

"THIS IS OUR WAR"

Israeli Children Domesticating the War in Iraq

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Israeli children were caught up in a whirlpool of anxieties in the spring of 2003. For months, the media had been building up expectations of a possible Iraqi missile attack. Appearing on TV screens, radio interviews, and newspaper headlines and front-page photos, politicians, military generals, and academic professionals, mostly men of authority and power, fed the tension about a possible doomsday. All agreed that an attacked Iraq—particularly a desperate one—would seek revenge by attacking Israel once again, as it did in the first Gulf War of 1991. Nonconventional weapons, biochemical missile heads, poisoning water, food shortage, and even atomic bombs became the topic of dinner table conversations. The landscape of the news media was characterized by typical manifestations of media coverage at times of crisis (Blondheim & Liebes, 2003; Katz, 1992; Liebes, 1998). Among them was the lack of clarity of much of the coverage, due to a form of information fog, misinformation, and conflicting pieces of information regarding present and future developments. This situation of lack of credible information created fertile ground for the spread of many rumors while the media were busy in their attempt to fill broadcast time with reruns of attractive visuals and regurgitation of information. For reasons of national security, varying limitations on the free flow of information as well as various forms of censorship were employed, all of which contributed to the confusion. Experts and commentators, who tried to explain the unknown dur-

ing such a time of uncertainty, often contributed to the intensification of anxieties, rather than the other way around.

Like their parents and educators, Israeli children were confined to their homes during this period and were more exposed to the news media, as well as dependent on it. Many helped their parents prepare shelters and special protective rooms. They helped carry bottled water, canned food, and first-aid equipment to their parents' baskets at the supermarket. They walked to school with their individual protection kit, which included their own gas mask and anthropin shot in case of exposure to chemical substances. In class they practiced putting the gas mask on and rushing in and out of shelters. Under these circumstances, no child could have missed the danger of a possible war hovering and, indeed, consuming their lives.

The period of uncertainty and the feeling of existential danger that characterized the weeks in early Spring 2003 that preceded the outbreak of the Iraq War, as well as the first 2 weeks of the war itself, elicited much concern, anxieties, and fear among adults and children alike. Children, in particular, were attentive not only to the external threats, but also to the tense atmosphere around them created by the significant adults in their lives. Their limited, prior experience with periods of intense pressure and their developing cognitive skills made them particularly prone to dependency on media coverage. Emotionally, children, more than adults, tended to react with emotional flooding, and to use mechanisms of reality denial (e.g., "This is not really happening") or detachment (e.g., "I am now busy doing other things"). As a result, they appeared unconcerned, when they were actually suffering from deep anxiety. This ongoing, intense period disrupted children's daily routines and served to create a sense of helplessness and lack of control. At such times, children needed to find outlets for legitimate and safe expression of their emotions, for physical activity, and for maintenance of routines while seeking fulfillment for their needs for information (Berger, 2003).

Studying the role of the media in children's perceptions of the war under these circumstances poses unique challenges. News consumption by the public is not only high most of the time, but is also regarded as an important civic duty and good parenting practice in Israel (Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1997; Lemish, 1998). Unfortunately, there is never a dull moment in Israel, and children learn from birth to accept news media as an integral part of their environment. Previous research on the role of news in the political socialization of children in Israel has demonstrated that TV has a central role in shaping attitudes of teenagers toward the Israeli-Arab conflict, in general, and formation of stereotypes of Palestinians, in particular (e.g., First, 1997). These contributions to the construction of a political worldview were found to be related to the amount of time adolescents devoted to watching TV news, as well as to their reasons for viewing and attitudes about TV (e.g., the desire to gain information from TV, dependency on TV as a political information source, self-perception of vulnerability to TV's influence). The

contextualizing role of the family, too, has been the focus of other studies, demonstrating that family conversations and critical debates over news items presented on TV are central to understanding political socialization in Israel (Liebes & Ribak, 1992; Ribak, 1997). Most recently, a study of the stereotypes of Arabs held by Jewish Israeli children revealed the role they assign in the formation of their prejudiced views of the portrayals of Arabs they encounter on TV news (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005).

THE STUDY

In collaboration with the studies conducted in Germany and the United States (see Götz, chap. 1, this volume; Seiter, chapter 2, this volume), I wanted to understand the role children ascribe to the media in their understanding of the war in Iraq, in general, and its possible effect on their lives, more specifically. Due to the unusual circumstances and the desire to interview children within the first 2 weeks of the war, which officially began in March 2003, I solicited the collaboration of 39 children between their 7th and 11th birthdays through a convenient snowballing sample method. Obviously, such a sample cannot aspire to represent the population of Israeli children in any manner, although it included children of various profiles of the Jewish population of Israel, including a diversity of socioeconomic status (SES), ethnic origins, geographical regions, and religiosity. Of the interviewees, 19 were boys and 20 girls, 24 were middle class, and 15 were lower class.

University students, specially trained for this project by me, interviewed these children using a structured yet open-ended questionnaire (similar to the German one) that included questions regarding information learned from the media, interesting news items, the rationale for the war, the role of parents and teachers in mediating news, wishes for future news coverage, and the like. The interview session included a drawing assignment consisting of two parts: something the child saw on TV news regarding the war, and something the child would like to see on TV news regarding the war. The use of drawing as a means of expression of children's perspectives of war was employed in nonresearch situations during the 1993 Gulf War, as well as in research projects designed for the study of others in relation to the Israeli-Arab conflict (e.g., Teichman, 2001; Teichman & Zafir, 2003). In this particular case, the drawings served more as a complementary stimulator for conversation, and not as a method in its own right, therefore its analysis was general in nature. Most children cooperated enthusiastically and seemed eager to talk about their experiences. The drawing assignment drew some resentment, and therefore varied in degree of investment. Four children refused to draw altogether.

The qualitative analysis of the interviews followed the conventional method of allowing themes to emerge through close reading of the transcripts and viewing of the drawings. Clearly, the conclusions we can draw from such an analysis are limited given the hasty nature of the study's planning and execution, as well as the nature of the research population. Therefore, the results presented next should be treated as insights into the inner worlds of Israeli children during the first 2 weeks following Allied initiation of the Iraq War and the role they assign the news media. The interpretations are constrained by the social nature of the interview interaction and the degree of the children's willingness to share their thoughts and feelings on such a complicated issue that affected their lives in a deep sense.

"THIS WAR IS OUR WAR"

On the whole, Israeli children had an elaborate understanding of the situation, were quite up-to-date on the daily developments, and perceived the war in Iraq as one that had direct relevancy to their own lives. Of the 39 children, only 1 girl responded with a vague "don't know" to questioning about her knowledge of the war, while 1 girl reported making a conscious decision to deny the situation out of fear. The overwhelming majority responded to questions with explanations about the Americans attacking Iraq, the fear of nonconventional weapons, a personification of the war into a Bush-Saddam power conflict, some awareness of antiwar demonstrations around the world, and even a preoccupation by some of the children over Saddam's many look-a-likes. A few gave quite sophisticated, albeit naïve, responses. For example, Beni (10-year-old boy) answered the question "Why do you think the war broke out?" with, "Because of conflicts with the Iraqi regime, Saddam Hussein, who is the dictator in Iraq. When they had elections in the dictatorship Saddam Hussein threatened everybody that he'll kill them if they don't vote for him. That's why the war started, because Bush wants to bring democracy to Iraq, so it will be a democratic country and not a dictatorship." Roi (11-year-old boy) explained: "It's because Iraq has a non-democratic regime and part of the population is against it but they can't express themselves because they are afraid of the ruler. It's also because Bush thinks that Saddam has weapons of mass-destruction." And Gili (10-year-old girl) said: "The US is entering Iraq because they want Saddam's rule to come down. They presented Saddam an ultimatum that if he doesn't destroy his chemical and biological weapons within 49 hours and leave Iraq, the US will have to attack and enter Iraq."

Almost all of the children assigned benevolent motivations to Bush's military actions when they argued that his attack of Iraq was an act of

defense to save the world from terrible dangers and to restore democracy and good life to the Iraqi people. Elad (8-year-old boy) put it simply: "I heard that Bush is against Saddam, and Bush is one of the good guys and Saddam is one of the bad guys, and that's what I know." None of the children showed any awareness of issues related to the political economy or possible self-serving motivations.

Overall, the most striking theme that emerged from their responses was the tendency to domesticate the war into an Israeli issue: The conflict between the United States and Iraq was framed as *our* war, as Irit (9-year-old girl) explained: "The Iraqis want to attack Israel, so the Americans want to bomb Saddam's bunker. And tomorrow we need to come to school at 9:00 because there is a strike and we have to bring our protection-kit with us to school." This theme was explained through four integrated arguments. For many children, the reason Bush chose to attack Iraq was to protect Israel. "There is this person who is against us named Saddam Hussein and the Americans want to protect us, so they want to do something to him," said Ravit (9-year-old girl), who said later in the interview: "The Iraqi people hate us and the Americans are kind of protecting us." Chen (10-year-old girl) said: "The war is against Saddam Hussein because there is no democracy in Iraq and because they are afraid that he will send missiles to Israel."

Indeed, the potential dangers to Israel were real in these children's responses, particularly the fear of a missile attack. Roi (11-year-old boy) explained: "Saddam has nonconventional weapons . . . we've got the Patriot, and Saddam has biological and chemical missiles." Many children expressed their fear, saying: "I was scared," "I worried," "I felt fear, sadness, and anger," "I was afraid to sleep at night," "I was afraid to put the gas mask on," "I was afraid I was going to die," and the like. Both boys and girls of all ages admitted to having these disturbing feelings. Adi (11-year-old girl) gave a voice to her fears: "I think: What will happen if I am at school and the war starts, and my dog . . . what if I won't make it home on time . . . what will happen to my family?" Gilad (9-year-old boy) admitted: "First, when my brother told me about it I got really scared. I thought Iraq will attack us, but in the end I understood that the US would attack Iraq. I thought it will be a serious war and all the soldiers of Iraq will attack us. So I asked all kinds of questions, like for example when will the war happen."

In addition, children talked a lot about the preparations taken by the state, as well as their own preparations at home and at school: military plans for diverting missiles, organization of communal shelters by Civil Defense Forces and/or in their apartment building, hospitals, cemeteries, centers for distribution of protection kits, and so on.

Many of their remarks suggested that they were involved in a form of anxiety management. Hagar (11-year-old girl) comforted herself by saying: "I was a little bit afraid, that in a few seconds a missile will fall. But on the other hand the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] have the strongest weapons and

we are the strongest army and there is nothing to be afraid of because there is someone to protect us." Liora (11-year-old girl) explained: "I used to be afraid at the beginning, but they [parents] explained how to use the mask. I used to be very scared, but they explained to me that there is nothing to be afraid of, that we have the kind of missiles that blow up their missiles in the sky and we have the IDF that has the power to fight them." Gili (10-year-old girl) said: "I asked them [parents] all kinds of questions regarding the war and what could happen if there is a war and what we will do if there is a war, and whether we will go to school or not, and whether I would still be able to talk to my friends." Interestingly, all of these examples come from girls who were either more willing to admit they were experiencing anxiety to their parents as well as the interviewers and/or better able to express their fear-management strategies.

Domestication of the war in Iraq into an Israeli affair was occasionally confused with the general Middle East conflict: "The Iraqis and the Arabs have combined their military forces and they claim that Jerusalem belonged to the Arabs and that's why the war started," explained Sivan (8-year-old girl). "It's because Iraq wants that Israel will belong to her, . . ." argued Tamar (9-year-old girl). "It's because the Iraqi people hate us and the Americans are kind of protecting us," explained Ravit (9-year-old girl). A persuasive illustration of such a confusion comes from Liora (11-year-old girl), who adapted a common argument applied against proposals for returning land occupied by Israel to the Palestinians and applied it to the war with Iraq: "They are against us because they want Jerusalem and the other holy places that we have. But after they will get Jerusalem they will want more land." Similarly, Asaf (10-year-old boy) said: "People are going to die, there will be people completely injured and lightly injured. They don't have a protective wall" [referring to the much debated Security Wall constructed by Israel in Palestinian occupied territories in order to prevent infiltration of terrorists].

Several children echoed the general media discourse on the *axis of evil* and the struggle against radical Islam prevalent in the media. For example, Adam (8-year-old boy) said: "It's because the collapse of the Twins. It's like in the First World War, between the Americans and their enemies . . . in this case, they killed many in the Twin buildings, but the Americans paid them back—not through the use of terror, but in a fair war—missile against missile [makes a noise of missiles colliding]." Ariel (11-year-old boy) explained: "It's because Bin Laden sent two planes to the Twin Towers and they are searching for Bin Laden, but because Saddam killed Americans while they were looking for him, Bush wants to kill both him and Bin Laden now." Clearly, children have adopted the frame of reference for the war from the general hegemonic media discourse in Israel and beyond during that time.

Interestingly enough, the general sense that the war will not really change anything dramatically seemed to prevail in children's responses, reflecting once again the general discourses prevalent in national conflicts

around "fate" and "no end in sight" (Dor, 2003). Children expect that lots of people will die on all sides, that the tension between Israel and the Arab world will get worse, that a Third World War may be hovering in the horizon, and that fear and tension will mount. "It will get worse," said Irit (9-year-old girl), "war only brings more violence." "Perhaps at the end this will lead to a Third World War, this is what I always thought. If there was a first one and a second one, then for sure after a long time there will be a third one, too," suggested pessimistic Adam (8-year-old boy). Ariel (11-year-old boy) concluded: "In the end nobody will win and nobody will lose, and in the end this entire war would have been in vain."

MEDIA DEPENDENCY

Indeed, children's discussion made it clear that they were heavily dependent on the media for their information and interpretation of the situation, as well as it serving as an avenue through which to try to handle their anxieties. All but four children claimed that the media were their sources of information. Television news reporting was mentioned by 32 of the children as their main source of information regarding the situation (with special news programs for children mentioned by 9 children, and general family entertainment programs by 6).

An indication of the children's heavy reliance on TV news was that their recollection of news reports was accurate and contained anecdotal information. Examples include relating information about prisoners of war, the bombing of Baghdad, training dolphins to detect bombs, the whereabouts of Saddam and his use of look-a-likes, visual evidence that parts of an American missile contained an Israeli label, direct (and quite accurate) quotes from Saddam and Bush, descriptions of maps, Turkey's refusal to cooperate with the United States, and the like. Occasionally, interviewees got carried away in their description of the war situation by mixing facts and fiction, as did Roni (7-year-old boy):

Our teacher asked us to bring newspapers and things about the war. Avi from class said that Saddam is hiding 40 meters under the ground and he has palaces there and things. We read in the newspapers that he takes a very very hot shower that you can die from, and he does it to people he wants to kill and he cuts off their hands and legs.

These children never challenged the authority of news reporting as a factual, truthful, and reliable source. Gili (10-year-old girl), for example, trusted it completely: "I am not afraid anymore because I know that Saddam

Hussein will not send missiles because they already took over his Baghdad and we don't see him on TV anymore." Seemingly, if he is not there on the news, then he simply does not constitute a threat anymore, according to these children.

Although most children reported watching news reports on TV to some degree, about half claimed that they did not like them. Two main reasons were given. The first reason was that the children found the news reporting to be boring, it did not satisfy their needs and interests, disturbed their regular scheduled programs, and generally the news was not attuned to them. In particular, they found talk on TV news to be repetitive and disengaging, whereas the action-oriented coverage was attractive. Beni (10-year-old boy) explained:

I am bored watching what they are saying and all, but I like to watch the real war closely, like the shootings and all. . . . All those carrying about—the interviewers, the news studio and all those explaining about the war—were boring because you already know it all, and they repeat it like a parrot, you need something new, it's not like something is happening, it's like stuck.

Only the pictures were interesting, the reporters just blah blah and didn't say anything new . . . the same thing all the time. (Adi, 11-year-old girl)

The news on Channel 10 don't interest me too much but now because of the situation I watch it. I like the weather forecast more than the news. I don't like all the talking that they have there. All the time they talk about politics and never about something more for children. I like the pictures when the Americans bomb the Iraqis so now they learn what it means to have terrorist attacks. (Ariel, 11-year-old boy)

Everybody's speeches were boring, especially Saddam's because I didn't understand a word. (Shirley, 9-year-old girl)

Children admitted to being left with many unanswered questions of interest: "I didn't understand how many look-a-likes Saddam has," said Dan (10-year-old boy), "I didn't understand how the US airplane fell in Iraq. They didn't explain a lot," illustrated Gili (10-year-old girl). Although many of these questions related to their interest in intriguing details of the war, some also challenged the existence of the war: "I didn't understand when a house was bombed whether it was an important house, a residential house, a store? Why aren't they stopping the war for a moment and trying to talk and reach an agreement?" asked Adi (11-year-old girl). "At first, I didn't understand why is there a war? And why are there demonstrations? I didn't

understand how is that at all related to the war," explained Adam (8-year-old boy). Others were deeply concerned with the implications of the war: "They didn't say how many people got killed. They only said 'several tens of people' and that could be 10 or a million, every number you can multiple by ten," said Gilad (9-year-old boy).

The second type of reason given by the children in explaining their dislike of the news related to its emotional impact. Many children, mostly girls, confessed that the news brought reactions of fear, and they do not like to watch human suffering. "I didn't like it because they show people suffering and it is not fun to watch," said Irit (9-year-old girl), "It's not like they are showing a birthday party—it's a bad thing and they show killings, and I don't like to watch it," said Shirley (9-year-old girl).

When asked about ideas for how the news could have been done differently, children concentrated on the need to explain things. "I would have explained . . ." was a common response. A few stated that news reports should be more appropriate for children: "I would have invited many children, especially from my own class, to say all kinds of things that they think about the war. I would have been kind of nice, like all those people on television that have a high rating, I would talk to them, I would have told them not to be afraid, all kinds of things like this. I would have called the program 'the war with children,'" explained Adam (8-year-old). Yariv (9-year-old boy) had many suggestions:

I would have interpreted all the information I have collected. Let's say I have this machine, like a satellite that tells me what is going on, and I would have interpreted the information and explain it in my own words and pass it on to those who don't know. I would have talked to a few people, interviewed a few people, what do they think about the war. I would have let people at home contact us if they have questions about the war, to tell about their fears.

I would have made a special program for children, because adults know what war is and children don't. I would have explained what war is, how they build missiles, and what will happen to us. I would have also made fun of them, and imitate George Bush or Saddam so the children will calm down. (Shirley, 9-year-old girl)

This last response presents in a nutshell an understanding of the role the media play in Israel at the much too frequent times of crisis: providing information about the crisis, offering interpretations of the meaning of such information and the implications it may have for the viewers, and creating appropriate ways for tension relief through various forms of entertainment genres (Peled & Katz, 1974).

WHAT DOES THE WAR LOOK LIKE?

Several themes appeared frequently in the drawings produced by the children. War as a personal battle between individual soldiers, most often portrayed as Bush and Saddam, was found in 11 drawings. The soldiers, often notated as Iraqi and American, or as Saddam and Bush, were shown pointing weapons (guns, swords, grenades) at one another. The children's verbal description when asked about their drawings centered on the details of combat: "It says 'war.' There is Bush on the left and the country of the USA. There are missiles where it says USA Rockets and underneath there is Saddam and a map of Iraq with Baghdad," described Yariv (9-year-old boy) about his drawing (see Fig. 3.1).

Other children added verbal information about the combatants' roles in the action, such as "Bush is shooting Saddam—Saddam is blowing [things] up" (Alon, 8-year-old boy); "an American soldier is trying to hit an Iraqi soldier who is smoking a cigarette" (Noa, 7-year-old girl); "Good guy George Bush says: 'wear masks!'—evil Saddam Hussein says: 'Blow them up now!'" (Amit, 10-year-old boy). In nearly all the cases, the Americans are portrayed as good and helpful and the Iraqi as evil and mean.

The second main theme that also appeared in 11 of the drawings was a general war scene that included military weapons such as tanks, missiles, and airplanes, sometimes within a setting, such as Adam's (8 year-old boy) drawing (see Fig. 3.2).

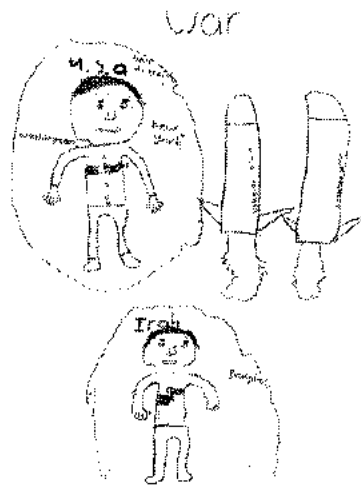


FIG. 3.1. Yariv: Bush and the United States of America are fighting against Saddam and Iraq.

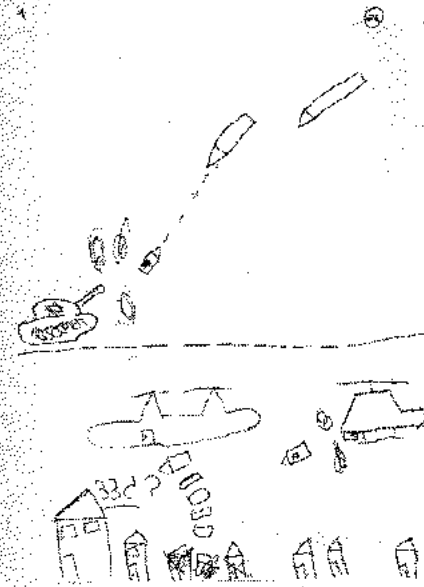


FIG. 3.2. Adam: Many missiles are fired.

Adam's drawing is divided into two scenes. In the upper one, an Israeli tank (identified by the Star of David) is shooting at two (supposedly Iraqi) missiles aimed at it. The lower part depicts two helicopters dropping bombs on Baghdad (spelled out in Hebrew above the tall building).

In other cases, children used verbal explanations to depict the war, such as in Merav's (11-year-old girl) drawing (See Fig. 3.3). The Hebrew titles include: "USA" on the right, "Iraq" on the left, "The war in Iraq" on the bottom, and titles for each object: "missile," "sword," "shield," and "bomb."

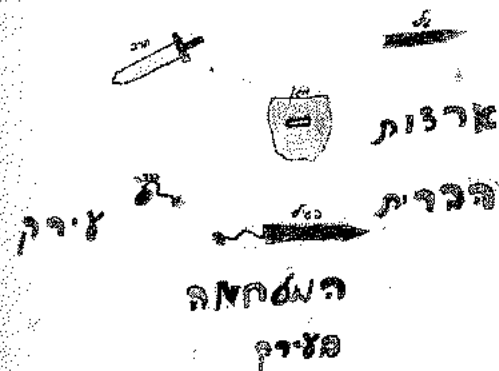


FIG. 3.3. Merav: Weapons.

Four of the drawings—all drawn by girls—dealt with emotions and personal involvement. Managing fear was the most obvious expression. "It was my first day at war," says the title of Sigal's (9-year-old girl) drawing of her protective kit. She added: "I felt I was going to die. I trembled very much. Suddenly there was a siren, I trembled, I was afraid. I put on the gas mask and I ran to the shelter. The war ended finally."

Irit (9-year-old girl) explained her drawing (see Fig. 3.4):

There are houses and there are missiles [the Hebrew titles state: a regular missile, a dangerous missile, a chemical missile], and there is a girl or a woman who is sitting. On the table there is a radio-tape and suddenly it sounds a siren and then she yells: "oi, no! a siren!" I wanted to write about a biological missile, but I don't know how to write it."

Clearly, the female in the drawing is frightened by the alarm and can imagine the various dangers presented by the different missile types presumed to be possessed by the Iraqi army. Irit, who lived in a northern town of Israel close to the Lebanese border and has already had real-life experience with the Katyusha rocket attacks by the Hezbollah, transferred her feelings to another female figure and to the unknown dangers ahead of her.

Reactions of fear to news reporting is, of course, expected particularly when the threat is perceived as real and relevant (Cohen & Adoni, 1980), as seemed to be the case in the recent war in Iraq. Additional support for this



FIG. 3.4. Irit: The siren.

argument comes from studies of children's reactions to the coverage in Europe and the United States of the 1993 Gulf War, where the threat was geographically removed and not immediate, and the results much less conclusive (Cantor, Mares, & Oliver, 1993; Hoffner & Haefner, 1993; Wober & Young, 1993). More recent studies of children's reactions to news reporting of war and catastrophic events (e.g., terrorist attacks, 9/11), as well as to routine types of news, suggest that many children experience negative emotions following viewing of news reports (see e.g., Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003; Smith, Moyer-Guse, Boyson, & Pieper, 2002; Smith & Moyer-Guse, 2006; Smith & Wilson, 2002; Walma van der Molen, 2004; Walma van der Molen, Valkenburg, & Peeters, 2002; see also Walma van der Molen & Konijn, chap. 4, this volume; Moyer-Guse & Smith, chapter 13, this volume). Most Israeli children in the current study seemed to use the drawing in an active way as an outlet for their anxieties and fears, by identifying with the fighting rather than with their own situation as potential victims.

WISHFUL THINKING

When asked to draw what they wish to see on TV, children concentrated on two versions of putting an end to the war: either victory (17 drawings) or peace (8 drawings). Contrary to expectations based on prior studies that have assigned themes of conflict and action to boys and peace and harmony solution to girls (see e.g., Götz, Lemish, Aidman, & Moon, 2005), here there was no obvious difference between boys and girls. Victory motives included neutral scenes such as a newswoman announcing the victory and a scene of homecoming greeting to an American jet plane. But it also included humiliation scenes—such as Saddam shown dancing wearing a dress at gunpoint and Iraqi soldiers surrendering or begging for their lives. More extreme examples were victory scenes that included destruction of houses by missiles and tanks and even depictions of death—either of Saddam Hussein (e.g., Saddam on fire, Saddam being killed by sword, Saddam lying dead in a grave) or Iraqi soldiers. Only one girl presented victory from a positive viewpoint of the Iraqis cheering with happiness for their newly acquired democracy: "We got rid of Saddam for ever! Hey, you, who did you vote for in the elections? Long live Bush we are a democratic state—hurray, hurray, hurray!" (Chen, 10-year-old girl).

A unique drawing was offered by Yael (10-year-old girl), who presented an elaborate comic-style story in which she plays the central heroine role, much like the traditional biblical character of Esther, the Jewish bride queen who saved her people from the hands of the Persian king she married and manipulated. This story is retold on the Purim festive, celebrated in Israel

shortly before the war broke. The comic reads as follows (from right to left; see Fig. 3.5):

Saddam: This is so much fun because I am going to bomb Israel.

Girl: I pretend: Saddam, you are so beautiful and cute, do you want to marry me?

Saddam: She is so cute, I will agree, but without kisses.

Girl: Saddam'ele [loving suffix], come lets not make war, we need to talk about our wedding and to spend time together.

Saddam: You are right sweetie, can you bring me a glass of wine?

Text: Yael filled the glass with wine and put poison in it so Saddam will die.

Yael killed Saddam and made peace with the Iraqis.

In her interview, she relates the following: "Afterwards I make peace with the Iraqis and everyone loves me. I don't want anyone to cheer for me, because all of this is due to God." She ended by saying: "I hope that you don't take this seriously, because I hate Saddam Hussein."

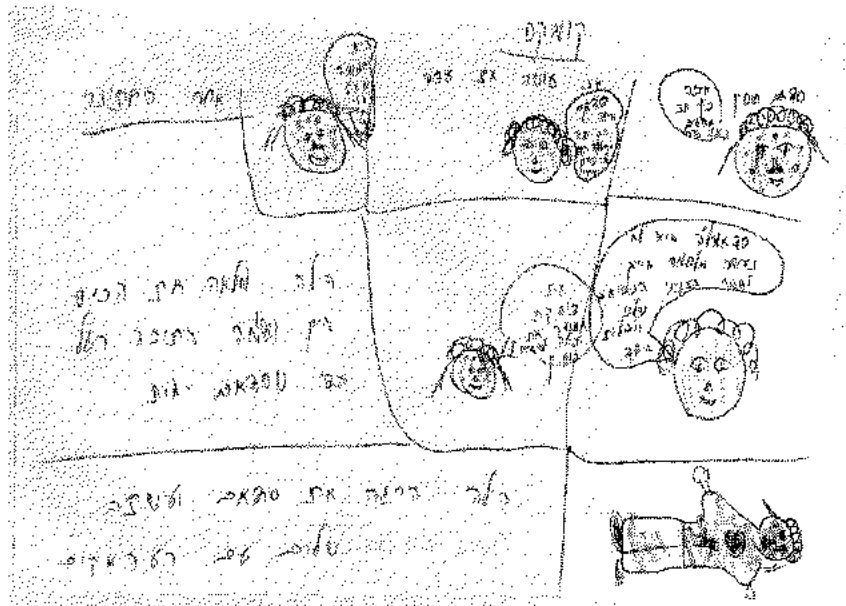


FIG. 3.5. Yael: Yael and Saddam.

Yael, so it seems, placed herself in an active role in bringing the situation to a fairy-tale-type ending, recruiting for that purpose a biblical—albeit stereotypically gendered—role model of the manipulative wife who uses her beauty to tempt her man into conceding to her wishes.

The theme of peace was expressed by eight of the drawings, partially by drawing symbols such as hearts, butterflies, and flowers, and mostly by drawing of the personalized handshake, smiles of Saddam and Bush, and statements such as: "let's stop the war," "OK, I am resigning from the war," "peace treaty," and "we want peace!" Because the Israeli children perceived the war as *our* war, peace became *our* peace as well. This is clearly visible in Tamar's (9-year-old girl) drawing in which she places Israel's Prime Minister Sharon in between Saddam (on the right) and Bush (on the left) under a rainbow with the Hebrew word *Shalom* (peace) on top (see Fig. 3.6).

Although the personalization of peace into a personal handshake may seem a limited concretization of an abstract concept, it can easily be related to the many presentations of ceremonial events that Israeli children have seen on TV. The famous ceremony on the White House lawn of the signing of the peace treaty by U.S. President Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Rabin (later to be assassinated for his peace initiatives), and Palestinian President Arafat (now deceased) in 1993 is probably part of every Israeli child's visual memory as the symbol of peace.

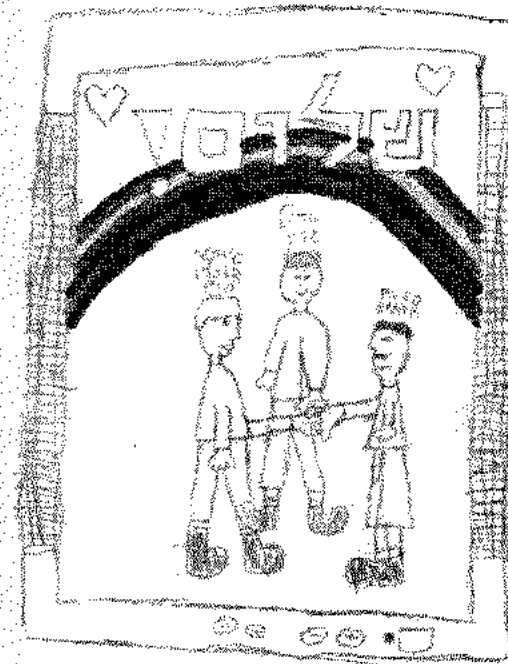


FIG. 3.6. Tamar: Peace.

CONCLUSION

What conclusions can be drawn about the role of the news media in Israeli children's reactions to the war in Iraq? Clearly Israeli children were heavily dependent on the media, TV in particular, as was the entire population of the country. Television presented them information on related events—war strategies, tactics, political developments, and the like. The approach taken by the media also was adopted as a frame of mind, so that they perceived the war as posing an immediate threat to their lives, as being directly related to their country's conflict with the Arab world, and as a justified, even heroic act taken by President Bush. This frame was the uniform attitude in favor of the war, accompanied by the lack of public debate over this frame that typified much of news reporting in Israel during that period (Mandelzisz & Naveh, 2006). Although there was some evidence of awareness of antiwar demonstrations around the world and political resistance by certain European countries, the justification of the war as the most necessary and logical course of action was never challenged by the children, just as it was hardly challenged by anyone in the Israeli media. At the same time, many Israeli children seemed to have adopted the fatalist belief so common now in Israeli society that the war in the region will continue, with no end in sight, and that the promise of peace in the Middle East is becoming more and more distant. It seems that the media's framing of reality at a time of this existential crisis was successful in cultivating a worldview among children according to the Allied hegemony. This was probably achieved through their exposure to media coverage of events, as well as through the reinforcement provided in the home and educational environments.

Indeed, a critical reading of much of the literature regarding children and news suggests that children need to be studied as unique meaning-making audiences, characterized not only by their individual and psychological developmental stages, but also by the specific social contexts in which they are situated. The special circumstances in which children in Israel live today offer an outstanding opportunity to study the role of the news media in their lives. The combination of the intense realities of life in a deeply divided society involved in perpetual armed conflict, together with exposure to a culture of heavy news consumption, raises important questions regarding the potential roles of news in children's lives and in developing citizenship. In general, it can be argued that news media are a resource of growing importance for children in Israel as they seek to make sense of the world around them, as well as their collective identity as Israelis, as citizens of Israel, and citizens of the global world. This is of outmost importance not only for the future of civil society and democracy (as Buckingham, 2000, so persuasively argues), but also, in the case of Israel, for any efforts in the development

of a culture of peace (Raviv, Oppenheimer, & Bar-Tal, 2005), which is at the heart of any discussion on the future of the Middle East, in general, and Israel, in particular.

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DUTCH CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO NEWS ABOUT THE WAR IN IRAQ

*Influence of Media Exposure,
Identification, and Empathy*

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Today, news information reaches us through an ever-increasing stream of both public and commercial TV and radio news programs, (free) newspapers, and the Internet. Although children may get their news information from different resources (family, school, or the media), TV is by far their main source of knowledge about human or political crises, fires and accidents, and crime and war (Ball-Rokeach, 2001; Children Now, 1994; Walma van der Molen & van der Voort, 2000a, 2000b). Many older elementary school children claim they watch the news because they find it important to stay informed (Hoffner & Haefner, 1994). However, even if children do not choose to watch the news, they are still frequently confronted with it when they are looking for other programs or when their parents are watching (Cantor & Nathanson, 1996). Furthermore, with the growing practice of interrupting other programming to report on breaking news stories, children of all ages may be regularly confronted with news information.

A number of studies have observed an increasing trend to present more violent news topics and to supplement regular news items with progressively more sensational and graphic pictures (e.g., Slattery, Doremus, & Marcus, 2001; Slattery & Hakanen, 1994). Apart from these general trends in report-