted as having said, 'that their

cell planned an attack on a large crowd at the Macabiah [sports event], “perhaps with hundreds of casualties”. The Defense Minister also noted that the assassination of Jamal Mansour and Jamal Salim ‘saved the lives of hundreds of Israelis’, while Abd a-Rahman Hamed was ‘planning to carry out within the next few days a large suicide attack’.⁴¹ As if to ensure that there will be no misunderstandings, some titles chosen by the newspapers impart a similar message. ‘A senior Hamas member was liquidated – before he carried out a blazing attack’ (*Ma’ariv*, 15 December 2000); ‘Was planning to detonate a car bomb in Jerusalem – and was liquidated’, (*Ma’ariv*, 6 May 2001); ‘The IDF liquidated 4 Hamas members as they prepared an attack’ (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 18 July 2001); ‘The IDF liquidated the ticking bomb’ (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 1 November 2001); ‘IDF: Those killed in the helicopter attack in Jenin were preparing to launch mortar bombs’ (*Ha’aretz*, 13 May 2001). It is precisely the sudden shift in the narrative, whereby the newspapers transform the targeted person into a ‘ticking bomb’ after he has already been killed, that further emphasises the newspapers’ implication in the government’s efforts to legitimise its policy of extra-judicial executions. As mentioned, the newspapers can do so only by distorting our basic conceptions of both chronological time and causal relations, since the person is portrayed as a ‘ticking bomb’ only after the execution.

This novel narrative, which currently appears in most articles covering extra-judicial executions, appears to have been introduced immediately after Thabet Thabet’s wife, Siham, filed a petition to the High Court of Justice (9 January 2001), asking the Court to outlaw the use of extra-judicial executions.⁴² The security establishment, so it seems, understood that it is not enough to blame the targeted person of having ‘blood on their hands’, and began adding the accusation that the assassinated person had been planning to carry out an attack in their press releases and in the statements made by officials, in this way rendering them a ‘ticking bomb’.⁴³ Through its reiteration in the press, the ‘ticking bomb’ metaphor rapidly seeped into the public discourse concerning extra-judicial executions.⁴⁴ Even those who at times criticise Israel’s executions swiftly adopted the ‘ticking bomb’ language. Roni Shaked, a senior reporter for *Yedioth Ahronoth*, writes after the assassination of Jamal Mansour, ‘this is not the liquidation of one more terrorist, a “ticking bomb” on his way to inferno, but a leader who is a high ranking politician’.⁴⁵ In another article published in the same newspaper, opposition leader Knesset Member Yossi Sarid writes that ‘liquidations are flawed if they are carried out in order to punish or deter. It is, however, possible in exceptional cases to be understanding towards this act, but only in instances when it is demonstrated that the case is an obvious prevention of a “ticking bomb” in high probability [sic] and will result [if not stopped] in an attack [against Israelis]’.⁴⁶ Sarid’s words, which were meant to criticise government policy, actually epitomise the successful introduction of the ‘ticking bomb’ into the narrative concerning Israel’s assassinations, and in this way reinforce the hegemonic worldview. It is not in order to kill, punish or even deter that Israel executes these people, but rather to rescue and protect life.

One is reminded of Foucault’s notion of bio-power, the idea that in the eighteenth century governing began to concern itself with life – rather than death – by using a variety of techniques to manage the lives of its subjects.⁴⁷ In this case, though, biopolitics is practised and ensured through a thanatopolitics, the politics of extermination and death. After every Palestinian attack large parts of Israeli society feel vulnerable and apprehensive, which raises the question concerning the government’s ability to secure its citizens’ lives. The transformation of the targeted person into a ‘ticking bomb’ alongside their successful assassination – which is carried out before the person is converted into a bomb – becomes a mechanism to manage the subjects’ anxieties and simultaneously to reinforce the government’s authority.

The 'ticking bomb' metaphor is extremely powerful because it ties into two different rationalities – biblical and legal – circulating in the Israeli public sphere. It coincides with the Talmudic phrase 'להורגך השכם להורגך' [‘If someone is coming to kill you, you must preempt and kill him first’].⁴⁸ Legally, for many years the Israeli government used the 'ticking bomb' rationale in its attempt to justify the exercise of torture during interrogations. Ironically, after a decade-long struggle in the courts, which ended just over a year before Israel reinstated its assassination policy in the occupied territories,⁴⁹ and reintroduced the 'ticking bomb' justification, the High Court of Justice outlawed the use of torture, ultimately rejecting this line of reasoning.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, the 'ticking bomb' metaphor still carries weight within large segments of the Israeli public and is used both to rationalise and to justify the employment of extra-judicial executions. The preventative reasoning supplements the 'eye for an eye' logic, and in this way presents the assassination less as an act of vengeance, or even as punishment or deterrence, but rather as a mechanism to avoid or ward-off some horrific damage that is expected to occur in the near future – a 'preemptive strike'. To be sure, both the 'blood on their hands' and the 'ticking bomb' metaphors promulgate very different and even contradicting ethical rationalities, yet each one addresses distinctive social and political needs and together they imbue Israel's actions with reason.

Summing up the previous three sections, one notices that tying the assassinated person to a series of attacks is key in the process of establishing guilt. Linking him to an attack that is engraved in collective memory adds credence not only to the execution, but also to the Israeli government that has managed to punish those who attack its citizens. In order to reinforce the impression that the targeted person was indeed culpable, their imprisonment history is invoked while the incarceration/execution binary also insinuates that imprisonment is an inadequate form of punishment. But in order to convince the public that the person had to be *executed* a much more persuasive argument is needed. Therefore the newspapers help transform the targeted person into a 'ticking bomb'. The 'ticking bomb' metaphor alongside the knowledge of the person's imprisonment history and Israel's inability to rely on the Palestinian Authority to incarcerate them engenders the sense that assassination is the only way to stop them. The first part of the judiciary process has thus been accomplished: the execution was shown to be the only effective means to secure Israeli lives and this is why the assassination was committed.

Displacement as a Mechanism to Engender Morality

The newspapers take it upon themselves to persuade the reader not only that executions are the only effective way to prevent the targeted person from carrying out a dreadful attack, but also that the assassinations are not really immoral. In order to do so, they produce the morality of executions through the displacement of the debate from the execution itself to its 'unintentional' excesses. The portrayal of Masud A'yad's assassination cited in the beginning of this article helps exemplify this point, also because in this case the reporters took the liberty of creating a drama by concocting the Apache pilots' thoughts and envisaging what A'yad saw and did during his last moment.

Two Apache combat helicopters are gliding in the distance, waiting for the right moment. A'yad passes a mosque. For a moment his car moves away from the other vehicles on the road. This is exactly the moment the pilots have been waiting for. Four missiles are launched towards the car. A split second before the missile hits the car, A'yad notices its trail of fire and attempts to slip away, but to no avail.

The writers lure the reader into a gripping scene that could have been taken from any James Bond movie. But the fascinating narrative is meant not only to entice the reader;

it also has a pedagogical role: to highlight the morality of the Israeli military and to demonstrate that the extra-judicial executions are carried out with great care in order not to hurt innocent bystanders. While it is unlikely that the reporter actually had information about the movement of the car, the narrative is constructed in such a way so as to highlight the notion of precision or cleanliness, which serves to demonstrate, in turn, the care Israel takes not to produce any unintended outcome.

This theme recurs, particularly when Israel employs Apache helicopters – provided by the United States – to carry out the assassination. A *Ma'ariv* article entitled 'The First Liquidation of the Sharon Government', describes the extra-judicial execution of Muhammad Abd al-Aal.

The liquidation was carried out yesterday in the afternoon, after extended intelligence surveillance performed by the Shin Bet [Israeli secret services]. . . . Senior military officials said that the operation was complex since the directives were to strike only at al-Aal, and to refrain from hurting innocent civilian bystanders. According to these officials the missiles were fired only when al-Aal reached a relatively isolated location in the downtown area of Rafah, in this way assuring that other people will not be killed.⁵¹

When the military does fire a missile that kills bystanders, like in the case of eight-year-old Ashraf Khalil Abu Khader and ten-year-old Bilal Khalil Abu Khader who were killed during the assassination of Jamal Mansour and Jamal Damouni in Nablus, military sources are quoted as saying that 'the IDF was unaware that the two children were near the offices [that were fired at] when the decision regarding the operation was made'.⁵²

One notices how the discussion concerning the morality of the executions is dependent on the prior appropriation of the innocent/guilty binary, which the newspapers produce, and on the assumption that guilt warrants death. Accordingly, the debate concerning the morality of executions is not about the execution itself but rather about the undesired effects an execution may have. In other words, the execution's excesses, or more precisely, the lack thereof determine its morality. Consequently, the narrative circumscribes the ethical discussion in such a way that it does not actually include the assassination, but only the unintentional injury or death of bystanders. When 'innocent bystanders' are killed or injured it is indeed regretful, but since it was an 'unintentional mistake' it hardly reflects on the inherent morality of the perpetrator or on the actions carried out. The morality of the execution is accordingly determined by the precautions the assassinator takes, and their success in not injuring people they did not intend to hurt. After the assassination of Hussein Muhammad Abayat by helicopter missile fire and the killing of two 52-year-old women bystanders, *Yedioth Ahronoth's* Roni Shaked wrote an opinion piece: 'The most efficient way to fight terrorism and guerilla warfare is by means of intelligence. Namely, focused hit, surgical, wise, unanticipated by the opponent. An operation that strikes only the perpetrators of terrorism and not the public at large.'⁵³

The very concept that the state employs to denote executions accentuates this point. In a typical Orwellian move the military spokesperson refers to executions as 'focused obstruction' [סיכול ממוקד] This clinical neologism radically transforms the connotation one tends to ascribe to an assassination; it is no longer about killing or death, but about prevention, a kind of prevention that focuses upon a specific target. The 'obstruction itself is warranted; it is the lack of focus, the diffusion of the act, which signifies an error

Sanitised Executions

'Focused obstruction' is also an extremely sanitised way of describing a rather gory action, and its objective is to displace or conceal the gruesome facets of the execution

itself. A similar concealment also takes place in the newspapers through their hygienic portrayal of the assassination – the blood, scattered body parts, evacuation of the wounded are rarely mentioned. Incidentally, these are precisely some of the issues *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Ma'ariv* focus on when covering the consequences of a Palestinian attack on Israeli targets.

At times the papers spend very little space actually describing the execution, veiling it in a web of secrecy.

Halawa, 27 years old, was driving in the middle of Nablus in a new car which he received a few days earlier, when suddenly a forceful bomb detonated inside the vehicle. The car was totally ruined from the blast, while Halawa was killed on the spot. Another Hamas member who was with him was lightly injured.⁵⁴

Nothing more is said about the assassination, there is no description of the scene after the explosion; the only other information provided is that the operation was based on intelligence gathered by Israel's secret services. The sharp reader is supposed to understand that the new car was Israel's weapon.

On other occasions, the newspapers describe the assassination in detail, but spend most of the time outlining the operation's 'highly sophisticated technical' achievements, employing diagrams and sketches that draw the reader's attention to the mission's different stages rather than to its (in)human dimensions. 'Brilliant Operation', reads the title of Alex Fishman's article on Iyad Hardan, who, as mentioned earlier, was assassinated by a bomb planted in a phone booth outside the Palestinian prison where he was being held. 'It was a brilliant demonstration of intelligence and operational capability', the reporter states in his first line. Fishman goes on to describe how "live sources" [i.e., collaborators] make possible the correct and efficient activation of technical intelligence. Namely, monitoring phone conversations, long-term observation, etc'.⁵⁵ *Ma'ariv* provides its readers with a drawing made up of three pictures, each one accompanied by written captions.

Picture number 1: 'Iyad Hardan leaves the prison and turns to the nearby public phone booth'.

Picture number 2: 'According to the Palestinians a MRPV (mini remotely-piloted vehicle) is flying in the air, following the terrorist's movements'.

Picture number 3: 'Palestinians claim: a bomb was detonated in the telephone booth using remote control. Hardan was killed on the spot'.⁵⁶

The assassination has been reduced to a comic strip, which is a mechanism of undermining and erasing its dirty, but all too real, signification.

The emphasis on the technical dimension of the assassination and the clinical phrases used to describe it elide the fact that a person was killed without due process, and in this manner help conceal the (im)moral dimensions of the gory act. It is in this context that the absence of personal information about the assassinated person is also important. Most often there is no human being behind the assassinated person, just a bloodthirsty 'ticking bomb' who is eliminated.

The *only* criticism that appears from time to time in the newspapers revolves around the issue of the operation's political astuteness. Alex Fishman criticises the assassination of Abu Ali Mustafa, claiming that although he deserved to die it was not wise – politically speaking – to kill him and therefore Israel should have refrained from carrying out the execution.⁵⁷ Roni Shaked agrees with Fishman, and it is not surprising that both do not decry Abu Ali Mustafa's death but rather spend time criticising the operation's political and technical dimensions. They write, 'This was not a very complex military operation:

the whereabouts of Abu Ali's offices were known and familiar to everyone. The secretary general of the Popular Front carried out his activities in public. He did not fear for his life and freely moved within the West Bank. All the journalists who worked in the territories had his direct telephone number'.⁵⁸

There is no discussion about the morality of summary executions in any of the articles examined. From time to time the newspapers appear to be raising the moral dimension, but only when an execution produces 'undesirable effects'. The displacement of the discussion to the executions' so-called excesses only serves to reinforce the notion that the execution itself is moral, while the sanitised portrayal of the killing conceals its inhuman quality. Thus, the second part of the judiciary process has been accomplished: the execution is not only necessary but also moral. The political criticism that is occasionally voiced by journalists produces the sense that the newspapers continue to be free and pluralistic, while in effect the criticism only bolsters the rationality, legitimacy and moral validity of the executions since it addresses only tactical questions, leaving the fundamental issues untouched.

Producing Essences

One more issue worth raising involves the essentialisation of Palestinians and Israelis within the articles. As some of the preceding discussion implied, the Palestinians are frequently presented as the bad guys: they are immoral evil beings who do not really care about the value of human life; they are the provokers, aggressors, assailants and terrorists, who are driven by emotions, irrational and fanatic aspirations. Israelis, on the other hand, are often portrayed as moral beings; human life is of great value to them, they merely react in order to defend and secure life, they are the victims who are driven by rational calculations and whose major aim is to protect life. Since these sets of binary oppositions are not unique to the articles examined in this paper and have been discussed by other scholars, I will limit my discussion to one example, the way the newspapers represent the reaction of Palestinians to the assassinations.⁵⁹

As every novice journalist knows, one must request a response from the 'other party' involved in the incident. The very idea of including in the article a reaction from the Palestinians seems natural to the reader, primarily because Israeli journalists tend to abide by this unwritten law. Ironically, the idea informing this edict is impartiality: let the other side respond as well, give them a voice. Thus, virtually all the articles covering assassinations include some kind of quote from a Palestinian spokesperson, often towards the end of the article. These responses are, nonetheless, artificially connected to the article; there is neither a natural or necessary link between them and the assassination nor is the choice of the person whom the journalist chooses to quote or to ignore in any way natural. The journalist could have received a response from the targeted person's grieving parents or children, but chose not to do so.

Usually there will be one citation from the Palestinian Authority and another from the military faction to which the assassinated person belonged. The reactions brought forth are frequently laconic, the vocabulary limited, and there is one basic message that is continuously repeated – revenge. This message takes on a number of different forms: 'a reprisal will follow', 'we will avenge the blood of the dead', 'Israel has opened the gates of hell', 'we will make the lives of Israelis into a living hell', 'the revenge to come will be painful', 'the flames will reach each Zionist wherever he may be', 'the blood of our sons will not be spilled in vain', 'Israel will pay the price of the cold blood killings', 'the flames of the Intifada will only strengthen', but mostly 'revenge', 'revenge', 'revenge'.

The repetitive citation of these responses has two very different implications. First, they create, sustain and reinforce the pervasive image of the Palestinian, in this case the blood-thirsty perpetrator. Even though the Palestinians are responding to an assassination, they continue to be portrayed as the aggressors. The fact that the reaction usually appears towards the end of the article leaves the Jewish reader with a feeling that they are a potential victim of an impending attack. Moreover, there is no real sense of grief or personal loss in these reactions, which strengthens the notion that Palestinians do not attribute much value to human life. In this sense the statements only reinforce the subtext advanced in the article's preceding parts. At the same time, however, the cited Palestinian reactions produce a totally different effect. They notify the reader that each assassination triggers a Palestinian response, that is, another attack on an Israeli target.⁶⁰

This latter message produces an absurd public reaction, as seen in one of the polls published in *Yedioth Ahronoth*. The poll finds that 74 per cent of Israelis are in favour of the government's assassination policy, clearly suggesting that the government's efforts to convince the public that the targeted person was a 'ticking bomb' who must be stopped at all costs have paid off. The high percentage of supporters also intimates that most people do not consider summary executions to be morally reprehensible; they have been rationalised and legitimised. However, when asked if they thought the assassinations were effective, 45 per cent claimed that they actually increase Palestinian terrorism, 31 per cent stated that they have no effect on terrorism, and only 22 per cent averred that assassinations help deter terrorism.⁶¹ Thus, the Palestinian call for revenge has an effect, since almost half of all Israelis believe that the government's reaction to terrorism engenders more terrorism. Nonetheless, many of these people continue to support assassinations. Which brings us back to the first implication of the presentation of Palestinian reactions, the one that reinforces the pervasive image of Palestinians. If Palestinians are irrational bloodthirsty beings we must continue the assassinations – even though they engender more terrorism – since such beings understand one thing only – that is, force.

Conclusions

There is nothing essentially different about the construction of articles covering extra-judicial executions; all newspaper articles are made up of emplotments that engender a subtext informed by the power relations circulating in society. The novelty of this essay therefore is not so much in its general claims about the formation and operation of reportage articles, but rather in its specific textual analytics. First, it reveals that the three major Israeli newspapers *Yedioth Ahronoth*, *Ma'ariv*, and *Ha'aretz* have appropriated, disseminated, and thus reinforced, the government line concerning a policy that is a blatant violation of human rights. Second, it uncovers some of the mechanisms and strategies the newspapers employ to advance this message. While the reportage articles covering Israel's extra-judicial executions supposedly adhere to principles of impartiality and neutrality, this essay has exposed how through the introduction and concatenation of data, figures, records the articles create a narrative that has a politically driven subtext whose major aim is to rationalise and legitimise the government's policy. It is therefore no coincidence that most Israelis, as suggested by the poll just cited, have been persuaded that the government should continue its use of summary executions.

By way of conclusion, let us recollect what Immanuel Kant had to say about assassinations. In *Perpetual Peace*, Kant outlines six 'prohibitive laws' that need to be followed in order to bring about peace among nations. Three of these laws are considered to be 'strict', that is, a class of laws that holds *regardless of the circumstances* and therefore they also demand immediate implementation.⁶² One of these strict laws states that 'No nation at war

with another shall permit such acts of war as shall make mutual trust impossible during some future time of peace: Such acts include the use of *Assassins*. . . etc'.⁶³ Kant explains that some 'level of trust in the enemy's way of thinking must be preserved even in the midst of war, for otherwise peace can never be concluded and the hostilities would become a war of extermination'. A war of extermination, he adds, would permit perpetual peace to occur only in the vast graveyard of humanity as a whole. While Kant may be overly conclusive, I agree with him that 'such a war, including all means used to wage it, must be absolutely prohibited'.⁶⁴ In this sense, at least, the coverage of extra-judicial executions by the Israeli newspapers is myopic and is sowing dragon's teeth for the future.

Acknowledgements

This article was first presented at the seminar of the Human Rights Program at the University of Chicago, where Jennifer Mitzen offered interesting comments and criticisms. Catherine Rottenberg, Nitza Berkovitch, Dani Filc and Yigal Bronner read earlier drafts of the manuscript and helped me with their insightful suggestions. My research assistant Adi Tal helped collect the articles and other relevant material while the Minerva Institute for Human Rights at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, as well as the Faculty for the Humanities and Social Sciences at Ben-Gurion University, Beer-Sheva, offered the much needed funding. Finally, I would like to thank the Public Committee Against Torture for its assistance.

Notes

¹D. Regev et al., 'The Terrorist was Liquidated from the Air', *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 14 February 2001. This and all the following translations of articles from the Hebrew press are mine.

²B'tselem 'Assassinations – Extra-Judicial Executions', accessed at <http://www.btselem.org/>. Regarding Israel's employment of summary executions during the first Intifada, consult J. Ron, *A License to Kill, Israeli Undercover Operations Against 'Wanted' and Masked Palestinians* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993).

³While the legality of Israel's extra-judicial executions is currently being challenged in the High Court of Justice (see note 5), quite a few scholarly articles dealing with the more general question concerning the legality of assassinations have appeared over the past number of years. These include M.N. Schmitt, 'State-Sponsored Assassinations in International and Domestic Law', *Yale Journal of International Law*, Vol.17 (1992), pp.609–85. P.Zengel, 'Assassination and the Law of Armed Conflict', *Military Law Review*, Vol.131–4 (1991), pp.123–55. L.R. Beres, 'The Permissibility of State-Sponsored Assassinations During Peace and War', *Temple International and Comparative Law Journal*, Vol.5, No.2 (1991), pp.231–49. L.R. Beres, 'On Assassination as Anticipatory Self-Defense: The Case of Israel', *Hofstra Law Review*, Vol.20, No.2., Winter (1991), pp.321–40. T.C. Wingfield, 'Taking Aim at Regime Elites: Assassination, Tyannicide and the Clancy Doctrine', *The Maryland Journal of International Law and Trade*, (Fall 1998/Winter 1999), pp.287–317. R.F. Turner, 'Symposium Legal Responses to International Terrorism: Legal Responses to International Terrorism: Constitutional Constraints of Presidential Power', *Houston Journal of International Law*, Fall (1999), pp.77–91. T. Ward, 'Norms and Security: The Case of International Assassinations', *International Security*, Vol.25, No.1 Summer (2000), pp.105–33.

⁴D. Raviv and Y. Melman, *Every Spy a Prince: The Complete History of Israel's Intelligence Community* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1990). See also Y. Melman, 'Wiping out the Liquidation Policy', *Ha'aretz*, 12 November 2000.

⁵Since January 2001, three different petitions against Israel's policy of extra-judicial executions were filed to the High Court of Justice. The first two petitions *Dr. Siham Thabet v. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon et al.* HCJ 192/01 and *Knesset Member Muhammad Barakeh v. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon et al.* HCJ 5872/01 were dismissed on 29 January 2002, while the third petition *The Public Committee Against Torture et al. v. The Government of Israel et al.* HCJ 769/02 is still pending. In addition, Knesset Members Mosi Raz and Naomi Hazan attempted to stop Israel's assassination policy by introducing a law that forbids it, but the 'Proposed Law for the Protection of Residents of a Foreign State', which was submitted on 12 November 2001, was immediately rejected by the Knesset.

⁶A study put out by Keshev – The Center for the Protection of Democracy in Israel – claimed that with regard to the protests of Palestinians inside Israel and the killing of 13 citizens by the police, the ‘Israeli media contributed to the provocation of public anger and to the sense of fear and risk for Israel’s existence, and perhaps even created these sentiments’. M. Neiger, E. Zandberg and I. Abu-Ra’iyeh, ‘Civil or Ethnic Media? – An Evaluation of the Coverage of the October 2000 Violent Clashes between the Police and Israeli Arab Citizens’ (Tel-Aviv: Keshev, 2000) p.18. Consult also M. Kubti, J. Farah, H. Zu’bi and K. Shkirat, ‘The Israeli Media and the Intifada’ (Haifa: LAW, The Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment, 2000); and D. Dor, *Newspapers Under the Influence* (Tel-Aviv: Babel, 2001) (In Hebrew). For a more wide-ranging study about the Israeli media vis-à-vis the first Intifada: consult A.A. Cohen and G. Wolfsfeld (eds.), *Framing the Intifada: People and the Media* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1993).

⁷Kubti et al. (note 6).

⁸Dor (note 6), p.11.

⁹Amnesty International, ‘Israel and the Occupied Territories: State Assassinations and Other Unlawful Killings’, 21 Feb. 2001; Amnesty International press releases, ‘Israel/Occupied Territories: Amnesty International Condemns State Assassinations’, 21 Feb. 2001, ‘Israel/Occupied Territories: State Assassination Policy Must Stop’, 4 July 2001; Human Rights Watch press release, ‘Israel: End “Liquidations” of Palestinian Suspects’, 29 Jan. 2001; B’Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, ‘Israel’s Assassination Policy: Extra Judicial Executions’, Position Paper, January 2001; The Public Committee Against Torture in Israel and LAW, The Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment, *The Assassination Policy of the State of Israel, November 2001–January 2002*, June 2002.

¹⁰B’tselem, ‘Israel’s Assassination Policy: Extra Judicial Executions’ (note 9), p.12.

¹¹For a discussion about the denial of human rights abuses in Israel consult S. Cohen, *Denial and Acknowledgment: The Impact of Information About Human Rights Violations* (Jerusalem: Center for Human Rights, Hebrew University, 1995).

¹²R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

¹³The figure of 47 people does neither include the many bystanders who had been killed nor those who had been wounded. Consult B’tselem ‘Assassinations – Extra-Judicial Executions’ at <http://www.btselem.org>. The newspapers covered 31 of these executions.

¹⁴The titles were taken from the 6 May 2001 edition of the newspapers.

¹⁵H. White, ‘The Historical Text as Literary Artifact’, in H. White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John University Press, 1985), p.83.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p.90.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p.91.

¹⁸M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p.154. Obviously, there are major ontological and epistemological differences between Foucault’s and White’s most basic assumptions, regarding, for example, the notion of ‘real events’. Whereas for Foucault ‘real events’ are discursively constituted, for White reality precedes language. Consult M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1993); and H. White, ‘The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory’, *History and Theory*, Vol.23 (February, 1984), pp.1–33.

¹⁹As an institution that is discursively constituted, journalism has during a particular historical period a specific mandate that isolates objects of observations (e.g., which events are considered news); it has particular regulations governing acceptable practices (e.g., whether one asks for a response from a person who is criticised in an article); and a defined membership that determines who should be considered a reporter, editor, etc. Foucault, however, qualifies this claim when he suggests, for example, that statements constituting a specific mandate cannot be considered autonomous units. Rather statements gain meaning as they cut ‘across a domain of structures and possible unities, and which reveals them, with concrete contents in time and space’. So while journalism is constituted by statements (that determine its mandate, membership, etc.), a statement is dependent on the institution of journalism for its meaning (the statement ‘this is not news’ gains meaning within the context of journalism). Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (note 18), p.87.

²⁰On the one hand, the emplotment that constitutes the narrative is not apparent. The persuasive power of the articles depends on their ability to present all of the information they introduce as if it were naturally rather than artificially concatenated. On the other hand, all narratives are a product of an emplotment, indicating that every article in the newspaper is made up of some kind of artificial unison of disparate information that had been gathered and joined together. Certain information is always suppressed, and other information is highlighted through repetition, variation of tone, etc. In this sense all reportage articles are alike; those covering extra-judicial executions are similar to articles covering sports and the stock market. Accordingly, the claim that an article is made up of an emplotment or fictitious unity is, perhaps, trivial; it does not have

a necessary bearing on the article's value, and in and of itself lacks moral content. Nonetheless, this claim is in no way banal, for it problematises the idea of neutral journalism, revealing that the articles are both informed by the power relations circulating in society and simultaneously serving these relations. Consequently, the question that concerns me here is not to determine whether the articles describing Israeli assassinations are a product of a particular emplotment, but rather to disclose some of the features characterising the specific plot structure that informs these articles and to reveal how it operates in order to advance a certain political agenda. To do so I will not only disclose how the narrative is constructed, but also reveal the subtext that it engenders.

²¹Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (note 18), p.94.

²²Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, Colin Gordon (ed.) (New York: Vintage, 1980), p.101.

²³For an interpretation of Foucault's notion of ubiquitous power that leaves room for human agency consult N. Gordon, 'Foucault's Subject: An Ontological Reading', *Polity*, Vol.31, Number 3 (1999), pp.395–414; and N. Gordon, 'On Visibility and Power: An Arendtian Corrective of Foucault', *Human Studies*, Vol.25, No.2 (2002), pp.125–45.

²⁴On 1 June 2001, 21 people were killed and 120 wounded when a suicide bomber blew himself up outside a disco near Tel Aviv's Dolphinarium along the seafront promenade just before midnight, while standing in a large group of teenagers waiting to enter the disco. On 9 August 2001, 15 people were killed, including 7 children, and about 130 injured in a suicide bombing at the Sbarro pizzeria on the corner of King George Street and Jaffa Road in the center of Jerusalem. On 27 May 2002, 29 people were killed and 140 injured – 20 seriously – in a suicide bombing in the Park Hotel in the coastal city of Netanya, in the midst of the Passover holiday seder. The numbers of those killed do not include the attackers. For more information consult <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0i5d0>.

²⁵A. Harel et al., 'IDF killed the two Hamas leaders in Samaria and 6 Palestinians', *Ha'aretz*, 1 Aug. 2001; A. Harel, 'Israel renewed its assassinations: killed a senior Hamas Member in Qalqilya', *Ha'aretz*, 15 Oct. 2001; A. Harel et al. 'A Hamas activist was killed in Nablus; the [Palestinian] Authority: this is an Israeli assassination', *Ha'aretz*, 16 Oct. 2001; A. Harel, 'In Nablus: Israel assassinated a senior Hamas member', *Ha'aretz*, 23 Oct. 2001; Y. Limor et al., '2 Helicopter missiles liquidated the senior Hamas member', *Ma'ariv*, 1 Nov. 2001; A. Harel, 'Apache helicopters fired at the car; Abu Hunoud was identified only as a result of a scar', *Ha'aretz*, 25 Nov. 2001

²⁶A partial list compiled from the articles examined in this research project.

²⁷Regarding the definition of terrorism in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict consult N. Gordon and G. Lopez, 'Terrorism in the Arab-Israeli Conflict' in Andrew Valls (ed.), *Ethics in International Affairs: Theories and Cases*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

²⁸A. Harel and A. Hass, 'Israel assassinated a Palestinian commander; Fatah: Revenge will follow', *Ha'aretz*, 10 Nov. 2000.

²⁹A. Harel, 'IDF soldiers ambushed a senior Fatah member near Rafah – he and three others were shot to death', *Ha'aretz*, 23 Nov. 2000.

³⁰A. Rapaport and D. Regev, 'Liquidation in Gaza', *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 23 Nov. 2000.

³¹Y. Limor and E. Bohanda, 'A senior member of the Tanzim was liquidated in a salvo of fire from the ambush', *Ma'ariv*, 23 Nov. 2000.

³²In the printed report describing IDF activities on 22 November 2000, the day Abd a-Razzek was assassinated, the spokesperson was more laconic: 'During an operation initiated by the IDF in the Morag region, the IDF killed a senior member of the Fatah Tanzim, Jamal Abd al-Qader Hassan Abd a Razzek, while attempting to arrest him as he was riding a car on the road connecting Rafah and Han Yunis and trying to drive through a military checkpoint. In this incident three other terrorists were killed. The military spokesperson emphasizes that the IDF forces will continue to operate in a determined and precise was against terrorist targets and will attack any element that risks the lives of Israeli citizens'. IDF Spokesperson press release, 22 Nov. 2000.

³³'According to the I.D.F. (February 1991), some 75,000 Palestinians had been arrested during the first three years of the Intifada, of whom a yearly average of 15,000 were actually charged each year'. S. Cohen and D. Golan, *The Interrogation of Palestinians During the Intifada: Ill Treatment, 'Moderate Physical Pressure' or Torture?* (Jerusalem: B'tselem, 1991). In *Administrative Detention in the Occupied Territories Since the Beginning of the Intifada*, (Jerusalem: B'tselem 1992) it is noted, 'over 14,000 administrative detention orders have been issued to Palestinians since the beginning of the Intifada'.

³⁴Of the 30 assassinations covered by *Ha'aretz*, only 12 include personal information about the targeted person, other than his age and place of residence. *Ma'ariv* includes personal information in 10 cases out of the 27 that it covered, while *Yedioth Ahronoth* relates personal information in only 6 of the 24 cases it covered.

³⁵There are, nonetheless, quite a few differences between the articles covering criminal and extra-judicial incidents, of which I will mention only three here. First, the criminal suspect is alive. Second, the Israeli government intends to try them. Finally, the government wishes to incarcerate them. These distinctions suggest that the information conveyed has a somewhat different objective.

- ³⁶People on the lists of the 'wanted people' that Israel handed over to the Palestinians are usually those that it assassinates. See, for example, Y. Limor, 'The list of wanted people – Liquidation candidates', *Ma'ariv*, 6 Aug. 2001. There have been, however, cases of assassination attempts of people who did not appear on a list. See, for example N. Gordon, 'Israel's Enemy Within', *In These Times*, 21 Jan. 2002.
- ³⁷Y. Limor et al., 'Liquidation in the phone booth', *Ma'ariv*, 6 April 2001.
- ³⁸Title of an article describing the assassination of Yasser Asira; R. Shaked et al., 'The end of a ticking bomb', *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 2 Nov. 2001.
- ³⁹Raviv and Melman (note 4).
- ⁴⁰In *Ma'ariv*, in only one case out of the first eight, it is mentioned that the targeted person planned to carry out an attack against Israelis, whereas of the remaining 20 incidents covered by *Ma'ariv* in 17 of them this information is conveyed. In *Yedioth Ahronoth* again, up until the assassination of Thabet Thabet in only one incident is it mentioned that the targeted person planned to carry out the attack, whereas in 13 of the remaining 17 incidents it covered this information is conveyed.
- ⁴¹Y. Limor et al. 'Liquidation in a telephone booth', *Ma'ariv*, 6 April 2001; H. Shlain and I. Saban, ' Hamas commander in Bethlehem was liquidated together with his deputy', *Ma'ariv*, 18 July 2001; E. Kamir et al. 'The attack on Nablus "saved the lives of hundreds of Israelis"', *Ma'ariv*, 1 Aug. 2001; Y. Limor et al., 'The one responsible for the bloody attack on the Dolphinarium was liquidated', *Ma'ariv*, 15 Oct. 2001.
- ⁴²*Dr. Siham Thabet v. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon et al.*, HCJ 192/01.
- ⁴³In IDF press release from 17 July 2001 it is stated that 'the air force struck the leader of Hamas's military arm in the Bethlehem region, while he was near his home in Bethlehem, and in this way prevented with certainty an attempt to carry out an attack against Israeli citizens within the green line'. In its press release from 25 July 2001 the spokesperson states that 'IDF forces hit Salah Darawzeh this afternoon, a senior Hamas terrorist, who is among the Hamas leadership in Nablus. Darawzeh was recently a major instigator in planning and coordinating Hamas terrorist activities in Nablus, and participated in preparing a large exhibitory attack against Israeli citizens within the green line'.
- ⁴⁴The term had already been familiar to the Israeli public due to the debate concerning torture; then too the torture victim was conceived of as a 'ticking bomb'.
- ⁴⁵R. Shaked, 'The price might be too high', *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 1 Aug. 2001.
- ⁴⁶Y. Sarid, 'Liquidating the opportunity', *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 1 Aug. 2001.
- ⁴⁷M. Foucault, *Power* (ed.), James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 2000), pp.210-22.
- ⁴⁸Talmud, tractate Sanhedrin, p.72a.
- ⁴⁹Ron (note 2).
- ⁵⁰B'tselem Position Paper, *Legislation Allowing the Use of Physical Force and Mental Coercion in Interrogations by the General Security Service* (Jerusalem: B'tselem, 2000).
- ⁵¹Y. Limor and E. Bohanda, 'The First Liquidation of the Sharon Government', *Ma'ariv*, 3 April 2001.
- ⁵²A. Harel, 'A helicopter fired three missiles towards the 7 story building and demolished the Hamas headquarters in Nablus', *Ha'aretz*, 1 Aug. 2001.
- ⁵³R. Shaked, 'The initiation return to the IDF', *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 10 Nov. 2000.
- ⁵⁴Y. Limor et al., 'Wanted person no.1 was liquidated – the terrorist who has the blood of 48 Israelis on his hands', *Ma'ariv*, 23 Oct. 2001.
- ⁵⁵A. Fishman, 'Brilliant operation', *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 6 April 2001.
- ⁵⁶Y. Limor et al., 'Liquidation in the phone booth', *Ma'ariv*, 6 April 2001.
- ⁵⁷A. Fishman, 'Decision from the stomach', *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 28 Aug. 2001.
- ⁵⁸R. Shaked et al., 'The Assassination that shook the [Palestinian] Authority', *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 28 Aug. 2001. Interestingly, this is the only article in *Yedioth Ahronoth* in which the word assassination rather than liquidation appears in the title.
- ⁵⁹For more on the different representation of Jews and Palestinians in the Israeli media see Dor (note 6) and Neiger et al. (note 6).
- ⁶⁰Many commentary articles also state that the extra-judicial executions engender more attacks inside Israel. Consider, for example, R. Man, 'Liquidation and telephone lines', *Ma'ariv*, 6 April 2001; Y. Sarid, 'Liquidating the opportunity', *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 1 Aug. 2001.
- ⁶¹S. Plotzker, 'Angry, So Liquidate', *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 7 Dec. 2001.
- ⁶²I. Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), p.110.
- ⁶³*Ibid.*, pp.109–10.
- ⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p.110.