

Comparative Representations of the Middle East: National Values and Russian State-aligned Media

Heywood, E

Author post-print (accepted) deposited by Coventry University's Repository

Original citation & hyperlink:

Heywood, E 2015, 'Comparative Representations of the Middle East: National Values and Russian State-aligned Media' *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, vol 23, no. 2-3, pp. 195-211

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0965156X.2015.1116792>

DOI 10.1080/0965156X.2015.1116792

ISSN 2573-9638

ESSN 2573-9646

Publisher: Taylor and Francis

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe on 21st December 2017, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/0965156X.2015.1116792>

Copyright © and Moral Rights are retained by the author(s) and/ or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This item cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

This document is the author's post-print version, incorporating any revisions agreed during the peer-review process. Some differences between the published version and this version may remain and you are advised to consult the published version if you wish to cite from it.

Comparative Representations of the Middle East: National Values and Russian State-aligned Media

Emma Heywood

Situating its analysis post-cold war and post-9/11, this paper examines how Russian state-aligned media coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (2006-08) not only reports the events as they unfold but also reveals specific national values as the state seeks to establish an international and diplomatic role for itself. It provides the example of a country in the process of transition a decade and a half after the collapse of the Soviet system and discusses findings from both quantitative and qualitative investigations conducted over a two-year period of analysis. Using news values and agenda-setting as the methodological framework, the paper draws on additional comparative research into similar coverage by France’s 20 Heures and BBC’s News at Ten to emphasize how, in portrayals of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Russian state-aligned media is widely employed as an instrument within Putin’s nation-building campaign.

Key words: news values; foreign conflict; television; Russia; France; BBC

Introduction

This essay provides an understanding of how news from the Middle East is portrayed by a Russian state-aligned news provider, in comparison with French and UK coverage. Given the influence of television news providers in shaping audience understanding (Entman 1993; Gamson 1989; McCombs and Shaw 1972) and therefore its understanding of conflict, the findings from this longitudinal analysis of news items from 2006 to 2008 are relevant in informing contemporary analyses of the present-day situation in the broader region. The article shows how television news coverage does not purely report conflict but, through inclusions and omissions, is shaped to a great extent by events occurring in, or associated with, the reporting country. In this case, this results in significant information also being provided about Russia which endorses pre- vailing state policies. The article discusses how *Vremya* fulfils its role as a news provider and how its foreign conflict reporting compares with that of two established public – rather than private – European broadcasters. It considers the broadcaster’s representations of conflict in the Middle East at this point in its country’s

history and at a time of stability in the broader region in the years leading up to the Arab uprisings. By conducting a comparative analysis of coverage of an on-going conflict in such a highly sensitive area as the Middle East, the article therefore highlights the characteristics of this state-aligned broadcaster's foreign conflict reporting and identifies certain trends and practices which will enable a better understanding of subsequent reporting of conflict, particularly of what has been called "the Arab spring" and its aftermath in the region.

While the news media is a main source of information for national populations across the world, television's share is particularly high: according to Standard Eurobarometer (2011), television is the main provider of information (64%) in EU member states. This figure was even higher in Russia where, according to a 2004 survey, "national television remained the most popular media outlet with eighty-two percent of the respondents watching it routinely" (Oates 2006). It is in this knowledge that broadcasters – and consequently their states if they are state-aligned – can use the news media as an important tool to convey certain messages. Yet they are also expected, and indeed tasked, in many countries, with acting as a fourth estate, or watchdog, and with providing independent and accurate information to the population. This is a clearly stated statutory requirement of two of the broadcasters under analysis (BBC 2010; France Télévisions 2011a) which is one of the reasons for their inclusion in the project as comparisons can be made between them and the Russian state-aligned broadcaster: they are similar, being public rather than private broadcasters, yet distinct because of the stringent regulations and remits imposed on the French and UK news providers, which are absent in Russia.

Analysing foreign conflict reporting – rather than domestic reporting, for example – helps determine an overall picture of approaches adopted by the broadcasters with regard to this region in the period prior to the Arab uprisings. These can include viewpoints on the protagonists; potential solutions to, and international involvement in, the conflict; the impact of the fighting both in the region and globally; and also how broadcasters perceive themselves and their reporting countries in relation to the fighting and those involved. The comparative approach is also advantageous as it enables a shift away from ethnocentric studies and incorporates the experiences of other national media rather than generalizing those of just one country (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

The essay illustrates the extent to which the Russian broadcaster's own value systems override the news providing task by imposing state-related news items on the schedule, thus shaping the coverage of the Middle East. This heightens the salience of Russia, its officials and its citizens at a time when the Russian state was endeavouring to establish an international and diplomatic role for itself in the post-9/11 and post-cold war era. The paper achieves this by firstly examining, comparatively, a section of the project's quantitative findings which concerns the broadcasters' selection of subject matter and then discusses one example of just *Vremya's* coverage of events from June 2007 to demonstrate the nation building role of state television news. Two other European news providers are used for the comparison: *News at Ten* from the nominally independent BBC, representing a British public service broadcaster and the more centrally oriented *20 Heures*, representing France, another EU member and also a public service broadcaster, from a media system with a long history of state intervention. This comparison is meaningful as it highlights aspects of Russian state-aligned news provision which might not have emerged had it been analysed in isolation.

The Case Study and the Reporting Countries

The main case study for the project is the longest-running conflict in the region, a conflict defined here as Israel, the Palestinian territories and Lebanon. The former two would be included in most definitions, but the addition of Lebanon is because the 2006–2008 comparison period started just following its war with Israel which continued to be reported by the broadcasters for many months, often as part of their Israeli and Palestinian coverage. The conflict, which brings together many of the geopolitical and post-imperial struggles facing the three broadcasters' reporting countries, is ongoing and pre-dates the collapse of the Soviet system and also the events of 9/11, both of which have led to significant shifts in global relations and the emergence of new political blocs.

The news programmes, which have been selected from the flagship channels of the UK, France and Russia, are *News at Ten*, *20 Heures* and *Vremya* and represent the main evening news broadcasts on their channels. The selection of these three is compelling despite differing regulatory structures and differing levels of state intervention. They all encountered the similar challenges of the global communications revolution, particularly the ever-increasing use of web-based news sources influencing and, to an extent, replacing traditional national broadcasting. All three systems faced similarities in that each experienced a change in government during the comparison period which resulted, in the case of France, in significant

adjustments to the media system (Kuhn 2011). In the UK, Gordon Brown replaced Blair as Prime Minister following the latter's resignation; in France, Sarkozy replaced Chirac as President following national elections; and in Russia, Medvedev replaced Putin as President after the latter's constitutional mandate expired.

The three reporting countries are similarly associated to the Middle East. Internationally, they all support the so-called war on terror, with Russia aligning itself with the West as it confronts rising levels of Islamic militancy and nationalism at home and conflicts with Chechnya (Russell 2009). Domestically, all three suffer from Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, incidents of which have witnessed increases both post-9/11 and also following flashpoints in the Middle East.

Both at the time of the comparison and now, the UK and France had the largest Muslim and Jewish populations in Europe and attempts to facilitate greater integration of ethnic minority populations within the UK resulted in the introduction of government legislation targeting migrants amongst such groups (MPI 2007). In France, controversial legislation banning the wearing of hijabs and other religious symbols in state primary and secondary schools led to public unrest and to allegations of discrimination (Legifrance.gouv.fr. 2004). The change in French government from Chirac to Sarkozy saw a shift from a pro-Arab to a more centrist, pro-Israel stance and to the new President promoting a more diplomatic role for France, within the EU and globally, all of which shaped a complex attitude towards Jews and Muslims within France's secular legislation framework. Russia had, and still has, a dual relationship with the Middle East (Kreutz 2007). It enjoys close links to Islamic countries through its own indigenous Muslim population and has strong trade and military links with many states in the broader Middle East region. It also promotes relations with Israel, with which it is extending cultural ties, especially in view of the significant Russian-speaking diaspora in Israel. Thus, the approaches taken by the three broadcasters to the countries in the case study will, to a degree, be equally valid for the broader region enabling this analysis to form a valid backdrop for further, contemporary research.

News Values and Agenda-Setting

The methodology used by the analysis encompasses both agenda-setting and news values. The former determines the salience of the media agenda and the transfer of that salience to the public agenda; and the latter determines how an event is considered sufficiently important to gain a place in the news. Working in a cooperating manner, these two areas, which

influence the shaping, length and positioning of a broadcast, allow the news reports in the comparison period to be analysed first quantitatively through an analysis of the running orders, airtimes, number of items per programme and subject matter; and then qualitatively, through an examination of the broadcasters' portrayal of news values and agenda-setting attributes found in the same choice of news items. There are two levels of agenda-setting. The first enables the subject matter to be situated within the overall agenda, allowing the overarching scene to be set; while the second allows the broadcasters to shape viewers' perceptions about the given subject by using agenda-setting attributes, or the "presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (Entman 1993, 52).

Agenda-setting does not, however, help explain why these items have been placed in high ranking positions in the schedule so news values can be used to explicate the factors behind the ranking. News values, as a concept, establish a number of interacting factors which determine the conditions of "newsworthiness" of a news story and which allow an event to be transformed into news. This can be understood in the context of the influential study by Galtung and Ruge (1965) who established 12 factors which determine the conditions of newsworthiness of a news story – the greater the number of factors which an event possesses, the higher the likelihood that it will be aired. These factors, or news values, can be grouped into three main areas: impact of the event; audience identification; and media effects and include values such as frequency, negativity, human interest, relevance, elite persons and nations, and composition (Brighton and Foy 2007). The analysis is also based on the realization that news values will differ from country to country. Despite their reporting countries being similar as they are members of the EU and part of the capitalist Western world, *20 Heures'* news values may not coincide entirely with those of *News at Ten*. Similarly, news values in Russia are different again as the media is influenced by its Soviet past. Rather than adhering to Galtung and Ruge's list of news values, there is a dominance of news items on *Vremya* which are broadcast because of their positive reporting of Russian politics or Russia and which are described here as having "imposed" news values.

The paper now examines, comparatively, a section of the project's quantitative findings and then discusses one example of just *Vremya's* coverage of events from June 2007 to demonstrate the nation building role of Russia's state television news.

Selection of Subject Matter

The paper takes its findings from a larger research project which investigated over 30,000 reports from *News at Ten*, *20 Heures* and *Vremya*, recorded over the period November 2006 to September 2008. The aim was to examine the broadcasters' news values and the many influences on their reporting which resulted in contrasting representations of the same conflict. It offered a back-drop to subsequent qualitative analyses of the news providers' Middle East coverage by illustrating how the selection and positioning of news stories reveal much about a broadcaster's (or country's) news values. The Middle East conflict, rather than wars of short duration, was particularly appropriate for the analysis because of the vast array of subject matters it contains, and which are available for selection by the news providers. It helps understand the broadcasters' representation not just of conflict reporting in the region but also of broader, non-conflict issues.

A catalogue of news items provided dates, running orders, lengths and a short description of each item. For the research, and using the item description and additional research, each national catalogue was categorized into "international" news and each of these categories was then refined to a "foreign conflict" news subset and again to a "Middle East" news subset, using the same process, to compare the airspace and running orders of news stories in each category by each broadcaster. Although detailed quantitative analyses of each broadcaster's airtimes and running orders were conducted as part of the over-all project – allowing the overarching nature of a broadcaster's news provision to be determined and the role played by, and the value attached to, Middle East coverage – these are not included in the focus of this paper. Differences did exist between the lengths and positions of programmes on the three programmes, yet these were not sufficient to constrain a "meaningful comparison" (Blumler et al. 1992, 13) and still allowed the trends and patterns of individual broadcasters to be analysed and compared.

Airtime and running order figures revealed little about the subject matter of the reports and it was the very diversity of news stories within the on-going Middle East conflict which enabled a broadcaster's news values to emerge. The Middle East-related news items were grouped into varying typologies to highlight the value the broadcasters attached to the reporting of various groups of information within the conflict, including non-conflict items, which might not be possible with coverage of other short-term conflicts. These typologies were: conflict stories; human interest stories; religion and ethnicity; political/peace attempts; gender; and domestic-related stories. By analysing the portrayal of these diverse subject areas, it was possible to compare *Vremya*'s coverage with that of *News at Ten* and *20 Heures* to illustrate how one of its primary aims is the promotion of Russia. The paper now discusses

the manner in which the broadcasters categorize their Middle East reports and which subject areas they foreground.

News at Ten

Having classified the reports into the above-mentioned subject areas, and as can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, it became apparent that *News at Ten* adopts a reporting strategy whereby the majority of Middle East-related news items comprised a “main” story which would introduce the news item and gain its position in the running order because of a particular news value. A “secondary” news item would then be brought in, not necessarily directly related to the main item. An example of this occurred on 15 April 2008. The introduction suggested that the report would centre on attempts by Israeli forces in Gaza to capture Palestinian fighters which raised the “conflict” value of the piece while, in fact, the remainder of the three-minute item covered the

News at Ten - Main category

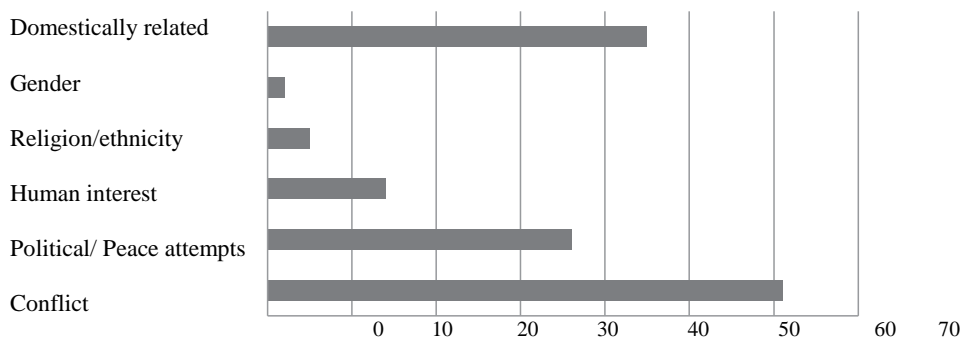


Figure 1. Main categories of news items on *News at Ten*

News at Ten - Secondary category

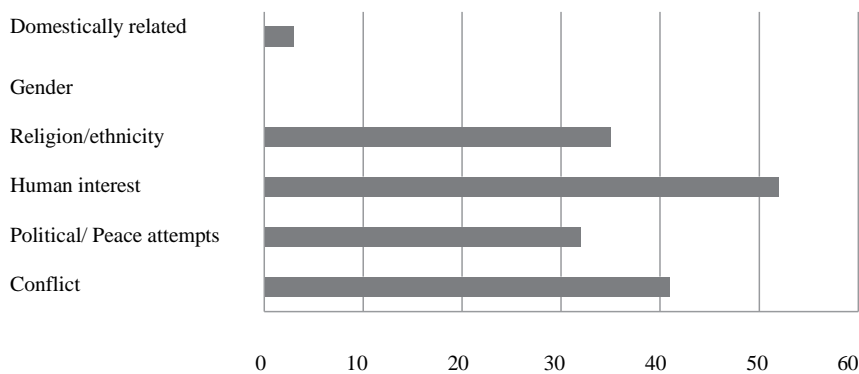


Figure 2. Secondary categories of news items on *News at Ten*

effects on life in Gaza and on being isolated from the modern world. Similarly, on 18 June 2007, the introduction to the report by the presenter suggested it would cover the new Palestinian Cabinet. The initial information was that the new Cabinet, excluding all Hamas members, had been sworn in. However, with the exception of these first few seconds, the report focused on the hardships of everyday life faced by the residents of Gaza and the West Bank.

Categorizing the subjects in news reports in this way illustrated that *News at Ten* devoted over a third of its headline news stories to actual conflict; yet, the principal secondary category covered by over a third of the stories was in fact “human interest” stories which was defined as including general interest stories, kidnappings, exchanges of prisoners, funerals, commemorations and hardship stories. It was also seen that the next main categories, following “conflict”, are “domestic-related” and “political/peace attempt” stories. It appeared that these dual headings within news items had the effect of serving differing purposes: the “main” category highlighted important subject areas which initially gained the viewer’s attention and ensured a high position in the running order; and the secondary category was possibly more representative of other values held by *News at Ten* which might not, alone, have secured a good position in the schedule. In one example, on 19 November 2007, the item started with Tony Blair’s announcement of “a range of industrial and business projects aimed at revitalising the Palestinian economy” and, because it was a domestic-related story and therefore of interest to the viewer, it rose up the schedule to occupy position number three in the running order. The piece then focused on sewage in the streets of Gaza and on unemployment and poverty levels which highlight the humanitarian aspects of conflict reporting which permeated the majority of the Middle East reports. On the one hand, these aspects appeared to be highly valued by *News at Ten* yet, on the other, were not considered sufficiently newsworthy to be a story in their own right.

The subject matters also revealed much about *News at Ten*’s own understanding of the Middle East. Based on *News at Ten*’s coverage, the Middle East appeared limited to the Palestinian territories, and mainly Gaza. Its Middle East reporting was consistently associated with conflict generally and, facing a tight schedule with limited airspace, *News at Ten* prioritised these news stories over any general interest (non-conflict) stories which might have arisen from the Middle East. Within the broad categories shown above, it selected news stories connected with the international peace process, fighting and the accompanying hardships. Stories about the elite who are involved in the peace process, be they from the UK, the US or elsewhere, were newsworthy and therefore gained airspace. By frequently

juxtaposing “political/peace attempt” stories with “human interest” stories within the same news item, *News at Ten* appeared to emphasize the disconnection between a remote dominant frame represented by those in power and the practical realities of the insurmountable situation they are trying to resolve. *News at Ten* attached great value to this latter area and to the need to raise the profile of the victims of the conflict to the domestic UK audience.

News at Ten provided a duality of information to the viewer: the first being newsworthy, securing a high position in the running order; and the second revealing *News at Ten*’s preferred subject for broadcast which focused on the humanitarian situation. The broadcaster consistently maintained the Middle East’s presence in the news. Despite the fact that this conflict, unlike wars of short duration, encompassed a great breadth of news items, *News at Ten* only selected conflict items, illustrating the apparent significance *News at Ten* attached to the foreign conflict aspect of Middle East reporting and suggesting that it might continue to do so in its reporting of subsequent conflict in the broader region.

20 Heures

The same categorization approach was used for the French coverage of the Middle East. *20 Heures*’ coverage appeared more straightforward than *News at Ten*’s as it was not necessary

20 Heures

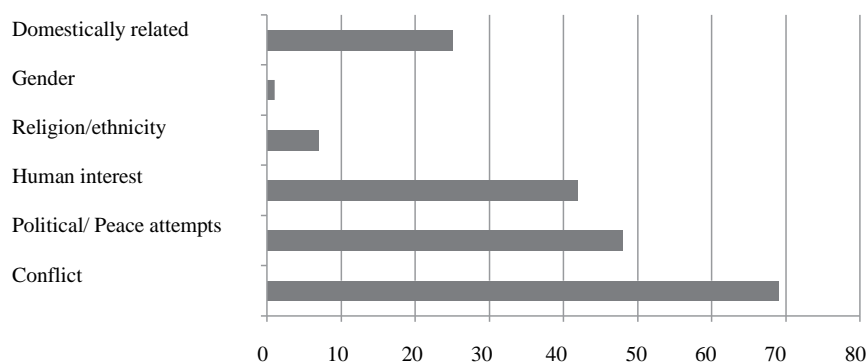


Figure 3. Main categories of news items on *20 Heures*

to conduct a secondary categorization since, largely, only one story was provided throughout a report rather than a main item and then a secondary one which was the case with the UK broadcaster (Figure 3).

20 Heures deviated from concentrating on conflict reporting when covering the Middle East by broadcasting many wide-ranging human interest and religion stories, illustrating a less restricted interpretation of the Middle East than that of *News at Ten*. It also illustrated, in contrast to *News at Ten*, that reports from this region fall under the rubric of “foreign reporting”, rather than just “foreign conflict reporting”. A particular narrative, which it introduced in November 2006, covered the departure of young French Jews for life in Israel.¹ This continued over the course of the comparison period with further coverage of French citizens now living in Israel. A report on 14 May 2008 centred on life led by young people in the Tel Aviv “bubble”, highlighting many who have moved to Israel from France, far from religion and the taboos of Jerusalem and concluded that their main aim was to stay in Israel. Raising the status of France was important in *20 Heures*’ reports, illustrating that although this is a public sector broadcaster, its reports portray a strong association with the state, potentially challenging expectations of public sector broadcasters. Continual links with, and references to, France permeated the broadcaster’s coverage of the Middle East highlighting an apparent need to stress France’s global diplomatic importance, especially in such a sensitive region. This became apparent with frequent coverage of official trips by various politicians to the area both before and after the presidential elections in 2007. France continued to be mentioned in other human interest stories, although to a lesser extent. For example, at Pierre Gemayel’s funeral on 23 November 2006, it was stated that Philippe Douste-Blazy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, was the only EU minister in attendance, emphasizing France’s diplomatic status. Similarly, in January 2007, one item mentions the 500m aid for reconstruction promised to Lebanon by Chirac, as it shifted from the conflict-reporting framework to a report on a ski resort in Lebanon to discuss how tourism is suffering from the situation in the country. Another report from Lebanon focused on a yoghurt factory destroyed in the war by Israeli jet fighters and now only managing to remain in business by using milk imported from France (21 January 2007). References such as these raised the newsworthiness of these items and, in combination with items directly focusing on

1. This followed increased levels of anti-Semitism in France leading to a call by Ariel Sharon in 2004, and again in 2005, for French Jews to emigrate to Israel (For further details see Lichfield and Jacquet 2004; LeMonde.fr 2005).

domestic- related stories, illustrated the importance the broadcaster attached to raising the status of France and creating a positive image of the country.

20 Heures provided wide-ranging reporting and demonstrated a broader geographical coverage and a greater diversity of society in the Middle East than *News at Ten*.

Proportionally, and in comparison with the other two broadcasters, more news items focused on Lebanon than the other two broadcasters highlighting France's close connections with that area not only through the country being its former mandate but also because of the close links France had been cultivating with the Arab world and its central diplomatic role in bringing a ceasefire to the region in August 2006 (Horsley 2006).

Vremya

The above discussion of the French and UK broadcasters' choice of subject matter is not only informative, but also provides important information against which *Vremya* can now be discussed. The latter's news item selection illustrated an important distinction between the broadcasters. Because *Vremya* is state-aligned, unlike *News at Ten* and *20 Heures*, the perceived newsworthiness of stories and subject areas on *Vremya* is largely determined by imposing state-related news items on the news schedule. This either overrules the lists of news values, which was established based on Western media, or raises the meaningfulness value of items by emphasizing or "imposing" cultural similarity and a sense of identification with the target audience (Galtung and Ruge 1965). The emphasis placed by *Vremya* on domestic-related items during the comparison period was particularly high and represented 29% of total coverage (Figure 4). Similarly, many of the "political/peace attempt" items gained value either because of Russia's involvement in a news item – for example, heightened importance is attached to the role of the Quartet – or because references were made to other countries which were not necessarily positive or whose positiveness was reduced in order to boost Russia's image. Negative reporting of other countries emerged during coverage of the political demonstrations in Lebanon when *Vremya* used this opportunity not just to report on events in Beirut but to make cutting remarks about Europe. *Vremya* commented on the speed with which Europe reacted to the events by sending a UK-German mission to Lebanon and on the fact that the EU stated that the demonstrations should be halted and not be allowed to interfere with the work of the Lebanese government. It went on to contrast this reaction with that of the EU two years previously when, in a similar situation, the latter supported

Vremya

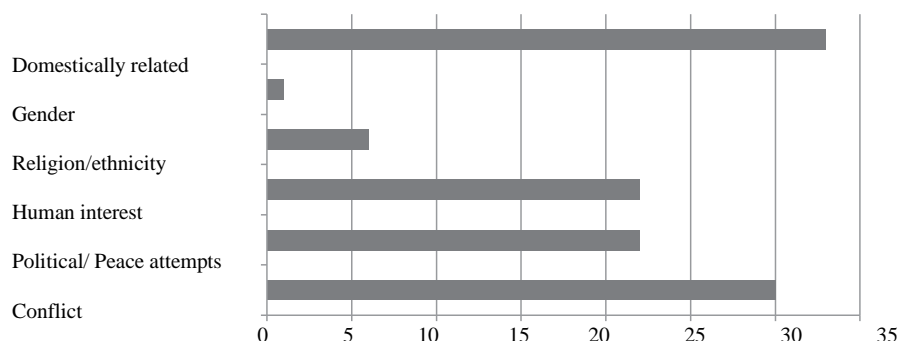


Figure 4. Main categories of news items on *20 Heures*

the demonstrators in Kiev protesting against a government which was not sufficiently loyal to the EU (3 December 2006, 10 December 2006).

As with *20 Heures*, and in contrast with *News at Ten*, *Vremya* provided broad coverage of the Middle East, maintaining the latter's presence in the news both inside and outside the conflict framework (Figure 4). In view of the fact that over a million Russian-speaking citizens of the FSU (Former Soviet Union) live in Israel and of the economic and geo-political significance of Israel to Russia, the latter was keen to encourage the influence of its own diaspora in the national identity. This emerged in the many non-conflict-related reports which focused on Israel and contributed to the construction of a narrative which centred on the need to maintain the relationship between Russia and an ethnic Russian group in Israel with ethnic culture, values and character (Ben-Porat 2011, 82). In this narrative, the Russian-speaking group was defined loosely and was not limited to "Russians" but included citizens from the Former Soviet Union who were generally referred to as compatriots (*sootchestvenniki*): an interesting reflection of how Russian national identity is now constructed and its relationship with Soviet identity.

The conflict and human interest categories, respectively, representing 27 and 19% of coverage, extended *Vremya's* focus on Israel and the Israelis' way of life in the conflict. They illustrated the priority placed on items about Israel rather than Palestine or Lebanon which were generally only covered in connection with conflict events. There were reports about civil defence drills in Israel and the requirement for bomb shelters in each community (8

April 2008) and, following a Hamas attack on a Jewish school, reports were broadcast on the levels of security and technology required in Israeli settlements to ensure safety (10 March 2008).

Imposed state-related news items on *Vremya* also permeated the religious frame in which reports were not provided on the religious practices and celebrations of Jews or Muslims in the Middle East. Instead, reports only appeared newsworthy if they focused on references to Russia. For example, Easter in Jerusalem was reported by highlighting that sacred fire was to be brought from Jerusalem to Moscow for the preparations for the forthcoming Easter mass (7 April 2007), an Orthodox festival in Jerusalem was covered as it involved Russian nuns and the re-creation of Russian cuisine (12 April 2008), and also active steps by Russia to buy Russkoye Podvorye, a complex of buildings in Jerusalem that used to belong to the Russian Orthodox Church but was sold to the Israeli authorities by the Soviet leader Khrushchev, were covered in detail (19 December 2007, 4 July 2008).

Coverage of the close connections between Russia and the Russian-speaking diaspora in Israel was extensive and pervaded many frames and the heavily Russia-oriented reporting can be perceived as being detrimental to the conflict coverage which it sidelined and even replaced. Yet, although imposed by a state-aligned broadcaster, this approach not only provided a more all-round image of a region at war, but also revealed more about the values and culture of that region thus shifting coverage of the Middle East from “foreign conflict reporting” to the broader “foreign reporting”. Overriding the newsworthiness of other subject areas, *Vremya* attached particular significance to the positive role of Russians, Russian leaders, services and institutions in the Middle East which reflected Putin’s desire to raise Russia’s global diplomatic status and also characterized the news provision of *Vremya*. The overarching quantitative analysis and the above section revealed significant differences not only in what was reported by the three broadcasters, but also in the portrayal of their reporting countries, or states, in the reports. The inclusion of the state in news items appeared least important on *News at Ten*, more important on *20 Heures* where particular priority was given to news stories with links to France, its leaders or its citizens, and most important on state-aligned *Vremya*. *News at Ten* attached most significance to both foreign conflict reporting and to Middle East reporting. It prioritised coverage from within the Palestinian territories and emphasized conflict coverage and humanitarian or human interest issues to the exclusion of most general interest stories; *20 Heures* provided broader coverage including information about events in Lebanon, everyday life in Israel and religious events; *Vremya* provided an even broader scope in its reporting by including many non-conflict related

stories, particularly covering Israel. Again the Middle East was not just a site of conflict and *Vremya* used the conflict narrative to emphasize the close connections between Russia and the Russian-speaking diaspora in Israel and the role of Russians and the Russian leaders. This latter finding will now be further analysed using a single example from the comparison period – purely in relation to *Vremya*.

Context for the Intra-Palestinian Fighting Case Study

The example discussed below relates to analyses of the coverage of sporadic fighting between the Palestinian factions of Hamas and Fatah which had been ongoing since Hamas's victory in the January 2006 parliamentary elections. This outcome led to economic crises as the US and EU, viewing Hamas as a terrorist organization, froze their aid to Gaza, and Israel halted the transfer of tax revenues accounting for half of the Palestinian Authority's income. The fighting escalated during May 2007 and peaked in mid-June 2007 when Hamas seized Gaza and Fatah took control of the West Bank. The fierce fighting, which resulted in 130 deaths and 630 injured (ICRC 2007), received international condemnation for human rights violations by both sides (Amnesty International 2007). The Palestinian territories were ultimately divided into Hamas-led Gaza and Fatah-led West Bank yet not before a humanitarian crisis unfolded in Gaza. It is *Vremya's* reporting of this aspect which will now be discussed.

Vremya's 12-day coverage initially concentrated on the Hamas-Fatah fighting and illustrated the hierarchy in news values on *Vremya* in the post-9/11 and post-cold war period. Caught, on the one hand, between the fear of Islamist radicalism at home, and the need to maintain relations with the Arab World on the other, Russia was, and remains, obliged to tread a fine line between exacerbating its internal security problems and offending its allies. *Vremya* adopted a careful approach conveying Russia's anti-terrorist preoccupation in its reports. As *Vremya's* reporting country at the start had no national interest here, these events were initially framed to serve a purpose which, in this case, highlighted the threat of terrorism. In the first half of the report, there was no lack of negative framing of the Palestinian fighters, particularly Hamas, with images of hooded armed fighters, terrorist training camps, rockets and so on.

Yet it is the second section of the reports which is of interest here as gradually, *Vremya* began to shift the emphasis from the fighting to showing the difficulties encountered by the Gazan civilians as the humanitarian crisis worsened, highlighting the human interest value of the crisis. *Vremya* pursued a similar approach to *News at Ten* as it reported on thousands of

Gazan refugees who appeared in multiple scenes at food markets, in streets, in hospitals and waiting at border points. But then suddenly, it becomes apparent that Russian expats are also caught up in the crisis and the state-aligned broadcaster had an important role to play, immediately moving the focus from thousands of homeless Palestinians in a state of emergency to just over a hundred Russian-speakers relying on Russian state help for their evacuation. This was a broadly defined group and included individuals from Ukraine, Moldova and other countries which the state considered to be within its sphere of influence.² The value attached to covering this varied group (and to the Russian-speaking diaspora as a whole as mentioned above) reflects how Russian national identity, and its relationship with Soviet identity, was being constructed.

For the subsequent six days, the emphasis of *Vremya*'s coverage of the conflict shifted from the Gazan refugees to focusing almost entirely on a small group of Russian compatriots requiring Russian state help as they were evacuated from Gaza to Jordan and finally to Moscow. Similar situations in media coverage where a broadcaster focuses on its own nationals requiring assistance are not unusual (for example, during the Algeria hostage crisis in 2013 – *Le Monde* 2013; *Le Nouvel Observateur* 2013), but the extent to which *Vremya* stressed the plight of the Russian-speakers and their apparent dire need for assistance from Russia – seemingly the only possible source of such help – could be viewed as disproportionate. Again, this provides a further example of what could be viewed as the principal subject of the reporting (the conflict and the Gazan victims in view of their number) being displaced suggesting that this is not an isolated trend but will occur again in the broadcaster's coverage of subsequent unrest in the broader region as it continues to provide a very specific representation of the Middle East.

The manner in which the state aid is being provided to Russian-speakers is as important in *Vremya*'s coverage as the suffering of the individuals itself. This message is a priority as it promotes the status of Russia as always prepared to help its people, wherever they may be. The broadcaster simultaneously uses the opportunity to compare Russia's own efforts with those of other states – in this case Israel – which it denigrates both to boost its own actions but also because Israel is a US-ally, illustrating the intrusion of international relations into foreign conflict reporting. Relations not directly associated with this specific flashpoint in the conflict are accorded news value by the broadcaster in order to present the Israelis as being accountable for the injustice of the suffering as they are “not letting anyone through.” This

² The question about whom Russia, as a state, is claiming authority and rights over is discussed by Ryazanova-Clarke (2013). A similar attitude is emerging, albeit to a different extreme, during the crisis in Ukraine in 2014.

highlights *Vremya*'s ongoing theme concerning the Israeli authorities' lack of reliability, associating it with the US-led West and enables the broadcaster to boost Russia's agency in the evacuation process by highlighting its embassy's role through repeated reports and pieces-to-camera which provide updates on their actions. It also marks the difference between the way in which *Vremya* portrays the people inhabiting Israel, many of whom are part of the Russian diaspora, and the Israeli authorities, presented unclearly as either allies of the US, and therefore negatively, or as a state with which trade is being fostered. Collaboration between Russian diplomats in the Middle East and those in Russia is underscored and both the thoroughness and extent of the aid is stressed as the reporter states "the work of [Russia's] Ministry for Emergency Situations does not end [once the expats arrive in Moscow] but colleagues are providing additional support helping travellers obtain tickets to enable them to reach their final destination." The thousands of Palestinian victims, who were once the focus of *Vremya*'s humanitarian coverage, have long been replaced by the plight of the Russian-speaking expats, now sheltered from all ills by a benevolent Russia, providing an opportunity for *Vremya* to broadcast praise of the Russian government.

Conclusion

This article contributes to a better understanding of the trends and practices of Russian state-aligned television news media in the period prior to the Arab uprisings and provides a backdrop against which subsequent analyses into the more contemporary situation in the Arab world can be conducted. The quantitative analysis of the period 2006–2008 provides contextual information not just about the Russian broadcaster's choice of subject matter, but also that of BBC's *News at Ten* and France 2's *20 Heures* in their Middle East coverage. By doing so, it illustrates, comparatively, the extent to which *Vremya* "imposed" news values on its schedule to ensure that the emphasis of reports focused on the actions of Russia and its officials, citizens and actions.

Fifteen or so years after the collapse of the Soviet system, little evidence emerged of the Russian news provider being anything but state-aligned. Yet the analysis also demonstrated that accentuating state actions was not exclusive to countries such as Russia where there is state control of television, but extended (although not to the same extent) to public sector broadcasters, such as *20 Heures*, which are nonetheless subject to strict regulation to ensure their independence (BBC 2011; France Télévisions 2011b). This could be the legacy of a system with a history of state intervention or simply because items are reported which are

associated with the country's leaders and citizens and therefore have meaningfulness value and increased relevance to the audience.

The analysis highlighted the extent to which events associated with, and occurring in, Russia affected coverage of the Middle East, resulting in inconsistent and blurred representations. Portrayals of Israel and its authorities would shift from being negative to positive depending on how the Russian-speaking diaspora was affected and the extent to which the Israeli actions appeared to be associated with the US-led West. Similarly, the Palestinians would be portrayed either peacefully in order to reflect the close links Russia has to Islamic countries through its own indigenous Muslim population and its strong trade and military links with many states in the broader Middle East region or they would be portrayed as terrorists, reflecting and endorsing the prevailing anti-terrorist state policy. Indeed, many reports, where no particular national interest was apparent, were framed to serve the specific purpose of highlighting the threat of terrorism. Based on the analysis of the 2006–2008 coverage, it is noteworthy that *Vremya* does not portray Israel in relation to Palestine or any of its neighbours but principally in relation to Russia, its own reporting country. This reveals the instable nature of a country, still unsure of its identity, using the media to convey positive nation-building messages with regard to its own actions and also to deprecate other countries, not always perceived as allies. Whatever the prevailing stance of the state in future years, it will be against this confused and changeable background that further study of the broader region must be placed.

The comparative analysis, which highlighted differences between public sector and state-aligned broadcasters, also demonstrated the extent to which *Vremya* used imposed news values and shaped its reports to ensure that a particular message was conveyed to the target audience. There is no doubt, however, that *Vremya*, like *News at Ten* and *20 Heures*, did provide primary information about events in the comparison period. Yet on closer examination of the news values, it was obvious that certain aspects of its Middle East reporting were highlighted and manipulated to reflect the prevailing policies of the Kremlin and, without the monitoring of a central regulatory body, also revealed the prevailing tight restrictions on freedom of expression. The resultant shaping of ideas found in these examples of *Vremya*'s foreign conflict reporting illustrates the fragmented and unstable nature of Russia in this post-cold war period. Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union having occurred over a decade and half before the research comparison period, Russia is still in a state of transition and, although it tolerates pluralism on the internet, at least to a degree, it seemingly remains unable and unwilling to place any confidence in a public, independently regulated

broadcasting system. It masks complex realities associated with the state's relations with nations in the broader Middle East, its inter-national relations generally, its diaspora, to say nothing of domestic responses to events in the Middle East, which must still be taken into account when analysing subsequent coverage of conflict and uprisings in the broader region.

References

- Amnesty International. 2007. "Occupied Palestinian Territories: Torn Apart by Factional Strife." Accessed January 25, 2013.
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE21/020/2007/en/642b5fe4-d363-11dd-a329-2f46302a8cc6/mde210202007en.pdf>
- BBC. 2010. "BBC Mission and Values." Accessed April 15, 2010.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/purpose/>
- BBC. 2011. "Royal Charter and Agreement." Accessed May 12, 2011.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/purpose/charter/>
- Ben-Porat, I. 2011. "Perpetual Diaspora, Changing Homelands: The Construction of Russian-Speaking Jews as a Diaspora of Both Israel and Russia." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 17: 75–95.
- Blumler, J. G., J. M. McLeod, K. E. Rosengren. 1992. "An Introduction to Comparative Communication Research." In *Comparatively Speaking: Communication and Culture across Space and Time*. J. Blumler, J. McLeod, and K. Rosengren, 3–18. London: Sage.
- Brighton, P., and D. Foy. 2007. *News Values*. London: Sage.
- Entman, R. M. 1993. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of Communication* 43 (4): 51–58.
- France Télévisions. 2011a. "Principes et objectifs." Accessed October 27, 2013.
<http://www.francetelevisions.fr/engagements/principes.php>
- France Télévisions. 2011b. "La Charte de l'antenne." Accessed April 12, 2013.
<http://www.francetelevisions.fr/engagements/charte.php>
- Galtung, J., and M. Ruge. 1965. "The Structure of Foreign News: The Presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers." *Journal of Peace Research* 2: 64–90.
- Gamson, W. A. 1989. "News as Framing: Comments on Graber." *American Behavioral Scientist* 33: 157–161.
- Hallin, D., and P. Mancini. 2004. *Comparing Media Systems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Horsley, W. 2006. "France Takes Lead Role on Lebanon." Accessed November 11, 2011.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5257602.stm
- ICRC. 2007. "Gaza and West Bank: 19-06-2007 Operational Update." Accessed January 25, 2013.
<http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/news-release/2009-and-earlier/palestine-news-190607.htm>
- Kreutz, A. 2007. *Russian in the Middle East: Friend or Foe?* Westport: Praeger.
- Kuhn, R. 2011. *The Media in Contemporary France*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Le Monde. 2013. "Prise d'otages: la journée de jeudi heure par heure." Accessed March 23, 2015.
http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/01/17/prise-d-otages-en-algerie-les-ravisseurs-veulent-le-retrait-des-militaires-algeriens-du-site_1818167_3212.html

- Le Monde.fr. 2005. "Ariel Sharon appelle les juifs de France à émigrer, sans froisser Paris." Accessed December 08, 2011.
http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2005/07/28/ariel-sharon-appelle-les-juifs-de-france-a-emigrer-sans-froisser-paris_676157_3218.html
- Le Nouvel Observateur. 2013. "Algérie: 30 otages tués dont 7 occidentaux." Accessed March 23, 2015.
<http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/monde/20130118.OBS5821/en-di-rect-algerie-30-otages-tues-dont-7-occidentaux.html>
- Legifrance.gouv.fr. 2004. "Loi n° 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées public." Accessed January 12, 2012.
<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000417977&dateTexte=>
- Lichfield, J. and A. Jacquet. 2004. "Unsafe for Jews? France is Shaken by Sharon's Jibe." Accessed December 08, 2011.
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/unsafe-for-jews-france-is-shaken-by-sharons-jibe-553781.html#>
- McCombs, M. E., and D. L. Shaw. 1972. "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (2): 176–187.
- MPI. 2007. "The Immigration Legacy of Tony Blair." Accessed October 09, 2013. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/immigration-legacy-tony-blair>
- Oates, S. 2006. *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia*. London: Routledge.
- Russell, J. 2009. "The Geopolitics of Terrorism: Russia's Conflict with Islamic Extremism." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 50 (2): 184–196.
- Ryazanova-Clarke, L. 2013. "Russian with an Accent: Globalisation and Post-Soviet Imaginary." In *The Russian Language Outside the Nation*, edited by L. Ryazanova-Clarke, 249–281. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Standard Eurobarometer 76. 2011. *Media Use in the European Union*. European Commission — Directorate-General for Communication. Accessed October 09, 2013.
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb76/eb76_media_en.pdf