Term project

COMM 409

Renata Carlos Daou

#### Analysis of the News Coverage Of the Ariel Sharon visit to Temple Mount

#### Introduction

#### The Israel Palestinian conflict has been going on for more than 20 years. There were two major uprisings during the conflicts, known as the intifadas (also spelled as intifadah.) The second intifada, more deadly and violent than the first, is considered to have started after Ariel Sharon, Likud’s prime ministerial candidate, visited Temple Mount in Jerusalem (Bader, n.d.). The visit was seen by many as an Israeli attempt to establish Israel’s sovereignty over the Al-Aqṣā Mosque, the third holiest site of Islam, which caused riots to break out and the second intifada to start (Bader, n.d.).

#### News media outlets had difficulties while reporting on this topic, as it is a sensitive case that can result in outrage. Historically, traditional research implies that American and western reports tend to favor Israeli perspectives while Arab news media have favored Palestinian perspectives, discounting and muting Israeli voices (Elmasry et al., 2013). When analyzing Arab news media such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, it was found that both networks favored Palestinians as victims and Israelis as aggressors. There were differences, however in how they viewed the different actors in the conflict (Elmasry et al., 2013). It is not clear if this is the case to all news coverage.

#### In this paper, I will analyze the coverage of the visit of Ariel Sharon to Temple Mount. I will be analyzing coverage from news medias across the world, ranging from the American New York Times, the British The Guardian, the Palestinian Palestine Chronicles, the Israeli The Jerusalem Post, among others. I will analyze their choice of sources, speculation, evolution, descriptions, and framing. In addition, I will provide an ethical analysis of their choices and the implications.

#### One thing that is important to note, is that that none of the Arab newspapers I found talking about the event contain the name of the authors. This could be happening to avoid a crackdown from both sides of the conflicts as both the Israeli soldiers and the Palestine Authority have a history of abusing and arresting journalists who criticize them (HRW, 2016), but nothing is confirmed.

#### Another interesting thing about Arab newspapers is that there wasn’t any newspapers in English from 2000 that reported on the visit. The majority are from years later, either recounting how the second intifada happened or talking about what happened in the 20 years since the event. There are Arab newspapers in English since the 90s but none of them reported on the Ariel Sharon visit to Temple Mount when it happened. The newspapers I retrieved from databases are referring to the visit years after it happened.

#### Analysis

#### Sources

The sources used to report on the visit of Ariel Sharon to Temple Mount are similar among the Western media. They use a mix of official and unofficial sources in order to portray both what the Israeli official Sharon considers to be the motive of the visit, what Yasser Araf, the leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization believes, as well as what Faisal Husseini, the top Palestinian official in Jerusalem, says. Sharon is quoted in all four media outlets analyzed: the American New York Times and CNN, and the British The Guardian and BBC. The only difference is that during the CNN on air coverage it cites a spokesman of Sharon instead. All four media outlets also use unofficial sources, such as quotes from the Palestinians who were protesting the visit of Sharon to the Temple. Quotes such as “God is great!” (Greenberg, 2000) and “murderer” (Goldenberg, 2000) by the Palestinian youth, might be impossible to prove, but are still necessary to express the sentiment of those affected by the visit.

The sources used with Israeli newspapers are different from the Western media. While the Western media uses informal sources to portray what the Palestinians were feeling, the Israeli news media focuses only on formal sources. Among the people cited are the Internal Security and Acting Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami, Palestinian Preventive Security Service chief Jibril Rajoub, Marwan Barghouteh, a senior West Bank Fatah leader, Likud spokesman Ofir Akounis, David Tsur, head of the Internal Security Ministry's operations branch, and Gaza Preventive Security Service chief Mohammad Dahlan.

The use of such a variety of sources helps provide a broader perspective of the situation. Some of those sources believe that Sharon was being deliberately provocative while others believe the roots of the uprising were other. However, the majority of sources are being used to collaborate to the idea that maybe Sharon had authorization to enter Temple Mount and that the visit was not a deliberately trying to provoke Palestinians.

In the Arab newspapers, however, sometimes seem unclear about who their sources are. Since the stories mostly mention the Ariel Sharon visit to Temple Mount as an event in the past, it is usually not cited where the information came from. When sources are cited, they are mostly formal and come from official sources. The Palestinian News Network (PNN), for example, cites Tayseer Khaled a member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Since he is the only one cited in this particular article, the interpretation is narrowed to his point of view. The readers become inclined to follow what the “main character” in this case is saying.

While retelling the story of the second intifada, Al-Jazeera takes a different approach than PNN. They provide multiple sources for interpretation of the event, maintaining that all of them are official. To explain the beginning and development of the second intifada, al-Jazeera cites groups like Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) to explain, for example, the reaction of Palestinians to the occupation of territories by Israel, and the United Nations, to affirm the idea of two states, Israel and Palestine. Even with the use of multiple sources, al-Jazeera still pushes towards favoring Palestinians, as all the sources seem to collaborate to build the idea that Israel keeps breaking the accords and occupying the Palestinian spaces.

#### Rhetoric & Speculation

The title of most western news media coverage already implies the blame is on Sharon for the beginning of the second intifada. When using phrases such as “Sharon Touches a Nerve” in the New York Times (Greenberg, 2000) and “'Provocative' mosque visit sparks riots” on BBC (BBC, 2000) those news media companies are already closing off the dialogue for interpretation that maybe Sharon is not to blame for the uprising, his visit could have been innocent and the uprising was an accident.

While using the direct quotes from Sharon, all western news media outlets are providing Sharon with the opportunity to avoid implying that it was not his intention to provoke Palestinians. In those statements, Sharon claims that “What provocation is there when Jews come to visit the place with a message of peace?” (Goldenberg, 2000). He is trying to say that it is only fair that Jewish people visit Muslim temples as Muslims are welcome in any part of Israel. However, usually the statement by Sharon is being placed at the end of the articles, when most readers already stopped reading. Only BBC places the statement by Sharon close to the middle.

In addition, the statement by Sharon which implies that his intention was not provocative, are often overshadowed by statements that lean towards the idea that Sharon’s visit was a deliberate attempt to provoke the Palestinian people. BBC, for example, reports that Sharon had a “highly controversial tour of the mosque compound early this morning” (BBC, 2000). The Guardian follows a similar patter with “Ariel Sharon staged a provocative visit to a Muslim shrine at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” (Goldenberg, 2000). All western news media companies analyzed contain similar phrases, showing that they do shift the blame of the beginning of the second intifada to Sharon. They are trying to speculate Sharon’s intention to provoke.

The use of testimonials by Palestinian authorities reinforces this point. The New York Times, for example, quote Faisal Husseini when he says, “Mr. Sharon's visit was 'a direct attempt to derail the peace process and an attempt to inflame the whole region,’' which reinforces the point already made that the visit was purposeful, and the results were intentional.

In the two articles by the Israeli newspaper The Jerusalem Post, it is not as clear that Sharon is to blame for the protests, as it is in the Western newspapers. The speculation is at first about who is telling the truth. Did Rajoud actually warn about what the visit could mean? There were two versions of the story, one by Internal Security and Acting Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Am and another from Preventive Security Service chief Jibril Rajoub himself. The use of multiple sources provides multiple perspectives on what they believe to be the cause of the protests. Unlike the western media, they try to weight other possibilities for the start of the protests, not directly linked to Sharon’s visit to the temple.

The use of multiple testimonials is used to diverge the idea that the second intifada was started with Sharon’s visit to the temple. Spokesmen to Sharon also claims that the police approved the visit to Temple Mount (Lahoud et al, 2000). In addition, Tsur claims that “Sharon's visit was not expected to be used as a "platform" for the riots that ensued,” (Lahoud et al, 2000). Dahlan also claims that the protests had other reasons as “the riots erupted following Friday prayers because armed border policemen entered the Wakf compound and started shooting at stone throwers,” (Lahoud et al, 2000). All those sources together are put there to prove that not only is unclear of whether or not Sharon’s visit actually caused the riots, but also it probably wasn’t the only reason. Adding to that, the claims by Ben-Ami that Rajoud said that "there was no reason for concern" about his visit to Mount Temple (Lahoud et al, 2000), are trying to shift the blame to prove that the decision was not made by Sharon alone.

In very few moments it is cited in either of the articles by The Jerusalem Post that the visit was provocative or intentional to cause unrest. Instead, the focus is on trying to prove that the cause of unrest has nothing to do with Sharon. Rajoud cites it as provocative but is still implied that it was not intentionally provocative. Barghouteh is the only one cited as believing that the visit was intentional to cause unrest. However, the following sentence seems to be put in place to prove that the allegation is not true (Lahoud et al, 2000).

First, we have the following quote directly from Barghouteh “We know that Sharon wants to provoke a confrontation, but we can not ignore the visit ...at such a sensitive time in the peace process... after all, it's Fatah that is fighting in the negotiations for Palestinian sovereignty over the [Temple Mount]. Should riots erupt and Palestinians get injured, the protests will spread to the West Bank and Gaza and turn violent” (Lahoud et al, 2000). Following his quote, we have the sentence that implies that his line of thought is unreasonable. “Legally, Sharon has the right as a Knesset member to visit any place in Israel” (Lahoud et al, 2000). The idea behind putting those sentences together is to show that Sharon was not wrong to visit the temple and seems like an attempt to shift the blame.

Similarly to the Western newspapers, the Palestinian newspapers also imply that the blame for the second intifada lies on Sharon. In the al-Jazeera newpaper, right under the title we see the description of the visit. When the author says that the visit was “a highly provocative move by Israeli politician Ariel Sharon was the act that triggered the second Intifada,” (al-Jazeera, 2003), it is clear that there is no intent to find alternative causes for the riots. It already leads the readers to take Sharon as responsible and the word “provocative” shows how this was a deliberate attempt to get a reaction out of the Palestinian population. The blame to the movement is already set on Sharon.

The Palestine Chronicle also follows this same pattern. They mention that “visits to the compound by Israeli officials are rare and extremely sensitive” (The Palestine Chronicle, 2009) when referring to the visit of the right-wing politician Ariel Sharon. In the Palestine Chronicle it is also explicitly stated that the al-Aqsa intifada happened as a direct result to his visit to Temple Mount. In this article, Sharon is also used an example to explain why the visit of Internal Security Minister Yitzhak Aharonovitch to the temple can also be considered extremely sensitive and can generate anger (The Palestine Chronicle, 2009).

The Palestine News Network does the same thing as The Palestine Chronicle when it implies that the new policies of the Tel Aviv government in occupied Israel might have similar consequences. Both news sources use the visit of Sharon to the temple as a blueprint of what is going to happen if these other Israeli figures also visit the temple. Through the wording, it is implied that Sharon’s visit was deliberate and that his intention was to cause riots. By explaining this in addition to the explanation that the Israeli authorities continue to disrespect what is considered Islam’s third holiest site, they are trying to push forward the idea of the Palestinians as victims of the Israeli government.

#### Evolution & Descriptions

All stories by western media start with a summary of what happened, before launching on the significance of the actions, back to the protest, and coming back again to the implications of the actions. This back and forth set up helps people understand why the visit was significant, as well as getting a background on what was going on. While explaining the significance of the actions, the western media pull the rhetoric and speculation, using the ideas of what just happened to push forward that Sharon is to blame for the uprising.

For example, the New York Times coverage implies juxtaposition of his intentions in “Ordinary Israelis can visit the Temple Mount like any other tourists, although most Orthodox rabbis have forbidden entry because of the area's special sanctity under Jewish law. But Mr. Sharon, who has a provocative reputation among Palestinians, is no ordinary Israeli. Among other things, he owns a home in a Muslim neighborhood of the Old City” (Greenberg, 2000). While reading this quote and later reading Sharon’s declaration that his intention was just to visit a temple that he has the right to do, the reader was already led to believe that his intentions weren’t as pure as he claims. The evolution of the article is set up to lead the reader to place the blame of the protests on Sharon.

#### In addition to the evolution of the pieces, we also have the descriptions of what happened. In all the western news coverages analyzed, the Palestinian are first portrayed as throwing stones at the Israeli soldiers, who quickly responded with rubber bullets. Descriptions such as “He came down 45 minutes later, leaving a trail of fury,” (Goldenberg, 2000) by the Guardian still seem to favor Palestinians.

#### In the Jerusalem Times, the evolution of the story differs from the ones in the western newspapers. The first story from the Jerusalem times starts with a statement that Sharon was authorized to be there. This seems to set the tone that the uprisings were not his fault. The debate continues, until is followed by a very brief description of what happened in the confrontations. The second story, however, was written the day the visit happened. It starts with the explanations of the confrontations, of why it could be considered provocative, followed by why is not provocative with Fatah’s response, and an explanation of the right of Sharon to be there. This seems to put the idea that Fatah’s response was unreasonable.

#### First, the authors used the following “Fatah has organized scores of Fatah youth to come to the Temple Mount "to protect the site," where two of Islam's most sacred shrines are located,” (Lahoud et al, 2000) to present an action taken by a Palestinian Authority. After that, they present this sentence: “Legally, Sharon has the right as a Knesset member to visit any place in Israel,” (Lahoud et al, 2000). The two sentences together, in this order, shows to the reader that Sharon’s action is nothing but his right and the actions taken by Fatah seem unreasonable.

#### Additionally, unlike the western media, the descriptions of the riots seem to show much more self-defense by the Israelis. In the sentence “riots erupted following Friday prayers because armed border policemen entered the Wakf compound and started shooting at stone throwers,” (Lahoud et al, 2000) it seems evident that the only reason the police was involved was as a result of actions already taken by protestors.

#### All the three Arab news media used the recounting of Sharon’s visit with the objective to show how the Israeli visits to the temple are sensitive and caused the riots that led to the second intifada. Both the Palestine Chronicle and the Palestine News Network start with a recounting of what the current problem is in order to set the scene of present in comparison to the past visit by Sharon. Both are related to an Israeli official and their actions towards the Palestinian Territories, more specifically the al-Aqsa mosque. After explaining the news and the significance, both news media go on to explain why it is believed that such visits would cause arrest. This is the point where they bring back Sharon’s visit to Temple Mount. This can be seen in the quote “the encouragement of the Israeli government of settlers and the official Israeli extremists and others incursions into the courtyards of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the planned displacement and ethnic cleansing of Palestinian citizens in and around occupied Jerusalem to empty the area of ​​its residents and turn it into a vital area for settlement activities, which would deteriorate the situation in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank , just as the provocative visit by former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon twenty years ago constituted the spark that ignited the second Palestinian intifada, with the losses of property , infrastructure and of life from both the Palestinian and Israeli sides,” (PNN, 2020). This shows how even 20 years later, the visit is still sensitive. The highlight of the importance of the temple to Muslims and the explanation of how the presence of Israeli officials is unsettling to the Palestinian population is evidenced by the historical account of the Temple Mount visit that set off the second intifada.

#### Al-Jazeera, while reporting on the second intifada as a whole, gives descriptions about the feelings that the people had that lead them to revolt. In the quote “the Intifada was – and still is – an expression of a deep disappointment and frustration over the ongoing disrespect and denial of basic rights for Palestinians caused by the occupation – including the right to free access to Jerusalem, security and development, and the refugees’ right to return,” (al-Jazeera, 2003) shows that what is considered a disrespectful visit to a sacred temple to Muslims was just the tipping point to a much larger feeling. However, the blame is still stated and placed on Sharon as the person at fault for provoking Palestinians enough to riot.

#### Framing

The framing adopted through all western news media coverage is responsibility framing. From the title to the end, it implies that Sharon knew what he was doing, and he did it deliberately. It puts the responsibility of the uprising on Sharon as he is described as provocative, and it is stated in the New York Times, for example, that “Mr. Sharon used his visit to criticize what he called concessions on Jerusalem by Prime Minister Ehud Barak, the tour seemed no less an attempt to upstage Benjamin Netanyahu” (Greenberg, 2000).

In The Jerusalem Post, there is also a responsibility frame, but instead of focusing the blame on an individual level and blaming Sharon, the blame is thematic. The blame is shifted to already existent tensions between Israel and Palestine, it is explained that the visit was authorized, and that there were already protests going on. The fault here is not really put on Sharon, like it happened in the Western media and, instead, alternatives were sought. The blame is now on a societal level, no longer on the individual.

Like all the other western newspapers, the Arab newspapers also adopt a responsibility frame. They all blame Sharon as the individual responsible for all the unrest, with an addition. They also blame other Israeli officials for other riots with a context similar to Sharon’s visit to Temple Mount. Sharon’s visit is stated as purposeful and he is the one blamed for the unrest, much like the other Israeli officials that are implied as not caring and acting on purpose to provoke.

One thing we can identify as different is that while Sharon is solely blamed for the unrest, the others seem to be more about the general Israeli government. For what happened in 2000, the blame is entirely placed on Sharon, saying that his provocative visit is the cause of the Second Intifada and “losses of property, infrastructure and of life from both the Palestinian and Israeli sides” (PNN, 2020).

#### Conclusion & Interpretation

#### In the case of Ariel Sharon’s visit to Temple Mount we can see that the newspapers don’t follow the pattern identified in previous research for the Israeli-Palestinian coverage. While historically, traditional research implies that American and western reports tend to favor Israeli perspectives while Arab news media have favored Palestinian perspectives (Elmasry et al., 2013), in this case, western media mostly place the blame of the uprising on what is considered Sharon’s provocative nature and it is generally implied that his visit was purposeful, and his intent was to instigate the Palestinian population. The Arab news networks also favor this view, while the Israeli news organizations focus more on others.

#### The coverage of the beginning of the second intifada has flaws and raised ethical issues. The first issue involves transparency and truthfulness. Transparency implies openness in communication. It means being clear about the intentions and actions. The transparency allows us, as rational human beings, to assess each other’s behavior. This is directly applied in Sharon’s case. It is not clear what was his true intentions for visiting Temple Mount. His visit is founded on speculation. What he says can’t be taken as absolutely true, which also causes a problem. Sharon is not transparent about his intentions, which leaves a lot of room for interpretation. The Palestinian youth, for example, interpreted his visit as an offense. Husseini interpreted it as an attempt to disturb the peace (Greenberg, 200). Barghouteh interpreted it as an intentional act intended to cause unrest (Lahoud et al, 2000). Tsur, on the other hand, believes that the visit is not a platform for the riots (Lahoud et al, 2000).

#### It might be hard for newspapers to pinpoint which figures are telling the truth and which are trying to push their own agenda. The best way to ensure transparency, in my opinion, seems to be to broaden the choice of sources. The Jerusalem Post, for example, did provide both sides of the possible interpretation about Sharon’s visit: they had sources that believed that Sharon was to blame for the beginning of the unrest (Barghouteh) and sources that believed that he was innocent (Tsur). To be even more transparent, both sources should receive the same amount of space and attention. Newspapers should also add the voice of the Palestinian youth like the New York Times did. It would be better and more transparent about what the youth really want instead of just assuming through movement leaders. Those steps are necessary to provide the readers with the basic journalistic mission: provide the population with the information necessary so they can make their own conclusions out of the situation.

#### Another ethical problem involves autonomy. Moral autonomy evolves the ability to control our own actions in a way that shows we have an understanding of our obligations. This seems to be applied more to Arab and Israeli newspapers. Considering that the majority of readers of Arab newspapers are from countries that support Palestine and that the majority of readers from the Israeli newspapers are from Israel, it makes sense that those newspapers also follow the inclinations that their readers have. This is a problem, as the news media become dependent on public opinion for their pieces. This becomes even trickier as most sources available for the Israeli newspapers, for example, are Israeli leaders, and most sources available for the Arab newspapers are part of the Palestinian authorities. Leaning towards the other side of the spectrum might cause controversies in the countries that these newspapers are originally from but is necessary that they report it as impartially as possible and avoid following a pre-defined bias. This ensures that the news presented follow the Society of Professional Journalists to act independently.

#### When it comes to western media, research done by the International Communication Gazette says that the journalists interviewed think it is difficult to find unbiased sources. According to the research “there are various reasons for the predominance of Israeli sources. First, there is the well-functioning Israeli PR machine that distributes loads of information. Second, there is the fact that the correspondents tend to favour the Israeli point of view,” (Deprez, 2010). Due to a facility of contact with Israeli sources, some journalists might become inclined to favor the Israeli point of view. However, throughout the analysis of the western media coverage of Sharon’s visit to Temple Mount, the big news media companies have been able to contact members of the Palestinian authorities and officials, which might help in their mission to remain autonomous.

#### The last ethical issue is justice. To be fair in their reporting, journalists should adopt Rawls’ concept of the “veil of ignorance.” Under the veil, since no one knows where they are in society, freedom is prioritized and social-economic inequalities are arranged in a way that the least advantaged will benefit. If journalists apply this veil, reporting for Sharon’s visit would be fairer. This is for all the news media, no matter where in the world. It is important to report on what is going on, and not condemn an individual for action. One example would be to let the readers decide what to make out of the events. In this case, not condemn Sharon for the riots so promptly and not condemn the protestors as “unreasonable”. It is important for journalists to report what happened, the direct reactions of the events, and let the readers decide whether or not Sharon was the cause of the riots. In the case of the Israeli soldiers shooting rubber bullets into the protestors, don’t put the fault in the protestors' actions and let the readers decide if the reaction of both the protestors and the soldiers were appropriate.

#### References

#### Bader, A. (n.d.). Intifada. Palestinian-Israeli History. *Britannica.* Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/intifadah>

#### Deprez, A., Raeymaeckers, K. (2010) Bias in the News? The Representation of Palestinians and Israelis in the Coverage of the First and Second Intifada. *International Communication Gazette*. Retrieved from Sage Journals

Elmasry, M., Shamy, A., Manning, P., Mills, A., Auter, P. (2013). Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya framing of the Israel– Palestine conflict during war and calm periods. *The International Communication Gazette, volume 75 (issue 8).* Retrieved from Sage Journals

Goldenberg, S. (2000). Rioting as Sharon visits Islam holy site. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/sep/29/israel>

Greenberg, Joel. (2000). Sharon Touches a Nerve, and Jerusalem Explodes. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/09/29/world/sharon-touches-a-nerve-and-jerusalem-explodes.html>

Hanna, M., Brahimi, R., (2000). Violence at Temple Mount After Sharon Visit*. CNN* international. Retrieved from Lexi Uni database.

Israel Minister’s Visit to al-Aqsa Sparks Anger. (2009). *The Palestine Chronicle*. Retrieved from <https://www.palestinechronicle.com/israel-ministers-visit-to-al-aqsa-sparks-anger/>

Khaled calls for unity in struggle against occupation on Al-Aqsa Intifada anniversary.  (2020). *Palestine News Network (PNN) - English.*Retrieved from Lexi Uni database.

Lahoud, L., Lefkovits, E., Gilbert, N. (2000). Rajoub warns of riots if Sharon visits Temple Mount today. *The Jerusalem Post.*Retrieved from Lexi Uni database

Lahoud, L., Gilbert, N. (2000). Ben-Ami: Rajoub said Sharon Temple Mount visit would pose no problem. *The Jerusalem Post.*Retrieved from Lexi Uni database

Palestine: Crackdown on Journalists, Activists. (2016). Chilling Effect on Free Expression. *Human Rights Watch*. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/08/30/palestine-crackdown-journalists-activists>

‘Provocative’ mosque visit sparks riots (2000). *BBC.* Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/september/28/newsid_3687000/3687762.stm>

The Second Intifada. (2003). *Al-Jazeera.* Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2003/12/4/the-second-intifada>