

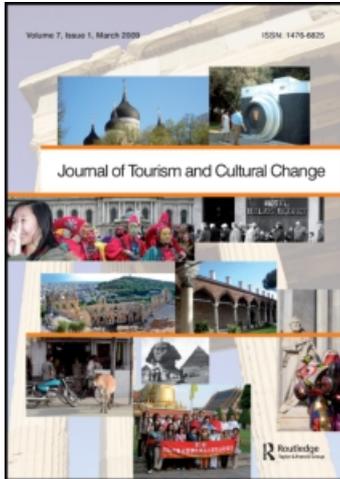
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## Mediating touristic dangerscapes: the semiotics of state travel warnings issued to Israeli tourists

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Official ‘travel warnings’ are recurrently published by the Counter-Terrorism Bureau in Israeli media, with the aim of informing potential tourists about the dangers of terrorism aimed at Israelis who travel abroad. These travel warnings, which juxtapose menacing warnings with tranquil visual representations of touristic vacationscapes, have recently gained a considerable public attention and have sprouted discussions around local tourism and identities. In this article, we offer a discursive and semiotic analysis of 55 travel warning articles, which appeared between 1998 and 2010 in printed and digital Hebrew press in Israel. We address visual and textual aspects of the articles and ask how they represent and mediate touristic vacationscapes. Following recent developments (‘turns’) in both tourism studies and media studies, we argue that these warnings articles construct multilayered spatial–visual representations of tourist destinations, which amount to a unique genre of tourism imagery in and of itself. Focussing on travel warnings addressing Israeli tourists who travel to the Eastern shores of the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula, we find that these combined or hybrid images and spaces present a convergence of two contemporary systems of representation, related to tourism and mass media, respectively, and construct a charged and mediated cultural space in Israeli collective imagination.

**Keywords:** media; discourse; representations; Israel; terror; nationalism; visual images

### Introduction: travel warnings issued to Israeli tourists bound for Sinai

It is not very often that spaces representing anxiety and danger – henceforth ‘dangerscapes’, are juxtaposed and associated with tourist leiscapes and vacationscapes, at least not in a systematic fashion and on regular basis. This article deals precisely with such unique cases, which take the form of ‘travel warnings’ issued by the Israeli National Counter-Terrorism Bureau (NCTB).<sup>1</sup> These travel warnings, which make the headlines in the Israeli media on a regular basis every few months, are ominous announcements meant to alert Israeli tourists to the danger of terror attacks in various countries and destinations. Over time, and due to their widespread exposure in the media and considerable impact on many Israelis, these warnings have generated extensive public debate and acquired a much wider cultural meaning above and beyond their original security purpose. The public debate generated by the travel warnings touches upon the preferences

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and leisure patterns of Israeli tourists, and upon the considerations that guide these tourists (and the tourist industry), in shaping leisure and recreation preferences in general and in Sinai in particular. At a deep level, the debate deals with charged issues pertaining to the relationship between tourism and (collective) identity shaping and, in the local context, with the weighty issues concerning Israeli identity in the geopolitical region of the Middle East, and with the role of media and tourism in this complicated sphere.

The study presented here is the first to examine the unique relationship between the system of tourism and the system of media as reflected by press articles dealing with NCTB travel warnings. Each of the main fields relevant to this study – tourism, media and terrorism – is a broad domain in itself, and this article cannot, nor does it attempt to, review all the theory and research in each of these fields. Instead, it combines discursive and multimodal semiotic analyses of a sample of typical warning articles, with the aim of examining a few of the cultural and identity implications they involve. The theoretical framework utilized in this study is anchored in recent advances regarding the relationship between the tourism and media systems, developed as part of the ‘media turn’ in tourism research and the ‘spatial turn’ in media research (more on this below). These innovative theoretical perspectives complement one another, and when utilized together, they provide an especially fruitful approach to the study of travel warnings, since they illuminate the ways in which the realm of tourism is presented within and by means of the realm of the mass media.

We will argue that articles reporting on NCTB travel warnings exhibit a fascinating blend of spatial images from the realms of tourism and mass media, and juxtapose one of the greatest fears of our time – the fear of terrorist attacks (triggering strong emotions and touching upon various issues pertaining to national identity, patriotism and more) – with the ultimate pleasure and repose offered by modern leisure tourism. The analysis of these reports, which will be treated as unique media–cultural products, can shed light both on the local tourism discourse and on the broader discourse that shapes collective identity in the Israeli context. We will focus on warnings pertaining to tourist resorts frequented by Israelis on the eastern shores of Sinai. Due to this destination’s complex history in the collective memory of Israelis, as well as its close proximity to Israel, the Sinai warnings in particular have received special public attention and have been at the eye of a heated civic debate.

### **‘Keep out of Sinai’: images of tourism and terrorism in the press**

Tourism and media are both global industries, and their accelerated development in the second half of the twentieth century was a primary catalyst to globalization processes. It is no news that these two industries are interconnected in numerous ways, including through vigorous mutual economic ties in which, according to functional approaches the media, in all its forms provides the stimuli, while tourism provides the actual product – the holiday (i.e. transportation, accommodation and sights; see McIntosh & Goeldner, 1984). This article will focus on one of the connections between the two industries, having to do with their *similar modus operandi*, which forms the basis of and for their lucrative collaboration. More specifically, it will examine the similar ways in which the media and tourism present (leisure)spaces – both real and imaginary – as products of mass consumption. With regards to tourism, this point was powerfully made in Urry’s (1990) seminal work, since his key term – ‘the tourist gaze’ – refers not only to actual tourism activities, i.e. activities performed while practicing tourism, but also to a wide range of additional activities involving the observation and visual consumption of spaces and places, such as

watching TV and movies, viewing printed ads or broadcast commercials, etc. This is what Urry refers to when he reiterates that 'we are tourists much of the time' (Urry, 1990, p. 82).

The notion that the systems of tourism and media both offer commercialized spaces of consumption, albeit in different – and complementary – ways, has seen intriguing conceptual development in the last decade, developments that can be broadly conceived as post-functional/structural. In effect, a new inter- and sub-disciplinary field of research has emerged, which challenges the traditional dichotomous distinction between the media as a provider of representations or images (stirring the imagination and evoking fantasies) and tourism as a provider of transportation means and actual spaces and sites that satisfy the needs created by the media. The new field blurs this dichotomy in that it recognizes the similarity between the two processes, which are both anchored in *the centrality of visual and spatial experiences* (whether 'real' or 'imagined') in late modernity. It offers a meeting point between the study of tourism and various aspects of geography on the one hand, and the study of media processes on the other, based on the 'spatial turn' in communications studies (Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006), and complementarily on the notion of 'virtual geographies' (Crang, Crang, & May, 1999).

This field, therefore, does not simply combine the study of communication and the study of tourism (and geography), but provides essential insights into the charged and mediated aspects of places and sites on the one hand, and into the spatial, multidimensional and multimodal nature of media on the other. Below we shall consider the page (of a printed newspaper or internet site) as a visual and verbal imagined space. According to the approach utilized here, the gaze of a tourist at a tourism site is not 'objective' or 'real', but is the result of institutional and historical conditioning; conversely, media consumers watching television at home or browsing through the pictures in a tourism magazine are in effect 'tourists' who undergo a visual and spatial experience as they 'move' or 'wander' in and among spaces, views and landscapes (Crouch, Jackson, & Thompson, 2005; Jansson, 2002; Lagerkvist, 2008; Lengkeek, 2001; Lübbren & Crouch, 2003; Rojek, Shaw, & Veal, 2006; see also the 2005 special issue of *Tourism, Culture and Communications* on tourism and media in the twenty-first century, and the 2007 special issue of *International Journal of Consumer Studies* on unique aspects of consumption in tourism). Moreover, movement within and to tourism spaces, as well as the acts of daydreaming and fantasizing about them, are very meaningful in that they play a role in shaping various collective identities, including national, class and gender identities *inter alia* (Edensor, 1998, 2001; Morgan & Pritchard, 1998).

Also relevant to the present analysis is the field of research examining the relationship between media and terror, and especially the ways in which the media covers and presents terror attacks. This field – which encompasses the domains of media, political science and discourse studies – has likewise expanded significantly in the last decade. This development was prompted by the 9/11 attacks, which focussed much attention on the role of the media in covering terror (especially Islamist terror), and on the values and perceptions that guide the media in creating visual and textual images of the attacks and their victims (Bulley, 2008; Ferrari, 2007; Sanz Sabido, 2009; Silberstein, 2002). A basic finding here – in fact a truism – is that terror attacks receive *especially extensive coverage* in the media (in quantitative terms, i.e. in terms of the sheer number of reports), especially in news broadcasts and supplements in the printed and broadcast media. The media has developed special 'attractive' formats for the extensive coverage of terror attacks – such as the 'disaster marathon', used only for the coverage of terror events (and occasionally also massive natural disasters; Blondheim & Liebes, 2002; Liebes, 1998). Media researchers have claimed that the industry has a special 'affinity' for terror attacks (and wars in

general), and that it paradoxically associates war with news and peace with lack of news (as reflected in the title of Katz and Liebes, 2007, paper: 'No more peace!'). As Liebes and Kampf (2007) recently showed, terror-related 'media events' manipulate images through intensification and dramatization of terror attacks and disasters. This is made possible by the distinctly visual character of terror events (which leave behind them noticeable traces of chaos and destruction).

In Israel, where terror attacks are frequent, a sizable corpus of research has accumulated on the ways in which the local media (especially television) reports on terror attacks in marathons and 'open broadcasts', and on the consequences of this type of coverage, such as the routinization of terror (Liebes & Kampf, 2007; Veimann, 2003), and the media's use of the drama generated by terrorist attacks to position itself as a highly influential institution.

While the above-mentioned observations pertain to the *volume* of coverage that terror receives in the local and global media, another branch of media research examines the explicit and implicit *positions* that the media expresses regarding terrorist attacks. Here, we see that even in countries where the media tends to be relatively independent and critical, terror attacks prompt it to rally to the side of the state authorities and to systematically adopt patriotic positions. These positions sustain a dichotomy between the generalized categories of 'us' versus 'them' (the latter portrayed as alien, threatening and dangerous) and create a sense of a shared collective national identity (even when the terrorists are citizens of the country where the attack took place; Sanz Sabido, 2009). These heightened patriotic and collectivizing positions come at the expense of a more informative and multifaceted approach that examines the political motivations for the attacks and their implications in a nuanced and thoughtful manner.

Finally, though in the scope of this study we will not examine the relationship between tourism and terror, or the (actual or anticipated) impact that terror-related media reports have on tourism, it is worthwhile to mention that recent studies examined motivations and accounts supplied by Jewish Israeli tourists who traveled to visit Sinai in the last few years despite the repeated warnings against it (Uriely, Maoz, & Reichel, 2007, 2009). Though the current study does not deal with these considerations, it is interesting to note that some of the claims reported in these papers, and some of the contradictions presented there, are also reflected in the warning articles examined in this study, as will be shown below.

In the specific context that concerns us, terror attacks in the peninsula (as well as the 2000 Al-Aqsa Intifada in the Occupied Territories) had a significant and immediate effect on the number of Israelis who chose to vacation there. Figure 1 shows dramatic fluctuations in the number of visitors following terror attacks (Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000) and two terror attacks which took place in Sinai (2004, 2006) are indicated by one and by two stars, respectively). Note that these slumps are noticeable against the backdrop of a general trend of increase in the number of visitors throughout the 1990s and in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

### **Sinai destinations as a test case**

The corpus investigated in this study consists mostly of press articles that report on the NCTB travel warnings and caution Israelis against visiting Sinai. Israeli tourism to Sinai provides an especially interesting test case due to the cultural richness of Sinai as a tourism and holiday destination for Israelis. The Sinai Peninsula carries rich and complex symbolism in the geographical imagination of Israelis, and its identity as a site

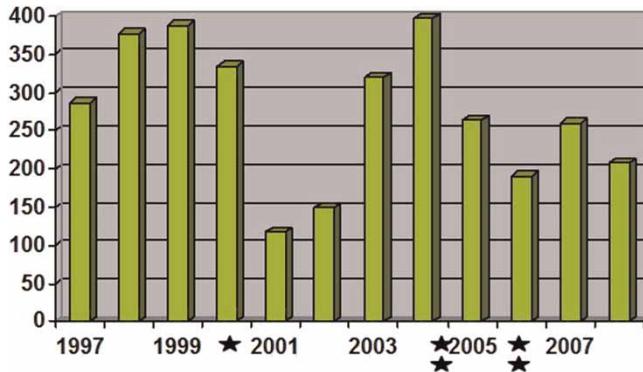


Figure 1. Israeli visitors to Sinai (in hundreds of thousands). Based on data from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics and the Border Authorities.

is woven of numerous cultural associations that exist side by side in the collective Israeli consciousness.<sup>2</sup> Being the locus of the mythic journey of ancient Israelites through the desert, Sinai is imbued with mythic–religious significance as part of the founding myth of the Jewish people. At the same time, it has historical significance as the setting of Israeli wars, conquests and withdrawals (the 1956 Israeli invasion, during which it was briefly occupied; the 1967 war and Israel’s subsequent presence in Sinai between the years 1968 and 1982). The geographical proximity – and in fact adjacency – to Israel, and the unique border arrangements that allow Israelis to enter Sinai without a visa, intensify and add complexity to the sense of affinity between the spaces of Sinai and the sovereign territory of Israel (Noy, 2007a; Noy & Cohen, 2005). These representations construct Sinai as a nostalgic space that merges concrete (historic) and symbolic (mythic) images. The headlines of the articles that report the NCTB warnings often utilize this bank of cultural associations, imagery and texts in alluding to the spaces of Sinai. Headlines such as ‘Exodus from Egypt’ (*Yetsi’at mitsry’im*) (2008) and ‘The children of Israel have returned to Sinai’ (*Bnei yisrael hazru lemitsra’yim*) (2008) are intertextual and obviously draw from the collective discourse on Sinai and its multiple layers of significance for Israeli readers.

This national bank of collective memories, images and fantasies has been augmented in recent years by images of terror attacks that occurred in Sinai. The most significant of these were in the last decade: the triple attack of October 2004 at the Taba Hilton and on the Ras Al-Satan beach, in which 34 people were killed (11 of them Israelis), and hundreds were wounded, and the April 2006 triple attack in Dahab, in which 27 people were killed, most of them Egyptians. Another attack that has been painfully etched into the Israeli collective memory is the Ras Burka shooting of October 1985, in which an Egyptian soldier killed seven Israelis.

### Corpus and methodology

This study is based on an analysis of printed and online Israeli press materials, focussing on warning articles which convey and usually also discuss the official NCTB warnings. The NCTB warnings are reported and discussed in various media and social spheres in Israel, both official (radio and television news reports) and informal (talkbacks, casual conversations and more). In this article, we restrict ourselves to the research of printed and online materials, for a number of reasons: first, news reports are one of the official channels by which governmental communication is conveyed unto the public, and as this article is

the first to examine travel warnings it is appropriate that news article would be examined. Second, the press in Israel plays a special role around holidays, when consuming this type of media amounts to a local ritual (purchasing a number of newspapers simultaneously). Third and last, we are presently occupied with a special focus on spaces in tourism and in the media, which is illuminated when discussing the spaces in and of printed and online media (as the analysis below will reveal).

For this study, we analyzed warning articles published in the newspapers *Yedioth Ahronoth* (Latest News) and *Ma'ariv* (Evening News) in both their printed and online editions, between 1998 and 2010. These newspapers were chosen because they are the most popular daily newspapers in Israel, and by way of elimination: the two other central dailies are *Ha'aretz* (The Land), which is rather 'highbrow' and tends to avoid publishing visual dramatic-related articles, and *Israel Hayom* (Israel Today) which is a more recent newspaper (available since 2007) and is actually distributed freely. The duration examined (12 years) reflects a substantial period, when both times of tension and relative normalcy were recorded. Specifically, 1998 was chosen as the onset of the research because it still reflected the optimism following the Oslo Accords and shortly preceded the Second Intifada of 2000 (cf. Figure 1).

The corpus includes 30 articles from the printed press (20 from *Yedioth Ahronoth* and 10 from *Ma'ariv*) and 25 articles from these newspapers' websites (20 from Ynet,<sup>3</sup> the site of *Yediot Aharonot*, and 5 from *Ma'ariv*'s site NRG<sup>4</sup>). These were collected from both the archives of the National Israeli Library and from these dailies' internet websites and archives.

As we collected the warning articles, it became clear that overwhelming majority (approximately 90%) were published in proximity to major Jewish holidays, especially Succoth (Tabernacles) and Pesach (Passover) – each of which supplies a period of about 1 week of vacation (in the autumn and spring, respectively). Indeed, allusions to these holidays appeared both in the article headlines and in the readers' comments.

The analysis was carried out using tools of print and digital media research. As a departure point, we carried out discourse analyses, focussing on the structure and content of the printed and online articles, including for instance, terms and metaphors that are employed in article's headlines, texts and picture captions', structure of reported speech and its effect (authenticity, irony) and more. Then, we added an analysis of the visual imagery accompanying the articles – all as part of an approach that conceptualizes the newspaper page as a unified verbal–visual space (Kress, 2009). Finally, we completed the procedure with a multimodal content analysis, which combines an analysis of verbal and visual discourse and shows the meanings that emerge from the enmeshment of these sign systems. Recently, with the recognition of the essential affinity between tourism and media as systems of representation, and the recognition of their multidimensional nature, these approaches have been fruitfully utilized in the study of tourism (Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005; Jaworski, Ylanne-McEwen, Thurlow, & Lawson, 2003; Noy, 2008). We should note that these methods are not without problems, the foremost being that they rely on the expertise and to some degree on the subjective perspective of the researcher(s). Being aware of this problem, we tried to describe in detail the qualitative procedures which were used and to suggest a clear analytic frame which can be repeated in future research in the combined field(s) of tourism and media.

All these approaches, as used in media research, apply a visual analysis not only to actual images (pictures), but also to elements such as text, headlines, etc., and to the space they inhabit, namely the newspaper spread. These approaches also explore the relationship between the visual characteristics of this space and the written descriptions.

This is significant, because, as will be shown below, there is an intrinsic contradiction between the character of the visual images and the character of the articles' verbal content. The relationship between word and image in this context again calls to mind the interesting similarity between the experience of the reader browsing through the paper and that of the tourist. Like the tourist, the reader wanders through diverse spaces that vie for his attention, inviting her/him to cross their threshold (represented by a frame or headline), walk their 'reading paths' and 'visit' them (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998).

### **The warning articles: spatial reports and images in media and tourism**

Two main findings emerge from the analysis of the warning articles and their depiction of the Sinai tourism sites to be discussed shortly. These concern: (1) the *pervasive supply of visual imagery* (photos) of tranquil tourist destinations and spaces thereof and the noticeable discrepancy between *these visual messages and the verbal ones*. (2) The polyphony or multivocality of the writer as both a journalist and a tourist, and the conflict between these two (and some times more) voices.

#### ***Between the visual and the verbal: converging and conflicting messages***

The first point to be raised is the relationship that exists between the texts (the verbal dimension of the warning articles we examined) and the images in the articles. This point is relevant because the overwhelming majority of the articles (over 95%) included illustration photos of spaces of coastal tourist resorts in Sinai. In all (but one) of the cases we examined, these photos were chosen by the editors from an existing image bank, and in one case the reporter was also the photographer. The issue, however, is not merely quantitative; rather, we regard the warning articles as *a unique journalistic genre that is defined by a particular combination of visual and verbal components*. Like ads and other marketing materials in tourism, which feature typical images of familiar tourist sites and spaces, the warning articles also make regular and consistent use of pleasant and pastoral images of and from touristic leiscapes. This gives rise to the question of what messages are conveyed verbally and what messages are conveyed visually, and what is the relationship between these two systems of representation, as applied to the depicted (leisure/danger) spaces of Sinai.

Most of the pictures appearing in the warning articles are similar in their visual content to Figure 2 (and to Figures 3–5). They feature iconic representations of Sinai resorts – e.g. straw huts, sand, and palm trees and leaves on a beautiful Red Sea beach – which locate the articles' message squarely within the realm of tourism and draw up a typical tourist vacationscape. Most of them are stock photos taken from established press archives, and some, a small minority, are photos of Israelis in Sinai taken especially for the article in question. Overall, then, the pictures that accompany the warning articles draw from a bank of *token or iconic images* of Israeli vacationers (notably female tourists) on the beach; their message is conveyed not only through what they include, but also through what is *absent from them* – namely any hint of the menacing threat described in (the verbal part of) the warning. Paradoxically, these pictures reconstruct a 'clean' or 'pure' and attractive touristic image in an article that explicitly warns against vacationing in the depicted space.

When the photos include elements that do hint at potential threats or at Sinai's identity as 'enemy territory', such as border checkpoints, signs written in Arabic, etc., they are always neutral illustrative photos lacking any emotional charge; if they evoke any emotion at all, it is a sense of (Orientalist) nostalgia for Sinai. Pictures of this sort are



Figure 2. Israelis on Nuweiba beach.

Note: Hebrew: *Yisraelim al hahof beNuweiba*. In *Yedioth Ahronoth*, September 9, 2004, p. 5 (Picture by Avigail Uzi).



Figure 3. Minimal degree of skepticism. (Caption: An Israeli in Sinai).

also found in commercial brochures of travel agencies. In other words, these pictures invoke a commercial-escapist genre, and thus soften the sense of threat and danger evoked by the written text.

Since the photos are iconic, the people they depict are not perceived as individuals, identified by name, but simply as ‘familiar Jewish Israelis vacationers’. The people are anonymous and familiar at once: anonymous on the individual level, but familiar as participants in a collective (national) touristic scenario, namely as ‘Israeli tourists’. These figures, along with the Sinai beach scenes, form a commercialized representation of ‘communing with nature’, conveyed through ‘clean’ minimalist images of spaces (the sea, the beach sand, a straw hut, a young woman on the beach looking out to the sea, an empty sleeping



Figure 4. Caption: Will (they) stay at home? Vacationers in Sinai last year.

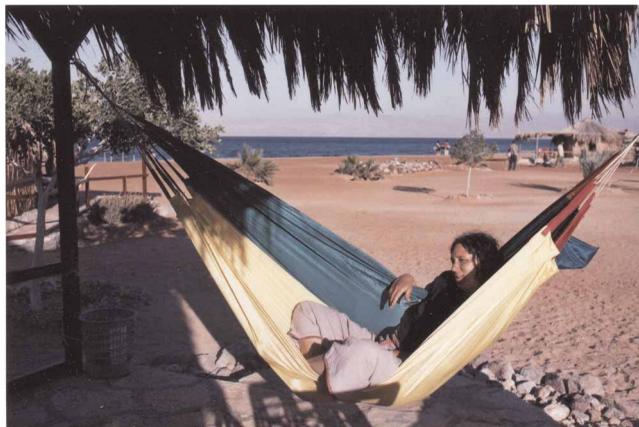


Figure 5. Caption: An Israeli in Sinai. The threat to the peninsula is defined as ‘concrete and highly severe’.

bag, etc.). Again, these are archetypical images of modern tourism, without a hint of threat or danger (Löfgren, 1999). Placing several of these photos side by side, we find ourselves in an abstract landscape of ‘tourist desires’ (Rojek & Urry, 1997).

These images create several simultaneous effects. First, they render the spaces of Sinai abstract and ‘general’, and therefore difficult to charge with concrete meanings of terror and

horror, or alternatively with a sense of personal, intimate pleasure that can be seriously threatened by danger. Second, they associate Sinai with the flat and stereotyped image of a tourist destination. Tourism sites, as a product meant to bring pleasure, have a flat (poster-like) quality, and their stereotyped images are presented to us like a well-packaged promise, which tourists attempt to believe so as to convince themselves that they got their money's worth. Finally, these photos are meant to evoke in each viewer 'her/his own Sinai'. The press photos, reduced to illustrations that obscure the meanings of the depicted sites as dangerscapes, provide both the press and the public – the press's consumers who are readers and potential tourists – a way to disregard political and social problems while still fulfilling the press' basic duty of reporting potential threats (see discussion in Lucaites & Hariman, 2001). Here, we can see a convergence of the media and tourism systems: an iconic photo depicting the 'ritual of vacationing' overcomes the force of the written official warning, which, as we shall see, is likewise presented in a formulaic manner that robs it of much of its power. The agenda of the media, which aspires to restore things to their normal routine, thus matches the economic interests of the tourism industry.

### *Attitudes to the travel warnings and their reflection in the articles' space*

The second major finding that we wish to discuss concerns the juxtaposition of perspectives, voices and attitudes that are typically expressed in warning articles. Let us first address the issue of the journalist's attitude to what she/he writes in the article, which is one of the fundamental elements constructing the semiotic framework of a newspaper report in general (Zelizer, 2005). In the warning articles, this attitude is conveyed via three main modes of reporting, which reflect *escalating levels of skepticism* about the validity of the warning. The interesting point is that these varying levels of skepticism are expressed through the 'virtual geography' of media (Crang et al., 1999). More specifically, the attitudes of the journalist are conveyed through different ways of shaping and exploiting the material space supplied by the (news)paper itself, which comprises a visual (semiotic) representation of these attitudes.

In preparing a report, the journalist and editor attempt to utilize and direct *the tourist gaze of the reader* as she/he wanders among the pictures, headlines and other texts in the paper (van Leeuwen, 2001). The reader has a complex tourist gaze, involving touristic images and a visual experience of leafing and roaming through the newspaper's spaces and identifying images of various sorts (ads, news illustrations, etc.). We argue here that, in the warning articles, one can identify three levels of skepticism that stand in inverse proportion to the severity of the warning and are conveyed through three modes of reporting, namely: (a) a straightforward delivery of the warning; (b) a delivery that expresses reservations about the warning by citing other institutions or bodies, or by presenting photos that contradict the warning message; and (c) an ironical delivery of the warning message.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the voices in the warning articles, let us mention that all the articles examined in this research use a uniform and recurring rhetorical formula. This is a textual formula which supplements and complements the visual formula entailed in the iconic imagery discussed above. The articles all begin with the 'dire news', namely the ominous and formally worded travel warning itself, which captures the readers' attention and remains etched in their consciousness. While having a severe beginning, the frightening warning articles end with a tranquil description of the reactions of the guests vacationing at the relevant resort. This structure, which, oddly enough, is *typical of ironic discourse* (Booth, 1974), juxtaposes the primary topic of discussion (the serious warning) with its opposite, with the aim of implying criticism. The effect produced

by this ironic structure serves both the political agenda of the media and the economic interests of the tourism industry.

*Minimal degree of skepticism: a straightforward delivery of the travel warning*

*Example 1:* Article headline: ‘Travel warning: Immediate threat of abduction of Israelis in Sinai’ (2008).<sup>5</sup> From the body of the article: ‘Today (Monday), the Counter-Terrorism Bureau raised the already high level of travel warning for the Sinai Peninsula, and called on all Israelis vacationing or visiting there to return to the country with all possible haste’ (Figure 3).

Typically, the articles deliver the travel warnings directly, or else mention the source in third person, with the warning itself appearing between quotation marks to highlight the credibility of the report (Blum-Kulka & Nir, 1981). The delivery is straightforward, the register is formal and the formula recurs whenever the article cites the NCTB (or similar bodies), thereby giving presence to an authoritative institutional (state) voice in the article. As already mentioned, the blunt and alarming warning is typically juxtaposed with an illustration photo evoking idyllic notions of tourism and vacationing; in other words, the severe text is contrasted with a photo that challenges it directly. The article’s space thus becomes an arena of struggle between two voices or representations of a single site/space, both of them on an equal footing. From a functional point of view, these articles discharge the press’ institutional duty of mediating between the authorities and the public, and of reporting the news, albeit to a minimal extent. But the image accompanying the article, chosen by the media outlet rather than by the NCTB (which, it should be noted, does not supply any visual material with the warnings’ texts), leaps out at the reader, challenging the text of the travel warning. This juxtaposition of conflicting positions creates a media–touristic virtual geography that is hybrid in nature and includes a sharp contrast: the travel warning is cited verbatim, and therefore ‘leaps’ into the media space and ‘penetrates’ it with its official wording; the picture, on the other hand, presents a different geography – one that is enticing, wholesome and peaceful.

We should perhaps note here that direct quotes are common in these articles (see below), as in other types of reports that relay statements from various institutions and figures. The primary purpose of the direct quotes is to lend credibility to the report through a sense of authenticity: the warning is quoted verbatim, *exactly* as it was originally issued by the authorities, but also other voices (sometimes contradictory) are cited directly. It is a well-established fact that the issue of authenticity plays a central and fundamental role in the tourism industry and culture (MacCannell, 1976). In fact, recent studies focussing on tourism discourse have shown how tourists construct authenticity discursively, precisely through reports that make use of direct quotes (Noy, 2007b). These reports establish what is referred to (somewhat paradoxically) as ‘constructed authenticity’, which tries to infuse mediated accounts (whether institutional or interpersonal) with the legitimacy, authority and cultural esteem associated with authenticity (Wang, 2000).

*Moderate degree of skepticism: expressing reservations about the warning via multivocality*

*Example 2:* Headline: ‘Grounded for Pesach [Passover]’ (2004)<sup>6</sup> (Figure 4)

The texts characterized here as displaying a moderate degree of skepticism combine a number of ‘voices’, or perspectives on the warning. In this example (Figure 4), the journalists employ a strategy of creating a multivocal array of positions – presented through both

texts and images. The headline ('Grounded for Pesach', which runs diagonally across the left page) already evokes connotations of punishment, which is associated with a sense of injustice in contexts familiar to the Israeli reader, such as the army and school, the home/family. This recalls Dann's (1996) conceptualization of 'tourists as children', and the fact that the journalistic and news discourse mirrors this pattern, familiar from commercial tourism publications. The headline thus implies disapproval (by infantilization) of the limitation imposed on the travelers by the NCTB, which are presented as an arbitrary punishment. This disapproval may resonate specifically with the Israeli tourists who frequent the Sinai beach-hut resorts, for these tourists are typically young (high-school to post-army age, and young families).

Beside this ironic caption is a quote: 'The Foreign Ministry expresses fury over the warning: "There is no alert regarding attacks on Israelis. It's just groundless panic"'. This quote interestingly illuminates the conflicts between the various government ministries (or, more accurately, between government ministries on the one hand and the prime minister's office and the security agencies subordinate to it on the other). But more importantly, it undermines the validity of the travel warning by presenting another institutional and authoritative voice that challenges the authority of the NCTB. While specific refutations of warnings that originate with the Foreign Ministry do not accompany most NCTB warnings, it is often that experts' opinions are included in the article, which contradict the admonition in the warning. In addition to the caption expressing (the paper's) skepticism, and the quote, which raises additional doubts (on the part of a government ministry), the article also includes a typical illustration photo depicting a threat-free vacation scene (young tourists on the beach), which constitutes another dissenting voice.

On the same spread, in the lower left-hand corner, is a report titled 'Not afraid: 45 Thousand Israelis on their way to Sinai and Istanbul'. This report, appearing in its own special frame, adds a fourth voice to the article – that of the Israeli traveler who 'can take care of himself' and 'knows better', and refuses to give up his much-anticipated holiday. This framed addition also draws a connection between two Muslim countries (Turkey and Egypt) that are the location of vacation sites favored by many Israelis.

Finally, near the special frame and on the lower left-hand part of the spread, we can see an image of a male person in full uniform and arms. The image corresponds and at the same time stands in (dramatic) contrast with the images of the vacationing tourists in the large picture, who are vulnerable, unarmed (mostly) women. The text near the image of the armed male is: 'Fear of an El-Qaeda terrorist attack. A Turkish policeman'. Thus again – here via visual icons – contrasting and cultural images are accumulated: for (Jewish) Israeli readers the armed Muslim (Turkish) is simultaneously menacing and comforting.

Significantly, the different voices and perspectives presented in the article are designated visually – in that they occupy different spaces that compete for the reader's attention and orientation. A hierarchical system of captions, headlines, articles, pictures, quotes and framed reports (with a differentiated color scheme) vie for attention and try to catch the reader's eye. Thus, the various authoritative voices are not only heard but also seen – through a visual array of elements that inhabit the paper's space, inviting the reader to assess and compare them, and choose among them.

The multivocality that frequently characterizes the warning articles, blurring and even neutralizing the sense of threat associated with them, is also manifest in the phenomenon of conflicting headlines. One article, for example, juxtaposes the headline 'Serious travel warning for Sinai' with the (sarcastic) headline 'In Israel there are no warnings?' (2004).<sup>7</sup> This example and others like it create a 'balance of contrasts' between two sections of the page – a balance which leaves the debate open, allowing the consumers, the readers

of the paper, to draw their own conclusions, for they are not only readers but also potential tourists that the article both addresses and describes.

*Highest degree of skepticism: a straightforward ironic attitude*

*Example 3:* Headline: ‘Terror warning for the holidays: Sinai still tops the list’ (2007)<sup>8</sup> (Figure 5)

Here again we observe the typical mismatch between text and photo. But in addition, this article challenges the authority of the warning by two combined means: through the wording of the report (content) and through its style. In terms of content, the article questions the urgency of the warning, and the validity of the alert which allegedly justifies it, by presenting them as seasonal, as coming ‘like every year . . . before the holidays’. The mention of the holidays (note that these are solely Jewish holidays) evokes in the readers’ minds other features of this festive season, such as holiday shopping, gifts given by companies to their employees, etc. Another touch of irony is added by the phrase ‘tops the list’, which calls to mind pop charts and specifically the pop charts compiled for the (Jewish) New Year. The title ‘Sinai still tops the list’ indexes particularly successful ‘hits’, which remain at the top of the charts lengthily. The travel warning is thus presented as heading the pop charts, as it were, and as part of the holiday hubbub. In this context, the direct quote from the NCTB warning, which appears in the article – ‘[The threat is] concrete and especially severe’ – does *not* serve to increase the authenticity and credibility of the warning, but rather creates an effect of ironic distancing.

The idyllic photo adds a visual dimension that completes the sense of irony conveyed by the text. The ironic intent is evident from the inclusion of the NCTB quote in the caption under the picture, which reads: ‘An Israeli [fm.] in Sinai. The threat in the peninsula is defined as “concrete and especially severe”’. This caption highlights the contrast between the warning and the serene and playful picture, and with it the ironic effect. It should be noted that humor is not alien to tourism, and that tourists are quick to identify humorous situations – because tourism itself represents a liminal time and space where people are in disguise, and the daily rules and norms of ‘serious’ behavior are suspended (Cohen, 1985). The irony in the article winks at the reader and evokes the tourist realm that is game-like and liminal, based as it is on an illusory sense of temporary disassociation from institutions of power and authority (‘illusory’ because tourism itself is such an institution). At the same time, and on a symbolic level, the menacing message can be deciphered as hinting at the vulnerability of the vacationing Israelis, as it is embodied in the image of a young female tourist calmly swinging in a hammock.

**Conclusion: the tourist discourse of leisurescapes and dangerscapes**

The analysis of the NCTB warning articles reveals how they construct significant and politically charged tourist spaces by delivering conflicting and ambivalent messages which index popular Israeli vacationscapes on the beaches of the Sinai Peninsula. This is accomplished by utilizing a bank of both visual and verbal tourist images that, when juxtaposed, are ambivalent, and which are etched in the collective spatial and visual consciousness of Israelis. As a result, multilayered spaces of tourist recreation are established and mediated, which, depending on the eye of the consumer, are perceived as either menacing dangerscapes or peaceful and inviting leisurescapes.

In this context, one of the questions that arise is why the media refrains from delivering the warning in an unambiguous manner; for example, why does it refrain from illustrating

these articles with images from deadly terror attacks in Sinai, which would effectively warn the reader against the recurrence of such attacks and would diminish the ambivalent quality of these spaces? The answer involves the mutual relations that exist between the media and tourism industry – discussed at the beginning of this article – which manifest in the attempt to weaken the force of the warning and to soften its menacing tone. In addition, the media's ambivalence may reflect attitudes prevalent among Israelis, who wish to reserve for themselves the option of escaping to an imagined visual enclave in the form of a tranquil leisur-escape. In this sense, the media functions as a sort of *buffer zone*, where the security and institutional discourse meets the civilian and public discourse, and the two clash and intermingle using the familiar iconic grammar of tourism spaces. This is not necessarily a conscious or deliberate action, but rather conveys embedded cultural norms and concepts of Sinai as an imaginary tranquil resort as well as a lucrative touristscape, which are shared by both journalists (editors included) and the larger public.

The media, then, displays a complex attitude toward the travel warnings out of a desire to enjoy both worlds: it seeks to perform the responsible public service of mediating between the authorities and the public by conveying the former's messages to the latter; at the same time it wishes to collaborate with the tourism industry and with the citizens' desire to escape to a realm of peace and repose. The discrepancy between pictures and texts, the conflicting voices, the acceptance of this disharmony as a fact that can be tolerated, and actually should be tolerated almost as an ideal, the ironic presentation of the warnings – all create a new Sinai or perhaps a new Sinaiscape: a (mediated) touristic stage for civil disobedience on a small scale.

From a theoretical perspective, we opened this paper with a discussion of the presentation of tourism spaces, and the modes of presentation shared by the tourism and media systems. We argued that the industries of tourism and media have powerful shared interests, which create shared domains of action, and that tourist vacationsapes – both real and imagined – constitute such domains. Our study focussed on the tourist resorts along the eastern shore of the Sinai Peninsula, and on the struggle, enacted through the various media and communication channels, over the definition of these spaces from the perspective of the (Jewish) Israeli visitors. The main players in this struggle are the NCTB (and other security services), the Israeli media and the Israeli public. None of them as a distinct advantage over the others – hence the unresolved complexity identified in the warning articles. Moreover, these three players are themselves heterogeneous and multivocal (the Israeli public, for example, evinces different views of Sinai, as do the Israeli media and the state authorities, as we saw), and they are bound together by complicated institutional and public obligations.

Thanks to these characteristics, the warning articles constitute an intriguing cultural-institutional site, combining essential aspects of the global (but also 'glocal') systems of tourism and media, both of which have an immense impact on modern societies and peoples. Typical warning articles – in Israel and perhaps elsewhere – constitute a touristic genre that was heretofore unrecognized (at least in the traditional models of media advertising analysis, see Dann, 1996; McIntosh & Goeldner, 1984), in which terror and blissful repose are juxtaposed in a paradoxical fashion. It is frequently claimed that tourism is a 'media-induced' activity. This study did not set out to refute this claim; however, it has found that the warning articles are an unexpected site of 'tourism inducement'.

The analysis of the warning articles thus illuminates the struggle over the presentation of particular tourist spaces, as well as the multiplicity of players, interests and presentations involved. As Jansson (2002, p. 441) points out, 'the mediatization process creates a new potential for mobility in mediascapes, which also involves the naturalization of images and fantasies of foreign landscapes and socioscapes'. Note that the newspaper spread,

which has been at the focus of the preset research, is not just a space that juxtaposes conflicting voices. Newspaper spreads (and even more so the pages of online articles) also frequently contain colorful ads for diving trips in Sinai, jeep tours in the mountains, etc., which are obvious in their commercial intent yet marginal – in fact almost ‘transparent’ – in their presence. These visual elements add yet another spatial layer, whetting the reader’s appetite for travel and thereby challenging the written and institutional travel warning.

This inquiry into warning articles published in Israeli media is admittedly preliminary, and obviously does not exhaust the topic under investigation. Clearly, it does not encompass the entire public debate sparked by the warning articles, the full range of their influence on the preferences and motivations of Israeli tourists, or the role of the other players mentioned, who impact and shape the virtual domain of Sinai. This research joins recent studies (e.g. Uriely, Maoz, & Reichel, 2007, 2009), in hopes of gaining a better understanding of the local context – with its unique and unusual complexities – and also of broader theoretical questions involving the mediation of touristic spaces, the (collective and national) identities associated with them and the perception of the dangers that currently threaten them.

## Notes

1. The NTCB, established in 1999, is a department of the National Security Council in the Office of the Prime Minister.
2. In our analysis, we address Secular Jewish Israeli tourists to Sinai, which is precisely the audience that warnings articles in local (Hebrew) media address. It is important to point that Israeli tourists to Sinai are not a homogeneous population, and that many are not Jewish–Palestinians who live in Israel.
3. (Keep out of Sinai, 2006). This was a headline in the September 5, 2006 issue of the daily *Yedioth Ahronoth* (online edition). Retrieved from [www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3248658,00.html](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3248658,00.html).
4. [www.nrg.co.il](http://www.nrg.co.il).
5. Picture by Eli Dassah.
6. Picture by Avigail Uzi.
7. The latter headline is ostensibly cynical, a sense conveyed via the use of a rhetorical question (implying ‘Surely, in Israel there are warnings too’).
8. Picture by Yaron Kaminski.

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