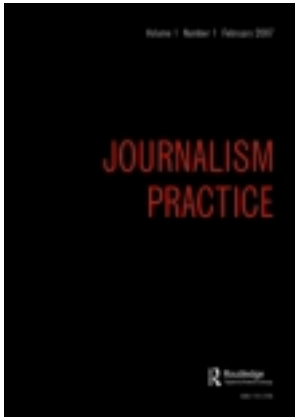


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# THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

## Storytelling of war in Afghanistan and street crime “at home” in the *Omaha World-Herald*

**Robert E. Gutsche Jr.**

*This narrative analysis explores the juxtaposition of local crime news in Omaha, Nebraska with coverage of local troops embedded in Afghanistan in April 2011. It argues that narrative devices such as scene-setting, characterization, sourcing, and the use of dramatic elements constructed violence abroad as heroic and expected, but disruptive and dangerous at home; these contrasts worked to sustain a dominant ideology of institutional superiority.*

**KEYWORDS** crime coverage; geography; local news; narrative analysis; nation-building; place; war reporting

### **Introduction**

In Spring 2011, two journalists from the *Omaha World-Herald* in Omaha, Nebraska traveled to Afghanistan as embedded reporters. Stories in their eight-week “At War At Home” series documented the daily lives of local soldiers, highlighted military missions of providing aid to Afghans and US soldiers, and profiled soldiers’ families left at home. In all, the news stories tell of violence related to valor and strength; they are riveting tales of gun battles with insurgents and dramatic narratives that describe the dangerous nature of war. The *World-Herald* presented its series, which began in February 2011, as “a vital mission to inform the public about our nation’s wars and Nebraskans and lowans who are sent to fight them” (Omaha.com 2011).

The series told stories of humanitarian efforts by US soldiers in Afghanistan and profiled troops and their family members in Omaha. Tales of firefights between American soldiers and Afghani insurgents were also common. Such stories were celebrated in news coverage, as journalists highlighted the drama and the heroic battles that soldiers were fighting for American Freedom. Meanwhile, violent crime and murder had plagued Omaha since 2010. In early April 2011, Omaha’s streets once again erupted in gunfire, much of it related to gang violence. Four people were dead and dozens were wounded by the end of the month’s first week. Journalists racialized the cause of the street crime, tagging the violence as being “senseless” and as a result of ghettoized *personal* behavior that “needs to stop” (Glissmann 2011).

This paper begins by exploring how journalists explain violence, particularly domestic street crime, and that which is government-sponsored. My central argument is that Omaha newswriters treated both acts of violence, which included guns, death, and murder, in ways that explained and excused the nation’s military action abroad while casting violence at home as deviant and unexplainable, thereby performing an ideological function of nation-building (Appadurai 1990; Pieterse 1994). While journalists ascribed patriotic meanings to violence by American soldiers, they rejected any social or cultural

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explanations that could explain the causes for street crime at “home,” reducing the possibility that such deeper explanations could be applied. In this paper, I conduct a narrative analysis of this one week of coverage and present findings associated with how journalists told stories about violence at the local level.

### News as Cultural Storytelling

News practices, media ownership, and relationships with political, social, and economic forces position news media close to other institutions within society through which media come to operate as a tool used to institute social control (Herman and Chomsky 1988). Through tight relationships with institutions, such as business and government, media messages become propaganda veiled as objective news. News medias’ role, then, becomes less about serving the public than about selling the public on dominant ideology through storytelling and narrative (Bhabha 1990) that allow journalists to connect with audience and perpetuate ideology through the use of familiar tales and ways of telling (Frosh and Wolfsfeld 2007).

Ideology through story, or narrative, builds a notion of nation, a defined—albeit imagined (Anderson 1991)—group of commonality (Bhabha 1990). In a transnational, global world with mobile societies meshing places and spaces, the “ambivalent figure of the nation” depends, to some degree, on the cultivation of common narratives. Such narratives relate people to a space that they can call “home” through images and ideas that empower social order, governance, and common language (Bhabha 1990, 2). The notion of nation emerges from a construction of social, cultural, and political elements, which members of a society may share (Anderson 1991). Language and diction in media, then, become used and sold within the information and political marketplace and interacts with notions of power and technology to influence notions of communities and national identities (Anderson 1991; Frosh and Wolsfeld 2007).

Just as language, ideologies, and representations of nation are altered, geographic borders of nation become as ideological as they are physical (Frosh and Wolfsfeld 2007). Indeed, while an expanding—or shrinking—world has removed borders and barriers between cultures and geographies, “another set of borders [has been] erected” (Carey 2009, 453). Informed by storytelling, political discourse, and the complexities of geographic, economic, and individualistic participation, nation represents a mindset that may—or may not—relate to the existence of any tangible item that precedes the nation itself (Said 1979). Carey (2009) and other scholars suggest that for media researchers to understand a “rebordered” (453) world, they must explore online and transnational communities through language, mediated communication, and interactions between communities, media messages, and identity (Anderson 1991; Frosh and Wolsfeld 2007).

### US Media’s Coverage of Violence Abroad and “At Home”

Historically, coverage of war, violence, or social upheaval in US news media tends to play a role in maintaining the position of dominant ideology, often times calling for peace or explaining causes for social conditions in order to maintain social order (Edy 2006; Katovsky and Carlson 2004). Since 2003, thousands of journalists have accepted the US military’s invitation to be “embedded” with US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan—an

unprecedented opportunity for newswriters from both national and local news organizations to report first-hand accounts of their “hometown” troops. While embedded, US news media, in general, build support for military action while ignoring the complex and controversial details and consequences of what the war means for international relations and peace.

Newswriters relay governmental policy and perspective on the need to conduct military actions as though theirs was a verified, objective journalism. News media turn to storytelling with the drama of patriotic fervor and the “pitting” of “us” vs. “them” (Said, 1979), obscuring concerns for state-sponsored violence, and casting a broad net of undifferentiated “terror” to make violence against Iraq, for instance, a “legitimate response” (Reese and Lewis 2009, 792). And despite the bloodiness of war once it starts, stories by journalists (often of violence and victory), tend to be clean and free of bloodshed and instead highlight positive attributes such as human relief efforts and contributions to the American Empire (Aday, Livingston, and Hebert 2005; Lewis and Threadgold 2004; Pfau et al. 2004).

Journalists perform similar ideological functions in coverage of domestic, US crime (Gutsche 2013) as they do in coverage of international violence, by demonizing non-whites involved in crime (Stabile 2006), marginalizing explanations for social conditions that are alternative to Western or dominant communities (Lule 2001), and enhancing American values to enforce social control (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1987).

Juxtaposition of news coverage of Omaha street crime with news about military-led violence in Afghanistan reveals the ideological work of local news media in creating nation through glorious stories of violence abroad and demonized local crime. While both types of violence were different—one government-sponsored, the other informal and among citizens—this paper addresses how *World-Herald* journalists relied on similar storytelling and narratives to embed differing ideologies related to social order to build the notion of nation.

## Methodology and Analysis

In this analysis, 27 stories and two newspaper editorials were identified as pertaining to a span of street shootings within Omaha, Nebraska, and stories that were included in the “At War At Home” series about the current war in Afghanistan. The week of April 3–10, 2011 was selected for analysis, because of the interesting and representative juxtaposition of news stories involving violence included in the series on war and the rise in local crime in Omaha. A single week’s coverage of news was studied through a critical lens to identify and explain potential ideological values and meanings within the text (Hall 1980; Lindlof and Taylor 2010; Parisi 1998).

All news stories were read through the newspaper’s e-paper—a digital version of the newspaper that includes news photographs and the placement of stories as they appeared in the printed edition. Stories were read multiple times to explore the potential meanings of the tales told through understanding the development and roles of characters, the voice of the narrator, descriptions of the violence, and how journalists explained causes for the violence (Chesebro and McMahan 2006; Lindlof and Taylor 2010).

Bal’s (2009) presentation of narrative theory in exploring story provides a structure by which to explore a tale’s narrative traits. His elements of story include: the sequence of

events within the story; the amount of time allotted to elements of the story; descriptions of characters and locations within the story; interactions between characters, their surroundings and the events; and the story's "point of view," or what Bal refers to as "focalization, the relation between 'who perceives' and what is 'perceived'" that "colours the story with subjectivity" (Bal 2009, 8).

Previous analysis of language and story through metaphor, for example, has provided a rich perspective in deciphering the many meanings embedded in literature and news (i.e. Batstone 2000; Berkowitz and Gutsche 2012; Lakoff 1991, 2003; Lule 2004; van Dijk 1988). Once text is selected for analysis, its "narrative elements" (Lule 2004, 182)—such as agents, scenes, acts, and temporal relations—are identified. The reader then turns to an analysis of semantics to identify diction, context, and structure in which the "eminent aspect of news discourse" and its "hidden opinions or ideologies" are embedded (van Dijk 1988, 177). Throughout the analysis, the researcher must recognize her reading is an interpretation and that multiple meanings may be derived from the same text, depending, in part, on who does the reading (Lule 2001). In the analysis below, I identify setting, sources, and storytelling as major categories with which to apply and discuss elements of news storytelling addressed above.

### *Setting: Location as Ideology*

As a device, setting provides a familiar terrain through which the reader can see the characters play out the plot (Bal 2009). In this case, identifiable physical features of the environment placed in the news story provided legitimacy to the resonance of the news occurring in particular geographies. To local news readers, spaces they can locate on a city map in relationship to their own location and space enhances their physical and psychological connection to the news, where it happens, and the news story's personal meaning. If characters "resemble people" (113) (i.e. the reader herself or someone she knows—or *could know*), then, the narratives surrounding a story's actors come to also resemble "real world" interactions. In this situation, the reader sees that an event did not *just happen*, but that it happened in *her* city, near *her* home.

In the coverage of street crime and war, newswriters at the *Omaha World-Herald* focused on highlighting relationships of the news to local locations. Descriptions and details about the space in which the violence occurred—Omaha or Afghanistan—set the scene for the reader as being either familiar and natural or foreign and strange. Newswriters set the familiar geographic setting for a story about a man who had allegedly made threats against law enforcement and then was shot with rubber bullets as officers stormed his home. Journalists referred to the space as "a South Omaha neighborhood" (Womack and Clarridge 2011, B1), a specific address of the "chaotic scene" and "a fierce struggle between deputies and the wanted man." Such an effort to name a place by which readers could refer within their own city attempts to make what happened at the relatable location closer to home, tangible and more meaningful.

In a story about a man who had threatened police (and who later died from an apparent heart attack during his arrest), journalists described the setting as a neighborhood where such behavior seemed normal; neighbors had "said they thought [the victim's] house had been abandoned. After crime scene tape was removed, broken porch windows were visible. The yard was unkempt and the driveway was littered with paper" (Womack and Clarridge 2011, B2). Reporters turned to one resident's story about the event

and his perception of the neighborhood to call upon resonant narrative of urban space—its “broken windows” (Skogan 1990), “ghettoized” nature and gangs: “Berry said the area is called Dead Man’s Hope by former gang members. ‘That name has sprung up in the last year or so because of the trouble around here,’ he said” (Perez and Cole 2011, B2). In this instance, the resident’s story provides a history and a context for a space in a way that makes it real. The space may be “naturally dangerous,” but that perception—or misperception—is given credence by journalists who turned to neighbors for context. Hearing from residents—people “like us”—who provide eyewitness descriptions help readers measure the impact, influence, and meaning of news events and the narratives.

In another case, journalists shared details of one home—the scene of a killing—to connect the space to the readers’ own “home.” In this story, “home” meant a calm and familiar space where violence would be a shocking disturbance. Journalists described the scene of one shooting inside a home to have “walls and fireplace mantle [that] featured dozens of family photos and framed memories. Children’s toys were scattered about the 25-year-old’s living room” (Burbach 2011, B2). This scene, then, resembled many “homes,” allowing reporters to draw upon the irony of violence that destroyed the calm: “About 10:30 Sunday night, at least five bullets were fired through [the] bedroom window. [A resident] was struck and later died, and [the] 25-year-old [resident] was wounded” (Burbach 2011, B1).

Conversely, space in terms of war in Afghanistan was described in vague, foreign terms in which chaos would not be surprising. Whereas journalists qualified that notion that the neighborhood above was inherently dangerous through descriptions provided by neighbors, journalists abroad told a story that danger may always lurk in an unknown land. A story about Iowa’s Bravo Troop’s search for “two suspected insurgents” outside of Bagram Air Field (Morton 2011a, A1), for instance, provided detail about the soldiers’ role in the War on Terror and the geographic area in which the soldiers worked:

The troop’s main task—providing security in the areas just south of the sprawling Bagram Air Field, a major base and a nexus of coalition activity in eastern Afghanistan—has produced little enemy engagement.

But the troop is also responsible for a remote section of Parwan province, which lies just north of the capital city of Kabul and includes the village of Pacha Khak. When they visited the area in December, they noticed several men watching from afar, hidden under a blanket and possibly holding a weapon. (Morton 2011a, A4)

Yet, this story’s spaces—the Parwan province, Bagram Air Field, Kabul, the village of Pacha Khak—are left to the readers’ imagination. Characters’ operations and interactions occur in “another world,” one that is framed as separate from Omaha’s. Of course while more details, such as street signs, intersections and landmarks may not help a reader *better* understand this particular space, journalists apparently chose to ignore the voices of residents—the people of the Parwan province or Pacha Khak or Kabul. Doing so allowed journalists to further hide what these spaces are and what they may mean.

Journalists turned to a scene of a faraway land, rural and hard environments stripped of the human element to present a space that is easily depicted as naturally violent. In this story, reporters told a tale of soldiers “scouring a series of ravines for more than an hour without finding two suspected insurgents they had seen earlier toting AK-47s” (Morton 2011a, A1). The drama, which is focused on the details of the space and environment, continues:

Then, suddenly, Spc. Mark Otte of Atlantic, Iowa, saw them, about 40 feet below him on the floor of a ravine.

Otte stared into one man's face and pointed his gun at him, waiting to see whether he would surrender.

Instead, the man opened fire with his assault rifle, forcing Otte back from the edge of the ravine.

About the same time, other soldiers from Bravo Troop who were searching the ravine floor came upon the men.

The man shooting at Otte quickly redirected his fire at the soldiers in the ravine. Staff Sgt. Michael Davis of Altoona, Iowa, was the closest—less than 10 feet away. (Morton 2011a, A1)

The story's drama and diction (i.e. "hidden under a blanket," "stared into one man's face," "opened fire") reveal the event's mystery and suspense in the middle of which exists the protagonist—Spc. Mark Otte. Telling the story from the vantage point of a protagonist—in this case, a US soldier—in which he is under constant fear and uncertainty in a foreign land, released journalists from the need to describe the space, the setting. Focusing on the character and his *interaction with the space* replaced the need to *describe the foreign place*, descriptions of which may not resonate with American audiences. Embedded ideological messages may have greater meaning, then, when the local space is defined as "ours," familiar and meaningful, and foreign space is veiled, descriptions dominated by those of "us" prevail as characters in the space.

### *Sources: Embedding Ideology Through Actors and Characters*

Beyond providing a setting for stories, readers rely on characters and narrators to act out the storyline (Bal 2009). Stories rely on good guys and bad guys, heroes/victims and villains (Lule 2001) by which moral and ideological lessons are propagated, spread, and institutionalized (Bettelheim 1976). Characters in stories from both embedded journalists and those reporters who covered the "war at home" in Omaha limited themselves to characters that were military officials, soldiers, and their families. And the stories of living the war from at home in Omaha and from the position of US troops abroad focused on an element that may not be easily associated with the notion of war—joy. One story about treating injured soldiers in war zones focused on scenes of laughter (Morton 2011b, B1). In another story, a couple reminisced about World War II on how they found love via their love letters while he was abroad and she was home (Grace 2011, A1).

By focusing on the stories of those directly involved with the US position in the current conflict abroad via pro-US characters (i.e. soldiers, medics, and housewives), newswriters allowed these characters to *tell their own stories* through dialogue and vantage point (Bal 2009). Highlighting events and activities from the position of the pro-US characters allowed journalists to embed the ideological work of supporting soldiers in military action, denying the reader the opportunity—or the need—to hear other voices that may contribute to a holistic understanding of the conflict. However, these added voices may also contradict the desired messages of support for US soldiers. At the very least, a more complex representation of the character's actions and views may confuse the reader and stifle the ideological function of the news text, which relies on clear storytelling.



One specific story about troops in Afghanistan reveals a representative construction of narrative journalists used to create characters, which presented the story's focus as solely on the main, US-affiliated characters:

Shortly after 8:30 a.m., Spc. Cody Bunkers of Ankeny nosed the lead M-ATV around a large boulder, trying not to rub against the rock and topple the truck down the side of the mountain.

Boom.

At first Bunkers thought he'd hit the rock after all and blown a tire, but the billowing black smoke told him otherwise. The radios went crazy.

"Contact: IED."

"We've got a trigger man running towards the valley."

"You want me to drop this [guy] if I see him?" one gunner asked.

"Only if he has hostile intent."

The truck's front half was blown to pieces, with parts strewn across the landscape. But everyone inside was safe. (Morton 2011a, A4)

Within similar tellings throughout the week, soldiers were depicted as heroes, as told through elements of the soldiers' human nature—stories of sadness, victory, and challenge. Even in stories about soldiers' families who were left in Omaha, a consistent focus was on their heroic nature and the righteous nature of their mission. Dramatic telling of violence—gunfights and skirmishes with foreign insurgents—ended with resolutions surrounding the valiant nature of soldiers. For instance, after one battle between local soldiers and "insurgents," the reporter wrote about the soldiers' strength, resilience, and even their ability to avoid injury:

The only injury to the U.S. soldiers was a small scratch to Henrich. His uniform was torn on the shoulder. A red mark showed where a bullet had grazed his skin.

He didn't even notice it until someone else pointed it out.

The soldiers' mood was a mixture of exultation and relief that none of them had been hurt.

"I don't know how they didn't get shot," Stanford said of the soldiers on the ravine floor.

Henrich seemed baffled by it as well. (Morton 2011a, A4)

In stories of violence in Afghanistan, journalists constructed the character of the soldier, in part by enhancing their human characteristics, *and*, in turn, by dehumanizing the "enemy." The term "insurgent" or "Afghan" represented the clusters of enemies with whom US soldiers were fighting. "Insurgent," then—in its mysticism—comes to represent "the other" (Lule 2001). In a further means of creating "the other" (Gutsche 2011), the voices of Afghanistan "residents," "natives," or even the "enemies" themselves are absent, leaving room for their perspectives and experiences to be filled by the character of the soldier. For example, one story about female soldiers began with an overt creation of "the other":

The snickering pupils in the second-story window of the girls' school alternated between hiding their faces and waving at the American soldiers hanging around the women's center next door.

"At least they aren't getting beaten," Army Maj. Mary Parmenter said as she looked up at the girls. (Morton and Hansen 2011, A1)



By relying on the stories of the protagonist—the local soldier—journalists were released from the need to construct new and relatable characters to play the role of the enemy. Instead, they relied upon common narratives of the enemy built around perceptions of “Islamic treatment” of women, which is often presented by mass media to be intolerant, abusive, and restrictive. Even though the meanings of gender relationships in “Islamic” has been contested (Mahmood 2005), this narrative has been used to shape Western perspectives of behavior and culture of the “other.”

In coverage of Omaha street crime, journalists also constructed characters to fit the roles of protagonist, antagonist, and victim. Yet, whereas reporters turned to local soldiers and their families to *tell their own stories*, journalists relied on official sources, such as police, to *tell stories about* those involved in fighting or experiencing street crime. Newswriters highlighted the work and narratives of those charged with maintaining social control—namely law enforcement. Stories reported “the dangerous work of serving arrest warrants” by law enforcement, such as following an incident of violence when police attempted to arrest a man (Burbach and Perez 2011, A4).

Another story highlighted the honor of two brothers who work together as sheriff’s deputies, brothers who “routinely put themselves on the front lines of metropolitan Omaha law enforcement” (Burbach 2011, B4). One deputy said that the brothers are “not looking for trouble, but they don’t shy away from it” (B4) and ended with sentiments that “They’re good deputies . . . If something was going on, I’d want them to back me up” (B4).

In an editorial about the week’s street crime, the newspaper “salut(ed) the courage of (1) hospital personnel who deal with tense and sometimes deadly situations involving volatile visitors and (2) law enforcement officers who handle the inherently dangerous duty of serving warrants” (*Omaha World-Herald* 2011, B6). Additionally, journalists themselves performed the role of narrator (Bal 2009) in the telling of street crime by entering themselves into the story as a protagonist. The *Omaha World-Herald* became a part of the news and actor in the “war on crime.” An editorial stated the newspaper’s role:

*World-Herald* news articles and editorials have noted the multiple ways in which Omahans from many walks of life—neighborhood leaders and judges, police officers and early childhood specialists, teachers and social workers, business owners and government officials, ministers and volunteers—all are working to do their part in helping, bit by bit. (*Omaha World-Herald* 2011, B6)

By writing so profusely about the position and perspective of official sources, the writer attempted to align the newspaper with those it claimed to be heroes. And, conversely, it aligned itself against the threats at home, reinforcing the worth of American Empire and diminishing the social and cultural influences that caused local, gang-related violence. In doing so, the newspaper further constructed the character of the “enemy”—often referred to as “a gunman” or “gunmen”—as the “other” by separating law enforcement/the newspaper/the larger community from the perspective of the accused.

When journalists did attempt to create a sense of who the enemies were by turning to family members and friends, such narratives that revealed the humanity of the accused were often countered in the same stories. A report about a man who was shot and killed in a city park by another man who had “a history of hardship” after being “handed from one custodial or parental figure to another, from the age of 7” (Ruggles and Mendoza 2011, A4)—turned to the mother of a friend of the accused to describe the charged: “This is a surprise and shock to me,” she said of Phillips’ arrest. “He never brought any problems

into my home. I never saw this type of aggression from him” (Mendoza and Cole 2011, B1). But the woman’s sentiment was countered near the end of the story by a man claiming that a relative of his had once been abused by the accused: “I don’t have anything positive to say about him at all,” Castle said. “She moved in with me to get away from him,” he said of the relative (Mendoza and Cole 2011, B2).

Journalists’ descriptions of characters (i.e. whether they were heroic soldiers or devious gangbangers), allowed them to perform and be an extension of the authorities in defining what kinds of violence are acceptable: When “deviants” were identified or described—as they were in coverage of street crime—descriptions of their character, informed by dialogue from family, friends, and neighbors, cast them in a dark light. Further, by not positioning “insurgents” in *any light*, newswriters were able to cast the characters in juxtaposing positions with little effort.

### *Storytelling: Using Drama to Explain Meanings of Violence*

Dramatic storytelling in the coverage of Afghanistan contributed to the construction of American soldiers as heroes and Afghani residents as villains, while storytelling in the coverage of Omaha street crime built a distance between the public-as-victim and as-the-enemy. Journalists turned to stories of “everyday” activities and normalcy with which they were able to reveal the uncommon nature of crime. For example, one of the shootings during the first week of April occurred in a hospital—a public space considered safe for healing, not harm (Soja 2010)—created an opportunity for journalists to tap into the audience’s perception of safety and calm. This way, the violence seemed more dramatic and unexpected. While the hospital was on “lock-down” following the shooting, a news story detailed the experiences of several patients and doctors to reveal the fear of untethered street crime:

The hospital served refreshments—water, coffee, pop.

Margaret Thurston, 68, of Schleswig, Iowa, was in her husband’s room on the fourth floor.

She walked to the elevator to go to the first floor to get something to drink.

A nurse gave her a simple instruction: You’re not going anywhere. (O’Connor 2011, A4)

This example reveals how journalists turned to dramatic representations of violence—even though the experiences of victims—to alter the otherwise calm condition of everyday life. Newswriters, then, were able to contrast otherwise “safe space” with the potential for shocking violence. Coverage of Omaha’s street crime was ripe, as well, with cultural explanations for how these spaces could erupt with crime.

Reports following one story placed the blame for a recent shooting on poor parenting, mental illness, and gangs (Ruggles 2011, B2). Another story blamed violence on warm weather (Womack 2011). A newspaper editorial argued that the cause of the week’s “senseless shootings—in a public park, at a hospital, against deputies serving a warrant”—are easily explained:

This problem ties in with the abiding discussion about self-responsibility and responsible parenting. It relates to Omaha’s discussions about early childhood education, truancy, community policing and summer jobs for youth. It relates to Nebraska’s ongoing struggles on foster care and juvenile justice improvements. (*Omaha World-Herald* 2011, B6)

The editorial, accompanied by a cartoon of the city's name peppered with bullet holes—some still smoking and spattered with blood—mirrored the paper's news coverage. In both cases, journalists turned again to official, governmental sources to explain the crime and to call for calm. In one story, Omaha's mayor claimed that:

the culprits behind violent crime in Omaha are poverty, unemployment and a combination of drugs and illegal guns. He [the mayor] has repeatedly said job creation is a priority of his administration.

"We're an angry society," Suttle said. "I ask people, cool down, put down your gun. Pick up your cell phone instead and get some help." (O'Brien 2011, B3)

This call for calm was a common theme in the newspaper's coverage of street crime. For example, one story opened with the sentence, "We're coming after you" (O'Brien 2011, B3).

Another story began by urging the community to fight crime, yet the same report highlighted the police chief's explanation for street violence and his calls for mediation of conflict: "'It's an issue where people need to learn how to solve conflicts without bringing firearms . . . in the middle of it,' Hayes said" (Glissmann 2011, A1). The story continues with several interviews with community members, educators, and law enforcement officials in order to detail what is already being done in the community to make peace.

The newspaper's coverage of calls for calm and their own editorials that attempt to decipher and defuse the violence reveals the long-held tradition of a news organization's "commitment" to "the community" (Singer 2003). However, coverage of the *causes* for street violence is striking when compared to coverage of what led to military violence.

Causes and explanations for the US-led violence in Afghanistan emerged through the *types of stories* that were told about the soldiers and their missions. Soldiers and their families were allowed through their own words and the detailed narratives of their experiences to explain why they would sacrifice their lives—and their loved ones. For example, one story about medics abroad focused on soldiers treating the wounded from the position of the medics and healed soldiers. In this story, journalists highlighted one soldier's reasons for fighting—a mixture of practical and ideological work—from her own vantage point:

Eberly had assumed that she and the other two combat medics with the Iowa National Guard's 734th Agribusiness Development Team would be hanging around wheat fields and orchards as the team worked to help improve the lot of Afghan farmers. "I thought we'd be out there winning hearts and minds," she said." (Morton 2011b, B1)

In another story, one soldier's wife, left home in Omaha with two, small children, was able to express her reasons for supporting her soldier overseas; her husband is helping "serve his country loyally" (Hansen 2011a, A2).

She also is quoted as saying that a soldier's experience in war will make it so that soldiers are "going to take better care of their children and their spouse when he returns" (Hansen 2011a, A2). Finally, a news report about an Omaha man who has worked in Afghanistan for 20 years capitalized on the irony of his initial reaction to Afghanistan and on a Western perception of a backwards country, to which Dollis, an American, has arrived to "save" a foreign people:

The night his plane landed half a world from Omaha, Brad Dollis couldn't fathom spending nearly half his life in or near Afghanistan.

He grabbed his luggage and walked into the airport terminal in Peshawar, Pakistan. It was 3 a.m. just before Christmas 1990.

No one there celebrated Christmas. No one wore slacks or carried a coat except the Omaha accountant.

Instead, the men wore what looked like two-piece pajamas. They were all bearded. They wrapped themselves in blankets, eyed Dollis suspiciously and prattled on in a language he couldn't understand . . .

"I really thought I was on Mars. This wasn't the world or anything like the world I knew," Dollis said. (Hansen 2011b, A1)

The story about Dollis' experience continued to focus on cultural differences between the United States and a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, while images of the 9/11 attacks and of the World Trade Center collapse were peppered throughout the report to position the local-as-international worker as an extension of American Empire. As in other stories of the war in Afghanistan throughout the week, the dramatic nature of characters' interactions and experiences there constructed a common storyline that their efforts—however connected they may be to American military interests—were justified and acceptable. In both types of coverage, violence was shown to be acceptable if initiated by government and social institutions in order to exterminate deviance that threatens the system, and the notion of nation was built around a certain type of American/Omahan, those within the institution, that upheld dominant values and systems.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This paper looked at two sets of coverage of violence in one week in the *Omaha World-Herald*. And while both sets of news stories discussed very different scenes of violence—US-led military action in Afghanistan and street crime in Omaha, Nebraska—this paper suggests that the ways in which the violence was covered was quite similar: both used drama and narrative storytelling to cast characters in specific ways that furthered ideological purposes of nation-building. In this conclusion, I wish to (1) further reveal the role of local media in nation-building; (2) expose the ideological effects of embedded journalism "at home"; and (3) consider the effect of storytelling upon perceptions of crime/violence—all through the use of nation-building as a local action.

The *World-Herald's* presentation of violence at home and abroad provides an interesting example of local media clinging to traditional notions of nation—that it is defined by a negotiation between tangible communities (specific places, spaces and people), not communities that are virtual, imagined, mobile, and themselves contested (such as communities of specific identities, i.e. racialized, engendered, etc.). But more importantly, this analysis reveals a local newspaper's ability to "bring home" international affairs through embedded reporters as a way to construct a national identity while creating identity about "home," itself.

By casting Omahans as victims of street crime and Americans, in general, as victims of terrorism in both sets of stories of violence, news stories defined who was at risk and who was deviant to relay ideological meanings of the coverage to the public. Through such approaches, these stories created a common understanding from which to explain or rationalize the violence.

In juxtaposition with coverage of local street crime, the *World-Herald's* coverage of Afghanistan appears to not be mere "war stories" of military and local soldiers abroad. Tales of soldiers-as-heroes-and-victors were constructed to help the "home" community remember their own to support them from afar. Journalists' focus on dramatic storytelling—and on official sources as storytellers and main characters—constructed an archetype of hero within the American soldier and goodness of their missions against which the local culture could measure local crime. Journalists' exploration of emotional elements of war at home and abroad—in the case of the ideological reasons and the feelings of doing good while fighting abroad—promoted military violence in Afghanistan. Yet, embedded journalists discussed few details about the contested nature of the dispute, the casualties of the conflict, and the reasons that led to the war itself in the week's coverage.

Instead, newswriters turned to stories of encouragement and victory that maintain an acceptance of the violence to naturalize its existence, and personalize the reasons for the violence. Against these measures, it became easier for newswriters to depict street crime not as a complex result of oppression and economic strain, but simply as behaviors that are counter to dominant local values. The soldiers' stories were *so great, so heroic* that their actions and the causes of their violence did not need to be explained. Violence at home required a different story. Whereas soldiers and government spokespersons served as official heroes representative of the "nation" and insurgents represented the villain in coverage of violence abroad, at home, police officers and journalists defined "nation" by separating themselves from a local portion of civilians and demonizing street violence.

In the end, this paper argues that scholarship should turn to local news to explore cultural meanings of newswork and its ideological functions, as this study explored the use of nation-building as a local action. Also, any notion of journalists embedding with those involved with international terrorism or street crime, according to social and cultural journalistic values, would most likely be labeled ludicrous. However, such a practice may legitimize the vantage points, realities, and experience of the "insurgent" and "gang-banger" alike and challenge dominant constructions of deviance. As local journalists have increasing access via the internet, social media, and travel, including as embedded journalists in the US military abroad, it becomes crucial to explore further the role of local news in the ideological work that forms nation and identity within diverse communities at home, in each of our back yards.

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