ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

Symbolic boundary work: Jewish and Arab femicide in Israeli Hebrew newspapers

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Abstract

We analyze 391 news reports in Israeli newspapers between 2013 and 2015, covering murders of women and their family members by other family members and intimate partners. We compare articles where the perpetrators and victims are Jewish to those where the perpetrators and victims are Palestinian citizens of Israel (henceforth PCI). We found that articles tend to provide much more details about Jewish culprits than about PCI ones. As for ascribed motives, most murder cases by Jews were framed as an outcome of individual personality or the pathology of the culprit. Conversely, when Palestinian citizens were the killers, culture and tradition were invoked as the main motives. We suggest that the routine work of narration that the Israeli media preform when covering femicide is a case of political use of cultural stereotypes to gain moral ground in the intractable conflict between Jews and Palestinians.

KEYWORDS
Arabs, femicide, Israel, Jews, media, Palestinian citizens of Israel

1 | INTRODUCTION

On March 4, 2013, Dov Tagar, a 46-year-old security guard, stabbed to death his girlfriend Hatuela Kuznitsov (42) and her son Alex (17) in their apartment in Haifa, Israel, before killing himself. One year later, on March 18, 2014, 30 years old Lilian Masud, mother of two, was shot to death in the parking lot of a residential building in Lud (Israel).

The media coverage of Tagar's case focused on his personality and physiological profile, while also giving ample attention to his victims and their lives. Conversely, the murder of Lilian Masud was covered laconically, with little detail or emotion, despite her young age and the fact that she left two orphans behind. Newspapers focused on her city of residence and suggested that the motive for her murder was related to her ethnic and cultural background—an honor killing—despite the lack of concrete evidence for such a motive. While Tagar and his victims were Jewish, Masud was A Palestinian Citizen of Israel (henceforth PCI).

These two murder cases demonstrate the differential ethnic treatment of femicide in the Israeli media. This difference is largely driven by ethno-national and religious markers, which determine elements such as the motive ascribed to the murder, the depth of detail in the description of the culprits and victims, and the treatment of the geographical locations and communities in which murders occur. Israel is a strategic site for comparing the differential media treatment of femicides because it is characterised by a minority–majority cleavage, with ethnicity occupying a central role in the identity of both Jews and Palestinians. Furthermore, unlike previous studies on the media depictions of femicide among minority groups in liberal democracies, in the Israeli case both Jews and PCI are mostly non-immigrants, which could potentially influence their coverage. Yet, the relations between the Jewish majority and the PCI minority are characterized by hostility, distrust, and alienation (Tsfati, 2007). The Hebrew media has been an important agent in fostering these tensions on the one hand, and attempting to diffuse and play them down by highlighting co-existence on the other hand (Shor, 2010, 2015; Shor & Yonay, 2010, 2022), suggesting that its coverage of family murders may follow unique patterns.

Mary Douglas' (2003) work on purity and danger shows that cultural distinctions between the safe and the dangerous are key in the distinction between in- and out-groups. We suggest that the routine work of narration performed by the Israeli Hebrew media when covering femicide and other family killings provides a valuable prism for examining the construction of symbolic group boundaries based on group morality. Our analysis therefore contributes to the greater sociological literature attempting to understand the creation and reinforcement of symbolic boundaries between "society" and its "others" through the stigmatization and exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities (Bail, 2008; Lamont, et al., 2017; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Wimmer, 2013).

1.1 | Differential media treatment of ethnic minorities and gendered violence

The differential treatment of femicide in various Western democracies may be traced back to the binary distinction between the West and the East, rooted in European imperialism. In this binary, the West is rational, tolerant and progressive, while the East is irrational, fanatical and traditional (Abu-Lughod, 2006; Razack, 2008). Women in Eastern societies are perceived in the West as uniquely or particularly oppressed, while gender equality and freedom of choice are frequently depicted as features that characterize Western societies and exist only in them (Phillips, 2007; Razack, 2008).

As opposed to such static and monolithic portrayals of minority groups, post-colonial feminist scholars have argued that for dominant groups, culture is often invisible. Studies in the United States (e.g., Dyer, 2017; Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Shor & van de Rijt, 2023) have demonstrated that the media often construe Blacks as a monolithic mass, prone to violence, while ignoring cultural elements for Whites. Similarly, Steuter and Wills (2009) argue that Western media discourses tend to define White majority groups by their essential uniqueness and individuality, while people of Arab and Muslim decent are constructed as an indistinguishable mass. According to Volpp (2000), the media have an imperative role in constructing this view. While media coverage considers troubling behaviors of immigrants or ethnic minorities as a reflection of their culture, similar acts by White individuals are regarded as isolated incidences, reflecting individual traits rather than cultural ones. Studies examining the media portrayal of Muslim minorities in Australia (Ewart, 2012), North America (Steuter & Willis, 2009), and the UK (Poole, 2002) have demonstrated that Muslims are predominantly mentioned in relation to issues such as Islamic law, female genital mutilation, and honor killings. Such coverage portrays Islam as backward, oppressive, and uncivilized; an anti-thesis to the freedom and stability associated with Western liberal democracies (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017).

1.2 | Building social boundaries: Femicide in the media as a tool for moral exclusion

Ethnic conflicts, particularly severe and prolonged ones such as those taking place in Israel, the Balkans, Cyprus, and Rwanda, enhance social and moral exclusion. The moral failings of the "other" justify utilitarian, self-maximizing actions that allow the neglect of concerns about their well-being. The out-group is often constructed as inferior or even nonhuman, justifying destructive acts against it (Bandura, 1990). In such intractable conflicts, opponents are often delegitimized, and group boundaries are fortified, and sometimes even sealed (Bar-Tal, 1998; Shor & Yonay, 2011). In the current study, we investigate some of the tools used to create and maintain this differentiation.

One useful way to explore the construction of symbolic boundaries between groups is by comparing the narratives on minority and majority groups. Previous studies on cultural representation of gendered violence have mostly focused on gendered practices commonly associated with the "other", such as so called "honor killings" (Jiwani, 2014; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2009), forced marriages and adolescent brides (Volpp, 2000), and female genital mutilation (Sobel, 2015; Wade, 2009). However, scholars have cautioned against homogenizing both "the West" "Islam" while ignoring the particularities of national context when examining representations of minorities and their treatment of women (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2009; Poole, 2002).

Only a handful of former studies have adopted a comparative framework, examining the media coverage of both minority and dominant groups in the context of femicide. These studies provide important insights regarding the mechanisms by which the cultural/individual binary is constructed and reinforced. In particular, two studies on the Canadian context provide an important starting point for the current investigation. First, Jiwani (2014) found that when victims of femicide had a European heritage, the coverage tended to individualize the violent act, In contrast, the coverage of victims from an ethnic minority group provided detail on their culture, religion, immigrant status, and country of origin. Similarly, Shier and Shor (2016) concluded that Canadian newspaper articles often use the identity of victims and offenders rather than the facts of the case when ascribing motivations and labeling femicides. When immigrants from South Asia and the Middle East were involved, the coverage focused on cultural and religious traditions, as well as sentiments of breached honor and shame. Conversely, when family murders were committed by non-Muslim Canadians, culture and religion were seldom mentioned and stories focused on individualistic psychological explanations.

In the current study, we similarly adopt a systematic comparative design, relying on a large random sample of newspaper articles. However, we offer several major contributions that go beyond previous research. First, rather than focusing on labels such as "honor killings", we focus on the ways in which ethnic backgrounds shape the media treatment of all femicide. Second, While Jiwani (2014), Shier and Shor (2016), and others have looked at immigrants to Western countries from the Middle East and South Asia, we offer an analysis of a native Arab population. Finally, the Israeli case offers a unique opportunity to examine the role of media constructions in the context of a prolonged conflict, in which ideologies and policies reject assimilation, rather than preach for it.

1.3 | The Israeli case study

The Palestinian Citizens of Israel are an indigenous minority group. Some might expect this status to result in relatively more favorable coverage patterns of these born and raised Israeli citizens, who have deep roots in the territory, rather than being foreign newcomers. However, studies on the media coverage of indigenous minorities in other countries suggest that this has often not been the case. Media coverage of indigenous populations in liberal democracies like Canada (Burns & Shor, 2021) and New Zealand (Abel, 2013) often emphasizes violence, poverty, incompetence, and cultural inadequacies.

Furthermore, despite their indigenous status, Palestinian Israeli citizens experience substantial discrimination and are largely excluded from Israeli sociopolitical centers of power and decision making (Lewin et al., 2006). The cleavage between Jews and PCI is intensified by Israel's conflict with the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and the persistent questioning of the PCI's loyalty to the state (Shafir & Peled, 2002). As Israel has gone through a process

of right-wing radicalization over the last 2 decades, Israeli politicians and governments continuously promote populist and nativist agendas that include xenophobia and intolerance toward non-Jews (Pedahzur, 2012).

Israel's unique geopolitical situation provides a dimension of intersectionality when considering violence against minority/indigenous women. Shalhoub-Kevorkian (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2004; Shalhoub-Kevorkian & Daher-Nashif, 2013) has demonstrated how the culturalization of violence toward women by state and law agencies both normalizes this violence and depoliticizes the relationships between Jews and Arabs. As a result, the protection of PCI abused women weakens, as police responsibility toward them is neutralized. Negative/biased and sometimes racist images of Palestinians by police officers and representatives the judicial system affect their actions and prevent them from providing these women with adequate protection from violence.

Since most PCI live in segregated geographic areas (Yiftachel, 2006), many of them rarely interact with Jews. Most Israeli Jews consider Palestinians as the ultimate ''other'' in terms of their religion, culture, and national identification (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Ghanem, 2001). In fact, the segregation is so intense that for many of the country's Jewish residents, the printed media is the only sources of information about the PCI (Avraham, 2003). However, studies show that the PCI are both systematically excluded from the Hebrew media and criminalized by it (Avraham, 2003; Masalha & Jamal, 2011). The work of Wolfsfeld (Wolfsfeld, 2004; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008) suggests that the Hebrew media's coverage of Israel's Palestinian citizens has been dominated by the use of 'law and order' frames. Rinnawi (2007), who analyzed Israeli Hebrew press reports during the 2000 Al Aqsa Intifada, found that these mostly failed to differentiate between the PCI and the Palestinians residing in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with all portrayed as a security threat possessing a culture of violence.

Of note, most of this previous research has focused on periods characterized by violent clashes between Israel and the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories (and in 2000 also with the PCI). It is therefore important to examine whether such coverage patterns carry over when national conflicts are more subdued and the victims of Palestinian violence are Palestinian women, as well as in a more private domain (femicide), where the national and religious conflict is relatively less explicit. Given the deep divides between Jews and Arabs in Israel and the findings from previous research, we would still expect coverage patterns that vilify the PCI collective following femicide by PCI perpetrators, somewhat similar to that found for immigrant populations in studies of other liberal democracies and perhaps even more negative.

To our knowledge, very few academic studies have examined the media coverage of femicide in the Hebrew media. Shoham (2013) analyzed newspaper articles on spousal murders of eight Jewish women of Ethiopian decent, finding that newspapers framed these murders as characteristic of poverty and of neglect by Ethiopian community leaders. Herbst and Gez (2012) examined the high-profile murder of Jewish teenager Einav Rogel by her boyfriend, criticizing the common tendency to present women's murder as isolated and unusual. However, no study to date has systematically compared the newspaper coverage of Jews and PCI in the context of femicide. A comparative framework allows one to explore the precise nature of potential differences in coverage, as well as differences in ascribed motives associated with the criminality of different ethno-national groups.

2 | METHODS

Using the key words "killed", "murder/ed" "shot"," strangled", "stabbed", "family", "husband", "wife", and "lover", we retrieved 457 news reports, opinion pieces, and editorials published over a 2-year period between January 2013 and January 2015. We included in the sample articles related to murder in the context of familial relations that victimized women, either directly by murdering the woman herself, or indirectly by murdering her closest relations (e.g., partner or children). We retrieved these articles from the online archives of three leading national Israeli newspapers: *Israel Hayom* (110 articles), *Yediot Achronot* (205 articles), and *Maariv* (143 articles). *Israel Hayom* is a free daily newspaper and is the most widely read newspaper in Israel. It is a right-wing-leaning newspaper, promoting almost exclusively conservative and nationalist views (Dahan & Bentham, 2017). *Yediot Ahronot* (from here on *Ynet*, the name of its online edition) is the second most well read daily in Israel, giving voice to a wide variety of social and political views

and catering to a wide demographic (Caspi & Limor, 1992). Finally, *Maariv* is one of Israel's oldest daily newspapers, with a history of wide readership, although not as wide as *Israel Hayom* and *Ynet*. Readers of these three newspapers make up the large majority of the daily Hebrew language readership. We also attempted to examine the coverage in *Haaretz*, Israel's prominent left-leaning newspaper, but were unable to systematically search its archives.

The 457 articles in our sample described 140 cases of murders or attempted murders conducted by family members or by past or current romantic partners. We included in the sample ***all*** the relevant articles we could trace during the study's time frame, including those that reviewed trials of past murders and ones that reported on attempted murders. While most of the cases (79%) were of family/intimate partner femicide, we also included in the sample offenses against brothers, cousins, and other male victims, such as children, lovers, and new partners. These cases are important, as they were often part of patriarchal power relations. For example, murders of children or new partners were often motivated by the desire to take revenge against a female partner or ex-partner.

We conducted a comprehensive content analysis (Meyers, 1997; Van Dijk, 1988) of the articles in our sample. We first reviewed all the items in our sample and identified a large number of common themes, paying special attention to the phrasing of titles and sub-titles. We identified these common themes using an Excel spreadsheet in which we coded any specific theme that emerged for each article in the analysis. We then combined these specific themes into a smaller number of overarching themes. These overarching themes included references to ***cultural values*** verses ***personal history*** in the interpretation of the act and a focus on ***individuals*** verses the ***collective*** in discussions of the actors and the setting. In identifying these overarching themes, we were particularly interested in how murders and their perpetrators were presented and explained, both by journalists and by community members cited in the articles.

3 | FINDINGS

Most of the 457 articles in our sample described a female victim (79%), compared with 12% describing a male victim and 9% in which the victim was a child. Suspected culprits were overwhelmingly men (85%). About 65.4% of the articles described a Jewish victim, while about 20.1% of them described a PCI victim. The remaining 66 articles described 3 victims who were neither Jewish nor PCI (3.2%) or were not identified by their ethno-national group (11.3%). From here on, we focus on the sub-sample of 391 articles in which victims were clearly identified as belonging to one of the two former groups (Jews or PCI), as this is the comparison that stands at the center of our research. Table 1 summarizes the relations between culprits and victims according to the ethnic group of the victim in these 391 articles (299 describing a Jewish victim and 92 describing a PCI victim). Below we discuss the differential treatment of these murders by journalists, showing that while murders by Jews were mostly framed as an outcome of individual personality or the pathology of the culprit, when PCI were the killers, group culture and traditions were presented as the main motives.

TABLE 1 Culprits' relation to their victim, if known (*n* = 391).

Culprit	Jews (*n* = 299)	Palestinians (*n* = 92)
Spouse	37.78%	22.82%
Ex-spouse	24.07%	13.04%
Romantic partner	9.19%	5.43%
Father	7.02%	20.65%
Brother	7.01%	10.86%
Son	13.27%	6.52%
Mother or daughter	1.66%	0.00%
Other relatives	0.00%	13.04%
Unidentified, but family involvement speculated	0.00%	7.64%

3.1 | (De)humanizing perpetrators

Our findings revealed varying degrees of detail, empathy, and contextualization in the description of culprits, depending on their ethno-national identities. Articles on Jewish culprits included much more detail and depth, as every aspect of the perpetrator's personal history was examined and newspapers cited psychiatrists, family members, childhood friends, employers, and neighbors. Such detail was mostly absent for PCI culprits.

In order to systematically evaluate the degree of detail and richness in articles, we quantified the details provided in each article in our sample. We noted whether the article included each of the following items: (1) age, (2) name, (3) profession, (4) mentions of children, (5) a description of the relationship with the culprit, (6) other personal characteristics, and (7) the presence/absence of an image. The average cumulative number per article for Jewish Culprits was 2.87, almost double the average number for PCI culprits (1.51). Only about 11% of the articles on PCI killers mentioned more than three of the items on the list above, compared with 38% of the articles on Jewish killers.

Furthermore, articles on Jewish killers were not only more detailed, but also included greater levels of empathy and contextualization. For example, in the case of Roi Ochana, a Jewish man in his late 20s from Kiryat Ata, who murdered his mother, Batya Ochana and severely injured his girlfriend, Shani Yagodnik, journalists uncritically cited Ochana's brother: *"My brother is a good person, quiet and modest, who never even raised his voice at anyone.... Saying he is normative would be an understatement"* (Ravad & Sha'alan, 2013). In a later article, Journalist Ahia Ravad (2013b) recounted attempts by family and police to bring Ochana to face his crime. Such detailed and nuanced descriptions were never offered when PCI were the killers, even under similar circumstances.

3.2 | Ascribed motives

In Table 2 we present the presumed motives that articles ascribed to murders. Nearly all of the articles mentioned *domestic quarrels*. However, we felt that this describes the circumstances of the event rather than a motivation. Excluding this interpretation, we were left with 294 articles that clearly discussed a motive (226 for Jewish victims and 68 for PCI ones). In Table 2 we present the distribution of these ascribed motives by the victim's ethno-national background.

3.3 | When Jews kill: Pathology, charity, shock, and mystery

In about half of the articles involving a Jewish culprit, the motive suggested was psychological or pathological, including spontaneous outbursts, temporary loss of control, and the presence of a mental illness or personality disorder. Murderous acts were thus described as "mad slaughter campaign" or "spree of insanity." The evidence for such assessments, however, was often unclear. For instance, in May 2013, when Roi Ochana (mentioned above) murdered his

TABLE 2 Motives suggested in the article for the crime (*n* = 294).[a]

	Jews	Palestinians
Mental illness	62.2%	23.9%
Romantic background	39.7%	21.7%
Substance abuse	21.8%	0.0%
Financial motives	19.2%	8.7%
Honor killing	0.0%	37.00%
Blood feud	0.0%	8.7%
Other cultural reasons	1.3%	47.8%

[a]Many of the articles suggested more than just one motive, resulting in columns that add up to more than 100%.

mother and severely wounded his girlfriend, the police officer interviewed about the murder determined that Ochana was "*a normative guy*; *this is a moment of temporary insanity*" (Ravad, 2013a). This statement, released only moments after the murder, was clearly based on appearances and preconceptions. Other journalists suggested that Ochana murdering his mother might have been a case of euthanasia. However, several days later, Ochana confessed that he stabbed his girlfriend because he thought she was unfaithful and murdered his mother when she tried to intervene (Ravad & Buchnic, 2013a).

The case of Ochana is emblematic of the way in which Hebrew media treat cases of family murders by Jews. When Jewish men murder their family members—or attempt to murder them—journalistic reports are mostly incredulous and quickly suggest psychological or even "charitable" motives, rather than cultural ones. Indeed, in six murder cases in Jewish families reporters suggested that this was an act of mercy (i.e., Euthanasia), even as the bodies of victims bore traces of severe violence, such as repeated stabbing or beating with heavy objects. None of the murders by PCI in our sample received such "charitable" interpretations.

Newspaper reports also often drew portraits of madness for Jewish killers even when official psychiatric evaluations declared the men were mentally stable. For example, articles in *Ynet* and *Israel Hayom* repeatedly described Eli Gur, a 52 years old man from Bat Hefer, as a mad man. Gur threw his two children from the rooftop of a building after his wife left him following an abusive relationship. Prior to the murder, Gur was forced to undertake psychiatric evaluations, indicating that he was mentally healthy (Cohen, 2013; Ynet, 2013). While psychological evaluations sometimes fail to detect a mental illness, journalists' tendency to ignore such evaluations and ascribe mental illness despite contrasting evidence only occurred for Jewish killers, not for PCI ones.

When Jewish culprits were involved, newspapers were also incredulous. Titles such as "*Unbelievable!*", "*incomprehensible!*", and "*shocking*!" were often used to describe what reporters viewed as an astonishing and unpredictable occurrence, completely removed from the norms of Jewish-Israeli society. Such astonishment and disbelief were maintained even when murders occurred following years of domestic violence and abuse. One notable example is the high-profile case of musician Ilan Ben Ami, who had beaten to death his estranged wife, celebrity Dafna Har Zion. Many of the articles that covered the murder expressed shock and disbelief, despite testimonies that Ben Ami had been abusing Har Zion long before the murder, and that she even obtained a restraining order against him. The murder of Sivan Cohen serves as another glaring example for these media tendencies. Cohen was shot by her husband Golan, a policeman who used his service weapon while their young child was in the apartment. Journalistic reports were full of disbelief, with the headline in *Israel Hayom* contradicting itself: "He already pulled a gun at her once, but no one could imagine it would end like this" (Diaz, 2013).

A final prominent ascribed motivation, appearing for 40% of the murders by Jews, was "crimes of passion". This term was invoked when men murdered their romantic partners after the latter either attempted to end the relationship or were allegedly "unfaithful" or "promiscuous". In such cases, journalists considered the murder the result of unexpected temporary insanity sparked by the perpetrator's passionate love for their victim. However, interviews with friends and family again provide glimpses into prior incidents of violence and aggressive behavior. Other commonly ascribed motives for murders by Jews included financial stress (19.23%) and substance abuse (21.79%). Similarly to mental illness, these explanations focus on individual motives rather than social and cultural elements. Only in about 1% (1.32) of all articles describing Jewish victims was culture even mentioned as a potential motive.

3.4 | When Palestinian citizens kill: Honor, oppressive traditions, and cultural norms

In contrast to articles reporting on Jewish killers, most of the articles on PCI killers cited culture as the primary motive for the murder. In Figure 1 we summarize the broader categories of individual and cultural explanation offered for murders by each ethno-national group. As the figure indicates, only slightly more than one third (36%) of the articles on PCI victims proposed individual motives, compared with nearly 99% of the articles reporting on Jewish victims. Furthermore, even when mental illness was suggested as motive for PCI culprits, this was following the results of a
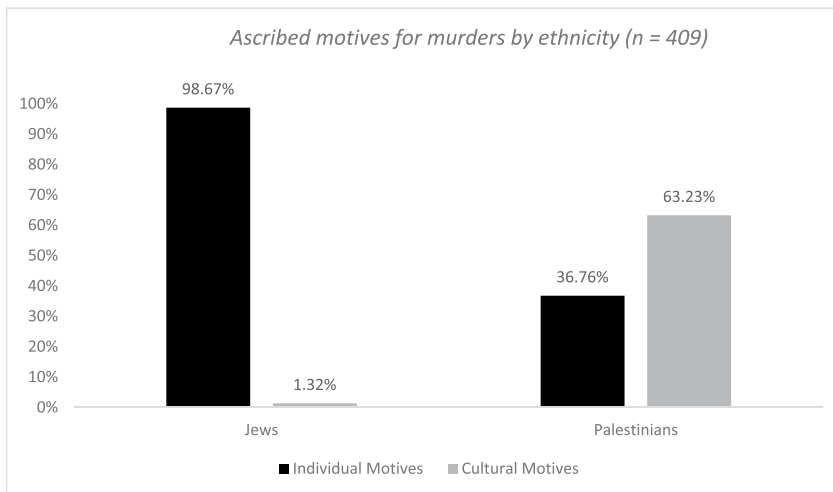
FIGURE 1 Ascribed motives for murders by ethnicity (*n* = 409).

court request for a psychiatric evaluation. That is, journalists only mentioned mental illness among PCI killers once an official defense line in court invoked this argument and they were forced to report it.

Figure 1 further shows that while ascribing individualistic motivations was much less common for the PCI, more than half of the articles on killings by PCI (54%) cited cultural motivations for the killing. Of these, 37% cited violation of family honor, 9% mentioned a blood feud between extended families, and 23% spoke about other cultural motivations, primarily the "backward" traditions of Arab society regarding women's sexuality and women's desire to advance, study, and work.

In most of the articles (12 out of 17) in which "honor killing" was suggested as the motive, reporters made this assumption despite the lack of a suspect or supporting evidence, using the case as an opportunity to discuss the phenomenon in detail. While some of these murders indeed match common definitions of so called "honor killings", others eventually turned out to be what is commonly termed "crimes of passion" or cases of domestic abuse. For instance, on August 18, 2015, 22 year old Bahaya Manaa from Be'er Sheva was found dead by a desert roadside not far from her hometown. Journalist Gadi Golan from *Israel Hayom* concluded that this was likely a case of honor killing (Golan, 2015). However, other newspaper reports later disclosed that the suspect in MAnna's murder was not a family member but rather her boyfriend, who was often beating her prior to that event.

The murder of Bisan Abu Ganam in Ramla provides another example for reporters' eagerness to describe murders involving PCI killers and victims as "honor killings". On October 25, 2014, Bisan was shot while driving in her car. Even as the details of the murder were still obscure, the title of a central piece in *Maariv* stated: "*Murder over family honor; how could this still occur in Israel?*" The subtitle read: "*Blood ties. The murder of Bisan Abu Ganam from Ramla allegedly an honor killing, one of many... Is this phenomenon connected to terrorism?*" (Zino, 2014). The article equated Bisan's murder with so-called "honor killings" in Muslim countries and argued that this was a growing phenomenon in Israel, citing exaggerated figures that fail to match official statistics. The journalist then tied this phenomenon to terrorism, despite the lack of a clear connection between the two. In this narrative, "*Western democratic Israel is held back by a traditional, patriarchal minority group (the Arabs), in which women are victims of gendered violence.*" (Zino, 2014).

This narrative contrasts against the very different treatment of tradition and religion among Jews. While several Jewish killers in our sample were religious, this fact did not serve to implicate Jewish religion and tradition in patriarchy, misogyny, and backwardness. Instead, Jewish religion is presented as an antidote to femicide, espousing moderation, peacefulness, and respect to women. For example, after an elderly Jewish orthodox man murdered his second wife in their Jerusalem home, the victim's son was quoted: "*We never heard of violence. They are religious people. He visited the synagogue daily. This is total madness... only God knows what happened here.*" (Dvir & Efraim, 2013). This

differential treatment persisted even when patriarchal entitlement, shame, and honor were clearly part of the motive among Jewish killers. For example, reports on the case of Jewish killer Dov Tagar eventually revealed that his girl-friend and eventual victim, Hatuela Kuznitsov, was afraid to talk to other men and severed her ties with male friends because of Tagar's volatile temper, jealousy, and aggression. Police reports implied that the murder occurred because Tagar suspected a relationship between Kuznitsov and family friend Yosef Dov, whom Tagar also killed (Ravad & Buchnic, 2013b; Ynet, 2013). Similarly, in the case of Jewish musician Ilan Ben Ami, subsequent coverage of the case clarifies that Ben Ami was suffering from feelings of inferiority and humiliation because his wife was more successful than him and earned more (Hacmon, 2014; Shimoni, 2015). Thus, while motives related to patriarchal culture and honor are found among both Jewish and PCI men, only for the latter does the framing of "honor killings" guide jour-nalistic coverage.

3.5 | Place and community in the narration of murders: "Sectorial violence" versus "monster in our quiet town"

Reactions by neighbors, residents, and community leaders were often cited in articles covering murders by both Jews (29%) and PCI (15%). However, the nature of these reactions differed greatly depending on ethnicity. When PCI were murdered (but not when Jews were), newspapers highlighted the town or village in which the murder occurred, with headlines such as "*A Day of Bloodshed in Tira* [an Israeli Arab city]" (Sha'alan, 2015a). Thus, the violence was associated with an entire locale or often even the entire PCI public. It is therefore not surprising that when PCI women were murdered, neighbors and community leaders forcefully condemned the violence and highlighted the otherwise peaceful nature of their village or town. Such renunciations often carried an apologetic tone, suggesting that the community needs to repeatedly refute the idea that it supports violence. For instance, following the murder of 42-year-old Raada Najam, a PCI teacher from Beit Jan, allegedly by her husband and son, a co-worker was quoted saying: "*Our village is normally peaceful, we do not suffer from violence*" (Sha'alan, 2015b). Similarly, following the murder of 14-year-old Fatma Hib from Tuba Zangaria, Sheikh Uthman Alhib of the village mosque emphasized that "*[w]e always call on residents to maintain amicable relations and put an end to feuds*."(Sha'alan, 2014).

Conversely, in cases of Jewish murders, community members talked mainly about the character of the victim and no one was quoted defending their city, village, or the character of Jewish people as a whole. Jewish public figures were never expected to or cited as condemning the overall violence in their city or within the Jewish sector and never apologized for their entire community. Blame was sometimes directed toward welfare agencies, the police, Israeli lawmakers, and the government for failing to prevent the murder. However, the collective behavior or culture of the Jewish-Israeli public never came into question. Consequently, certain geographical locations are constructed as dangerous and violent while others remain merely places where violence took place.

4 | DISCUSSION

We examined variations in the coverage of femicide in Israeli Hebrew newspapers by the ethnic background of victims and offenders. The murder of Jews by family members or intimate partners was framed as a shocking and unusual event, a result of the individual personality or pathology of the culprit or of other individualistic factors. Conversely, when Palestinian citizens of Israel (PCI) were the killers (or suspected killers), murders were treated as expected and were explained by focusing on the Arab collective, its culture, and its traditions. These findings echo claims by Volpp (2000), Jiewani (2014) and Shier and Shor (2016), who suggested that even when forms of violence are similar, women of certain minority groups are framed as victims of culture while women of the dominant group are framed as victims of individuals.

Hebrew newspaper articles also provide much more detail about Jewish culprits than about PCI ones. Articles on Jewish family murders often examine all aspects of the perpetuator's personal history, dwelling on childhood

memories of friends and family and describing recent developments in the culprit's life. These detailed examinations convey a desire to make sense of the event by understanding the unique circumstances that must have pushed a Jewish killer to such extreme actions, seemingly so uncharacteristic and alien to the Jewish public as a whole. Such detailed accounts rarely appear in reports on PCI killers. Thus, even when news reports do not explicitly offer cultural motivations for the murder, the laconic coverage of events leaves readers to draw their own conclusions, which are likely based on existing cognitive scripts and previous reports on family murders among the PCI population.

Constructing the act of murder as an essentially different event depending on ethno-national characteristics obscures the many communalities in motives and in the overarching ideology that allow femicide to flourish in different cultures and groups. Media accounts often vilify the entire Arab society for the femicides of Arab women and paint Arab culture as pathological, backwards, misogynistic, and violent, the mirror image of modern Jewish society. As a result, gendered violence in Jewish society is muted. It is considered the problem of the "other", allowing educators, opinion leaders, and policy makers to avoid an honest discussion of the causes and circumstances of gender-based violence. This approach hinders attempts to attend to gender-based violence and design more comprehensive and effective strategies for prevention, protection of victims, and prosecution of offenders (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2009; Shier & Shor, 2016).

The differential media treatment of femicide is important beyond only its obvious direct impact on discourse and policies related to these horrific acts. In fact, this differential treatment serves as one of the primary mechanisms through which the Jewish community draws and redraws the boundaries between Jewish Israeli society and its others. The media portrayal of femicide is a site through which the assumed "hierarchy of moral worth" (Lamont & Molnár, 2002, p. 168) of Jewish-Israeli and Arab cultures is being reaffirmed, allowing Jews in Israel to claim moral superiority. Lamont and Molnár (2002) noted that "symbolic boundaries" often materialize into "social boundaries" that enhance unequal distribution of resources, unequal accessibility to opportunities, residential and occupational segregation, and racial and class exclusion. Indeed, Israeli politicians and opinion leaders often justify anti-Palestinian policies by referring to the murderous and criminal nature of the Palestinian society while highlighting the moral superiority of Jewish-Israeli society.

Of note, these processes of media exclusion and drawing symbolic cultural boundaries are not unique to the Israeli case. Such processes were also reported in various other contexts (e.g., Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Steuter & Willis, 2009), as Western media tend to define White majority groups by their essential uniqueness and individuality, while non-White minorities, particularly people of Arab and Muslim decent, are constructed as an indistinguishable mass. However, the coverage of the PCI in Israel offers some important differences from these previous studies. Muslims and South Asians in Europe and North America are at least conceptually offered an ideal of full assimilation and inclusion, as long as they are willing to shed their "problematic" cultural habits. While the sincerity of this commitment has been questioned (see, for example, Shier & Shor, 2016), the formal ethos in most liberal democracies preaches assimilation and eventual inclusion.

In contrast, in the Israeli case, full assimilation for non-Jewish citizens has never been a dominant ethos. Israel is formally defined as the state of the Jewish people and other minorities are never offered full inclusion in the Israeli collective unless they convert to Judaism. As such, the vilifying media coverage of the PCI is primarily used to emphasize the presumed vast cultural differences between Jews and Arabs, stress the unfeasibility of assimilation (and perhaps even co-existence), and win moral points in the ongoing conflict against the larger Palestinian and Arab collectives.

In other words, we suggest that this is not a standard in-group/out-group dynamic, where each group vilifies the culture of the other due to lack of familiarity, a straightforward desire to feel morally superior, or a sincere attempt to alter the problematic aspects in the culture of the others in order to eventually assimilate them. Rather, in the Israeli case there is a clear political incentive behind the tilted media coverage of family murders among the PCI. While the Hebrew media clearly utilize Oriental assumptions drawn from global power hierarchies, we believe that the coverage of femicide mostly serves as an additional layer in Israel's struggle over moral ground in its intractable conflict with the Palestinian collective. This conflict necessitates negative media coverage of the others not only to exclude the PCI

minority in Israel and generate Jewish cohesiveness and feelings of moral superiority. Rather, this stereotypical media coverage is an important tool in delegitimizing the entire Palestinian collective (both the CPI and the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories) by "proving" to both Israeli Jews and the rest of the world that Palestinians can neither be trusted nor justified. If Arab/Palestinian culture endangers its own women, how could it be trusted to keep Jews safe? And how could liberal democracies side with such a murderous culture in its conflict with Israel? In the context of intractable conflicts, these collective narratives serve two major functions. First, according to Bar-Tal (2013), they are essential for mobilizing citizens to the cause of taking an active part in the fighting. Second, as Langenbacher (2010) notes, these conflict-supportive narratives serve the important function of positive self-presentation not only to the self but also to the international community.

Previous research on the depiction of Palestinians in the Israeli Hebrew media in times of active violent clashes has suggested that these media often willingly serve a key role in indoctrinating and recruiting the Israeli public to the war effort by delegitimizing and even demonizing all Palestinians (Rinnawi, 2007; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). One may therefore conclude that the Israeli media is controlled by the political establishment, which systematically dictates racialized coverage patterns. We believe that this is indeed part of the story at least for some media and journalists. Over the years, Israel's political establishment has been using the media to recruit support for its military efforts vis-à-vis the Palestinians (Oren et al., 2015). Furthermore, over the last decade, many of Israel's newspapers, online news websites, and television channels have moved into the hands of private owners with ties to political parties (especially parties who regularly form the Israeli government) and Israeli politicians and ministries have been applying growing pressures on media sources to cover events in ways that align with right-wing and often also racist ideologies.

However, we believe that our findings offer a more nuanced story. We found no evidence for clear political intervention and a systematic institutional guiding hand directing the tone and nature of PCI coverage. Instead, the ongoing conflict and ethnic tensions in Israel may be understood as a key driver of the tilted media coverage of Palestinian citizens. We therefore suggest that the coverage patterns we encountered in this study are primarily the result of deeply ingrained belief systems among reporters. These lead them to fit occurrences into pre-determined cognitive frameworks and narratives about Arab and Muslim culture without the need for institutional intervention or guidelines to determine these frameworks and manage the media discourse.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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How to cite this article: Shor, E., & Filkobski, I. (2024). Symbolic boundary work: Jewish and Arab femicide in Israeli Hebrew newspapers. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13080