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Reporting Ethnic Conflict in Karachi: Analysis through the Perspective of War and Peace Journalism

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of national media of Pakistan in terms of escalation/ de-escalation of the ethno-political conflict in Karachi. The researchers analyzed both print media and electronic media (television) for this purpose. Two leading television channels (Geo TV and Dunya TV), two English dailies (Dawn and The Nation) and two Urdu dailies (daily Jang and daily Express) were selected. Only the front and back pages of the four newspapers and 9 o'clock newscasts of the two TV channels were analyzed for a period of one year ((November 01, 2012- 31st October 2012)). The data were collected through the operationalization of dichotomous variables of an original contextual model developed by the researchers. This model was developed in line with the Galtunic typology of war and peace journalism. The contextual model contains dichotomous categories of politicization/de-politicization, securitization/humanization and

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sensationalism/ responsible. The researchers also conducted semi-structured interviews with journalists. They found that the Pakistan news media was escalatory and sensationalizing the conflict. The conflict was mainly reported through political perspective where the political victims are considered as worthy; the non-political victims are ignored and treated as less-worthy victims. The researchers advocate a more humanitarian perspective for news media in this conflict to reduce ethno-political tension in Karachi in particular and elsewhere in general.

Introduction

Karachi, the largest city of Pakistan often dubbed as the lifeline of the country is mired in deadly ethnic conflict since 1980s and so far thousands have been killed and many more injured (Yusuf, 2012). A top Military General who was in charge of military operation in Karachi, termed the ethnic conflict in the city worst than the terror war (Dawn, 2011). Many experts link the political instability, shambolic economy and the burgeoning societal schism with this conflict, which is augmenting fears both at national and international levels that Pakistan has lost its traction (Atlantic Council report, 2013).

The seeds of ethnic strife in Karachi were sowed when it was made the capital of the country back in 1948 and turned into a federally administered area much to the displeasure of the Sindhi people (the local inhabitants) who regarded it as a separation of their land. Being a port city, after the creation

of Pakistan, economic activities blossomed here and people of all ethnicities converged for better livelihood. However, as Zahab (2013) has pointed out, initially the tension in the city had little to do with the ethnicity and was primarily motivated by economic interests (property feuds and division of work), which later morphed into an ethnic conflict.

The three warring ethnic communities in Karachi are Mohajir (who migrated from India after partition), the local community of Sindhi people and the Pashtoon (who migrated to the city for earning livelihood). The first serious ethnic riot occurred in 1985 between Pashtoon and Mohajir communities over some land issue that soon engulfed the whole city. Over one hundred people belonging to different communities like Pashtoon, Mohajir and Sindhi were killed (Zahab, 2013). In riots again erupted in the city over transport issue. These riots were reignited in 1987, 1988 and 1990 leading to bloodshed and destruction on unprecedented scale (Ziring, 2004).

The establishment of Mohajir Qaumi Movement (hitherto MQM) in 1980s as a sole party for the Mohajir population led to the politicization of Mohajir and other ethnicities. Owing to inter-communal rift, the city was weaponized under the chaperoning of political parties. The situation worsened in 1992 when a military operation was launched to cleanse the city from the "criminals". The operation did succeed in de-weaponizing the city but was met with stiff resistance from MQM. The coming years also experienced ethnic tension of various intensities. The situation has not changed for any betterment in modern times though the major political party of the city MQM has been divided into three factions including MQM-London, MQM-Pakistan and PaksarZameen Party. Many experts

believe ethnic tension in Karachi was inflamed in recent times mainly by the unwillingness of MQM to share politico-economic benefits of the city with rest of the ethno-political groups and others believe the conflict has been intensified by the MQM's fears of the 'changing ethnic demographics' of the city (Hussain, 2015).

The major ethnic communities are Mohajir, Sindhi, Balochi, Punjabi, and Pashtoon. Politically, the Mutahidda Qoumi Movement splinter group claim to speak for Urdu-speaking Mohajir community, Awami National Party for Pashtoon, Pakistan People's Party for Sindhi and Balochi communities. The Punjabi community is though the second largest community in the city has no distinct political representation in Karachi city. Since 1988, MQM has swept elections from Karachi and Hyderabad except for the 2005 local bodies election. Other political parties including the Pakistan Peoples Party, Awami National Party and Pakistan Tehreek Insaf have nominal representation in the city.

Karachi being the economic hub of the country and headquartered to the major media outlets, usually gets highlights in the Pakistan media. This study will unravel how the Pakistan media report this conflict, what perspectives are highlighted, and what factors influence reportage of this conflict and how the theory and practice of peace journalism fits into the discussion.

Media and Conflicts: The Option of Peace Journalism

The concept of peace journalism was developed as an alternative to the predominantly traditional media that usually promote wars and intensify conflicts. Researchers

(Knightly, 2004; Bratic, 2006; Nohrsdet, 2009; Thussu& Freedman 2003; Cottle, 2006; Galtung, 2000; Shinar 2004) believe traditional media inflame conflicts due to political, financial and professional reasons. While the policymakers use media for propaganda purposes to deter enemy and gain the support of neutral groups during a conflict, media owners exploit it for commercial purposes due to public interest in the conflicts and lastly the journalists consider are motivated to focus more violence on related news due to newsworthiness--as explained by the journalistic cliché 'if it bleeds, it leads'.

According to Wolsfeld (2004) news media have vested interests in conflicts (p.133). Howard (2003) locates this problem in the ethos of professional journalism while Spencer (2005) opines media is not predisposed to peace because violence is 'news' and peace is 'no news.' Philip Knightly (2004) has analyzed media reporting of conflicts in the past one century including the Two World Wars, cold war era, Vietnam invasions, Falklands, and the attacks on Iraq and Afghanistan and concluded media did not remain neutral observers in national conflicts.

Swedish scholar Stig Nohresedt (2009) echoes the similar chord that journalists being at the pivotal position, are drawn to the conflicts either advertently or inadvertently thus making them combatants in the conflict that incite for hatred and violence. Hamelink (2008) has documented the proceedings of the International Crime Tribunal set up after the Second World War when in 1946, a German radio broadcaster was indicted for 'crime against peace" and a newspaper editor sentenced to death for incendiary write-ups against Jews. In 2003, another court set up to enquire into the Rwandan genocide, sentenced three senior

journalists to life imprisonments for incitement and instigating communal discord (Thompson, 2007).

The Norwegian peace scholar Johan Galtung (1998) is often credited for giving the concept of peace journalism in a seminal study in1965. He analyzed the role of Norwegian media in three international conflicts and found the media was escalatory and war-oriented. As a counter strategy, he developed the model of peace journalism that stresses to focuses on the (a) social and psychological impact of wars and conflicts (b) delve into the root causes of conflicts (c) try to bring the conflicting parties closer to each other by highlighting the similarities and commonalities among them and (d) explore avenues to facilitate win-win positions for all the stakeholders in a conflict (Galtung, 2002).

The advocates of peace journalism lean on the literature on peace and conflict studies for guidance. They agree that conflicts can never be wiped out completely but these should not degenerate into violence. Violence is not a solution to conflicts and hence conflicts should be transformed constructively (Galtung, 2002; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Media can be used effectively for presenting conflicts in a broader perspective (parties, goals and issues) by defining violence as the problem itself and suggest ways and means for peaceful resolution of conflicts (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Nohresdet & Ottosen 2010; Kempf, 2013).

The approach of peace journalism has been criticized for various reasons like its normativity (Hanitzch, 2007), naiveté (Lyon, 2007) and impracticality (Fawcett, 2002). In the past one decade, the exponents of peace journalism have successfully addressed number of queries relating to the theory and practice of peace journalism (Hackett, 2010;

Lynch, 2014; Kempf, 2013). They have been able to build a theoretically consistent pragmatic model for peace journalism to launch a strong attack on the elitist, nationalistic, inflammatory and ethnocentric character of traditional media during conflict times (Bratic & Ross & Graham, 2008; Hussain, 2017). They equate peace journalism with responsible journalism to ensure reporting a reality as truthfully as possible by relying on the notions of objectivity, impartiality and detachment (Kempf, 2007).

Like elsewhere, the academic discipline of peace journalism has attracted many researchers and academicians in Pakistan. One can find dozen of studies and student theses on the subject (Siraj, 2006; Siraj& Hussain, 2012; Hussain 2014 & 2015 & 2016 & 2017; Hussain & Haseeb, 2015). In these studies, the researchers have found that Pakistan news media has predominantly reported the politico-religio and security conflicts in war journalism fashion. Interestingly, unlike the other conflicts, the Pakistani researchers have not so far focused on the ethno-political conflict in Karachi.

This study attempts to fill this gap by empirically investigating the media reporting of ethno-political conflict in Karachi. For this purpose, the researchers of this study borrow the concept of peace journalism and apply it to the Pakistani settings to investigate how the ethno-political conflict in Karachi is reported in the leading news media outlets.

Research Hypotheses

H. Coverage of Karachi conflict will be significantly escalatory than de-escalatory in the Pakistan news media.

Ha. Karachi conflict will be reported by the Pakistan news media significantly through political perspective than security and humanitarian perspectives.

Hb Irrespective of the organizational policies and ownership Pakistan news media cover Karachi conflict through the same thematic strategy while reporting on the ethno-political conflict in Karachi.

Methodology

This study applies content analysis and semi-structured interviews to analyze the ethnic conflict in Karachi. For the content analysis, a total of six media outlets including two TV channels (Geo TV and Dunya TV), two English dailies (Dawn, The Nation) and two Urdu dailies (Jang and Express) were analyzed for one year from (November 01, 2012- 31st October 2013). The researchers selected one flagship newspaper (either Urdu or English) from the four major newspapers groups of Pakistan. They selected Dawn form Dawn Group of Newspapers, The Nation from Nawa-e-waqt, Jang from Jang Group of Newspapers, and Express from Express Group of Newspapers. These media outlets were selected to get a more representative sample of media in Pakistan. Only the front and back pages of the four newspapers and 9 o'clock newscasts of the two TV channels were sampled out for the study from Monday till Thursday of each week for the whole year.

The researchers used the conflict escalation/ de-escalation model originally devised for this study containing dichotomous categories of politicization/de-politicization, securitization/ humanization and sensationalism/responsible

as indicators of escalation and de-escalation. This model is inspired by the model of war and peace journalism developed by Johan Galtung. Despite many merits of the Galtunic model, the researchers of the present study believe that this model could not be applied to the Pakistani settings in to since the Pakistani journalistic culture is markedly different from the Western journalistic culture. So, the authors have modified the Galtunic model and fine-tuned it to the Pakistani settings. The model is given below.

Table 2: The context specific model of conflict escalation and de-escalation

Conflict escalating reporting	Conflict de-escalating reporting
1. Politicization Ethnic and sectarian affiliations are politicized, the victims belonging to political groups are considered worthy and common people get scant coverage, political wrangling are highlighted. The aggressors and sufferers are identified through their presumed political affiliations; deaths, sufferings, trauma in conflicts are neglected and the emerging conflicting political scenario becomes focus of media attention where political statements, controversies appear to be the only news. Vested interests of political parties are ignored and media always ready to provide a conduit to blame others, thus creating turmoil. **2. Securitization** Conflicts are securitized; they are discussed in terms of threats,	**1. De-politicization** Focus on the non-political aspects of conflicts; affiliations like politics, ethnicity, religiosity or other considerations are avoided. The social, cultural and economic costs of conflicts are highlighted. Political shenanigans are exposed in non-political and less sensational tones. The artificial barriers among conflicting groups produced by politicians are scrutinized threadbare, agendas and interests of politicians are exposed, examples of different ethnic and sectarian groups having political affiliations that live peacefully are highlighted. **2. Humanization** Conflicts are humanized, individual sufferings are highlighted, and trials and tribulation of common people get maximum coverage. Plight of women and children and other vulnerable groups is discussed. Conflict is covered

dangers, and occupations. Police force, army personnel and elites get the limelight. Conspiracies, issue of national sovereignty, security, territorial integrity, independence, and patriotism are related with the conflict. The system, culture and social values are securitized and feared to be lost if enemy prevails.

3. Sensationalism
Conflict reporting is dramatized, and sensationalized; every unfolding event is treated as mysterious, historic and unprecedented, drama and wild outbursts are highlighted. Arguments and counter-arguments of antagonists are the major feeds where opposite group is ridiculed and challenged. Future is predicted to be more violent and ominous, no chances for peace overtures.

from the perspective of common people. Loss to the social institutions and local culture is counted and steps urged for their recovery.

3.Responsibility
Reporters feel responsibility to society, outcomes of unfolding conflicts are given before hand, damage to society is told and re-told, caution is advised, reporting is devoid of sensationalism, pros and cons of conflicts are presented, and opportunities for peace explored. Contexts and background and root causes of the conflict is presented with an urge for peaceful resolution.

Finally, as many as six conflict reporters and editors (one from each outlet) and four media analysts were exclusively interviewed to investigate and identify the factors that determine the reporting of this conflict. These interviews were conducted at the respondents' offices and lasted for about 40 minutes. These were semi-structured and the interviewee given complete liberty in the expressing their opinions.

Findings and Analysis

H. Coverage of Karachi conflict will be significantly escalatory than de-escalatory in the Pakistan news media.

Table 1: Distribution of conflict escalatory and de-escalatory coverage

Model	Escalatory N (%)	De-escalatory N (%)	Total N (%)	Chi-square	P Value
contextual model	502 (55.29)	406 (44.71)	908(100)	9.176	0.000

Note: For this hypothesis, frequencies of the four variables each in escalatory and de-escalatory categories were totaled.

As shown in the above table, the selected news media predominantly reported the ethnic conflict in escalatory terms (55%). The low value of significance (p value, .00) show the difference is significant. Just to get an example that how Pakistani media reported the ethnic conflict, few examples are cited. On November 14, 2012, The Nation published an exclusive story on the 'situation in Karachi' and sought opinions of coalition and opposition parties in Sindh. The newspaper reduced the issue to a political battlefield where violence was the only option. ANP wants 'operation', MQM wants 'Taliban out from the city' PPP accuses 'judiciary for quitting criminals', PML-N is against 'ethnic-based political parties' and JI complains against the 'government apathy'. The dominance of escaltory content is not unique to Pakistani media. Many researchers (Rukhsana, 2010; Ottosen & Nohresdet, 2010; Lyon, 2007; Fawcett, 2010; Lee, 2010) have found that media usually focus on the escalatory aspects of conflicts due to newsworthiness of such events.

Ha. Karachi conflict will be reported by the Pakistan news media significantly through political perspective than security and humanitarian perspectives.

Table 2: Emphasis in conflict reporting

Escalation	N (%)	De-Escalation	N (%)
Politicization*	367(40)	De-Politicization	89(10)
Sensationalism	135(15)	Responsible	78(9)
Securitization	121(13)	Humanization	118(13)
*Chi Square 186.02 P Value.000			

The second hypothesis stated the ethnic conflict would be predominantly reported from political perspective. Out of the total news reports on the conflict, as many as 40 percent stories politicized the conflict, much higher than other themes like sensationalism, securitization, de-politicization, humanization and responsibility (Chi Square186.02, p.000). To get an example how that actually happens in Pakistan news media, the daily *Jang* published a story on the 'unabated violence' in the city on November 16, 2012 when six people were killed and seven were injured in separate interests. While little was told about others killed in the story, a story of PPP worker was presented in details. Even his home address was given in the stories. By focusing on the political deaths and ignoring others, the media shows penchant for political stories 'for being more newsworthy'.

H b Irrespective of the organizational policies and ownership Pakistan news media cover Karachi conflict through the same thematic strategy while reporting on the ethno-political conflict in Karachi.

Table 3: Inter-media differences on conflict reporting

Emphasis in reporting	Geo N (%)	Dunya N (%)	Dawn N (%)	Nation N (%)	Express N (%)	Jang N (%)	Chi squar	P Value

						e	
Politicization	54(41)	54(38)	56(48)	45(32)	87(42)	71(42)	4.69	0.104

The third hypothesis investigated inter-media differences in this conflict. As the above table shows, though Pakistan media serve different political and ideological interests, they did not differ greatly on ethnic conflict and report the conflict mainly from political perspective (chi-square: 4.69; p: 0.104).

R.Q.2: What are the key issues that influence reporting of ethnic conflict in Karachi?

The following factors have been identified during interviews with reporters, editors and media analysts that influence media reporting of this conflict.

1.   Self-censorship

When the reporters were asked about the real causes of violence in Karachi, they had a fair understanding of the tension but preferred to stay silent. They opined the three major political parties MQM, ANP and PPP are responsible for violence in the city. These parties, according to them, are founded on ethnic basis and have militant wings that are involved in extortion, land grabbing and criminal activities (MQM being the major culprit)**.** One journalist succinctly summarized the major reason for violence in Karachi as 'a conflict over the resources of the city'. In other reasons, they identified mismanagement and pathetic government which had done nothing in that sprawling metropolis inhabited by hundreds of millions people.

       Regarding the major actor in the violence, they were quick to point out MQM as the major perpetrator involved in

killings, extortion and other criminal activities. One journalist put the whole scenario like this. "MQM has a stronghold in the city but now other forces are asserting themselves. The party is not ready to share its absolute power with them and this is the major cause of conflict." Such an assessment was supported by the editors, stakeholders and political analysts to a fairer degree, leading credence to the assertion that journalists were aware about the causes and contexts of the conflict but could not express these feelings due to fear from certain quarters.

2.   Reporting 'a risky profession'

Reporting from Karachi seemed to be the toughest task for journalists as few have been killed in the recent past while a growing number of journalists received death threats. Journalists interviewed for this study took commitment from me that their names would not be shared. They remembered their colleagues who were killed and the advice they got from top management not to offend certain groups mainly the MQM, which has obfuscated media freedom (if any) and purge it from dissenting voices. One senior reporter working for an English daily presented the following picture. "Karachi is a dangerous place to live. We are always monitored and are expected to offend none. One can't offend political parties, religious groups and other terror mafias". Another reporter working for a TV channel said MQM, which has well established itself in the city, is dictating terms for media. The top management will never allow us to tell truth if it involves MQM. Another reporter working for an Urdu newspaper said there are sacred cows and no-go areas. Violating these codes will incur varying degrees of reprimands ranging from threats, job termination and killing. A young and enthusiast

journalist said how often he insists to tell the truth but his editor convinces him that "you will lose job and also life for stubbornness".

3.   Politicization of the conflict

When journalists were asked about the prioritization of political discourse and narrating events predominantly from political perspective while reporting on Karachi violence, they were unanimous in their views that it was of professional value. "It is more newsworthy, carry more impact and also close to the real events," said one reporter and added people want to know what politicians say about violence in the city. A TV reporter said political views are always important for journalists due to its impact. A certain political group mainly the MQM has easy access to top management and accommodate their perspective easily. Regarding the same issue, another reporter said when some violent event occur, we get press releases, phone calls and instructions from bosses to include perspectives of all groups in Karachi. When these reporters were asked why the humanitarian aspect of the conflict was neglected in media discourse, they opined it was less newsworthy and more laborious. One journalist said that though personally he valued it but his editor would not allow such an approach. Another reporter agreed that common people are the major sufferers and their issues need to be highlighted but professionally speaking, he added, when it comes to headlines, only politicians are able to get due coverage to its news value. Others said it would not be an easy task to get information on the common people who are killed or injured and since they had to give information instantly, political parties were better placed to accommodate their need for information.

4. Avoidance of ethnic affiliations

One positive aspect of the media reportage of ethnic violence in Karachi is the avoidance of showing ethnicities of those killed or injured. When I asked reporters about the rationale behind this issue, it was heartening to know that were deliberately doing it as self-censorship to minimize the intensity of conflict in the city. "I fear it will lead to further escalation that's why I avoid these labels" said one journalist. A journalist working for an Urdu daily said it was also politically motivated. "It's the Pashtoon who are killed in majority. If we show their ethnicity, it will go against MQM which wants to quell this type of reporting". The editors of these media outlets, however, said showing ethnicities of deceased would exacerbate the conflict and they were professionally bound not to do it. For media analyst Shahab Mehmood, though it is a good gesture but is not done properly as hints were given to reveal the ethnicity. For example, he said "when a deceased is reported to be a resident of Swat, it becomes clear he was a Pashtoon, thus destroying the whole purpose of this strategy'.

5. The desire to be objective

When the reporters were asked whether media should play a role in the peaceful resolution of the conflict, they were indifferent. None of them agreed it was the mandate of media to resolve conflicts. To remain objective and impartial appeared to be their main interest. "If reporters do it, they will make a hash of everything," said one reporter. Another reporter replied "journalists are the spoilers not resolvers of conflicts". For him, such a role and the ethics of journalism were pole apart and would result in poor journalism if ever

practiced. All the editors scoffed at the idea of 'peace media' and opined the journalists could do well if remained objective. One editor of an English daily feared 'it would open up a Pandora box and create a mess of everything.' The three stakeholders in the conflict supported 'peace media' and hoped such an initiative would bring peace to the city but they wondered how a media so given to violence would focus on peace, which may not be financially lucrative.

6.   The economic pressures

Conflict in Karachi is primarily a struggle over the resources of the city among political parties. Karachi being the economic hub of the country that generates 75 percent of revenue, and hence media organizations too have specific financial interests involved here. According to reporters and analysts due to economic clout, issues happening in the city have bearings on media reporting. As many as 60 percent of people's barometers used for rating are installed here while 40 percent are installed in rest of the country. Almost all the major media organizations of the country are headquartered here making it easy for players in the city to influence owners and the top management of media organizations. Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) being the largest party in the city has applied it successfully. The security risks for journalists have financial underpinnings for owners that ultimately put a check on conflict reporting. Media strategist Rehan Hasan said 'if you want a successful TV show, conduct a program on Karachi conflict with a leader from MQM, you will get rating'.

Conclusion

This study empirically demonstrates that the ethnic reporting in Karachi is inflammatory and jingoistic. The conflict is told from political perspective while the humanitarian aspects are completely ignored. The politicians having communal interests use media for fomenting ethnic tensions through the carrot and stick policy (mainly the MQM). The reporters and editors though feigned objectivity but confided that risks were involved in telling the bare facts. "As reporters we are required to tread the fixed route, if one deviates, he/she is in trouble," said one reporter requesting anonymity. MQM has been in power for the last 25 years in the Sindh province and are maintaining a tight grip on all affairs in Karachi city through militant wings and intimidation of big businesses.

Regarding the key frames in media reporting, the conflict is covered as "law and order issue, battleground, ethnic and political tension, mafias and extortion and political vendetta" while the actors are framed as "MQM vs ANP vs PPP, political rift, ethno-based, pro-Taliban, religio-politico, terrorists, Layari gang, Aman committee, irreconcilable interests, worthy political workers". As the media discourse is highly politicized, common people are usually ignored. However, occasionally they get the lowlight as "people of Karachi, citizens", and unworthy victims as simply body counts are given when killed.

During interviews with journalists and stakeholders, it was revealed that conflict reporting in Karachi is circumscribed by various factors including the ethno-politico affiliations of reporters, security problems, strong influence of MQM on media houses, commercial pressures and the active self-censorship by the media practitioners during sense of responsibility to society. All these factors tilt the coverage of the conflict towards war journalism. While the

'worthy politicians' are given maximum coverage, the 'less worthy common people' are usually ignored to put it in Chomsky's parlance, which according to Hackett (2006) is indicative of war journalism. If common people are killed, they are simply ignored or reported in one liner but when workers of political parties are killed, they get the media limelight. These incidents are followed by political rigmarole where the conflict is turned into political battle. In fact, conflicting political statements are apportioned a major chunk of time and space.

Another limitation for peace journalism is the indifference of conflict reporters towards media role in resolution of conflicts. Peace journalism scholarship suggests media people have to be convinced for peace it has to be turned into a reality (Tehranian 2002; Lynch, 2005; Hussain & Lynch, 2016). The silver lining in this whole scenario is the deliberate attempt by reporters to avoid revealing ethnicities of those involved in violence. The already volatile ethnic tension could degenerate into a full-scale war if reported irresponsibly. However, barring few examples, this study finds that the Pakistani news media come short of expectations while reporting on the politico-ethnic conflict in Karachi. The media appears to be an apple of discord rather than a voice for peace.

Like all human endeavors, this study has certain limitations. The data was collected few years ago when MQM was unified and had a tight control on the Karachi city. Though the two factions of the party in recent times—MQM-London and MQM-Pakistan are by and large the same—the absolute grip of its supremo Altaf Hussain has dwindled. So, a more recent study is required on the conflict. Secondly, a discourse analysis technique is needed to investigate the

conflict to know how specific frames and themes are highlighted and how the news media discursively prioritize the interests of one group in this complex conflict.

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