



# Journalism of attachment and objectivity: Dutch journalists and the Bosnian War

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## ABSTRACT

The civil war in Bosnia has been one of the most brutal periods in European post-war history. Dutch media played an important role in creating a rather stereotypical, simplified picture of the Bosnian conflict, and, as a consequence, also of what the Dutch government could do within an international context to solve it. The reasons the media created this simplified and stereotypical picture can be found in the phenomenon of 'journalism of attachment'. This form of journalism regards reporters as participants in the conflicts they report, taking part in the public debate about the conflict. Using a content analysis of the news coverage about the Bosnian war we found that journalists covering the Bosnian war show attachment in the news coverage whether openly in the straight news articles or in a more subtle way, through the use of opportune witnesses.

**KEY WORDS** • Bosnian War • journalism of attachment • objectivity • war coverage

## Introduction

The pictures of the emaciated men behind barbed wire in 'Omarska' pricked everyone's conscience in August 1992 and put the conflict in Bosnia on the international agenda. In the Netherlands, the images acted as a catalyst for the Dutch morally based crusade for military intervention in the conflict. The images brought back memories of Nazi concentration camps, with the Serbian forces in the role of Nazis. The preferred framework of 'good guys versus bad guys', within which the conflict subsequently was defined in the Netherlands, had clear references to the Second World War. Dutch media played an important role in creating this framework (NIOD, 2002; Ruigrok et al., 2005). As Wieten concludes:

Media and politics seem to have aided each other in creating a rather stereotypical, simplified picture of the conflict, and, as a consequence, also of what the

international community, the Netherlands in particular, could do to bring it to an end and solve it. (2002: 83)

The reasons the media created this simplified and stereotypical picture could be found in the phenomenon of 'journalism of attachment'. Coined by former BBC correspondent Martin Bell, 'journalism of attachment' proposes that reporters are participants in the conflicts they report and, as a consequence, take part in the public debate about the conflict. And in terms of such a conflict, his intention was to make somebody do something to end it. In Bosnia, many journalists, although not connected with one of the belligerent parties, but 'bystanders' covering the world for their home countries, embarked on similar moral crusades and became partial (Bell, 1998).

In this study we investigate the phenomenon of journalism of attachment in Dutch newspapers while covering the Bosnian war.

### **Journalism of attachment and the concept of objectivity**

For decades, journalistic practice has been the object of scrutiny by practitioners, critics and scholars. According to the traditional journalistic interpretation of objectivity that appeared in official discourses after the turn of the nineteenth century (Dahlgren, 1992; Schudson, 1978) a journalist is able to function as a neutral mediator between real-world events and the public. In this tradition news is defined as a mere reflection of reality, as 'an account of something real' (Campbell and Wolseley, 1961: 6) or as something that 'has actually happened' (Harris et al., 1981: 27).

More recent conceptualizations of news concentrate on the impossibility of news as a reflection of reality. In this tradition, researchers generally consider news in terms of the social construction of reality theory. Not only do the characteristics of the event determine whether or not a story becomes news, but also other influences within the journalists' sphere have an impact on these decisions. Contrary to the realism school of thought, where one can compare propositions with an external existing reality, reality for constructivists is a reconstruction of discourse, meaning that no outside version of truth exists.

Alternative models for objectivity in describing journalistic practice show the gradual evolution of the norm of objectivity in journalism from the focus on 'neutrality' towards 'accuracy', 'balance', and 'fairness' (Ryan, 2001). In the early 1900s, for example, journalists served as a social conscience and opened many people's eyes to the abuses of the powers that be. Criticizing the work of journalists at that time, president Roosevelt coined the term 'Muckrakers' for them.

These journalistic practices are in line with what later was called public journalism, defined as 'a theory and a practice that recognizes the overriding importance of improving public life' (Rosen, 1993: 53). Rosen argues that journalists practicing public journalism will have to abandon the notion of 'objectivity' that requires journalists to disengage from all aspects of community life. The role of the journalist is to initiate and sustain public debate about problems in society. Without advocating official policy makers' opinions, journalists must uncover societal problems and provoke debate among citizens (Voakes, 1999).

### **Journalism of attachment**

These models of journalistic practice deal with the daily routine in which journalists operate. In our study, however, we focus on news coverage during a war. If everyday news is, as defined by Irwin, 'a report on the conflict of opposing forces' (1970: 48), then news during wartime can be described as hyper-news, where the conflict is infinitely larger than any day-to-day discord the audience might encounter. Using the same line of thought, the phenomenon of journalism of attachment can be considered a hyperbole of public journalism. However, the fact that the journalists are not part of the belligerent parties, but 'outsiders' covering the war for the world outside the conflict, and in that respect can be considered 'neutral' bystanders, constitutes a special circumstance.

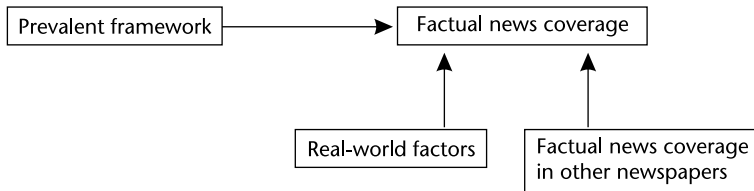
Journalists practicing journalism of attachment, however, will take sides with what they consider the main victims of the war, as opposed to the main culprits of the war. The conflict is portrayed in such a way that 'good guys' and 'bad guys', 'good' versus 'evil', are clearly distinguished. When practicing journalism of attachment, journalists actively participate in the debate, distinguishing 'right' and 'wrong' according to their own opinions and arguing for their own preferred solution to the conflict at hand. For proponents of this style of journalism, objectivity and accuracy are still 'sacred' (Vulliamy, 1999). What is rejected is the aspect of neutrality. This rejection of neutrality is based on morality. Journalism, according to Bell (1997: 7–16), is 'not a neutral and mechanical undertaking, but in some sense, a moral enterprise'. Attached journalists in Bosnia, for example, had a clear goal in mind with their news coverage: triggering a military intervention to set free the victims of the war. With a certain goal in mind attached journalists exhibit a functional model of journalistic practice.

### **Tracing journalism of attachment in news coverage**

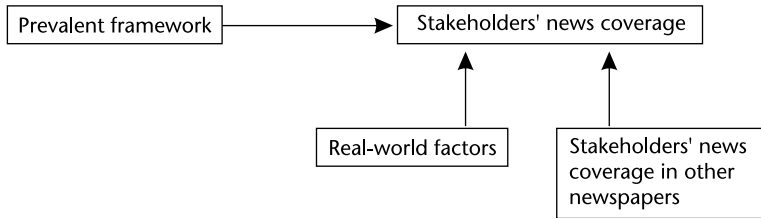
Attached journalists, who already have a framework in mind about the conflict to cover, use 'instrumental actualisation' (Kepplinger et al., 1991), up- or downplaying certain events or statements of experts in order to support their own opinions. Another aspect of attachment can be the selection of sources by using 'opportune witnesses' (Hagen, 1993). Hagen argues that journalists prefer to quote sources that support the journalist's own political stance or their editorial line (Hagen, 1993: 320). By selecting sources that put forward a certain opinion, journalists can convey the impression that experts share their personal views. As a consequence, journalists are barely led by real-world factors when selecting stories to cover and sources to quote. A third aspect to include in our research is the phenomenon called 'pack journalism', the tendency of journalists to write about the same stories in the same way (Crouse, 1973). During conflicts, when journalists are placed in the same hotels, this tendency is likely to occur, especially when journalists possess a restricted number of sources (Wood and Peake, 1998).

In order to trace the influence of the prevalent framework in the newsroom on news coverage we consider different forms of news coverage. According to the Western journalistic model, a distinction should be made between articles in which journalists are allowed to put forward their personal opinions, the news in which they bring facts, and the news in which journalists allow stakeholders to speak. In our research we consider the opinions of journalists as put forward in the editorials and op-ed pieces written by the journalists themselves as a reflection of the prevalent framework. We are interested in the influence of this prevalent framework on factual news coverage and on the news coverage in which stakeholders are quoted. However, besides the influence of the prevalent framework, a journalist is confronted with real-world factors that might influence both the framework and the factual news coverage. Therefore, we must also include this influence in the model. Furthermore, journalists are confronted with an influence from other newspapers. When journalists feel they missed out on something, they can be influenced by the news coverage published in other newspapers. This influence indicates the level of pack journalism that occurs. These influences are expressed in our model of journalistic attachment (see Figure 1).

Besides an influence on the content of the factual news articles, we also argue that journalists can use so-called opportune witnesses to either up- or downplay certain sub-themes, arguments or belligerent parties in the news. To investigate this possibility we have applied the model of journalistic attachment to the news coverage stemming from the stakeholders (see Figure 2).



**Figure 1** Model of journalistic attachment.



**Figure 2** The model of journalistic attachment applied to news coverage in which stakeholders get to speak.

## Methodology

This study proceeds from a quantitative content analysis of the news coverage of the Bosnian war, conducted by the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR) for the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, as part of its research into the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995 (NIOD, 2002). The NIOD research focused on the period from August 1992 when the conflict receives full attention worldwide, following the publication of the pictures of emaciated men in detention camps until the fall of Srebrenica, in July 1995.

## Chronology: news coverage as a reflection of reality

In the realism school of thought, a study into journalistic objectivity in news coverage can be seen as research into the relationship between the actual happenings and the coverage of these happenings in the media. There is of course no common standard for determining the 'real world'. In our study we compare intra- and extra-media data.

We obtained the extra-media data from a chronology made for the report 'Srebrenica, a "Safe Area"' by the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD, 2002). Based on a great number of different chronologies and composed by an independent scientist who strove to present an

extensive and complete picture of the war, we argue that this chronology is the best plausible reflection of reality and can serve as a standard in comparison with the news coverage about the conflict in the Dutch newspapers we have studied.

## **Method**

The data set we use for our study stems from a content analysis of articles about the Bosnian war, as published in Dutch newspapers. Coders selected all articles about the war in Bosnia appearing in the first section of newspapers, resulting in 3126 articles, and subsequently in 52,327 coded sentences. For the content analysis of the articles, coders used the so-called NET-method (Network Analysis of Evaluative Texts) based on the idea that the explicit or manifest content of a text can be depicted as a network consisting of relations between meaning objects, resulting in a number of coded sentences (De Ridder and Kleinnijenhuis, 2001; Van Cuilenburg et al., 1986).

### **Inter-coder reliability**

Two coders collected the data for this study. In order to measure the inter-coder reliability between the two coders, they both coded an identical set of 83 articles. This resulted in an average correlation of 0.81 between the two data sets on the level of actors and issues in both the object and subject positions. The greatest similarities were found at the level of actors (.87) whereas coders decided more often differently for issues (.77), the lowest correlation we found.

## **Operationalization of the concepts**

### **Different forms of news coverage**

In our model of journalism of attachment we make a distinction between different forms of the news. We measure the news coverage determining the prevalent framework in the newsroom by looking at the editorials and the op-ed pieces written by journalists themselves on forum pages. Stakeholders' news coverage is operationalized as all statements in which journalists quote one of the stakeholders, plus the commentary articles written by one of the stakeholders on the forum pages. Factual news coverage, or in other words, straight news coverage, is news coverage in which no stakeholders speak and in which no journalist or editorial board puts forward personal opinions about the conflict at hand.

### Frames in the news: bad guys and solution frames

In order to trace journalism of attachment, we will study the influence of the prevalent framework on both straight news coverage and the news coverage in which stakeholders get to speak. In the latter, journalists can up- or downplay explicit opinions by choosing stakeholders who adhere to the same opinions as the journalists themselves. In doing so, we focus on two specific frames, a 'bad guys' frame and a 'solution' frame. The 'bad guys' frame is defined by counting the statements in which one of the parties is said to commit (war) crimes, e.g. 'Serbs committed genocide in Bosnia' (*de Volkskrant*, 19 July 1995); uses violence against civilians, humanitarian aid workers, and UN soldiers, e.g. 'Serbs kidnap fleeing orphans' (*de Volkskrant*, 4 August 1992); obstructs the peace process or obstructs humanitarian aid, e.g. 'Serbs refuse all aid convoys' (*NRC Handelsblad*, 6 March 1993). Besides these statements the frame also includes statements in which civilians are portrayed as the victims of violence, war crimes or the war in general. In addition, sentences in which the terrible situation of the civilians is described fall within this category, as in 'A new exodus of Muslims' (*de Volkskrant*, 4 March 1993). Besides statements about the 'bad guy' actions of the belligerent parties and the consequences for their victims, the opinion of journalists and stakeholders can be expressed in an even more explicit way through evaluative statements about the belligerent parties. In these statements journalists or stakeholders not only mention the negative deeds of an actor, they explicitly state that the actor in question is bad.

The military solution frame is determined by counting all statements in which one states that a military intervention should take place, as in 'Danger of doing nothing is bigger than risking an intervention' (*NRC Handelsblad*, 18 August 1992), or when parties are urged to take military action, as in 'Western intervention necessary' (*de Volkskrant*, 13 July 1995). These statements can be put forward by the journalists themselves or by other actors involved 'Delors urges Europe to intervene in Bosnia' (*De Telegraaf*, 11 August 1992).

### Results

In order to trace the extent to which journalism of attachment occurs in the news, we will undertake different steps. First of all, we will look at the extent to which the belligerent parties are considered 'bad guys' or victims in the different forms of news coverage. We will compare this with the chronology to see to what extent journalists up- or downplay this specific frame, by which both actors are covered. A second step we undertake is investigating the influence of editorials and op-ed pieces on straight news coverage. This will

indicate to what extent the atmosphere in the editorial room can explain a divergence from the chronology. In doing so, we will apply our model of journalistic attachment to the news coverage. Our hypothesis is to find an influence stemming from the editorials and op-ed pieces by journalists on the straight news coverage. Moreover, we will investigate the extent to which journalism of attachment occurs when journalists choose the sources to quote, the so-called opportune witnesses in their news coverage. Here again we expect an influence from editorials and op-ed pieces stemming from journalists in the journalistic decision whether or not to quote specific stakeholders.

### **Stereotyping belligerent parties: 'bad guys' and 'good guys' in the news**

Human nature has a strong tendency to sympathize with 'the underdog', but what to do if everybody is victim and culprit at the same time?

(editorial, *NRC Handelsblad*, 4 August 1992)

The first step we take is looking at the explicit opinions of journalists in the distinction between the 'good guys' and the 'bad guys' in the conflict.<sup>1</sup> In total we count 17,043 sentences exhibiting the 'bad guys' frame in which one of the parties occur.

The news covers Serbian actors more extensively than Muslim actors. Over 60 percent of the news in which one of the two parties occurs deals with a Serbian actor. Most of the statements in which a belligerent party is mentioned deal with a great variety of activities or statements in which politicians are either supporting or attacking other politicians. However, in this research we are particularly interested in the news in which 'bad guys' and victims are determined. One out of every four sentences in which a Serbian actor appears, describes a negative action of this actor, while in the news in which Muslim actors appear this is little over 10 percent. An even more distinct picture is seen in the news coverage dealing with the victims of the war. Almost one-quarter of the news coverage about Muslim actors mentions the victimhood of the people, while Serbian actors are hardly ever described as victims.

In Table 1 we included the positive evaluations in comparison with the negative evaluations to show that negative news is more newsworthy than positive news. Negative evaluations occur more often than positive evaluations, focusing more often on Serbian actors than Muslim actors.

### **Bad guys frame in the different forms of news coverage**

We look at how the different sources portrayed the belligerent parties as 'bad guys' and as victims, expressed by the percentage of statements in which one



**Table 1** Statements in which the actors appear in the news

|                      | Serbs |       |       | Muslims |       |       | Total |       |      |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
|                      | N     | Row % | Col % | N       | Row % | Col % | N     | Row % | %    |
| Bad guy actions      | 3950  | 81.5  | 26.6  | 896     | 18.5  | 10.7  | 4846  | 100   | 20.9 |
| Victims              | 409   | 16.5  | 2.8   | 2071    | 83.5  | 24.7  | 2480  | 100   | 10.7 |
| Negative evaluations | 1026  | 75.3  | 6.9   | 337     | 24.7  | 4.0   | 1363  | 100   | 5.9  |
| Positive evaluations | 187   | 62.5  | 1.3   | 112     | 37.5  | 1.3   | 299   | 100   | 1.3  |
| Other news           | 9279  | 65.1  | 62.5  | 4974    | 34.9  | 59.3  | 14253 | 100   | 61.3 |
| Total news           | 14851 | 63.9  | 100   | 8390    | 36.1  | 100   | 23241 | 100   | 100  |

*Note:* Reading example: 63,9% of the news coverage focused on Serbian actors; of this coverage 26,6% dealt with bad guy actions.

of the parties is portrayed as 'bad guys' or victims in comparison with the total number of statements in which one of the parties occurs. We compare these percentages in the straight news coverage, the news of stakeholders, and the news in editorials and op-ed pieces with the news presented in the chronology. In the chronology the evaluative statements always derive from statements of actors involved (see Table 2).

Journalists are more outspoken in portraying the Serbian actors as 'bad guys' in comparison with the news in the chronology. This is especially true for journalists putting forward their opinions in editorials and op-ed pieces. Almost a quarter of all sentences in which Serbian or Muslim actors appear mention bad guy activities of Serbs, while this percentage is considerably lower in the chronology and in both the straight news reports and the news from stakeholders. The same tendency can be seen in the news coverage about the Muslims as victims of the war. In editorials and op-ed pieces journalists portray the Muslims most clearly as victims of the war. One out of six sentences in which Serbian or Muslim actors appear mentions the Muslims as victims. In the chronology only a small percentage of the sentences in which a Muslim or a Serbian actor appears states that this actor is a Muslim victim of the war. Also in the coverage stemming from straight news reports and stakeholders these percentages are clearly lower than in the editorials and op-ed pieces of journalists. Negative evaluations about Serbian actors are found in the news coverage as well. Even in straight news, journalists evaluate Serbs negatively, whereas stakeholders evaluate the Serbian actors relatively less often. Here again, most negative evaluations about Serbs are found in editorials and op-ed pieces of journalists.

When looking at the individual newspapers and their editorials and op-ed pieces, most statements were found in *de Volkskrant*, followed by *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Telegraaf*. In comparison with the other newspapers, *de Volkskrant* focuses mostly on the 'bad guy' activities of Serbian actors, while *NRC Handelsblad* emphasizes the Muslims as the main victims of the war and *De Telegraaf* criticizes the Serbian actors most harshly in the editorials and op-ed pieces.

### **Journalism of attachment: creating 'bad guys' and 'good guys' in the news**

The analyses above show the aspects of taking sides in the news coverage found in editorials and op-ed pieces, news stemming from stakeholders and in straight news articles. In order to trace journalism of attachment in the news we will apply our model of journalistic attachment to two different forms of

**Table 2** Journalists taking sides in the newspapers during different periods

| Chron               | Bad guys frame in different newspapers |       |      |                 |       |      |              |       |      |       |       |      |      |
|---------------------|--|-------|------|-----------------|-------|------|--------------|-------|------|-------|-------|------|------|
|                     | de Volkskrant                          |       |      | NRC Handelsblad |       |      | De Telegraaf |       |      | Total |       |      |      |
|                     | SN*                                    | Stake | Edit | SN              | Stake | Edit | SN           | Stake | Edit | SN    | Stake | Edit |      |
| Serbs as bad guys   | 18.2                                   | 16.2  | 21.5 | 30.5            | 13.8  | 22.7 | 14.1         | 13.7  | 21.6 | 27.8  | 14.6  | 22.0 | 23.2 |
| Muslims as victims  | 3.1                                    | 7.6   | 11.3 | 12.7            | 6.1   | 11.0 | 18.3         | 6.5   | 10.7 | 9.8   | 6.7   | 11.0 | 14.6 |
| Critics Serbs       | 2.2                                    | 4.8   | 2.5  | 5.6             | 3.8   | 2.6  | 11.0         | 3.6   | 1.5  | 21.7  | 4.1   | 2.3  | 10.3 |
| Number of sentences | 412                                    | 2065  | 988  | 94              | 1675  | 986  | 82           | 766   | 363  | 28    | 4506  | 2337 | 204  |

\*SN = Straight news; Stake = Stakeholder news coverage; Edit = Editorials and op-ed pieces.

news coverage: straight news coverage and coverage in which stakeholders get to speak.

### The 'bad guys' frame in straight news coverage

Applying our model of journalistic attachment, we look at the extent to which the straight news in the newspapers is influenced by the news coverage stemming from editorials and op-ed pieces, by real-world factors from the day before, and by straight news coverage published in the other two newspapers the day before. We conduct a regression analysis in which we include the statements about the bad guy actions, the statements about the main victims and the evaluations and apply the model of influences to the total number of statements in the different news sources. Table 3 shows the results of this analysis.

The aggregate results show a significant influence from the statements published in the other newspapers, as well as from the real-world factors, while no influence is found from the statements in editorials and op-ed pieces from journalists. When we look at the individual newspapers we see a different picture. The influence stemming from the other newspapers is found in both *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad*, while no such influence is found in *De Telegraaf*. For this newspaper the regression analysis does not show any significant influences. The influence from real-world factors is significant in the news coverage found in *NRC Handelsblad*, while real-world factors do not influence the straight news coverage in the other newspapers. The influence from the editorial desk, which is not significant when we look at the total news coverage, is highly significant when we consider the news coverage of *de Volkskrant*. From this analysis, we can conclude that the influence from

**Table 3** 'Bad guys' in straight news coverage

|                                    | Total  | <i>de Volkskrant</i> | <i>NRC Handelsblad</i> | <i>De Telegraaf</i> |
|------------------------------------|--------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Editorials/op-ed                   | .07    | .17**                | -.03                   | .05                 |
| Real-world t-1                     | .13**  | .12                  | .18*                   | -.07                |
| Straight news other newspapers t-1 | .24*** | .27***               | .27**                  | .05                 |
| N                                  | 475    | 240                  | 171                    | 62                  |
| R2                                 | .10    | .17                  | .14                    | .01                 |
| Adjusted R2                        | .10    | .16                  | .13                    | -.04                |
| S.E.                               | .21    | .21                  | .19                    | .24                 |

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

editorials on the content of straight news articles, with respect to the 'bad guys' frame, is found in *de Volkskrant*, while in *NRC Handelsblad* journalists seem to follow real-world factors to a great extent. Both newspapers also look at the arguments in the other newspapers. The regression analysis does not show any significant result for *De Telegraaf*.

### Opportune witnesses to put forward the 'bad guys' frame

Earlier we argued that, as a consequence of having a strong opinion about a certain issue, journalists will select sources whose viewpoints concur with their own, the so-called opportune witnesses. In the case of Bosnia this would mean that journalists tend to select sources portraying the Serbian population as the 'bad guys' in the conflict and the Muslims as the main victims of the conflict. In order to trace the use of opportune witnesses while portraying 'good guys' and 'bad guys' in the news we apply our model of journalistic attachment to the news coverage in which stakeholders get to speak. In doing so, the news coverage in which stakeholders put forward the 'bad guys' frame forms the dependent variable, while the independent variables are formed by news coverage including the 'bad guys' frame found in editorials and op-ed pieces respectively, the real-world factors from the day before, and the statements stemming from stakeholders in the other newspapers the day before. Table 4 shows the results of this analysis.

The analysis indicates an overall influence stemming from both the news coverage of other newspapers the day before, in which stakeholders get to speak, and the news in which journalists themselves put forward their opinions, while no influence can be traced from real-world factors. These influences are most clearly seen in *NRC Handelsblad*. Where no influence was found

**Table 4** Opportune witnesses portraying 'bad guys'

|  | Total | <i>de Volkskrant</i> | <i>NRC Handelsblad</i> | <i>De Telegraaf</i> |
|--|-------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Editorials/op-ed                           | .12*  | .17*                 | .17*                   | -.25                |
| Real-world <i>t</i> -1                     | .08   | .08                  | .06                    | .12                 |
| Straight news other newspapers <i>t</i> -1 | .15** | .09                  | .18*                   | .19                 |
| N  | 432   | 217                  | 166                    | 47                  |
| R <sup>2</sup>                             | .05   | .06                  | .07                    | .13                 |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>                    | .04   | .04                  | .06                    | .07                 |
| S.E.                                       | .31   | .31                  | .31                    | .34                 |

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

stemming from editorials and op-ed pieces when we looked at the straight news articles in that newspaper, we do find an influence when we consider the news in which stakeholders speak. Journalists apparently use stakeholders to emphasize the 'bad guys' and 'good guys' frame in the news coverage while keeping 'neutral' in their straight news coverage.

Looking at the news coverage in *de Volkskrant*, we only see an influence stemming from the editorials and op-ed pieces on the statements from stakeholders. Journalists from this newspaper emphasize the editorial line of thought about the 'bad guys' and 'good guys' in both the straight news coverage, as we saw in the previous analysis, and the news coverage in which stakeholders get to speak. The regression analysis applied to the coverage of *De Telegraaf* does show a high negative influence stemming from editorials and op-ed pieces. However, this influence is not significant due to the low number of cases in the regression analysis.

### Solutions to the conflict

'The do-something-brigade advances' (*de Volkskrant*, 30 April 1993)

Attached journalists during the Bosnian war embarked on a crusade in order to push governments to take action and to solve the conflict with military means. In this respect, journalism of attachment can manifest itself in the news coverage when, in straight news, journalists favor military intervention influenced by a pro-intervention frame expressed in editorials and op-ed pieces. To investigate if this phenomenon occurs, we follow the same procedure as in the previous section. First, we will study the extent to which journalists focus on a military solution to the conflict in the different forms of news. Secondly, we will determine the influence of these specific arguments in editorials and op-ed pieces on arguments published in straight news coverage and stakeholders' news coverage.

We distinguish three sub-themes dealing with solutions to the conflict: diplomatic intervention, military intervention and humanitarian intervention (see Table 5). In order to measure the extent to which journalists focus on a military solution to the conflict we look at the total amount of sentences dealing with one of the three solutions and calculate the relative attention paid to the statements explicitly favoring the three distinct solutions in the different forms of news coverage. These percentages are presented in Table 5.

Most attention is paid to diplomatic and military intervention. In the chronology, both solutions get more or less equal preference. A humanitarian solution is less discussed. The discussions in the newspapers follow a rather

**Table 5** News coverage about different solutions to the conflict

| Chron               | de Volkskrant |       |      | NRC Handelsblad |       |      | De Telegraaf |       |      | Total |       |      |      |
|---------------------|---------------|-------|------|-----------------|-------|------|--------------|-------|------|-------|-------|------|------|
|                     | SN*           | Stake | Edit | SN              | Stake | Edit | SN           | Stake | Edit | SN    | Stake | Edit |      |
| Diplomatic          | 21.7          | 13.6  | 7.2  | 11.3            | 16.2  | 6.6  | 9.3          | 12.3  | 6.7  | 3.3   | 14.1  | 6.9  | 8.9  |
| Military            | 18.6          | 9.9   | 6.2  | 14.2            | 9.5   | 8.0  | 17.8         | 11.7  | 7.5  | 15.3  | 10.3  | 7.2  | 16.1 |
| Humanitarian        | 7.3           | 8.5   | 4.8  | 5.1             | 6.4   | 3.8  | 1.3          | 10.5  | 5.0  | 6.3   | 8.4   | 4.5  | 3.5  |
| Number of sentences | 555           | 1830  | 527  | 79              | 2073  | 426  | 77           | 1068  | 193  | 7     | 4971  | 1146 | 165  |

\*SN = Straight news; Stake = Stakeholders news coverage; Edit = Editorials and op-ed pieces.

different course. Among journalists, the preference reigns for military intervention. They criticize the diplomatic efforts and argue in favor of a military solution. In August 1992 the editorial board of *de Volkskrant* writes 'Only a credible military threat will convince the Serbian leaders' (*de Volkskrant*, 12 August 1992). The editorial board of *De Telegraaf* states in 1993: '[But] the world, Europe especially, cannot continue standing by and doing nothing while the killing, raping and the persecution of people in increasingly gruesome ways continues, if only to prevent worse' (*De Telegraaf*, 27 April 1993). Stakeholders in both *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Telegraaf* tend to the same preference as the journalists, whereas stakeholders in *de Volkskrant* favor a diplomatic solution slightly more often. The straight news coverage of the newspapers all focus mostly on diplomatic solutions.

### Journalists ending a war? A crusade for military intervention

The analyses above show that in all forms of news coverage journalists favor military intervention. However, for journalism of attachment to occur, the statements favoring military intervention in straight news coverage have to appear under the influence of similar arguments published in editorials and op-ed pieces. Another form of journalism of attachment appearing in news coverage is formed through the use of opportune witnesses. Journalists will quote stakeholders who adhere to the same ideas as expressed in editorials and op-ed pieces.

### Journalists favoring military intervention in straight news

In Table 6, we present the outcome of our regression analysis measuring the influences on the straight news coverage of favoring military intervention.

**Table 6** Newspapers favoring military intervention in straight news coverage

|  | Total  | <i>de Volkskrant</i> | <i>NRC Handelsblad</i> | <i>De Telegraaf</i> |
|--|--------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Editorials/op-ed                           | .13**  | .33***               | .09                    | .04                 |
| Real-world <i>t</i> -1                     | .05    | .05                  | .04                    | -.01                |
| Straight news other newspapers <i>t</i> -1 | .38*** | .26***               | .39***                 | .43***              |
| N  | 647    | 260                  | 203                    | 182                 |
| R2   | .19    | .27                  | .18                    | .20                 |
| Adjusted R2                                | .19    | .26                  | .16                    | .18                 |
| S.E.                                       | .14    | .12                  | .14                    | .17                 |

\**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001.



Two major influences on the straight news statements favoring military intervention can be found. First of all, the influence of statements favoring the military options stated the day before in the straight news coverage in other newspapers and, secondly, an influence of editorials and op-ed pieces. No influence of real-world factors or the other newspapers can be found.

The separate newspapers show clear differences in this respect. The influence stemming from the editorials is most evident in *de Volkskrant*, while no such influence can be found in either *NRC Handelsblad* or *De Telegraaf*. The straight news coverage about military intervention as the correct solution to the conflict in these newspapers is highly influenced by similar statements found in the other newspapers the day before.

### Favoring military intervention through opportune witnesses

Besides the influences on statements favoring military intervention reflected in the straight news coverage, we also look at the influences on the news coverage in which journalists quote stakeholders. The central question, here, is the extent to which journalists select 'opportune witnesses' in their news coverage, those favoring the same solution to the conflict as they do. Tracing this tendency we use the same model of journalistic attachment, only replacing the straight news coverage by the news coverage in which stakeholders put forward their opinions. As independent variables, influencing the choice of stakeholders, we include the statements favoring military intervention stemming from editorials and op-ed pieces, statements in the chronology from the day before, and statements stemming from the stakeholders' news coverage from the day before as published by the other newspapers. The results are presented in Table 7.

To a greater extent than we saw when we looked at the 'bad guys' in the news, journalists make use of opportune witnesses when discussing the

**Table 7** Newspapers favoring military intervention through opportune witnesses

|                                 | <b>Total</b> | <b><i>de Volkskrant</i></b> | <b><i>NRC Handelsblad</i></b> | <b><i>De Telegraaf</i></b> |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Editorials/op-ed                | .20***       | .25***                      | .31***                        | .11                        |
| Real-world <i>t</i> -1          | -.01         | -.06                        | .01                           | .01                        |
| Stakeholders others <i>t</i> -1 | .01          | .07                         | .02                           | -.10                       |
| N                               | 657          | 274                         | 214                           | 167                        |
| R <sup>2</sup>                  | .04          | .07                         | .10                           | .02                        |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>         | .03          | .06                         | .08                           | .00                        |
| S.E.                            | .16          | .13                         | .19                           | .16                        |

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

solution to the conflict. Overall, most influence on stakeholders' statements favoring military intervention stems from similar statements in the editorials and op-ed pieces. The sense that a military option was the only solution to the conflict among the editorial staff finds its reflection in the selection of sources that adhere to the same opinion. No other influences can be traced in the overall picture. This is especially seen in the two 'quality' newspapers, *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad*. When we look at *De Telegraaf*, the regression analysis does not show any significant results.

### **The leading role of journalists**

Journalists have a leading role while covering the Bosnian war. They are most outspoken in their opinions concerning who are the 'bad guys' and who are the victims during the war in Bosnia. Their opinion about the most suitable solution to the conflict, military intervention, is presented prominently in the news. The 'good guys' and 'bad guys' are clearly portrayed and a solution to the conflict is also emphasized in the coverage.

This tendency is especially seen in the news coverage of *de Volkskrant*, and in a more subtle way also in *NRC Handelsblad*. In *de Volkskrant*, statements about Serbian actors as being the 'bad guys', as well as statements favoring military intervention in the straight news and in stakeholders' news coverage, were influenced by the prevalent framework that reigned in the newsroom. In *NRC Handelsblad*, only an influence of editorials and op-ed pieces from journalists was found when journalists decided upon stakeholders to quote in the news. In other words, journalism of attachment most explicitly occurred in *de Volkskrant*, while *NRC Handelsblad* chose a more subtle form of journalism of attachment, by choosing stakeholders to put forward opinions similar to the prevalent framework in the newsroom. Journalists of *De Telegraaf* show the biggest discrepancy with the chronology in their editorials and op-ed pieces. They argue most intensively for military intervention in Bosnia to end the conflict and demonize the Serbian actors most strongly. However, the opinions expressed in editorials and op-ed pieces do not influence the straight news coverage, nor do journalists make use of opportune witnesses to express these opinions. Instead, opinions about military intervention were mainly influenced by similar opinions expressed in the straight news coverage of other newspapers.

In our research, we focused on one specific conflict that erupted in the early 1990s in Eastern Europe. However, the indicators we have formulated can be applied to other conflicts in other situations. With the 'war on terror' going on and affecting the entire Western world, we can see an increasingly important

role for journalists. The fall of the Berlin wall has loosened the coherence and narrative power of the safe 'Cold War frame', clearly distinguishing the sense of 'us' against 'them' that reigned for several decades among journalists. After 9/11, journalists enthusiastically embraced the new framework of the 'war on terror', in order to interpret the 'friends' and 'enemies' of a state. Considering the new framework in which our world is perceived, there is an accelerating trend among journalists towards increased attachment. Mike Hennessy from WFLA Radio, for example, positioned himself as a patriot: 'I am an American first, a journalist second' (quoted in 'message' 2002 (1): 25). Tumber and Prentoulis (2003) also recognize this crude version of journalism of attachment emerging when journalists write about domestic issues. 'The traditional ideological framework of journalism is breaking down as a new culture of journalism, one that embraces emotion and trauma develops' (Tumber and Prentoulis, 2003: 227). They state that this could lead to a paradigmatic shift in mainstream journalism with journalists shifting 'from detachment to involvement, from verification to assertion, from objectivity to subjectivity' (Tumber and Prentoulis, 2003: 228). A recent example of such a shift can be found in the apologies of the *New York Times* for its one-sided news coverage in the build up to the Iraqi war. Ombudsman Daniel Okrent (2004) states that the newspaper 'fell for misinformation', and concluded that 'the failure was not individual, but institutional'.

These recent developments show that journalism of attachment, in a number of cases has evolved into patriotic journalism, since most journalists are part of nations involved in the global 'war on terror'. Therefore, on a theoretical level the distinction between journalism of attachment and patriotic journalism should be made clear. As Bell (1995) already stated, journalism of attachment is strongly driven by moral grounds, while patriotic journalism is driven by nationalistic motives. Nevertheless, journalism of attachment is an important journalistic practice to consider. After all, there are still a great number of conflicts around the world comparable with the conflict in the Balkans in the 1990s, with countries not actively participating in the conflict, but involved through their participation in UN missions, for example. On these occasions journalists can take sides with one of the opposing parties and express this attachment in their news coverage.

Moreover, the indicators we use to show the extent to which journalism of attachment can occur can also be used to determine the extent of other forms of journalism, such as patriotic journalism, but also peace journalism or advocacy journalism. Our indicators can in general terms be used to determine the extent to which an atmosphere among journalists can influence straight news coverage and the coverage in which stakeholders get to speak. The context in which this occurs determines the form of journalism. When

a country is at war, this can become patriotic journalism, for example, and when a social problem within a nation is discussed this can become advocacy journalism or public journalism.

With these considerations in mind, the role of journalists as mediators is increasingly important, even more so during crises. Journalists can influence this public debate through their editorials and op-ed pieces. In a more subtle way they can influence the public debate through their news selection and the stakeholders they choose to cover. In this research we saw that journalism of attachment can create an atmosphere around a certain issue, in which a socially or politically accepted opinion becomes such a dominant framework and in which the issue is perceived in such a way that it overrules the journalistic practice of balance and objectivity. Therefore, it is, at the same time, both more difficult and more important for journalists to be aware of the occurrence of journalism of attachment, with all its possible consequences.

## Note

- 1 We include in the analyses in this chapter only the Serbian and Muslim actors, since they performed the role of 'bad guys' and 'good guys' in the news coverage, as found in other research.

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