

## **Intertextuality and News Photography Production: International Making of a Pictorial Echo**

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This article explores intertextuality and the way it connects to international news organizations' production routines as complex moments and sites of conflict. I demonstrate the unique connection by analyzing a specific event covered by an Israeli Reuters photographer, in which a suicide bomber killed an Israeli officer in an attack near the city of Tulkarem. I conduct an interpretive analysis of the event and its coverage, combined with a semiotic analysis of both the "picture of the event" (selected as such by the Reuters photographer) and an older picture taken by a local Israeli news photographer, used as an intertext.

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### **Introduction**

Intertextuality, Morgan (1985) suggested, delivers people from old controversies to new ones, shifting their attention "from the triangle of author/work/tradition to that of text/discourse/culture" (p. 2). In its most basic form, then, intertextuality draws from early 20th-century Saussureian linguistics and from poststructuralist accounts of the relationships between meaning and language. Signs acquire their meanings through their combinatory and associative relation to other signs that surround them (Saussure, 1915/1960), and their meaning derives from the interaction between language, individuals and groups under the conditions of given social situations (Bakhtin & Medvedev, 1928/1978). The literary work—the text—acquires its meaning as the reader moves beyond the text's existing structure to relate it to other works and linguistic structures (Barthes, 1977a). The text is "a permutation of texts, an intertextuality" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 36). So "it is not true that works are created by their authors. Works are created by works, texts are created by texts, all together they speak to each other independently of the intentions of their authors" (Eco in Haberer, 2007, p. 57). Interpreting texts thus requires understanding these extraordinary relations, and reading becomes an infinite process of movement between texts, existing "between the text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext" (Allen, 2000, p. 1).

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The semiotic tools used to study "the life of signs within society" (Saussure, 1915/1960, p. 16) pushed intertextual discourse beyond the field of literary arts, making it now increasingly relevant to exploration of all cultural phenomena and widespread in visual culture (see Hatten, 1985; Leeson & Dunn, 1986; Perminger, 2001; Reader, 1990; Steiner, 1985). Indeed, Rogoff (2002) described visual experiences as intertextual, as they "are read on to and through one another, lending ever-accruing layers of meanings and of subjective responses to each encounter we might have with film, TV, advertising, artwork, buildings or urban environment" (p. 24). She continued,

The scrap of an image connects with a sequence of a film and with the corner of a billboard or the window display of a shop we have passed by, to produce a new narrative formed out of both our experienced journey and our unconscious. (Rogoff, 2002, p. 26)

Images are never free of context. Their meaning should never be confined to what is within the image, and they are always affected by other images (Walker & Chaplin, 1997). The meaning of an image is unstable, as it changes according to what is seen beside it, or immediately after it (Berger, 1972). Thus, the connection between intertextuality and visual imagery far exceeds the interlocking of visual texts: It is the ways in which interdependent modes of visuality interact (i.e., intervisuality) (Mirzoeff, 2002).

Similarly, news pictures therefore are not closed texts and stand for many things despite their still overwhelmingly common appeal (especially in the news milieu) as representatives of the "true" nature of things. As documents that do "more than simply provide reasoned information" (Zelizer, 2010, p. 8), they connect to intertextuality via the idea that news itself is not simply evidence or factual information (see, e.g., Fiske, 1989; Kitch & Hume, 2008; Seaton, 2005; Zelizer, 2010). This connection also concerns photography's evasive nature, evident in the ontological desire to understand photography, for example, or its uses of social power, control, and forms as a vehicle of memory (see Barthes, 1957/1972, 1982; Edwards, 1992; Sekula, 2003; Sontag, 1979; Zelizer, 1998).

Understanding this unique connection relies mostly on the news picture text. For example, as news pictures are known to usually bear captions, their intertextual connection to other texts is often discussed in terms of the complex image-word structure. Thus captions, though often said to be presented as neutral information, are in fact used to define a particular viewpoint, point the spectator to the "correct" reading of an expression, or simply "rationalize" the image (Barthes, 1977b; Chaplin, 1994; Hall, 1973). Researchers also know a newspaper photo speaks from the context of a complex set of messages "with the photograph as centre and surrounds constituted by the text, the title, the caption, the lay-out and, in a more abstract but no less 'informative' way, by the very name of the paper" (Barthes, 1977b, p. 15), and that certain visual elements within news images relate intertextually to evoke interest and convey rich meanings. These elements appear in newspapers in the form of binary juxtapositions, provoking interpretation by uniting contrasting ideas in the image itself (Werner, 2004). However, much work is still needed along these lines, particularly from a production viewpoint, as additional intertextual relations unveil themselves and add valuable insights to the complex meaning of news pictures when production routines are examined. It is "in the intricate circumstances by which each picture is produced, distributed, contextualized, recycled, and viewed that its impact comes clear, if only for a fleeting moment and for a particular segment of the public," Zelizer (2010, p. 23) said of the relation between news images

and journalism. This lacuna is even more acute in the case of international news agencies—the “unseen” players in today’s news landscape—as newsrooms worldwide rely on their materials more “than perhaps at any other time in news media history” (Johnston & Forde, 2011, pp. 195–196).

How, then, does intertextuality connect to news photography production? What forms does it take in the production of news pictures? How does it contribute to the understanding of international news production? This article explores the connection between intertextuality and the news image as it is produced and then published by international news organizations. It demonstrates this unique connection by analyzing a specific 2005 event, covered by an Israeli Reuters photographer, in which a suicide bomber killed an Israeli army officer and injured several Palestinian civilians and two Israeli soldiers in an attack near the city of Tulkarem. Taking into account the importance of images’ context to their analysis, I conduct an interpretive analysis of the event and its coverage (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001), combining it with a semiotic analysis of the *picture of the event* (selected for distribution by the Reuters photographer) and of an older picture taken by a local Israeli news photographer, used as intertext.<sup>1</sup> I also analyze the front page of the *International Herald Tribune*, where the Reuters picture appeared the day after it was taken. Intertextual relations are demonstrated at key moments and sites of the picture’s life history—from its raw form, as taken by the Reuters photographer in the field, to its front-page publication in an international newspaper. The intertextual relation to an older picture taken in Israel suggests a strong connection between the production and consumption of news images. This unique connection between intertextuality and the news image shows how the international production of news images often consists in complex moments and sites of struggle for social power, rather than being performed as a unified industrial unit of production.

### **Covering a Scene after a Suicide Bombing**

On December 31, 2005, at exactly 13:00, the photographer was paged about an explosion near the Avnei Hefetz settlement in Israel, close to the city of Tulkarem. A suicide bomber en route to the center of Israel had caused the blast upon being stopped by an unexpected Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) barrier.

It takes about 40 minutes to drive to the Tulkarem area from the city of Modi’in, where the photographer lives. He called to tell me about the event on his way to the scene, where I arrived about

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<sup>1</sup> The picture of the event “tells the story, without reading any articles or having a background attached; a picture that speaks for itself” (the Reuters photographer, personal communication, December 10, 2006). Reuters photographers, editors, producers and chiefs use this expression as distinct from “atmosphere pictures”—news pictures that are “less strong, less ‘hard news’ . . . used to decorate the event” (ibid.). Clearly this raises a range of issues, from the connections between news and photography, narrative, and storytelling to the complex relations of cultural production, media institutions, and power—among others. However, as this article deals with a very specific concept and the ways it operates in coverage of a particular event, these issues are outside its scope, though they certainly remain in the background.

half an hour later.<sup>2</sup> There, I identified him and other media representatives who were being held back by an IDF barrier 200 meters from the scene. Having arrived quickly, the media representatives appeared to have been detained so security forces could enter first to keep the scene unaltered. The photographers seemed not to approve of this and took advantage of the chaos to move toward the scene.

At the epicenter were the military and the police: Several soldiers commanded by a colonel, soldiers from the dead officer's platoon, Israeli Disaster Victim Identification Unit (ZAKA) workers, Israeli paramedics, the Division of Identification and Forensic Science, and the Israeli police. There were many media representatives: Photographers and TV crews, and reporters from local news outlets and major international agencies. At the scene, the photographer exchanged information on the event with M., another Reuters photographer, who lived nearby and had been first on the spot. Aware that M. had forgotten his laptop in his rush to get to the scene, the photographer, as the veteran, immediately sent M. to the Reuters office in Jerusalem with his pictures. He explained to me that having been first on the spot meant that M. might have some exclusive pictures. If he did, it was all-important to send them immediately. Once the news event ended, he would also start sending his pictures; by then M. would surely have made it to the office, so they would probably not lose valuable time.

A soldier from the IDF Press Unit briefed the photographers in detail about the event: The suicide bomber had been riding in a yellow taxi on his way to the center of Israel when the vehicle was stopped at an unexpected IDF barrier. The civilians in the taxi were ordered to get out to have their identification papers checked. At that point, the suicide bomber detonated his device, creating a major explosion that killed the officer and bomber, and injured two Israeli soldiers and several Palestinian civilians.

When we arrived, the bomber's body was lying near the taxi. Nearby, a group of soldiers had begun picking up the injured soldiers' gear while a line of kneeling soldiers in white gloves collected what appeared to be small pieces of the dead officer. Because of the extent of the destruction, the scene was divided into three: The taxi and the suicide bomber's body, the injured soldiers' gear, and the line of soldiers. The scene was chaotic, the photographers unfocused and highly stressed. They had to act quickly, as it was a major event, but they all feared missing the picture of the event. As a result, they all moved in a slow cluster to each of the three scenes, trying to carefully analyze the event and its pictorial potential. After a while, they separated to the different scenes. Within an hour, they all agreed to leave and meet at a nearby gas station and coffee house, Mifgash Hashalom, to edit and send their photos.

Throughout the sending process the photographers seemed relaxed and cooperated happily with one another—so much so that the international agency photographers who were present at the scene

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<sup>2</sup> The Reuters photographer agreed to my accompanying him in the field for research purposes, but early on I realized I needed his help to get to scenes. We regularly met at such scenes after he called to tell me the locations of events he was to cover. In many cases we drove together to the scenes, and at times I felt I had "contaminated" the "naturalness" of his surroundings with my presence. However, as my research progressed I realized that it is natural for a working environment to have numerous layers, some of which are visible only when others are hidden.

(Reuters, EPA and a local newspaper photographer selling his pictures to AP) collaborated on each other's captions ("What is the soldiers' unit?" "Who was the officer who was killed?" etc.). During this process the photographer showed me his picture of the event: It was a picture of a close-up of a kneeling soldier, flanked by his colleagues, scouring the ground for body parts. During the editing, the photographer explained that in such events it is important to send pictures in a highly organized manner. The agency's procedure for "big" events is that photographers send their pictures to the Jerusalem office to be carefully selected, screened, and approved by the chief photographer. The resulting images are sent to the global pictures desk in Singapore. In events like this case, the agency might also purchase pictures from non-staff photographers; it is important that these too are organized at the local bureau before being sent to Singapore.

The photographer added a short "one line" caption, saying the editor in the office would make the captions "thicker" before sending them on. He also told me the "big events" procedure of sending pictures to the local bureau first is not always good practice, since he, as the one at the scene, is better positioned to choose the best pictures from the event than an editor in the office. However, he said, this is how they work and he plays it as he is told. Within half an hour of arriving at the coffee house, the photographer had sent 12 pictures and we were ready to leave.

### **All for One and One for All**

The suicide bombing was an exceptional news event that highlighted the agency's unique set of considerations and regulations. Recognizing it as an act of "terror" immediately empowered its news value. As a direct consequence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it was part of the main story the agency covers in Israel. Moreover, it killed an Israeli officer and the Palestinian bomber, and injured several Israeli soldiers and Palestinian civilians. These unique newsworthy circumstances obliged Reuters to send a photographer to the scene in a process that also demonstrated the daily difficulties an international news agency faces locally. Its daily filtering of news events, for example, is an important task, as the agency employs about 15 photographers in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. Whenever a big event (e.g., a suicide bombing) occurs, covering it requires quick, spontaneous reorganization of the coverage areas, often at the expense of coverage of other events.

The photographer I accompanied usually covers both north and central Israel, so he was sent to the scene even though he lived 40 minutes away. His presence at the scene eliminated his availability to cover other events, which may have forced the agency to use freelance photographers for other, contemporaneous events. A big, unexpected event compels the agency to make on-the-spot adjustments to ensure the most socially stable arrangements possible (in this case, shifting a photographer to a distant site). These decisions are based on the event's unique circumstances, level of importance (prioritizing it as a "big spot" news event typifies its importance for coverage), and the bureaus' allocation constraints.

As a major incident, the bombing created a site where agencies' photographers competed for exclusive coverage. When the two Reuters photographers met at the scene, for example, they immediately focused on the possibility that the first to arrive might have taken some exclusive pictures. Exclusive pictures of big events taken early on may prove valuable by giving Reuters an advantage over

its rivals. The production routine of news pictures works in an open cycle of cause and effect, and parallel production routines constantly resonate (Frosh, 2003).

Cooperation between Reuters photographers at a given event is rare. Usually a photographer is the sole agency representative on the scene, barring coincidence or a planned big event to which two staffers are assigned. This unique meeting redefined the professional boundaries of the agency's photographers and authorities: The young photographer was reduced to a subordinate position when the senior photographer arrived, and the latter became the only agency authority on the spot once the inexperienced photographer left for Jerusalem. Operating far from the office, and often on their own, photographers are small, autonomous organizational units at the scenes of events. (They simultaneously fulfill several roles: Photographer, editor, technician, driver. I was often told that this affects the quality of pictures taken in the field.) When two meet at a scene, seniority plays an important role throughout the shoot, unlike in independent field operations where the photographers have more "liberty" to pursue coverage as they see fit. Yet despite seeming to run their own routines at the scenes, they are always part of a larger system with strict rules and regulations. In this concrete organization, photographers are only minor players at key moments and sites on a vast line of production.

This production line dictates the standards that determine a "successful Reuters picture." Photographers are "Reuterized" by absorbing these standards early in their training. Thenceforth, the successful Reuters picture is a conceptual formula guiding the photographer through a production of pictures disguised as a creative process—a "corporate form of creative control" (Ryan, 1992, p. 389). However, certain events can complicate things by suddenly stirring the photographers' sense of national identity and disrupt their daily production routine from within. Deviating from their roles as employees subordinate to a powerful international business, they become torn between their national and professional identities. Their pictorial products reflect this conflict.

### **An Image of a Local Disaster: Israeli Soldiers Picking up Body Parts**

In the event discussed here, a photographer's battle for identity reached a peak in the execution of the picture of the event (Figure 1). At the divided scene, the photographer chose to focus on the group of soldiers collecting the remains of the fallen officer. In the photo, an unarmed soldier kneels to search for body parts. He wears a pair of white gloves; another pair hangs from his right pocket. He holds a white plastic bag printed with the Hebrew words *number, date, team*, and the abbreviations for *catalogue number*. Underneath, the printed Hebrew letter **ⓧ** designates the bag as army property, as the circled **ⓧ** is a well-known local symbol for the IDF term **צבאי** (Army property). His fellow soldiers kneel in a line behind him, their weapons on their backs. They too wear white gloves and hold white plastic bags.



**Figure 1. Israeli soldiers picking up body parts near the city of Tulkarem.**

*(Thomson Reuters, Israel, December 29, 2006)*

The angle invites viewers to take part in the macabre process. Their gaze is level with the soldiers' line of sight, forming a relation of symbolic equality (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). The close-up of the soldier in front, empowered in this perspective by the line of fellow soldiers behind him, shatters the boundaries between the distant soldiers and the viewer, who now shares their experience as though he or she is one of them (ibid.). The Hebrew on the bags (צ and ט"מ [Catalogue number]) immediately identifies them as IDF property. Lined up in the background, the kneeling soldiers appear in their local identity as IDF troops. Their formation is a familiar military act known as "forming a line" (יישור קו)—an oft-used expression in IDF combat units that former IDF combat soldiers even joke about in everyday banter. It alludes to the act of lining up to cover a certain area in a group as the best way to gather or look for something on the ground.

Gathered into a collection of contradictory elements, all these signs suddenly reveal the picture's power. The soldiers at the scene are not in combat. Their weapons are on their backs, not carried as they would be before battle or in training, and the soldier at the front has no weapon at all. Their kneeling is an unusual posture, less "army-like" and thus disturbing. Instead of weapons, they hold white plastic bags that look much like garbage bags. Their white color contrasts with the soldiers' olive green uniforms and loads the situation with awkwardness, draining the "combat-like" quality of the hostile environment suggested by helmeted heads and the armored vest worn by the soldier in front. The white bags—here visually connected to the white gloves—change the soldiers' activity into an almost sterilized, delicate,

medical procedure. The image plays on a binary juxtaposition: The intertextual relation between colors (white and camouflage green) and contexts (combat and casual) creates a stronger effect, adding additional layers to the reading of the image (Werner, 2004).

Tiny pieces cover the ground between the soldier in front and the group at the back. The soldiers will pick them up as they progress. Compared to their smallness, the size of the plastic bags inspires awe, suggesting that a horrifying act has taken place. There is flesh and there is blood; it is a “bad” death (a “publicly” violent one and thus highly newsworthy) and a “hot” one (as flesh and as news), and the photograph as a news document is there to cleanse it all (Seaton, 2005). The combination of the writing on the bags and the fragments of a person to be collected in them adds another tragic dimension: The pieces will eventually be placed in the bags and categorized by the date of collection, the collection team, and their catalogue number, as though they were military items slated for storage in the army’s warehouse.

Yet by no means to all viewers share the horror reflected in the picture. The visual signifiers are “localized, in certain parts of the analogon” (Barthes, 1977b, p. 29), and its (complete) reading requires that readers have particular knowledge of the world. As already mentioned, lining up like the soldiers in the picture is a very familiar act embedded deep within the daily routines of Israeli combat units and Israeli society. The letter  $\text{\textcircled{L}}$  on the bag marks it as IDF property, and the abbreviations are part of a familiar written and spoken IDF jargon loaded with additional meanings known only to Israeli soldiers and those who have previously served in the Israeli army.

The olive-colored IDF uniform is proudly presented in the close-up of the soldier at the front. A visual example of how IDF soldiers look in the field, he represents his fellow soldiers, who are secondary participants (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). He wears red shoes, informing Israeli viewers that he may be a paratrooper, which loads the picture with the weight of historical significance: An Israeli paratrooper—a mythical symbol of the Israeli army’s strength and “greatness” evoking the “liberation” of Jerusalem in the Six-Day War of 1967—now kneels without a weapon, gazing submissively at the asphalt road as he collects the remains of his comrade-in-arms. No longer just a soldier (of course, he never was), he is at once a symbol of tragedy and bravery: His posture symbolizes the defeat of the Israeli army by enemy malice and the forces of terror—and of an army with high values and outstanding norms, whose own soldiers, dead or alive, are its top priority (now the group action of the soldiers represents military solidarity, with IDF values as its code of honor).<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the picking up of body parts acquires a religious dimension, as the soldiers involved in it are committed to it by their Jewish origin. It is not only part of an army routine but part of Jewish tradition. The act of carrying body parts is described as a commandment (*Mitzvah*) to bring the dead to burial (*Kvura*), as stated in the Book of Deuteronomy: “Lo-talin nivlato al-ha’ets ki-kavor tikberenu bayom hahu” (The remains of the deceased should not be left outside, and should be buried the same day)

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<sup>3</sup> The small body parts in the picture imbue the forces of terror with a quality of “third-world barbarism,” as opposed to the Israeli forces and their “first-world,” civilized behavior, as seen by first-world eyes (Pedelty, 1995).



(21:23). The gloves worn by the soldiers protect them from becoming impure, for the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Tora) says under *Tum'at Met* (corpse impurity) that a piece of a corpse larger than an olive can transmit impurity. The Deuteronomic commandment also explains why ZAKA, whose volunteers are mostly Orthodox Jews, gathers body parts at different scenes. Thus an additional intertextual relation forms: The religious text anchors the image, and the image frames the text for the religious Jewish reader. The image is a visual exemplar of a moral duty under Jewish law (*Halakha*), carried out as the Code of Maimonides instructs for matters of corpse impurity (Werner, 2004).

### **Text and Intertext, Nation and Profession**

The picture's local meaning is also heightened by activation of a different news picture from the past. In 2004, Barkay Wolfson, an Israeli photographer then working for the Israeli newspaper *Maariv*, received access to IDF forces on their way to the Philadelphi Route, which separates Gaza and Egypt. A few days earlier, a roadside bomb had killed some Israeli soldiers and destroyed an armored vehicle. Wolfson was the first to photograph Israeli soldiers digging through sand in search of dead soldiers' remains, and his picture immediately became famous (Figure 2). It appeared in all the Israeli newspapers and won first place at that year's annual Local Testimony competition.



**Figure 2. Israeli soldiers picking up body parts near the Philadelphi Route.**  
(Barkay Wolfson/Maariv, Israel, May 13, 2004)

Read together, the visual elements in both pictures (Figure 3) suggest that Wolfson's picture might be interpreted as a basic intertext that the Reuters photographer *misread* in an attempt to imbue his picture with local particularity (Bloom, 1975). At the front of the picture, a group of soldiers crawl in the sand searching for body parts with their bare hands. Wolfson chose to position himself above the soldiers, creating an oblique, high angle that makes the soldiers appear lower than the camera lens, belittling their presence; they are not part of his world (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Thus Wolfson detached himself from the group. He was a neutral news photographer shooting Israeli soldiers.

In contrast, the Reuters photographer stares right at his subjects. He knelt as if he were one of them to place his camera on their line of sight and he directs his gaze at his "comrades" in action. The resulting frontal angle connects the photographer with his subjects. They are part of his world and he is involved with them, taking pictures from within (Collier, 2001; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996).

Wolfson's soldiers crawl in sand, and their objective seems almost impossible. Their weird walk, and the way they turn the sand, seems to belittle them and identifies the situation as a senseless performance. Some crawl and some stand; their appearance is sloppy, their form broken. The solid line of their movement is shattered and disorderly, as if their act were being carried out wildly. The soldiers in the Reuters picture, however, kneel yet seem almost to be standing. They are all lined up and identical in uniform. They wear white gloves. Their discipline is strongly expressed in the person of the soldier at the front. His shirt sits on his body with straight creases. His shoes are firmly tied, and his bulletproof vest fits perfectly. His appearance is appropriate to the delicate event he is partaking in, and he stands as a magnified exemplar of the group's appearance.

Wolfson documents great confusion. His soldiers turn the sand as though their act is primal and unregulated. Any body parts found in the sand would have been gathered individually in whatever container was available at the scene (their pockets, perhaps, and with just their bare hands). The act is visually stripped of Jewish context because collecting body parts barehanded conveys impurity in Jewish law. They thus look like they are searching for some sort of object lost in the sand, and the body parts become things at the end of an objectifying process that transforms living human organs into a pile of silent particles.

In the Reuters picture, meanwhile, the soldiers' act seems a strictly orchestrated operation: Their straight line, and the gloves and white plastic bags given to them in advance, indicate that they are following a particular military, religious procedure (perhaps even a written one) for such horrifying events. The white gloves imply a medical, delicate act, an act by the living that, in Jewish law, honors the dead. The white plastic bags (perhaps manufactured especially for such events) demonstrate the sanctity of the situation. As a sensitive matter, it should be kept as clean and sterile as possible.



**Figure 3. Text and intertext, nation and profession.**

So, through their intertextual dialogue and visual similarities and contradictions, the two pictures represent an endless conflict and negotiation. The high angle capturing undisciplined movement by sloppily uniformed soldiers in an unregulated search in endless sand load Wolfson's picture with a sense of defeat. His confused soldiers can be seen to represent a weak, disordered army. They crawl like defeated animals to search for the body parts of fellow soldiers killed in a horrific explosion, their heads lowered to the ground. They are faceless and silent. Although the Reuters picture can be seen as a misreading of Wolfson's, this does not drain the picture of its local color; rather, it glorifies its sense of particular place and belonging: The well-organized routine, the soldiers' neat appearance, and the close-up of the soldier in the foreground endow the picture with the scent of a particular personality, one pleading for empathy.

Unlike Wolfson's picture, the other photograph documents a sense of heroism—visual evidence of sanctity. This is not expressed in the mere military assignment to collect body parts by searching for them on the ground. Here the gaze is pointed upwards, instead implying a religious ritual: The mission of the living to gather the particles. They are gathered by delicate tools and held by extraordinary containers—medical, pure, virginal white rubber gloves and plastic bags. The white color permeates the event with a sense of sanctity and purity. The Reuters photographer is a Jewish Israeli, and his picture is of Jewish Israeli origin. Its visual elements are footprints that reveal the photographer's local identity, inviting only a select group of spectators—a Jewish Israeli audience—to participate in a privileged dialogue through which their cultural identities will be molded.

To "fill in the gaps" in the pictorial text, then, one must "invite" Wolfson's picture to be an intertext (Perminger, 2001, p. 4<sup>4</sup>; Riffaterre, 1990). Discussed as a creative text that exists as part of a dynamic, creative system of production, the Reuters picture is interwoven with all the creative forces that

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<sup>4</sup> Originally in Hebrew, my translation.

surround it (and, assisted by the intertextual exchange, would also allow for a closer reading of Wolfson's picture, taken here as an intertext; see Perminger, 2001).<sup>5</sup> It becomes a reaction to combined forces, and an outcome of a unique relationship (whether in the form of struggle or acceptance) between different texts (Bloom, 1975). The "new" picture—now a revision of the "old" one—then becomes an expression of a "misreading" (ibid.).

However, the struggle discussed here is not at all between big artists and giant ones from the past (and thus representative of Bloom's anxiety), but rather a struggle over the territory of place and belonging. Depicting the Israeli–Palestinian conflict through the eyes of the Reuters photographer, it is a rare document that visualizes the photographer's torn identity as a local photographer in the service of an international news agency. When events are a matter of national security, his national sense of belonging overcomes the objective values required by his profession: He is no longer just a photographer working for an international news agency, but rather a Jewish Israeli working for a foreign news agency. Now, his occupational and national communities are entwined (Liebes, 1992; Nossek, 2004; Zandberg & Neiger, 2005; Zelizer, 1993).

This ongoing tension is also evident in the transformation of the picture's caption as it goes from the field to the local bureau in Jerusalem, then to Singapore, and finally into the publications of the agency's clients. In many ways it demonstrates the problematic of *ekphrasis*—the verbal representation of visual representation—through the ways that various players deal with the image-word problem and use it at different stages of the production routine, from soothing the anxiety of the torn photographer to making the picture internationally appealing and thus a better commodity for international clients and consumers (Krieger, 1998; Mitchell, 1996).

In the caption written by the photographer, the event carries a national connotation: "Israeli soldiers search and collect part of the bodies of Israeli soldiers. December 29, 2005. REUTERS." Apart from mentioning the Israeli soldiers searching for body parts, it gives the victims' bodies a nationality, to some extent at the expense of "dry" information about the event itself (e.g., where and how it occurred). A decontextualization process is in play: A one-time traumatic Israeli event in which Israeli soldiers played a substantial part is stripped of its historic significance as part of the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian dispute. The text here is clearly detached from the image and therefore, in a sense, "produces an entirely new signified" (Barthes, 1977b, p. 27). An *ekphrastic impossibility* is at work. This caption can be seen as a way to soothe the photographer's torn identity—but his words certainly do not *represent* the event as image (e.g., based on the visual elements of the image it is not clear whether the body parts are Israeli or Palestinian, and do body parts have a nationality at all?) (Mitchell, 1994).

The editor at the local office added some details and changed others on Reuters pictures' internal editing software: "Israeli soldiers collect and search for body parts following an explosion close to an army checkpoint near the West Bank city of Tulkarem, December 29, 2005." At a basic level, the editor used the

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<sup>5</sup> The intertextual relation between the two images therefore suggests a closer reading of both. Juxtaposed, with their intertextual relation reflected by their visual elements, both pictures contribute additional layers to one another's interpretation, as detailed in my analysis.

caption to “clarify” the image. It is now an image of a scene after an explosion that occurred somewhere specific. An *ekphrastic hope* is in play in the editor’s attempt to use the caption to make the viewer see clearly (Mitchell, 1994). The main goal in the office, however, is ultimately to make things easier for international clients. The caption helps the picture become an international commodity by placing it a wider context that may sell better to an international audience. It describes an explosion near a military barrier in the vicinity of the city of Tulkarem. Yet the explosion has no “face,” for there is no sign of the suicide bomber or the unexpected army barrier that forced the taxi to pull over (apparently leading to the explosion). Instead, it is an explosion, perhaps an accident that occurred when Israeli soldiers simply happened to be nearby.

Changing “search and collect” to “collect and search for” maintains a “proper” English style, and the latter phrase may be easier to read and understand on an international scale. Stripping the body parts of their Israeli nationality forces the photographer’s national identity into the shadows again, as his professional codes require. His choice of words (which seem like “bad” English) would most certainly reveal his own nationality (an Israeli? a Palestinian?) and might even indicate a political affiliation adopted by the local bureau.

#### **Front Page: The *International Herald Tribune***

The picture made it to the left-hand side of the front page of the *International Herald Tribune* (Figure 4), where it was given the status of factual information. The combination of the picture and caption treats the visual elements of the picture as obscure pieces of information that are explained by the text, and it is less obvious than other elements on the page, being reduced in size and placed at the bottom left of the page. The main picture, located at the top center, is twice its size. The black frame around the picture and caption separates the combination from other informational elements on the page, thereby empowering its awkwardness (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1998).



Figure 4. Front page, International Herald Tribune, December 30, 2006

Transformed one last time, the caption, as published on the front page of the *International Herald Tribune*, read:

**Suicide Bombing in Mideast**

Israeli soldiers collecting and searching for body parts after an explosion close to an army checkpoint in the West Bank on Thursday. The army had been on high alert after reports that a suicide bomber was trying to enter Israel. (*International Herald Tribune*, Front page, December 30, 2006)

Finally, on the front of the *International Herald Tribune*, the ekphrastic hope at first appears even stronger, as the text here seems "closer" to the image (Mitchell, 1994). The photo's visual elements are shared with the verbal message, and "the connotation of the language is 'innocented' through the

photograph's denotation" (Barthes, 1977b, p. 26). With the caption's help, the document becomes a *glocal* sign: It aspires to perfectly depict an event as part of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a globally scrutinized struggle that at times involves Israeli soldiers fighting suicide bombers in the West Bank. The explosion is now classed as the deliberate action of a suicide bomber trying to enter Israeli territory, making the picture and its caption a combined visual-textual attempt to represent a well-known conflict in which both sides endure sacrifices.

This startling event (one does not often encounter people picking up body parts) carries a powerful local scent. Its position marks its secondary importance compared to photos that depict other, more "comfortable" events in more familiar places—snow-dusted Florence in the main picture, or the head shot of the Italian central bank's new chief in the center—and are thus more easily read by an international audience (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1998).<sup>6</sup> Intertextuality across images is also in play here, as the *pairing* of images on the front page encourages the viewer to notice similarities and differences between them, inviting a deeper reading of the image, given its unusual theme and visual landscape (Werner, 2004). Since the pictorial coverage represents a strange event that is hard to understand through its visual elements alone, its caption becomes inseparable from its decoding process, as though it were a comic strip (Abbott, 1986). The picture and caption are transformed into a combined system of visual and textual signs that require an integrated reading (Barthes, 1977b; Werner, 2004).<sup>7</sup>

On a deeper level, then, the power of this combined system of signs is revealed one last time: It is an inseparable synthesis of word and image in which the visual aspires to represent the local and is thus detached from the international spectator's world, whereas the textual represents the international and thus becomes closer to it (Holtzman, 1997). This is the visual-textual language of globalization. Published on an agency client's front page, the transformation is complete, and the image is therefore easier for international spectators to digest.<sup>8</sup>

Once the picture is published, the photographer encounters it on the *International Herald Tribune's* front page, just do the audience of spectators, as well as his colleagues. Publication on the front page of a prestigious international newspaper is evidence of a photographer's success overseas. The published picture becomes an incentive to the photographer and his colleagues, and will inform the production of similar images in the future: Once viewed by other personnel on the production line and beyond, it reasserts the Reuters brand as having high standards, with production lines and final outputs designed for perfection. It is therefore part of the organizational meta-format of success—a sign among

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<sup>6</sup> Kress and Van Leeuwen (1998) pointed to the importance of the audience's common cultural background. In this specific case, a common "international" background was essential to the *International Herald Tribune* page's unique reading.

<sup>7</sup> Barthes refers to them as two separate structures—text and image—which must both be read completely and separately to understand how they complement one another. Nonetheless, here the text is seen not simply as a parasitic rationalization of the image, as Barthes suggested, but as two structures discussed in a complex bidirectional relationship (Barthes, 1977b).

<sup>8</sup> The newspaper's name (here, *International Herald Tribune*) affects the reading of a photographic message and adds to (or even sometimes completely changes) a photograph's meaning (Barthes, 1977b).

other signs bound together as a set of unwritten instructions to help reproduce successes and avoid failures (Frosh, 2003).

This set of instructions is ingrained as an essential learning process and part of the work experience acquired by photographers, editors and managers who work for the organization. These instructions account for the organization's experience in producing success, for the success of the cultural industry in which it operates, and eventually for a cultural sense of comfort and confidence. And when the news picture is published (and is therefore successful), it becomes a form of existential security—a cultural mechanism for soothing the existential experience of the spectator (Giddens, 1991). Only then do the horrifying visuals in the picture of soldiers searching for body parts become a place of comfort, one that "delineates the dangerous territory outside order, and throws into sharp relief the proper limits of that which is ordered" (Seaton, 2005, p. 32).

### Conclusion

Zelizer (2010) said images "regularly travel across circumstances that are transformative, sometimes playful and hypothetical, and often internally contradictory" (p. 12). This article has inspected such evasive relations through the scope of image production—from text to work, to redirect Barthes' famous title (Barthes, 1977c). More specifically, it describes how images of a particular kind—news pictures produced by an international news agency—acquire additional layers of meaning as they become vehicles of visual memory at certain moments in their production routine, echoing pictorial texts from the past.

As meaning is "caught in a process of production" (Haberer, 2007, p. 56), the system of manufacture inspected here suggests that various forces in play that govern the production of news pictures—from their conception to their processes of execution and forms of publication—yet have little to do with the events they depict. As such, it supports the idea that news pictures have "enigmatic boundaries which connect events in unpredictable ways" (Zelizer, 1998, p. 2) and meanings that are always subject to social dialogue and negotiation.

The analyzed event also supplied a glimpse into the heart of an international news agency—the powerful "silent partner" of journalists and news organizations (Johnston & Forde, 2011, p. 196). It particularly showed the complicated nature of the production of the agency's news pictorial products, which eventually appear in our daily newspapers and websites, and often are taken for granted. More importantly, however, it demonstrated that the complex entities responsible for setting the production routine in motion—photographers, editors, producers, and so on—bear complex cultural identities that constantly come into play as they cover the news. As a result, their cultural identities affect their daily job and are molded by it.

The organization in which they operate thus works as an arena of constant struggle over social power and control. Focusing on the work invested in news pictures may therefore offer a better understanding of how the news image works and permit visualization of some of the forces that make it work. At times, the making of news pictures unveils itself as an infinite process of movement between texts, and the news picture as a vehicle of a pictorial echo.



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