"The Cameras Were Everywhere": Media Conduct Through the Eyes of Homicide Victims' Families: Switzerland, Italy, and Israel

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Using a qualitative research method of life stories, this article examines perceptions among families from Switzerland, Italy, and Israel regarding the media's role in their process of coping with the murder of close relatives. The findings reveal a duality of attitudes regarding the media found in all three countries examined. The media logic predominant in the experience of victims' families has a very similar effect, clearly leading to a mediatization of victimhood.

This article inhabits the intersection of criminology and victimology on the one hand and media studies on the other. It probes media conduct as evidenced by the findings of a large-scale study that examined for the first time the posttraumatic experience of families who had lost relatives to homicide in three countries: Switzerland, Italy, and Israel. It is surprising that grounded theory, which was used to analyze the findings, revealed that the media play a significant role (positive and negative) in the bereaved family's coping process.

The families' posttrauma experience was examined using the qualitative, interpretive method of life stories, a tool that, to the best of our knowledge, has not previously been deployed in this field. The increasing tendency in recent years to make victim's voices heard, among victims' relatives and the academy alike, also served as a catalyst for this research, especially given the way this population has been neglected for so long. Only a

few studies, mostly from the United States, have engaged with bereaved families' postmurder experiences (Peterson-Armour, 2002; Redmond, 1996). Posthomicide trauma is particularly relevant and important because of the increasing numbers of homicides including those occurring outside the United States and because the social groups affected are so varied. Many homicides target random subjects, so that potentially any of us could find ourselves in the traumatic situation of losing a loved one because of violent crime.

The media are a major source of information in Western society and have the power to sway public perceptions about social problems and ways to address them. Nevertheless, the few studies exploring the media's handling of victims of violent crime (Marsh & Melville, 2009) do not address the media's contribution to the experience of families whose close relatives were murdered. Moreover, comparative studies of interactions between these traumatized families and the media in several European countries have never been conducted.

This interaction is particularly intriguing because, on the one hand, the events concerned are tragic and personal, whereas, on the other hand, they are dramatic and of great public interest, and therefore widely reported in the media. The resulting tension between the public and the private is potentially problematic for the victims' families, who may be subject to an invasion of their lives by the media and sudden, startling exposure.

Research into the media tends to focus on (a) analysis of messages and the ways in which phenomena are covered and presented and (b) the production of messages. Studies also often analyze audiences and their interpretations of various media texts (see McQuail, 2010). Nevertheless, the way individuals subject to media exposure perceive their treatment at the hands of the media, as well as the ways in which they cope with this intrusion into their lives, has been largely overlooked.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The State of Families: Bereavement, Trauma, and Loss

When violent harm is inflicted on a person or on his or her possessions, it leaves at least one victim, defined as the *victim of crime*. A relative is considered a crime victim when the direct victim dies as a result of a crime. Thus, defining families (who have lost a family member to homicide) as victims may grant them power, enabling them to seek benefits from the state and garner public sensitivity to their case. These may, in turn, promote and strengthen them (Peterson-Armour, 2002). Family members, on their part, consider themselves the main victims of the crime, as they are the ones left to pay its daily price (Yanay, 2002).

The death of a loved one carries a social and emotional-psychological import (Rubin, Malkinson & Witztum, 2000). Moreover, bereavement is

a prolonged process, unmitigated by time (Redmond, 1996; Spungen, 1998), while everyone inhabits their own level of coping with loss and bereavement, by either avoiding it or getting absorbed and immersed in loss and bereavement.

Studies show that the bereavement and trauma experienced by family members who lost their close relatives to a violent act as part of a homicide share common characteristics (Murphy, Braun, Tiller, Cain, Johnson & Beaton, 1999). These characteristics include the surprise, shock, and recurring coping of families with the murder reconstruction, as well as self-tormenting with guilt and dealing with the social milieu. All of these serve to weaken families of victims (Peterson-Armour, 2002). In addition, because murder is a public event, families are robbed of their rights for privacy and subjected to a public display for no choice of their own.

Furthermore, when death occurs in unnatural circumstances, as a result of murder, family members risk developing posttraumatic stress disorder, meaning that they are likely to become victims of trauma to varying degrees and time periods (Freeman, Shaffer, & Smith, 1996; Masters, Friedman, & Getzel, 1988). Studies have found that family members in such circumstances were affected by society's attitude and by the care they received more than families who grieve loved ones lost in different circumstances (Amick-Mcmullan, Kilpatrick, Veronen, & Smith, 1989).

That happens because family members who lost a relative to murder have other difficulties to deal with besides the death, such as the murder becoming a public incident and family's rights being snatched, laying them exposed publicly without them seeking it; legally, the murder is considered a crime against the state, meaning family members may become passersby in the story, as bereavement is no longer their personal business, controlled rather by the state and social milieu (Spungen, 1998). Self-blame is yet another typical feature of trauma victims, and it can often drive them to extreme acts such as harming others or committing suicide (Redmond, 1996; Spungen, 1998).

Media Coverage of Violent Crime and Its Victims

Events of violent crime are considered interesting, possessing a high news value. They are presented by the media mostly as a threat to the social and moral order and a deviation thereof and, as such, they actually serve to further reinforce the acceptable and desirable values (Jewkes, 2004; Surette, 2007). As part of this scheme, violent crimes—and murder in particular—are portrayed disproportionally to their prevalence in the actual crime figures (Reiner, 2002). Nevertheless, the gravity of a given crime cannot in itself account for the volume and nature of media coverage. These are affected by other factors, such as crimes that coincide with the event, other current affairs and constraints of time and space, as well as the sociodemographic

characteristics of the victim or perpetrator and the willingness of sources to cooperate (Chermak, 1995). The news value of a given crime is also determined by its power to generate a fetching, interesting visual image, such as victim photographs, and the focus shifts from the factual, relevant report to sensational, shocking, dramatic, and personal details of the crime coverage. This is the media's way to trigger the public's interest, which, in turn, prolongs and feeds the media's enticement with shocking details and images. All these give rise to an age of "tabloid justice" (Fox, Van Sickel, & Steiger, 2007 p. 3–4; see also Peleg, 2014, p. 193).

The coverage of crime also entails the coverage of its victims (Carter, 1999), as the latter facilitate the personalization of crime story, dishing out the emotion and interest-stirring element (Chermak, 1995; Marsh & Melville, 2009). Crime coverage, similar to victim coverage, is a selective and non-representative endeavor, and it involves processes of social constructionism (Greer, 2007; Marsh & Melville, 2009). Although studies are extensively engaged with the media coverage of crime, in the news or in entertainment contents (see Surette, 2007), the academic engagement with the media coverage of crime victims is limited, all the more so when it comes to the media's treatment of crime victims' relatives.

The literature shows that the media maintains a hierarchy of victimhood, on the basis of victims' demographic characteristics, with the top level inhabited by individuals—such as children and elderly adults—perceived as vulnerable, helpless, innocent, and worthy of sympathy and compassion (Chermak, 1995; Marsh & Melville, 2009). The victimhood hierarchy is also associated with the characteristics of the case at hand, such as physical violence, sexual violence, racial violence, white collar violence, and so forth (Greer, 2007).

Moreover, to provide the public with reliable and newsworthy information and about the effect of crime, the media contacts the victims, interviewing them or their families. The degree of cooperation on the part of victims or their families constitutes a major factor in the nature and volume of victim information presented, affecting the news value of the story and the interest it generates. Accordingly, the media today expects families of victims to express their feelings and share their pain and sufferings with audiences. Thus, family members who can face the limelight increase the story's news value and can keep it alive, generating as they do sympathy and empathy among the public (Greer, 2007; Marsh & Melville, 2009). In contrast, relatives who are reluctant or incapable of handling exposure may soon realize that the media's attention subsides unless new information, newsworthy in itself, emerges (Greer, 2007).

Intrusive, compulsive coverage, as well as competition among reporters over exclusive details, can result in aggressiveness toward victims or their relative and even inflict secondary victimization compound the families' traumas (Marsh & Melville, 2009). The reconstruction of the event (Carter,

1999) or the manner of presenting the story (in photographs of bodies and body bags, for example) may be detrimental to victims. Furthermore, the vast majority of victims have never interacted with the media before, which can result in their being thrust into the limelight against their will and due to crimes perpetrated against them or their family members (Marsh & Melville, 2009).

While this approach stresses the media's victimization of violence victims, other researchers, relying on professional sources of crime victims' care, rather than on empirical studies (see Marsh & Melville, 2009; Mulley, 2001), argue that media attention actually enables therapy and personal empowerment for victims, who derive a certain comfort from the media's interest in them and feel that the interaction with it allows them to assist the crime investigation. At the same time, victims may feel somewhat relieved given the chance to vent their feelings, telling their angle in the tragedy. They may also find relief in the satisfaction of the wish to get into the minute details of the event or even in the fulfillment of the altruistic desire to assist and give strength to others who might have suffered a similar plight. It is often nothing but a wish to raise public attention for issues such as victims' rights and the effect of the government policy on their case.

In sum, it seems as though media attention can compound victims' trauma in cases of intrusive, mentally offensive coverage; however, in other cases, the media can also be conducive to victims.

TEST CASES: SWITZERLAND, ITALY, ISRAEL

The three countries selected for this research are interesting to study because they differ, among other areas, in their prevalent crime levels and their crime characteristics and numbers of murder victims per annum. In Switzerland, crime rates are low, and resident security is high. The number of murder victims stands at 0.92 for 100,000 residents (Federal Statistical Office, 2011). Italy is marked by high crime levels and a massive presence of organized crime. The Mafia and Gomorrah (the Neapolitan Mafia organization) are located mainly in southern Italy, yet their influence is felt in every aspect of the country, from its leadership through its politics, to the financial, social, and security situation of its residents. Moreover, the past few years have seen a rise in crime in light of massive immigration. Murder rates in Italy stand at 1.28 for 100,000 residents (European and National Statistic Institutes, 2012). Israel faces special issues associated with internal security because of its multiple cultures and the way different groups perceive their position in society. The state also suffers security issues as a result of political conflicts with outside factors, enemies, and terrorist elements. In Israel, the murder rate is 2.03 for 100,000 residents (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012); this statistic tops the list of all European countries and other countries surveyed in this research.

The three countries differ also in their attitude to victims of crime. Switzerland acknowledges its obligation toward victims of crime and takes the most generous approach to rights of victims among the three countries examined. Families of victims are granted a special status in the legal procedure and actual help after the murder. The law in Italy does not offer a customized answer to the plight of homicide victims (as opposed to Mafia victims, for whom a special law is in place) and it has several nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations supporting victims. Israel recognizes its legal duty toward victims, but aid programs, at the time of research, are still in their various stages of development. From 2010 on, these organizations are active throughout the country. Regarding the media establishment in these countries, familiar trends in the journalism worldwide, such as tabloidization and populism (Harrington, 2008)—where news reports become more sensational, trivial, and melodramatic, marked by a rise in soft news—are at play as well (Lucht & Udris, 2010; Mazzoleni, 2003; Reich, 2009).

As such, there is an emerging interest to examine all three countries for the different aspects associated with the encounter with the media following a cruel and sudden death, exploring the subjective point of view of the victims' families, so as to achieve a better scrutiny of the experience and its meaning. The present paper tries to address this interest.

METHOD

This study is based on interview materials collected as part of Shaul's extensive research (Shaul, 2012), a study using the life story strategy. Through the life story, an attempt was made to understand how the subject perceived and retrospectively worked the harsh experience of losing a family member to homicide into a biographical narrative. This method enables us to examine the individual's subjective perspective; the description of the event constitutes a structuring based on the current perspective, while forming coherent meanings of the self and passing them to others (Kama, 2003; Linde, 1993). The present paper examines and analyzes statements regarding the media made during interviews.

To avoid an essentialist approach to the family as a uniform category and to achieve maximum variety, 30 families of diverse cultural, social, geographic, and economic backgrounds were sampled and interviewed. To reflect the cultural differences between interviewees from the three countries participating in the research, families were selected in each state from a variety of places of residence that was as wide as possible, because in both Switzerland and Italy, counties widely differ from one another culturally, legally, and politically. In seven of the 30 interviews, both partners requested to participate, which put the total number of interviewees at 37. Ten families in each state were interviewed, and subjects included different

members of the family (mothers, fathers, sons, siblings). The time elapsed since the murder ranged from few months to decades and even the reason for the murder varied from case to case. To reach the different interviewees, a theoretical sample was performed to determine the number of participants while data collecting (Denzin, 1994) using snowball sampling. The interviews as a whole were conducted over the 10 months between July 2009 and May 2010. Because the research spanned three countries, most interviews were conducted in the presence of female interpreters. Interviews were recorded and later translated and transcribed.

The analysis of interview materials was inspired by grounded theory, which involves reading and breaking down each interview's transcript into words, sentences, or fragments, to be later regrouped in a different order, under categories or themes. This allowed to study the phenomenon shared by the different interviewees (Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach, & Lieblich, 2008).

MEDIA MEETS FAMILIES

The interview analysis revealed a gloomy picture as far as the condition of families after the loss experienced—a picture that did not vary from country to country. The blow inflicted on the family changes the family's life unrecognizably and the members are awakened to a new life, which is unlike anything family members knew before. The harsh blow leaves the family, as individuals and organic unit alike, scarred and different from what it was before the crime (Shaul, 2012). Along the way, the interview materials suggested that mass media had had an important, key and complex role to play in the experience and coping of crime victims' families with the tragic event. In most cases, the encounter with the media extracts the families from uninterrupted obscurity, thrusting it into publicity and placing it centrally for all to see. It leaves them vulnerable and exposed during these trying times.

Families' attitudes to the media's conduct in their case is a dual and complex one. It can be addressed using the terminology of the structural-functional theory. The structural-functional theory (Wright, 1960) engages, among other things, with the different roles the media fulfills in society and its positive (favorable) functions or negative (unfavorable) dysfunctions it performs for various factors as a result of assuming these roles. Also, the key dimension traceable in the words of families is the degree of functionality or dysfunctionality in the media coverage of the murder.

The Functionality of Media Coverage

In all three countries, interviewees were aware of the media's significance in the murder coverage. In this context, a desire was expressed to cement the case in the public awareness, to warn the public, to use the media to

facilitate the investigation into the case, so as to bring to the murderer's capture or achieve a heavier sentencing and even to improve the situation of crime victims' families and raise awareness to their rights in the public arena. In addition, families expressed the insight that the media was a useful tool for them to present their version of the story, to be the mouthpiece of victim's families or to serve a warning for the public as a whole. To cite a mother from Israel: "I've just started going on television and giving interviews and stuff . . . So that people remember, so that they don't forget about this case, because the murderer is still out there . . . and he can hurt someone else, heaven forbid." She went on to explain that "they told him [her husband], 'wake up, you've got to talk to the media, the press, and say what we've got to say. So that our voice will be heard."

The media may also be perceived by families as a useful mean of obtaining information about the murder. To cite another mother from Israel:

> And then she came over. She interviewed me for a bit. Told me who are all o'them people in the investigation . . . the people in charge . . . the officers at the investigation . . . and she was in touch every time . . . and meanwhile, during research, she found out about things we never even knew.

Similarly, a mother from Switzerland explained: "We learned more from the press than from the formal procedures . . . We could never tell what was true and what wasn't."

In other cases, the media was held in esteem for its de facto assistance to authorities in advancing the investigation. Amother from Israel stated:

> On the one hand, they like really helped us during searches [for the daughter or her remains] . . . maybe they wouldn't have found her to this day. That would have been our worst nightmare, to have this happen, to never know . . . In this respect, we had a miracle . . . he could have been a free man today . . . We all know there are many murderers out there.

Beyond that, at the trial stage, the media can be of service to the families in their fight for a graver punishment, a matter of great interest for family members, both because of their wish to see the murderer of their loved one behind bars for a long life period and their genuine concern for the public's safety. A father from Israel stated:

> Needless to say that all this time, I tried to hang on to the plea bargain, appearing on TV . . . The goal was to make sure he didn't get away with any less, because everybody says he made like a lucky escape, because the others, in some cases, received ridiculous sentences. So I raised hell to stop this from happening.

Similarly, a Swiss mother expressed her outrage at the media's preoccupation with the murderers and at the exclusion of victims. She realized she had to make the case reverberate through the media if the murderer's punishment was to be any harsher:

> They [the media] engage with the murderer more so than with the victim. His conditions, release or release on parole. That's why we bring the tragic case of my daughter to the public knowledge. Because it is everybody's business. Other young girls can meet the fate of this little girl and therefore, people tend to accept the graver sentence.

Another functional aspect for families is the acknowledgment by some of them that expressing themselves in the media constitutes an emotional outlet and empowerment and hence, TV appearances are a part of a therapeutic process. Accordingly, a mother from Italy reports her good feeling following her appearance in the media:

> The Italian TV channel, Channel 5, called . . . The same program featured the head of Carabinieri in Rome and they arranged a phone debate between the two of us . . . Having vented all the anger within, I watched it on the TV and heard all the people in the studio giving me a round of applause, because I had the guts to say what I felt. What I said was the truth.

Some researchers believe the media attention can give victims strength, empowering them (Marsh & Melville, 2009).

The Dysfunctionality of Media Coverage

In all three countries even though interviewees are aware of the media's important role in covering the incident for the public, as previously explained, they perceive a significant dysfunctionality in the very invasion of the media to their lives and privacy and in their reliance on it. The same sentiment is expressed regarding the consequences of the incident's coverage. Because murder is a crime against the state, not just against the families (the state is the accuser in the murder trial), they are left with a harsh feeling, a sense that they are invisible, transparent and unable to truly make their stance. Their story is spread all over the media and this fact generates a sense that the story has been taken from them, from their possession. The story suddenly assumes a meaning of its own, publicly and independently of the familial-personal one. To cite a brother from Italy:

> It's important that the pain does not remain a family matter, but rather a public pain, shared by the all city. [But] you've got to face these people and tell them he was a private man, he had a life.

Families expressed different fears regarding statements made in the media concerning the murder; some family members perceived the very interview in the media as resignation to the harsh reality they had been trying to repress. To quote a mother from Israel:

> It was very hard for me to come on television. I was in another world back then, I couldn't take it to the media, I didn't accept it and being interviewed is like starting to accept the event.

Moreover, family members encountered significant emotional difficulties when interviewed, as attested by a mother from Israel:

> It was always either me or my husband. Then, he had enough with the newspapers and I stayed aside, because I found it very hard to be interviewed. I couldn't say a word. It was tears all the way through.

In some cases, concern was expressed for the well-being of children and other family members—parents had yet to reveal to them the full details and were concerned they might learn of them from the media (leaving parents unable to manage the information unfolded), or were otherwise concerned lest the murderer, still at large (or seeking revenge), might go on to harm other family members. To cite a mother from Israel:

> It was very hard and I constantly tried to keep things from them . . . especially from my youngest son . . . We never even told the youngest son how it had happened and after two years, we suddenly had to tell . . . and some things hadn't been published yet and I was worried the media might come, with him not knowing about it . . . So we went for therapy . . . and then they told me how to talk to him, exposing him to this stuff.

She went on to explain:

> I didn't want anyone to come up to our place. No media. I didn't want anyone near us. I didn't want to expose us, and the kids, because I didn't know at first who had done it. Is he a criminal or not? How can I let him know my kids?! . . .

Some families expressed a feeling of pressure, of being besieged and pursued, due to the intense media interest. To quote a Swiss father: "For the first four days, we couldn't leave the house, because there were media, radio

and reporters everywhere." In such cases, the family tries to protect itself and its privacy from the media's invasion to their life, employing all means at its disposal. And so, for example, interviewees reported their refusal to talk to reporters, let media representatives inside their homes or to have them attend the funeral, the Shiv'ah (the week-long mourning period in Judaism) or to interact with them in any way. Some interviewees contacted the press on their own accord, asking for a careful, responsible coverage, so as to avoid a postmurder escalation of news stories. A Swiss father whose son had been murdered by a young immigrant said that he had sent a letter to the press, published in all the newspapers. The letter read: "I am asking you, the press and the public, not to create monsters, as every nation has its good as well as its bad people . . ." The father said that "later on, many told me this letter was effective, stopping the rise of violence against foreigners."

The experience of fending off the media is referred to in interviews as challenging and emotionally draining. Interviewees reported the resources they had to invest in evading the media, attempting to avoid its questions. One mother from Israel stated:

> I could hardly walk, it was all like an earthquake, as if the ground was winding. That's how I felt. It was after a very elaborate media pursuit, everyone was chasing me, calling. It really upset me [crying]. They wrote about us. It was terrible, just terrible, what we've been through.

A Swiss mother referred to the fending-off experience as a war: "I had to fight the media, because TV cameras were everywhere, the journalists, it was really extreme . . . I felt as though I'd just been through a great shock." This finding coincides with the results of a survey conducted among 400 families of murder victims in England. The survey found that 32% of interviewees thought that handling the media had been one of the elements they had found hard to cope with following the murder (Casey, 2011). Being on the endless run from the media requires the sort of activeness that is incompatible with the family's situation at this stage; resources that must be channeled for its rehabilitation are spent on this front, which means a great toll on the family, in a process that might be referred to as *secondary victimization* (Marsh & Melville, 2009).

Families also expressed their anger at factually false and misleading coverage that might tarnish the victim's reputation. To cite a mother from Israel: ". . . the next day, the papers were already coming up with stuff, all sorts of false stuff. Like maybe she knew the murderer . . ." Similarly, in Italy, a daughter whose father was murdered many years before and was not considered a Mafia victim said:

> They had this program on the television, featuring a list of all people who had died because of the Mafia, but the first casualty died in the 1980s.

> No mention of earlier ones. I was very upset. I picked up the phone and
> rang RAY [TV channel], asking who was behind this program. They said,
> "We'll let you talk to the journalist who made this program." They put me
> through and I shared my anger with him. I told him that these murders
> had started many years before.

All of these accounts attest to the great significance attributed to the mention
of victims in the media, an act that in the eyes of the families bestows
importance and honor on the deceased.

Moreover, some families expressed their outrage at the media's interest
in the murderers, despite them (the families) being given a platform for
their statements and versions. Also, the media has a major part to play in
the transformation of murderers into heroes (Schlosser, 1997). The public's
interest in the tales of murderers and the operations of their minds is tapped
into by the media for its own purposes and families are in great pain every
time they come across a newspaper piece or a press interview, and whenever
the murderer sits among perfectly normal studio guests, as if he were an
integral part of normal society. A Swiss mother, for example, argued that
"they [the media] engage with the murderer more so than with the victim.
His conditions, release or release on parole. That's why we bring the tragic
case of my daughter to the public knowledge. Because it is everybody's
business . . ." Similarly, a mother from Italy claimed: "I had to attend many
protests and stuff, to attract attention and public interest to the story . . . We
must talk about the victims, not just about the murderers."

A final important point must be clarified: the cooperation of families
with the media is a dynamic matter, changing according to interests and
developments in the investigation and trial. It is an emotion-dependant ven-
ture. Thus, for example, a family may cooperate at the eve of sentencing
and by the end of the trial, refuse cooperation, having taken a conscious,
learned decision. A father from Israel who had been interviewed during the
commutation of sentence found himself refusing interviews, following the
decision on the plea bargain, as he felt no need for the media's assistance:

> Needless to say that all this time, I tried to hang on to the plea bargain,
> appearing on TV and interviewing for Channel 10. On Channel 2, they
> were only interested after the event and by then, I didn't need them.

The dependency theory (DeFleur & Ball Rockeach, 1989), engaging with
the mutual dependency between media and audience, as well as between
media and organizations and institution of society, can help understand the
findings. One could say that the media is dependent on the families for
obtaining additional information and in presenting the more personal side of
the story, which may increase its news value, maintaining it at the center of
public attention. One could reason that it may even garner public sympathy

and empathy (Greer, 2007; Marsh & Melville, 2009). The families on their part depend on the media for their own needs, yet interests are not always mutual and there could be an imbalance as far as the needs of either side or the degree of their mutual dependency. Cases, as such, can result in a communication breakdown—families may withhold the information sought by the media or seek to provide information that is incompatible with the media's requirements.

The families feel the media pursuit of them for information and various inputs. As in aspects raised in literature regarding the possible negative implications of the murder events' coverage for the victims' families, it appears the findings of the present research, shedding light on the victims' experiences, attest that these concerns are not without their reason. At the same time, academic literature based on professional sources who have been in contact with victims (see Marsh & Melville, 2009; Mulley, 2001) has even suggested that the media attention may actually have positive implications—such as therapy and empowerment—for victims, who feel that interaction with the media was beneficial for them. This approach too is reinforced by the families' accounts.

In sum, the findings show that the media plays a key role in the families' posttrauma experience, whether by choice or otherwise, and their attitude to it is a dual one. Families, on the one hand, need the media to intermediate between them and the public at large; most families felt that their case, rights and interests were better served or preserved and remembered if they agreed to engage the media in their cause.

On the other hand, families felt themselves thrust into the limelight by the media. They sometimes refuse cooperation, claiming the media negatively serves their interests and denies them their right for privacy (which they enjoyed up until the eve of disaster), violates the memory of their departed loved one or swaying the legal proceeding and compromising it. Furthermore, families felt themselves personally judged and found guilty by the media, while the murderers had received glorification and empathy. These sentiments made families wish to sever all engagements with the media.

THE MEDIATIZATION OF VICTIMHOOD

The experience of families bereaved by homicide in a media context is particularly interesting to study, as it involves a charged interaction between public and private spheres. Media coverage of the murder and the ensuing legal proceedings, as well as the media's dealings with the victim's family, may exacerbate the personal trauma and grief experienced by the family.

The findings of the present study reveal a duality of attitudes regarding the media. It appears that victims' families acknowledge the media's value

and significance and recognize its multifaceted contribution to their lives after the calamity that has befallen them. At the same time, however, it appears the media is perceived as a necessary evil, a negative and dysfunctional by-product of the disaster. This dual attitude was found in all three countries examined.

The research suggests that interviewees felt excluded from public discourse about the murder, which was seen as able to sway public opinion and determine agendas. Media presence during the most trying moments in the family's life; the highlighting of murderers' stories while downplaying victims stories; media involvement in the individual story and ties forged with the media and its representatives, for better or worse, are all of great significance in the lives of families from the moment of murder onwards.

The findings reveal that the families try to fend off the media's intrusion into their lives. The families' feeling that their privacy—a fundamental right in any democratic society—has been invaded is undeniably damaging. These findings imply that a more careful, judicious approach by the media, and a critical, responsible approach to their coverage, would help to offset the posttrauma suffered by the family.

Moreover, interviewees from all three countries perceive the media's conduct during their process of coping with the murder, in strikingly similar ways. This points to two important aspects: the intensity of the experience and its shared nature, despite sociocultural differences, as a result of similar tabloidization and populism in the media in all three countries researched. Notwithstanding the fact that the three countries differ in their treatment of victims, as shown in the theoretical background, the profound intercountry similarity evident in the findings suggests that the extent of the differences in management of families bereaved by homicide is dwarfed in comparison to the identical human trauma suffered following a common fate. The reduction of media coverage to the lowest common denominator of the tabloid press seems to reinforce the feeling shared by interviewees that the media have invaded their lives. Crime stories tend to be devalued by this kind of coverage with the media tending to play up the drama element. The tabloids revel in gory details, resorting to emotional discourse that entails invasive exploitation of the victims' pain, in order to strike the right emotional note with readers. All of these serve to exacerbate the negative developments described by interviewees and result in very detrimental consequences for them.

The media logic predominant in the experience of victims' families in all three countries has, then, a very similar effect, clearly leading to a mediatization of victimhood. Mediatization studies scholars have investigated the media's influence on many aspects of contemporary society, particularly in the context of politics (Eskjaer, 2013). This contrasts with mediation theory that pertains only to the media's presence and major significance in life today, at the micro as well as the macro level (Livingstone, 2009). The very core of mediatization lies in the institutionalization and introduction of

media logic (which guides the norms and practices of media work) into other social sub-frameworks, with media logic overtaking and affecting the actions of individuals in them (Schrott, as cited by Stromback & Dimitrova, 2011). The findings of our study reinforce the impression that in all three countries, media logic pervades the victimhood experience and obliges families to act accordingly.

Dealing with the death of a loved one under such violent circumstances inevitably means also dealing with the marketing of their personal story in the media. The media invades bereaved families' lives, exploiting their personal tragedy for their own needs. The family, for their part, must cope with the ensuing emotional damages as part and parcel of their posttrauma experience.

A decent, considerate attitude on the part of the media, including cooperation with bereaved families, would by contrast empower them, enhancing their ability to cope with such a tragic experience. This conclusion is consistent with Lazarus and Folkman's theory, which stresses the nexus of people and their surroundings when dealing with trauma. Examination of individuals' ability to evaluate an event reveals that positive feelings about it may support their coping process and generate new resources that may facilitate functioning, thereby enhancing a person's motivation to rehabilitate (Folkman, 2010; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This theory may also be relevant to attitudes to the media and the perception of their potential contribution to bereaved families' process of coping with trauma.

It would therefore be interesting to examine in a future study whether the experience is similarly perceived in countries where the media is noncommercial (as in communist countries) and therefore less prone to tabloidization and populism. It would also be useful to complement this qualitative study with a quantitative one, given appropriately sensitive analytical tools. In addition, a future study might usefully investigate the experience of families of whose loved ones died in other tragic circumstances, such as soldiers killed in action and road accident fatalities. It would be interesting to compare their perception of the way their personal catastrophe is reported in the media with that of the murder victims' families. The disturbing findings of this initial study indicate that it would be of benefit to formulate guidelines to be offered to the media by the state, press council or organizations assisting bereaved families, so that the media can contribute to their post traumatic care, rather than exacerbating the trauma.

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