The Hostile Suffering Effect:
Mediated Encounters With the Suffering of Opponents, Recognition, and Moral Concern in Protracted Asymmetrical Conflict

ROTEM NAGAR[1]
IFAT MAOZ
Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

Few studies have empirically examined how and to what extent media exposure to representations of the suffering of opponents in conflicts affects audiences' responses. Using public opinion polling (N = 671), we examine, in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the extent to which exposure to media coverage of the suffering of opponents predicts empathy toward the opponents and willingness to recognize their suffering. In line with our hypotheses, the findings demonstrate a *hostile suffering effect* in which higher exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering predicts decreased Jewish-Israeli willingness to recognize this suffering. This association is mediated by decreased empathy toward Palestinians. The implications of our findings for understanding the role of the media in eliciting moral concern are discussed.

Keywords: mediated suffering, recognition, hostile media effect, witnessing, empathy, media coverage in conflict, moral concern, protracted conflict, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, public opinion

　　　　Struggles for recognition in our time are conducted through the digital and printed media: Ethnic, cultural, and social groups use the media to gain acknowledgment and to arouse sympathy for their cause and suffering (Kampf & Liebes, 2013; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012; Wolfsfeld, Frosh, & Awabdy, 2008). The media constitute a decisive arena where images of suffering—including media representations of the suffering of opponents in conflicts—are constructed and disseminated to the public, challenging audiences' perceptions and feelings toward the other (Galtung, 1998; Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Mor, Ron, & Maoz, 2016; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). The media representations of the suffering of opponents are highly important, given that the way media cover conflicts profoundly shapes the public

perception of conflicts and their resolution (Galtung, 1998, 2006; Kampf & Liebes, 2013; Kempf & Shinar, 2014; Shinar & Bratic, 2010; Wolfsfeld, 2004, 2011). Furthermore, encountering mediated suffering challenges audiences to include others in their moral conscience and can play an important role in the maintenance and extension of moral concern by eliciting a sense of empathy and creating recognition toward others (Frosh, 2006; Frosh & Pinchevsky, 2009; Slovic, 2007).

However, media-reported suffering and misery are open to various interpretations according to the cultural context and background of the audience and can give rise to different responses that are not necessarily recognition of and empathy for the other sufferer (Kyriakidou, 2014, 2015; Ong, 2014; Scott, 2014; Seu, 2003, 2010; Sontag, 2003; Tester, 2001). Moreover, cognitive and emotional mechanisms operating in protracted ethnopolitical conflicts raise a question as to whether exposure to media coverage of the suffering of others indeed elicits recognition and empathy (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012).

Our study addresses this underexamined question by directly and empirically investigating how and to what extent exposure to media coverage of suffering of the opponents in conflict predicts one's willingness to recognize the pain and suffering. More specifically, we examine, using public opinion polling data, the extent to which the mediated encounter with the suffering of Palestinians is associated with Jewish-Israeli willingness to recognize Palestinian pain and suffering and with empathy toward Palestinians in the asymmetrical and protracted conflict between the sides.

Conceptual Framework

Mediated Distant Suffering and Recognition

The global media play an important role in publicizing the suffering of others, including the suffering of opponents in conflicts (Galtung, 1998; Kampf & Liebes, 2013; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). The media multiplies encounters with individual others, creating intimacy at a distance (Frosh, 2006). Struggles for recognition have become mostly media struggles: Ethnic, cultural, and social groups use the media to gain recognition and arouse sympathy for their cause and suffering (Kampf & Liebes, 2013; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). Encounters with the suffering of opponents are of particular significance because they profoundly shape the public perception of conflicts and influence any subsequent attempts at conflict resolution (Galtung, 1998, 2006; Shinar & Bratic, 2010; Wolfsfeld, 2004, 2011).

The media introduce new forms of proximity between the sufferers and their spectators that may form the basis of moral relationships and solidarity toward others (Silverstone, 2007). Moral exclusion is a process in which people are placed outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply (Opotow, 1990). Mediated suffering may challenge audiences to extend public moral concern by eliciting empathy and recognition (Frosh, 2006; Frosh & Pinchevsky, 2009; Slovic, 2007). The ethical role of the media, therefore, is viewed as forging moral inclusion in which the boundaries of moral responsibility are extended to include concern for others (Opotow, 1990; Opotow, Gerson, & Woodside, 2005).

However, most recent scholarly work suggests that the mediation of suffering is a complex and varied process, thus challenging its presumed role of eliciting feelings of empathy and creating recognition. Greater visibility of the other is not necessarily accompanied by a more empathetic representation (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, Hanitzsch, & Nagar, 2015). Audience attention is manipulated and attracted through techniques of representation that may block rather than enable moral response to mediated suffering (Chouliaraki, 2013; Cohen, 2001; Frosh, 2011; Hoijer, 2004; Moeller, 1999; Tester, 2001).

Furthermore, media-reported suffering and misery open possibilities of agency: Viewers engage with distant suffering in a variety of ways that are not exhausted with the arousal of empathy and recognition (Frosh, 2006; Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009; Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012; Scott, 2014; Seu, 2003, 2010; Sontag, 2003; Tester, 2001). The forms of engagement are filtered through both the nature and extent of media reports of suffering and the cultural context and background of the audience (Joye, 2013; Kyriakidou, 2014, 2015; Ong, 2014; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008).

Yet the current academic debate on how mediated suffering impacts media users has often taken place on theoretical, ethical, and moral grounds (Huiberts, 2016; Huiberts & Joye, 2015). Few studies have attempted to directly and empirically examine how and to what extent mediated encounters with the suffering of others affect audiences' responses. The question of whether exposure to media coverage of the suffering of others indeed elicits recognition and empathy is particularly relevant in protracted ethnopolitical conflicts. Cognitive and emotional mechanisms operating in such conflicts can create an ambivalent response to the encountered suffering of the opponents (Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012).

Representations of Suffering in Media Coverage of Conflicts

Contemporary news coverage displays an increased focus on the suffering of the opponents in conflicts (Kampf & Liebes, 2013; Tenenboim-Weinblatt et al., 2015; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). The media enables humanizing the enemies by exposing viewers to both their faces and their voices (Kogut & Ritov, 2005; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012; Slovic, 2007). Mediated personal encounter with the face of the enemy is an important arena for physical proximity and verbal interaction between representatives of conflicting parties (Liebes & Kampf, 2004; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012). The media representations of the suffering of enemies can contribute to conflict resolution and reconciliatory efforts by opening opportunities for sympathy and recognition and by encouraging support for peaceful solutions (Bar-Tal, 2013; Galtung, 1998, 2006; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012). Especially in asymmetric, intractable conflicts such as the Israeli–Palestinian one, the potential power of the media in to elicit moral concern toward the opponents is viewed as crucial to conflict resolution and reconciliation. Therefore, it is important to understand how viewers relate to media representations that call them—through presenting the humanity of the other side in the conflict—to feel empathy for these opponents and recognize them.

Several studies have demonstrated dissonance in viewers' emotional and moral responses to media representations of the suffering of the opponents in conflict, who are fundamentally seen as undeserving of personal recognition and compassion (Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012).

Rosenberg and Maoz (2012) have found, in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, how a televised interview with the enemy causes among viewers a dilemma of feeling sympathy for the interviewed other alongside severely hostile feelings such as anger and hatred. Viewers manage their dissonance by deploying various strategies that lead to multiple interpretations and responses, which are not necessarily empathy and compassion (Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012). Media representations that are seen as potentially attributing to one's own side the responsibility for the suffering of the opponents can increase dissonance among viewers and may lead, in turn, to repressing empathy and compassion and deflecting the blame (Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Mor et al., 2016).

The research discussed above offers valuable preliminary insights into the complex link between media exposure to representations of suffering of the opponent in conflicts and the fostering of empathy and recognition. The goal of our study is to directly and empirically examine the extent to which exposure to media coverage of the suffering of the opponents in conflict is associated with increased audiences' willingness to recognize the pain and suffering. More specifically, we examine, using public opinion polling data, the extent to which Jewish-Israeli exposure to media representations of Palestinian suffering is associated with increased empathy toward Palestinians and with a willingness to recognize their pain and suffering.

The Hostile Suffering Effect

How do we respond to media representation of the pain and suffering of the opponents in conflict? Little research has directly, systematically, and empirically addressed this question. However, a prominent research trend that focuses on our perceptions of media coverage in conflict might provide some clues. The *hostile media effect* refers to the tendency of partisans to judge mass media coverage as biased against one's own point of view, even when coverage is relatively evenhanded (Duck, Terry, & Hogg, 1998; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). This effect is particular to media materials and is generated by peoples' belief that information in a mass medium will reach a broad audience and, as a result, can have a broad misleading influence on public attitudes (Gunther, Miller, & Liebhart, 2009). Later research expanded the concept to what is termed the *relative hostile media effect*: When media content is more favorable to one side of the issue, both partisan groups will see the content as slanted toward that side; however, the group the message opposed will perceive a greater degree of bias than the group the message supported (Gunther et al., 2009). Hostile media perceptions vary as a function of agreement with media content: Partisans judge media coverage congruent with their political perspectives to be fair and balanced, but incongruent media coverage to be hostile (Arceneaux, Johnson, & Murphy, 2012; Gunther, Edgerly, Akin, & Broesch, 2012; Gunther, McLaughlin, Gotlieb, & Wise, 2016; Stroud, 2011).

A growing body of research illustrates that perceptions of media bias have important consequences for political attitudes and behavior (Feldman, Hart, Leiserowitz, Maibach, & Roser-Renouf, 2015; Huge & Glynn, 2010; Perloff, 2015). Hostile media perceptions might inspire individuals to take action (Barnidge & Rojas, 2014; Hwang, Pan, & Sun, 2008; Rojas, 2010), including propelling individuals to speak up or communicate in online environments (McKeever, McKeever, & Li, 2016). However, people who perceived hostile media bias may also feel powerless, distrustful of media and other institutions such

as government, and withdraw from functional political or social activities (Choi, Park, & Chang, 2011; Gunther, Perloff, & Tsfati, 2008; Tsfati & Cohen, 2005a, 2005b). In the specific context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, respondents who estimated a stronger media impact of biased media coverage of conflicts declared more hostile and less compromising attitudes in the conflict (Tsfati, 2007; Tsfati & Cohen, 2005b) and less support of peace proposals (Maoz, Ward, Katz, & Ross, 2002).

Furthermore, mediation of out-group suffering in conflict may be perceived as a cynical attempt at exploiting their suffering for political gain (Frosh & Wolfsfeld, 2007; Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). In the context of the Israeli and Palestinian media coverage, Frosh and his colleagues (Frosh & Wolfsfeld, 2007; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008) discovered that in-group media use defensive mechanisms when portraying the out-group's suffering. Wolfsfeld, Frosh, and Awabdy (2008) argue that when one's own citizens are hurt, the news media employ a "victim mode" of reporting, marked by high prominence of the story, a high level of dramatization, and personalization of the victim's suffering. In contrast, when injuries and loss of life on the other side are inflicted by one's own group, the news media tend to use a "defensive mode" of reporting, characterized by low prominence of the news story, an analytical perspective, and depersonalization of the victims. Given the asymmetric and protracted nature of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Jewish-Israeli recognition of Palestinian suffering may be also seen as admission of responsibility for causing this suffering.

The work reviewed above on the hostile media effect leads us to expect that the mediated encounter with the other's suffering—and especially with the enemy's suffering in intractable conflicts—will elicit hostile and negative attitudes toward the suffering of opponents. Thus, we hypothesize a *hostile suffering effect* in which exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering will predict decreased recognition among Jewish-Israelis of the pain and suffering and will be associated with decreased empathy toward Palestinians.

H1:   *Exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering and empathy toward Palestinians will each predict Jewish-Israeli willingness to recognize Palestinian pain and suffering, with higher exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering and lower empathy toward Palestinians predicting decreased recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering.*

Empathy as a Mediator

Empathy is an other-oriented emotional state comprising cognitive elements, such as perspective taking and "feeling for" or "feeling with" the other (Eisenberg, 2000; Singer & Lamm, 2009; see also David & Maoz, 2015). Empathy toward the other enables a fleeting transfer of emotion—as if the suffering were one's own—and can potentially lead to public action to alleviate the suffering (Batson, 2011; Waytz, Zaki, & Mitchell, 2012). Indeed, previous studies have found that empathy toward the opponent in a conflict has a substantial role in explaining decreased support for hostile and aggressive policies toward these opponents and higher support for political compromises (David & Maoz, 2015; Maoz & McCauley, 2005, 2009; Rosler, Cohen-Chen, & Halperin, 2015).

Yet, in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Liebes and Kampf (2009) demonstrated that viewers rarely express empathy for the mediated suffering of opponents: The dissonance that is aroused by the mediated encounter with the opponents' suffering leads viewers to repress empathy and replace it with negative attitudes toward the opponents. They may justify the suffering caused to the other side, make excuses for its occurrence, or reconcile the apparent dissonance between their own ideology and a specific image by seeing it as an exception to the rule (Liebes & Kampf, 2009). Moreover, Rosenberg and Maoz (2012) found that viewers contain the forceful dissonance by using interpretative strategies that maintain, rather than decrease, negative and hostile responses toward the opponents.

This analysis leads us to expect that the hypothesized hostile suffering effect will be at least partly explained or mediated by a reduction of empathy. Thus, we hypothesize that the association of exposure to media coverage of the pain and suffering of Palestinians with (decreased) Jewish-Israeli willingness to recognize the pain and suffering will be significantly mediated by decreased empathy toward Palestinians.

H2:   *Exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering and empathy toward Palestinians will still significantly predict decreased Jewish-Israeli recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering when the degree of hawkishness as well as the demographic variables of level of education and socioeconomic status of the respondents are added to the model as predictors.*

Controlling for Hawkishness, Socioeconomic Status, and Level of Education

A central ideological orientation in conflicts in general, and specifically in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, is a right-wing-hawkish orientation. Generally, hawkish positions tend to be less cooperative and trusting when the resolution of a conflict is on the agenda (Maoz, 2006; Maoz et al., 2002). Previous studies have found that higher Jewish-Israeli hawkishness is associated with more rigid and negative attitudes toward Palestinians, lower willingness to support a compromise solution to the conflict (Maoz & McCauley, 2005, 2008, 2009; Maoz, Yaniv, & Ivri, 2007; J Shamir & Shamir, 2000; J. Shamir & Shikaki, 2002, 2010), and lower willingness to recognize Palestinian pain and suffering and the Palestinian demand for national self-determination (Nagar & Maoz, 2014, 2015).

In regard to socioeconomic status and level of education, research conducted in European countries has found that higher levels of education and higher socioeconomic status are related to more positive attitudes toward out-groups and lower political intolerance (Scheepers, Gijsberts, & Coenders, 2002). Similarly, studies of public opinion in the Middle East have found that higher education and higher socioeconomic status of Israeli-Jews are associated with less negative attitudes and with lower political intolerance toward Arabs (M. Shamir & Sagiv-Schifter, 2006).

To bolster the validity of this study, we employ a predictive model that takes into account and controls for the effects of participants' hawkishness, socioeconomic status, and education level. We hypothesize that exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering and empathy toward Palestinians will still predict decreased Jewish-Israeli recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering when controlling for respondents' hawkishness, level of education, and socioeconomic status.

H3:   The association of exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering with (decreased) Jewish-Israeli recognition of this suffering will be mediated by reduced Jewish-Israeli empathy toward Palestinians.

In sum, the goal of our study is to examine the extent to which (1) exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering alongside empathy toward Palestinians predict Jewish-Israeli willingness to recognize Palestinian pain and suffering. To bolster the external validity of our model, we also examine (2) the extent to which exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering and empathy toward Palestinians still significantly predict Jewish-Israeli recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering when the respondents' degree of hawkishness, level of education, and socioeconomic are added to the model as predictors. In addition, we also examine (3) the extent to which empathy toward Palestinians significantly mediates the association of exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering with Jewish-Israeli willingness to recognize this suffering.

Method

Survey Design and Participants

Results of this study are based on a nationally representative random interview survey of 671 Jewish-Israeli adults (age 18 and older) conducted by a professional polling agency in Israel, during June 2015. The response rate in surveys of the Jewish-Israeli population, including this one, is estimated at between 20% and 30%. The survey was conducted in Hebrew, but items are reproduced here in English translation. The demographics of this sample are comparable to those of the general Jewish-Israeli population.

Measures

A scale for recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering was based on two items rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Responses to these items were averaged for each respondent to create one scale, where higher scores mean a greater willingness to recognize Palestinian pain and suffering. The two items were: "Recognition by Israel of the pain and suffering of the Palestinians, without taking responsibility, is important as part of the efforts to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict"; and "I think that as part of the attempts to resolve the conflict, Israel should recognize the pain and suffering of Palestinians." Cronbach's α coefficient for these items was .67 (see Table 1).

A scale for exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering was based on four items rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Responses to these items were averaged for each respondent to create one scale, where higher scores mean higher exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The four items were: "I am often exposed to coverage by the Israeli media of Palestinian pain and suffering caused by the Israeli–Palestinian conflict"; "I am often exposed to coverage by international media of Palestinian pain and suffering caused by the conflict"; "There is a small amount of media coverage of Palestinian pain and

suffering caused by the Israeli–Palestinian conflict" (reverse-coded); and "When the media covers the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, it downplays the degree of suffering of Palestinians caused by the conflict" (reverse-coded). Cronbach's α coefficient for these items was .56 (see Table 1).

An empathy scale was based on two items rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Responses to these items were averaged for each respondent to create one scale, where higher scores mean greater empathy toward Palestinians. The two items were: "I feel understanding toward Palestinians" and "I feel sympathy for the Palestinians." Cronbach's α coefficient for these items was .69 (see Table 1).

Hawkishness was measured by asking respondents to place themselves on a 9-point bipolar scale as follows: "In the scale presented to you, 1 represents full identification with left-wing (dovish) attitudes, 9 represents full identification with right-wing (hawkish) attitudes, and 5 represents middle/centrist attitudes. Where would you place yourself on this scale?"

Level of education was measured by asking respondents to indicate their number of years of formal schooling.

Socioeconomic status was measured by asking respondents to rate their household average monthly expenditure on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*a lot below the average*) to 5 (*a lot above the average*) as follows: "The average expense for a family of four last month stood at about 13,000NIS [New Israeli shekels; $3,565]. Considering your expenses and the size of your family, would you rate your family's expenses as average, below average, or above average?"

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of the Recognition of Palestinian Pain and Suffering Scale, the Exposure to Media Coverage of Palestinian Pain and Suffering Scale, the Empathy Scale, Hawkishness, and Demographic Items.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	M (SD)
1. Recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering scale (2)	.67	−.25**	.54**	−.43**	−.02	.10*	2.7 (1.1)
2. Exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering scale (4)		.60	−.27**	.22**	.09*	.04	4.5 (0.99)
3. Empathy scale (2)			.69	−.50**	.08*	.06	2.7 (1.2)
4. Hawkishness					−.14**	−.11*	6.3 (2.1)
5. Level of education						.08*	14.7 (3.5)
6. Socioeconomic status							2.9 (1.2)

Note. $N = 671$. Correlations in bold are $p < .05$ (two-tailed). Number of items for each scale appear in parentheses. Figures in italics on diagonal are Cronbach alphas of the corresponding scales. Recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from *not at all* to *very much*.

Exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering and empathy were each measured on a 6-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Hawkishness was measured on a 9-point bipolar scale ranging from *dove* to *hawk*.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 presents means and standard deviations for our measures as well as the zero-order correlations among them. These data indicate that Jewish-Israelis reported high levels of exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.99$), with 62% of respondents indicating such exposure (ratings of 4, 5, or 6 on the 6-point scale). Jewish-Israeli respondents indicated a low level of empathy toward Palestinians ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.20$), with only 18% of respondents indicating such empathy (ratings of 4, 5, or 6 on the 6-point scale). Our data also indicate that Jewish-Israelis expressed low willingness to recognize Palestinian pain and suffering ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.09$), with 18% of respondents expressing such willingness (ratings of 4 or 5 on the 5-point scale). Respondents expressed medium-level hawkishness ($M = 6.26$, $SD = 2.06$), with 53% of them identifying themselves as hawks (ratings of 6 to 9 on the 9-point scale), 14% of the respondents identifying themselves as doves, and 28% as centrists.

***Table 2. Predictors of Recognition of Palestinian Pain and Suffering:
Standardized Coefficient Values.***

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering scale (4)	**−.12**	**−.11**	**−.10**
Empathy scale (2)	**.50**	**.39**	**.39**
Hawkishness		**−.22**	**−.21**
Level of education			−.05
Socioeconomic status			.08
Adjusted R^2	.29	.33	.33

Note. Coefficients in bold are $p < .01$.

Exposure to Media Coverage of Palestinian Pain and Suffering and Empathy as Predictors of Recognition of Palestinian Pain and Suffering

The recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering scale showed strong zero-order correlations with the exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering scale ($r = −.25$; $p < .001$; see Table 1) and with the empathy scale ($r = .54$, $p < .001$). The exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering scale was also significantly correlated with the empathy scale ($r = −.27$, $p < .001$; see Table 1).

To test H1, we conducted a regression model using the exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering scale and the empathy scale to predict respondents' scores on the

recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering scale (Model 1, see Table 2). The regression model produced a statistically significant (adjusted) R^2 = .29, F(2, 477) = 100.6, p < .001. The resulting regression coefficients indicate that, as hypothesized, the exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering scale made a significant contribution to the overall explanatory power of the model (β = −.12, p < .001). In addition, as expected, the empathy scale had a significant effect on the recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering scale (β = .50, p < .001). Respondents with higher scores on the exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering scale and lower scores on the empathy scale showed decreased willingness to recognize Palestinian pain and suffering (see Table 2, Model 1).

Predicting Beyond Hawkishness and Demographic Variables

To test H2, we conducted a regression model using hawkishness, level of education, and socioeconomic status alongside the exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering scale and the empathy scale to predict respondents' scores on the recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering scale (see Table 2, Model 3). The resulting regression coefficients indicate that, as hypothesized, exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering (β = −.10, p ≤ .001) and empathy toward Palestinians (β = .39, p ≤ .001) still each significantly predict Jewish-Israeli recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering when hawkishness and demographic items are added to the model.

To better understand the role of hawkishness and of the demographic items, we conducted a stepwise regression model, in which we added hawkishness to our two-predictor model (exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering and empathy) in the second step. In the third step, we added the demographic items to the resulting three-predictor model (exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering, empathy, and hawkishness).

Hawkishness and Recognition of Palestinian Pain and Suffering

Adding the level of respondents' hawkishness in the second step of our regression, alongside exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering and empathy toward Palestinians (see Table 2, Model 2), produced a significant but small increase in (adjusted) R^2 from .29 to .33, F change (3, 476) = 78.3, p < .001. The resulting regression coefficients indicate that hawkishness is significantly associated with Jewish-Israeli recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering (β = −.22, p < .001), with higher scores on hawkishness predicting decreased willingness to recognize Palestinian pain and suffering. Exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering (β = −.11, p ≤ .001) and empathy toward Palestinians (β = .39, p ≤ .001) are still significantly associated with Jewish-Israeli recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering when hawkishness is added to the model.

Demographic Items and Recognition of Palestinian Pain and Suffering

Adding the demographic variables (level of education and socioeconomic status) to our above three-predictor model (see Table 2, Model 3) in the third step of our regression did not produce an increase in the (adjusted) R^2, F change (5, 474) = 48.4, p < .001. The socioeconomic status of respondents was significantly associated with Jewish-Israeli recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering (β

= .08, p = .05), with higher scores on socioeconomic status predicting increased willingness to recognize Palestinian pain and suffering. Respondents' level of education ($β$ = −.05, p = .20), however, was not significantly associated with their recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering.

Mediation Analysis

H3 predicted that (decreased) empathy toward Palestinians will significantly mediate the association of exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering with (decreased) Jewish-Israeli recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering. To test this hypothesis, we employed mediational bootstrapping analysis using the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2013). In this model, exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering was the independent variable, empathy toward Palestinians was the mediator, and recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering was the dependent variable.

The results suggest that exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering had a significant negative effect on empathy toward Palestinians, B = −.35, $t(540)$ = −6.77, p < .001, while empathy toward Palestinians, in turn, had a significant positive effect on Jewish-Israeli recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering, B = .46, $t(540)$ = 13.48, p < .001.

In line with H3, we found that empathy toward Palestinians was a significant mediator of the association between exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering with (decreased) Jewish-Israeli willingness to recognize this suffering, B = −.16; ~~CI.~~ the 95% confidence interval was between -.22 and −.11. The total effect of exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering on Jewish-Israeli recognition of this suffering (i.e., the effect not mediated by empathy toward Palestinians), B = −.28, $t(540)$ = −5.94, p < .001, remained significant when controlling for empathy toward Palestinians (i.e., the effect when taking mediation in consideration), B = −.28, $t(540)$ = −5.95, p < .001. That is, once empathy toward Palestinians was controlled for, exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering still decreased Jewish-Israeli willingness to recognize Palestinian pain and suffering, suggesting partial mediation.

Discussion

The analysis of polling data from a representative sample of Israeli-Jews indicated that, in line with our expectations, exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering predicts decreased recognition of the pain and suffering. In addition, and also in line with our expectations, our study indicates that the association of exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering with decreased Jewish-Israeli recognition of the suffering is mediated by a decrease in empathy toward Palestinians.

Our hypotheses were also confirmed when we applied a more extensive predictive model that takes into account the demographic attributes of respondents and the extent to which they support hawkish or dovish positions in conflict—thus bolstering the validity of our findings.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate a hostile suffering effect in which exposure to media coverage of the opponents' suffering is associated with decreased recognition of their pain and suffering and with decreased empathy toward the opponents.

The Hostile Suffering Effect

While mediated encounters with the suffering of opponents are often seen as evoking recognition and empathy, cognitive and emotional mechanisms operating in conflicts raise questions about this presumed association (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012). Indeed, recent scholarly work suggests that the suffering of opponents, when it is mediated, might lead to dissonance and, in turn, to repressing empathy and negative responses toward these opponents (Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Mor et al., 2016; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). Our study takes an important step toward an empirical understanding of the effects of mediation of suffering on eliciting recognition and empathy on the one hand and hostile perceptions on the other. This is done through empirically and innovatively demonstrating the seemingly paradoxical trajectory by which the more people are exposed through media coverage to opponents' suffering, the less they feel empathy toward these opponents and the less they see the suffering as deserving of recognition. However, it is important to note that given the asymmetric and protracted nature of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Jewish-Israeli unwillingness to recognize Palestinian suffering may also stem from reluctance to take responsibility for causing this suffering.

The hostile media effect relates to the tendency of people who are highly involved in an issue to see media coverage as biased against one's own point of view (Gunther et al., 2009; Perloff, 2015; Vallone et al., 1985). These hostile perceptions are particular to the media: They are generated by partisans' belief that mediated information will reach a broad audience and, therefore, will have a broad misleading influence on public attitudes (Gunther et al., 2009). Continuing and expanding on the important work on the hostile media effect, our study indicates that also, and specifically, media representation of the pain and suffering of the other—and especially of the enemy in intractable conflicts—may be perceived as biased against one's own side. By demonstrating that the mediated encounter with the opponent's suffering decreases empathy toward the opponent as well as the willingness to recognize the opponent's pain and suffering, our study adds to existing research on the political and ideological consequences of the hostile media effect and its implications for intergroup relations and emotions (Barnidge & Rojas, 2014; Choi et al., 2011; Feldman et al., 2015; McKeever et al., 2016). Since struggles for recognition are increasingly conducted through the media (Kampf & Liebes, 2013; Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008), hostile perceptions of mediated suffering might be explained by an audience's concern regarding the possible (misleading or unwanted) influence of these representations of opponents' sufferings on public attitudes in both the national and international arenas (Liebes & First, 2003).

The attempt to gain recognition of suffering can be viewed as an instance of intergroup competitive victimhood—the efforts of members of groups involved in violent conflicts to establish that their group has suffered more than their adversarial group (Nagar & Maoz, 2015; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008a, 2008b; Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012). This tendency is expressed in Israeli and

Palestinian media coverage where in-group media portray the out-group's claim of suffering as an act of aggressive competitive victimhood (Frosh & Wolfsfeld, 2007; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). Our study suggests a new perspective for understanding competitive victimhood in media coverage: Spectators perceive mediated suffering as an expression of out-group competitive victimhood and therefore react with hostile attitudes regarding the out-group and its suffering—that is, with decreased empathy and recognition.

Mediated Suffering, Recognition, and Moral Concern

There has always been a great deal of interest in the field of political communication regarding the role of the media in conflicts (Galtung, 2006; Kampf & Liebes, 2013; Shinar & Bratic, 2010; Wolfsfeld, 2004, 2011; Wolfsfeld, Segev, & Sheafer, 2013; Zanderg & Neiger, 2005). Recognizing the pain and suffering of others can be a form of moral inclusion in which the boundaries of moral responsibility are extended to include concern for these others (Nagar & Maoz, 2015; see also Opotow, 1990; Opotow et al., 2005). By representing the suffering of the opponent, the media has an ethical role in forging moral inclusion: It challenges audiences to extend public moral concern and react with empathy and recognition (Frosh, 2006; Frosh & Pinchevsky, 2009; Slovic, 2007). Specifically in regard to asymmetric ethnopolitical conflicts, the potential of the media to extend public moral concern toward enemies can contribute to conflict resolution and reconciliatory efforts (Bar-Tal, 2013; Galtung, 1998, 2006; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012). But does encountering with the suffering and pain of others through the media really make us care and overcome moral exclusion in situations of protracted asymmetric conflict? The present study addresses this urgent question regarding the ethical role of the media by directly and empirically examining the association of exposure to media coverage of the suffering of the opponents in conflict with manifestations of moral concern—that is, with recognition of the pain and suffering of these opponents. Our findings are counterintuitive in a sense and imply that a mediated encounter with the opponent's suffering can—paradoxically—increase competitive victimhood beliefs and thus increase moral exclusion.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

Despite the importance of our findings, this study also has certain limitations. Clearly, correlational data cannot be seen as proving a cause-and-effect relationship. In our regression analysis, we identified one measure (recognition of Palestinian pain and suffering) as our dependent variable and the other two measures (exposure to media coverage of Palestinian pain and suffering and empathy toward Palestinians) as the independent variables or predictors, thus implying a causal interpretation. However, although our results are consistent with a casual model, they cannot be taken as establishing a causal interpretation. Future studies using experimental paradigms might further establish the cause-and-effect relationship that drives the hostile suffering effect demonstrated here. It is important to also note, however, that findings from qualitative studies—mostly based on in-depth interviews (Ron & Maoz, 2013a, 2013b; Ron, Maoz, & Bekerman, 2010; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012)—support the validity of our findings. Consistent with our findings, these studies demonstrate that encountering Palestinians' pain and suffering elicits complex and ambivalent responses among Israeli-Jews, including hostility, anger, hatred, defensive reactions, and decreased sympathy (Mor et al., 2016; Ron & Maoz, 2013a, 2013b; Ron et al., 2010; Rosenberg & Maoz, 2012).

Another potential limitation is that, while responses and interpretations to mediated suffering may be diverse and vary according to context, our study focuses on one specific context of media coverage in conflict. Future studies should examine in additional and different contexts how perceptions of media coverage of the suffering of others affect the willingness to recognize the pain and suffering to obtain a broader and more comprehensive picture of the media's role in eliciting recognition, empathy, and moral concern. Moreover, given the complex and ambivalent responses to opponents' suffering, future mixed-methods studies—as suggested by Huiberts and Joye (2015; see also Huiberts, 2016)—could establish a more complex picture regarding the ideological and emotional mechanisms that drive the hostile suffering effect.

Conclusion

In exploring how exposure to mediated representations of the suffering of opponents explains audiences' readiness to recognize the pain and suffering, our study adds to and expands the ongoing debate about the role of the media in conflicts (Galtung, 2006; Kampf & Liebes, 2013; Shinar & Bratic, 2010; Wolfsfeld, 2004, 2011; Wolfsfeld et al., 2013; Zanderg & Neiger, 2005). More specifically, our study sheds additional light on the debate regarding the moral implications of the visibility in the media of the suffering of others (Chouliaraki, 2013; Frosh, 2011; Frosh & Pinchevsky, 2009) by addressing the largely neglected empirical question of how audiences actually react to and interpret media reporting on the suffering of opponents in conflicts. Our findings demonstrate a hostile suffering effect in which the mediated encounter with an opponent's suffering paradoxically leads to moral exclusion—manifested in a decreased willingness to recognize this pain and suffering. These findings further contribute to the understanding of the political and ideological consequences of the hostile media effect and its implications for intergroup relations and emotions (Choi et al., 2011; Feldman et al., 2015; Gunther et al., 2012, 2016; Huge & Glynn, 2010; Perloff, 2015; Tsfati & Cohen, 2005a, 2005b; Vallone et al., 1985).

According to Frosh (2006), media witnessing is usually articulated through interpretive encounters with "witnessing texts," posing questions of attributed authenticity and trust in media representational practices and intentions. Several studies on media coverage in conflict have raised the possibility that audiences may see representations of the opponent's suffering in conflict as cynical attempts to exploit victimhood for political gain (Frosh & Wolfsfeld, 2007; Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). Our study joins and adds to these previous studies by systematically and directly examining how audiences involved in a protracted conflict interpretively witness the suffering of opponents. In the context of the expanding discussion on media witnessing and its boundaries (Ellis, 2000; Frosh, 2006; Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009; Kyriakidou, 2015; Peters, 2001; Rentschler, 2004), our findings can help more clearly delineate the (bounded) ethical and social consequences of mediated representations of the suffering of others in a media-saturated world.

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