

Project Report: Deciphering Violence – Exploratory effort in analysing media coverage of the Chechen conflict and its’ interpretation by Western audiences.
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Setting the Scene:

Again I am shaken from my hard sleep
The earth it crumbles around
The cry of my child is not from *his* nightmare
The cry is of *the* nightmare....I know he is gone

I feel the blood roll over my lips and onto my tongue
Chaos confused my injury

No longer do I hear the cry
The dust has settled and he cannot be found
A mother widowed, now childless....no future....no hope for independence
Alone in this cold harsh city of bruised walls

BUT We do not shed tears
We are strong women...survivors

Our men only live a while...if returning from the fight
They receive no compensation...no money for a new leg
Many refugees around accepted not in neighbouring countries
The homeless, no longer given aid from the administration

The Chechen fighters are divided and not able to finance the war
If they have the money they buy their weapons from the Russian enemy
From those who are underpaid for their services.
And with these guns they kill each other

(Prose attempt by Joe Ringer in response to Anna Politkovskaya's "A Dirty War", 2001)

Is Chechnya a 'dirty' war field? Is it really an atrocity?

Research Attempts:

Originally this project aimed to make an “Exploratory effort in analysing prior and current media coverage of the Chechen conflict and its’ interpretation by Western audiences”. The writer attempted to gather sources on the Chechen conflict from as far back as the early 1900’s. He spent some time looking through the archival microfilms of the Sydney morning herald 1906 – 1952...Although there were many articles on Russia, there was nothing relevant to the plight of the Chechen conflict. News archives available took news back to 1992 (Reuters primarily).

As a result, the author has chosen to refine the historical scope to the Conflict of 1994-1996 under the Yeltsin government and the 1999-current conflict under the Putin government. This does not classify the exploration as a historical case, however points of interest can be drawn from examining the culmination to the past decade and the events occurring therein.

Project Scope:

In considering the scale and size of the Chechen conflict, there is an insufficiency of adequate coverage, academic comment and news media on the Chechen conflict (based on Library, Database, News and Internet research conducted). That which is available is primarily from Russian sources. That not much is publicly discussed in the west, makes Chechnya an interesting case to study.

Is this finding, however in contrast to **Mirsky (1997:80)** who believes that “of all the conflicts in the former Soviet Union, the Chechen war has been the most prominent in world media”? It may be the most public of all Russian conflicts, but this does not in any terms mean that coverage has been extensive. As this explorative work will highlight, Russia has had a history of media suppression to this day, hence sources of information are not bountiful.

Russia was at the fore of world current affairs during the height of the Cold War era. For the media consumer in the west, our current attentions are averted primarily to the concerns in Iraq, Israel and the war on terrorism. However, it seems that Chechnya hits the pages of UK press whenever Putin decides to travel to London (**Jones:2000**).

The reader is encouraged to read **Appendix A** in conjunction with this explorative project. The hope being that a background to the situation will assist in providing a framework to better interpret and analyse the Chechen conflict in the readers mind.

Why is it important to examine the media accounts of the Chechen conflict. The answer is in the broader context of exploring and possibly exposing the weakness of the readers' interpretation of media. Media is the primary vehicle for which the general public (audience), gather and interpret the status and consequences of international, national and local events.

By using the theories of 'The cognitive order of right and wrong' by **Karen Cerulo (1998)** and backfire by **Brian Martin (2004)**, it is hoped that the reader can place small piece in place in understanding the jigsaw of Russia, its' media, media portrayal and the Chechen conflict. Consequently it is recommended the reader become acquainted with these theories, if they are not already, by reading a brief synopsis in **Appendix B**.

It is highly recommended that the appendices be read at this point before continuing.

How Western people view the Chechen Conflict:

As a matter of simple qualitative research, 12 respondents from the authors' family and friends were interviewed regarding their understanding in interpretation of the Chechen conflict. The questions asked can be viewed in **Appendix C**.

I do not claim that these views represent the general populous; they do however, provide an interesting discussion.

Findings:

- All respondents had some (varying) understanding of the Chechen conflict.
- Most received their news information on this matter from the television, primarily SBS and ABC. No one had noted any coverage on the commercial networks.
- Every person thought that Russia was the responsible party in the conflict.
- Elements cited as possible causes for the conflict included independence, Islamic element, strategic war over oil.
- All respondents wanted Chechnya to have independence. A few thought that it was a high cost for national identity.
- Most people felt that the violence was extreme and protracted. Some cited images of widowed women and fatherless children. Others thought it was deviant violence as with any war.
- None of the respondents' views on the conflict had changed over time.

Through the project we will see that these are the dominant viewpoint. However, the plight of the Chechen nation has not improved and does not look like improving quickly.

Attempts at backfire, as we will see, have not had enough strength to mobilise public concern and action. Herein is a limitation of backfire theory. When the subject of the attack is not located in a strong democratic state and removed from western government and institution and geographically isolated or inaccessible, the mobilisation of enough voices and appropriate diplomatic pressure becomes difficult. Political pressure is complex, to illustrate this, the US government may lobby Putin on his tough stance on Chechnya but Russian control and influence in the Caucasus was instrumental for the US gaining military access from the north for its' campaign on terror in Afghanistan and the current conflict in Iraq. So the trade-off is possibly not worthwhile.

Photo essay - Victim sequence:

The aim of this photographic sequence is to explore viewers' reactions to the Chechen conflict in the context of Cerulo's victim sequence. The writer has specifically arranged the photographic sequence intentionally in the victim sequence to measure the validity of Cerulo's theory.

Notes: The 12 respondents are the authors' family and friends. The test is not statistically valid and is a small sample and not representative of the general population. It is however an attempt to gain a qualitative insight into the effectiveness of the theory. Respondents were asked what they thought of the violence in Chechnya after looking at this sequence. All of the respondents also completed the small interview (See Appendix)



Available: <http://www.xs4all.nl/~eddy38/Chechnya2003/ppages/ppage5.html> , Last Accessed 14/05/04

The above frames are an attempt to place the victims of the conflict first in the viewers mind and also place some form of explanation about the action around them. These photographs show the destruction of the war in Chechnya, the daily struggle of the Chechen people, and some of the damage to the capital Grozny. The selection of black and white impacts the viewer by drawing a parallel to the bleakness of the situation. The photo of the mass grave is quite confrontational to most viewers.



Last Accessed 14/05/04

Available: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/media_reports/595521.stm ,

The next set of photographs, present the authors opinion of who the performer is in this conflict, primarily the Russian army and then Chechen rebel groups. The also make some reference to the context of the conflict, a cold harsh country, where oil interests are a component of the mix in this war.

All of the respondents answered to feeling that, according to the sequence created that the violence in Chechnya was appalling, wrong, deviant, unjustifiable and uncalled-for. These responses draw a strong connection to Cerulo's model of victim sequences representing deviant and socially unacceptable forms of violence.

Another question from this small exercise is whether these thoughts are a response purely to the sequence shown or generally indicative of the feeling and understanding of the Chechen conflict from a western view point? Media is the primary source of information consumption for western audiences.

The photos of the victims were not found in news source but on humanitarian rights websites. The main theme of photographs in the media is of the army. This is interesting as the main thought of western audiences seems to see Chechen conflicts as deviant form of violence. In this, audiences primarily get performer sequences through the photographs. This should lead them to err to see the violence as acceptable or normal. It appears that this is not the case. Does Cerulo's theory work all the time? Maybe it doesn't, other factors may complicate the mix such as audiences being more educated and intuitive about the conflict than given credit for, also access to obtain inside photographs of victims may be difficult.

The Tale of Two Generals – Forms of Backfire:

The recent campaigns in Chechnya have been led by two Russian generals. One general Troshev has published his personal memoirs of the war, the other Shamanov has agreed to an open interview with Russian reporter Anna Politkovskaya. Troshev has been labeled “kind” by the people and Shamanov “cruel” (**Politkovskaya, 2001:180**). What do these two generals have to offer to promote backfire on the Chechen conflict?

General Troshev:

Troshevs’ memoirs entitled “My War – The Chechen Diary of a Trench General” are possibly the first time that a top ranking general has offered his views publicly. His views are critical of some of the events in the Chechen conflict. He claims it is an true eyewitness account based of a view from the trenches, facts and documents. “General Troshev's truth, about the storming of Grozny in December 1994, the fierce fighting in the mountains, the operation in Dagestan against Basayev's and Khattab's militants and, finally, about the time during which he himself was in command of the joint group of forces. The ringleaders of the rebellion were always on his mind. So were his men. There is also outspoken criticism of those who have made their political fortunes out of the war.” (**BBC Monitoring, 2001**).

They may certainly be interesting, and while not totally pro Chechen, how might the diary promote backfire?

- Expose the action – give more public awareness of the Chechen conflict, the realities for Russian soldiers and Chechens alike.
- Emphasise intuitive interpretation of the action – A diary is a unique perspective and first hand account for readers interpretation on the situation.

- Mobilise public concern (and avoid formal procedures) – Russian and external audiences may be provoked to action. A diary is a non-formal method.

General Shamanov:

Backfire does not implicitly need to be intentional. Shamanov's interview with **Politkovskaya (2001:180-191)** is an open interview where Shamanov supports his strong "cruel" stance on Chechnya. To the western reader of this interview, the belief that Russia has got it wrong regarding Chechnya is solidified.

- Expose the action – give more public awareness of the Chechen conflict. More insight into the Russian military perspective and the strong stance.
- Emphasise intuitive interpretation of the action – An interview is a unique perspective for readers interpretation on the situation.
- Mobilise public concern (and avoid formal procedures) – Russian and external audiences may be provoked to action. An interview is a less is a less-formal method.

Headline Sequences (1992-1996 & 1999-Current):

By investigating some of the headlines from news on the Chechen conflict we can attempt to see if the general perception in the west is of deviant violence in Chechnya is supported by analysis through Cerulo's framework.

The following headlines from a 1992 hostage conflict (**Source: Reuters, 1992**):

FIVE KILLED AS CHECHEN LOYALISTS STORM TV CENTRE.

(Victim Sequence) – Russian victim's, not Chechen.

REBELS IN BREAKAWAY NORTH CAUCASUS SEIZE TV, RADIO

(Performer sequence)

The Following Headlines from the 1999 - current conflict (Specific to Moscow theatre crisis) (**Source: Jones,2003 & Reuters 2002**):

MOSCOW -- Russia's deputy interior minister says 67 of the hostages in the Moscow theatre crisis were killed.

(Contextual sequence) – Does Cerulo's theory apply here? Contextual sequences are supposed give justification or explanation of what may be unacceptable violence. This does not do this

HOSTAGE KILLED IN MOSCOW THEATRE CRISIS

(Victim sequence) – also can be seen as backfire on the rebels attempts in that the public become concerned about the innocent civilians.

1994-1996 Conflict (Yeltsin):

Adapted (Key dates and Chronology Source: Agense, 2004)

Reading the summary of events below, the reader is predominantly exposed to a performer sequence, prompted to see the events possibly as an outcome of war. Is this generally acceptable violence?

June **1995** - Rebels seize hundreds of hostages in a hospital in the southern Russian town of Budennovsk. More than 100 die during the rebel assault and a botched Russian commando raid. The rebels are allowed to leave for Chechnya after five days in exchange for freeing their captives.

Jan **1996** - Fighters take hundreds of hostages in a hospital at Kizlyar in Dagestan, then move them by bus to Pervomaiskoye, on Chechen border. After a pounding siege by Russian air and ground forces, most rebels escape but many hostages killed.

Jan **1996** - Hijackers seize the Russian ferry Avrasya from the Turkish Black Sea port of Trabzon. They threaten to blow up the ship and its 200 passengers but incident ends peacefully.

1999-Current Conflict (Putin):

Adapted (Key dates and Chronology Source: Agense, 2004)

In the following chronology of headlines we see that while performer sequences are still dominant, victim sequences are introduced in 2002 and 2003. These victim sequences are however a result of suicide attacks or attacks on Russian civilians highlighting the Chechen violence as deviant and not the Russian militaries.

1999

Oct 1: Russian forces enter Chechnya for the first time since the end of the 1994-1996 war, forcing the rebels to abandon almost a third of the country.

Oct 29: 50 people are killed as refugees fleeing towards Ingushetia are bombed.

Nov 12: Russian forces take the second Chechen town of Gudermes without resistance.

Nov 25: Start of the battle for Grozny, defended by 2,000 separatists.

2000

Feb 1: The rebels say they are withdrawing from Grozny, followed five days later by an announcement by Russian President Vladimir Putin that the Chechen capital has been liberated.

Feb 11: Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov calls an all-out guerrilla war.

Feb 23: Human Rights Watch says more than 60 civilians were massacred in Grozny earlier in the month.

Feb 29: Russian forces seize Shatoi the last major rebel stronghold in the southern mountains.

June 8: Putin places Chechnya under direct presidential administration and names former mufti Akhmad Kadyrov as the leader of the pro-Russian administration.

2001

Jan 22: Putin gives the Russian security services, the former KGB, control of operations in Chechnya.

April 14: Putin makes his first visit to Chechnya since his election in March.

July: Russian prosecutors open an inquiry into a suspected "abuse of power" by Russian forces, as Putin acknowledges "irregularities" and "abuses" by the army.

Nov 19: First direct talks between envoys from Putin and Maskhadov, but the negotiations end without result.

Dec 30-Jan 1: More than 200 killed in a Russian operation east of Grozny

2002

Aug 19: A Russian Mi-26 helicopter is shot down by rebels, killing 121 people.

Oct 24: Rebels take hundreds of people hostage in a **Moscow theatre** and demand an end to Russian military operations in Chechnya. A total of 130 civilians and 41 Chechen guerrillas die in the rescue operation.

Dec 27: About 80 people are killed when rebels drove two explosives-packed vehicles into the Chechen administration headquarters, destroying Russia's symbolic seat of power there.

2003

May 14: A suicide attack on a government building in Chechnya kills 60 people, one of the deadliest single attacks since conflict between separatist rebels and federal troops broke out.

May 16: Another suicide bomb attack in carried out by a woman during a religious parade in Chechnya kills 18. Akhmad Kadyrov, who was present, survives.

July 5: Suicide attack on a rock concert kills 20 people in Moscow.

July 25: Russian army colonel receives a 10-year prison sentence for killing an Chechen teenage girl in Chechnya.

Oct 5: Akhmad Kadyrov elected president of Chechnya in controversial poll, winning over 80 percent of the vote.

Dec 5: More than 40 people die in a bomb attack on a Russian commuter train just north of Chechnya.

2004

Feb 6: A powerful bomb rips through a packed Moscow subway train during the morning rush hour, killing 41 people.

May 9: Akhmad Kadyro is killed in a blast in a stadium in Grozny. At least 15 others are killed and dozens of others injured.

From Headlines to The Cases – Rebellion as Backfire?

By examining two main events from the 1992-1996 conflict and the current conflict, backfire theory helps show the dynamics of Chechen rebels perspective. The two cases previously introduced were the 1992 siege of a Russian television and radio station, the other of the 2002 Moscow theatre crisis.

Both situations have elements of backfire being inhibited and then of being promoted. Interpreting situations purely from either end of the spectrum could be another potential weakness in the students' application of backfire theory. That is that it may over simplify a complex situation. Backfire is used below to highlight the relevance of the theory when it is considered completely. In this way the complexities and movements of both sides are shown.

Without saying who is right and who is wrong, we can see Chechen rebel attempts at hostage and seizure as an attempt at backfire, going to extreme measures to capture the governments of Russia and the globe and the media's attention to the cause. Lucy Jones outlines how these acts draw quick media attention, "'Country held hostage," "War bursts on Moscow," "World War," were some of the headlines in Moscow on Oct. 25 as commandos held at least 700 civilians captive in a Moscow theatre and demanded Russia withdraws its troops from Chechnya." (Jones, 2003). In the end 67 civilians were killed, 34 rebels were killed and 750 people survived.

Backfire can be inhibited by:

- Devalue the target – If considering the target (the oppressed) as the Chechen people, attempts to draw attention through terrorism draw strong criticism from most of the press. Regarding both cases media articles termed the fighters as "rebels", "savage", "murderous", "brutal terrorists", possibly placing them in the readers mind as animals with no legitimate cause.

- Re-interpret what happened – during the Moscow theatre crisis, information on the number of people, and what was occurring was in a constant state of flux. It was difficult at the time to properly interpret what was happening.
- Use formal procedures – Putin’s government used the theatre crisis as another peg in its’ argument to the world for a tough stance on terrorism.
- Intimidate or bribe people involved – In both cases military intimidation is a classic way of pressuring smaller rebel groups out of the situation. The military is not seen as the aggressor but a restorer of peace.

Backfire can be promoted by:

- Expose the action – The actions in both cases brought attention to attacks in Chechnya to the world conscious again.
- Blame the responsible body – Both cases the rebel group blamed the Russian government and tried to hold it to ransom on withdrawing troops from Chechnya.
- Emphasize intuitive interpretation of the action – Although an extreme measure, audiences are forced to ask themselves why a group would need to go to this extreme to be heard.
- Mobilize public concern (and avoid formal procedures) – These actions may challenge the audience viewpoint and possibly mobilize concern. In the conflict to date, these attempts have been insufficient to generate enough external concern to confront the Russian government in real terms.
- Resist intimidation – Obviously the fighting and the cases of hostage taking are an attempt to resist military intimidation.

Can we reach a conclusion?

The Chechen conflict is complex one, the dynamics and interplay of government, militia, rebels, and other interest ensure that the active audience has a lot to decipher and interpret.

As a whole the theories of 'Deciphering Violence' by Cerulo and 'Backfire' by Martin are useful tools for gaining a better educated perspective on the Chechen conflict.

Through the exploratory project the following are key findings of interest:

- There is a shortage of media coverage/sources of the war in Chechnya from a Chechen perspective and also at a historical level.
- Performer sequences are the most common in media on Chechnya. This contrasts with the finding that audience in the west still interpret the Chechen conflict through a victim framework, where they believe the violence is not called for. In this Cerulo's framework may work on a micro level, but be hard to link with the macro level feelings of conflicts as a whole. Certainly the framework applies well in one off events. This project does not cover the scope of possible reasons why this is the case. It may be the historical stance or sentiment in the west toward Russia through the events of the Cold War and the like.
- Victim sequences through Russian media sources are only used when Russian civilians are the subject of Chechen attack. This attempts to place Chechen's in the wrong and is a support for the Russian stance on Chechnya.
- Chechen rebel attempts at backfire have not had enough strength to mobilise public concern and action. Herein is a limitation of backfire theory.
- Interpreting situations by backfire in terms of binary opposites (either end of the spectrum) could be another potential weakness in a

students' application of backfire theory. That is that it may over simplify a complex situation.

- Backfire can be used to examine the interplay between the two parties in a conflict.

The conflict in Chechnya is still current, unless Russia can break the will of the Chechen populous, they should return back to diplomatic means of resolving this crisis. As this project highlighted, there is human element to this conflict that seems to be the unheard minority in media coverage of the Chechen tension.

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Appendix A:

Overview of the Chechen conflict; historical roots and current state:

Providing a background history and current state of affairs and the media, the reader will better be able to interpret the elements involved in the Chechen conflict.

History:

A part of the Russian Empire since 1859, the Chechnya-Ingushetia region was incorporated as the Checheno-Ingushkaja Autonomous Soviet-Socialist Republic during the founding of the Soviet Union. As **Mirsky (1997:80)** interesting points out, “they do not call themselves Chechens; this word was a Russian invention derived from the name of the first conquered settlement. In their native language, this ethnos calls itself Noxcijn”.

Chechens are Muslims. Islam came in the fifteenth century by neighboring Daghestan.

Over the course of Soviet rule, the Chechens endured a forced deportment of the whole population to Kazakhstan during World War II. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, an independence movement formed in Chechnya, while Russia refused to allow the secession. As a result, Chechnya has undergone two civil wars, which have left most of Chechnya under the control of the federal military. After the war, Chechnya started to be an increasingly serious problem for Russia with kidnapping, imprisonment, and selling of people for cash. Chechen separatists still claim an independent Chechnya and have orchestrated attacks in Chechnya and other regions of Russia. The recent Moscow Theatre hostage crisis is an example of this. Many lives are lost as a result of independent and terrorist actions and the retaliation and stance of the Russian government.

Geographic Situation:

Chechnya is located in the Northern Caucasus, often referred to as the Caucasian Cauldron. This mountainous oil rich region splits the Russian mainland from Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Russian control and influence in the Caucasus was instrumental for the US gaining military access from the north for its' campaign on terror in Afghanistan and the current conflict in Iraq.



Background:

The Chechen Republic is a constituent republic of the Russian federation. Presently, the independence of Chechnya is not recognized by any state; however this declaration caused armed conflicts in which several rival Chechen groups and the Federal army was involved. Federals still did not have full control of the republic, despite the official claims of Russian government. Islamic terrorism is only one thread of the Chechen conflict. "Every month, dozens of Russian soldiers and Chechen rebels fall, [and] innocent civilians are subjected to all manner of atrocities by troops from a nominally democratic state" (**Jones, 2003**). Because estimates of Chechen strength vary on a daily basis, Russian intelligence evidently knows neither the number nor location of the enemy forces it faces. As the birthrate of ethnic Russians plummets, the Muslim population is growing, and radical Islamic forces are expanding into Russia proper, as well as in its sphere of influence in the former Soviet Central Asia. (**Cohen, 2002**)

Additional to concerns over Islamic fundamentals, some commentators cite the struggle for control over oil resources as the major component of the conflict. The cause may not be so simple as war is rarely so clear cut, but a tangled web potentially of myriad political issues, power, financial, religious, ethnic, nationalistic aspiration, and many other factors. Mirsky (1997:83) believes "two issues seem to be of major importance. The first is rooted in the Chechen mentality which combines a fierce spirit of independence and a surprisingly strong penchant for entrepreneurial activity (and).... to an age-

long pattern of virtually autonomous community life without any overall state authority". The second reason he cites is the lucrative business of oil.

Now President Vladimir Putin has made anti-separatism the theme of his stance on Chechnya. A news reporter commenting on Putin says, "When Putin came to power in 1999, his main message to the population was, 'there is a wounded place on the territory of the former Soviet Union and I will heal this wounded place. I will stop the separatists once and forever'," (**Anonymomous,2003**). This source explains that among Russians this line was hard to sell until the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York. The link between Chechnya and Arab groups such as the Taliban or Al Qaeda has been an easy play for the Russian government, their war on terror.

To gain a different perspective on this point, it is worthwhile considering the response of Yegor Gaidar (a previous architect of Russia economic reform) to some interview questions. An extract is provided in **Appendix D** for consideration.

Comments of Russian Media:

It has been argued that a free media is an essential ingredient for a democracy; this is perhaps one reason Russia has failed to settle fully into a democratic state since the fall of communism. Russia's media landscape has traditionally been one of turmoil. **Price (1995:108)** commenting on looking at Russia's media, notes it "is like examining the wrists of a recently freed prisoner where the marks of the chains are still present".

Russia's current president is Vladimir Putin who has been in power since Jan 2000. Putin is a former officer of the KGB – Russia's spy and intelligence agency. "Russia still refuses to negotiate with its adversaries. This is because...the army, fearful of losing influence and income from the dirty war, is opposed to bargaining". (**Jones, 2002**). The Russian governments thinking on Chechnya is not easily influenced by international pressure and the input from other governments.

Putin has shown himself unwilling to tolerate any criticism of himself or his government. He has undertaken major efforts to increase state ownership of the media and tighten restrictions on journalistic freedom. Unlike his communist predecessors, Putin employs an indirect, subtle approach toward censorship that protects his regime from outright condemnation by other governments. Putin prefers to threaten broadcasters with the revocation of their licenses rather than to force them to shut down their operations. Putin's regime controls over 75 percent of all media companies in Russia, and this proportion rises every year. With only a muffled minority pushing for greater freedom, there is little chance that Russia's media will be able to galvanize domestic resistance to greater government control over the media (**Captain,**

2003). Officially Putin is on the record as saying "self-regulated media, and in this day and age it is impossible to issue prohibitions, to simply issue commands on what to show or not to show". "Of course, this could be done, but then it would be a different country and a different life," (**BBC,2004**). Putin has attempted to draw parallels between the US war on terrorism and Russia's intervention in Chechnya, possibly due to the Islamic element of Chechen independents.

Life for journalists and media representation has been difficult, the government has harassed journalists critical of the Kremlin and emboldened police on city streets who demand bribes from the citizenry they are supposedly protecting (**Fiefer, 2000**). Some journalists have been jailed for slander. "Journalism is one of Russia's most dangerous professions, with more than 120 dead and approximately one dying every month while performing his or her job since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991" (**Goble, 2001**). In the case of Andrei Babitsky who spoke up against the governments stance on Chechnya, "Russian authorities subsequently arrested and beat him, and he was not released until several months later." (**Captain, 2003**)

The media has never been totally free or unbiased in Russia, as a result of the privatization of media by former president Boris Yeltsin, both electronic and print media fell into the hands of oligarchs, most of whom were former Soviet officials who viewed the press as a weapon in the struggle for power rather than as a means of communicating information to the population at large. Because the oligarchs acquired their property largely through illegal collusion with the state, and because these properties were typically monopolies, the oligarch's continue to be dependent on the state and therefore can be manipulated by it (**Goble, 2001**). Oligarch's arrange publication of commissioned articles or "black PR." An under-the-table fee goes to the journalist-and is sometimes shared with editor/owners-- for an article praising a candidate for office or smearing a public figure. These stories typically are based on compromising material that is obtained illegally and provided to journalists. (**Giles, 2002**). **Politkovskaya (2001:30)**, believes that Russian media constantly feed contradictory reports to the public.

Appendix B: Overview of Cerulo's framework for deciphering violence + comments on the effect of this framework on media interpretation + Backfire:

Media is the primary vehicle for which the general public (audience), gather and interpret the status and consequences of international, national and local events.

Karen Cerulo (1998) proposes that the sequence chosen by journalists, when writing articles, taking video footage or photographs, related to violence and war, are part of a "broader storytelling formula". Whether this sequence is coincidental or deliberate is inconsequential in the use of this framework for analysing media texts. This impartial approach to deciphering violence draws some interesting observations as to how audiences may interpret a sequence of events; in the case of this essay, how western audiences understand and interpret the historical and current state of the Chechen conflict and its' particular stakeholders.

Cerulo apportions the story sequence into four main categories.

A **victim sequence** places the audiences' attention first to the subject of the violence, allowing the reader to empathize with the victim. This sequence classification is representative of deviant forms of violence. (1998:40)

A **performer sequence** gives priority to the information about the perpetrator of the violence. Subsequently, this attracts the reader to interpret the chain of events through the eyes of the violent actor. This sequence lends interpretation to the violence being a culturally acceptable form. (1998:44-45)

A **contextual sequence** is focused on the act's setting or circumstance. This format allows reason, explanation or justification to be given for what may be unacceptable violence. (1998:47)

A **double-casting sequence** concentrates using contextual information to cast the subject as both the victim and the actor. Cerulo says that this "complicates the flow of information: the sequence imposes a point/counterpoint format on an account" (1998:50). This stimulates the reader to evaluate more than one possible dimension of the violence.

Cerulo's framework is a useful tool for analysing media story telling at the cognitive level of the audiences' interpretation; however there may be specific subjects of violence that may not always conscribe to the four sequences. Suicide is an example of this; the victim is also the performer.

Notes on Backfire

Backfire is a relatively new theory for making sense of the actions of individuals or institutions in the media light regarding attacks whether it be the beating of Rodney King or the war in Iraq. **Martin (2004)** states that "an attack can be said to backfire when it creates more support or attention to whatever is attacked". Backfire is best used directly in relation to the specific activities of a case.

The conditions for backfire are:

- An action that is perceived as unjust, unfair, excessive or disproportional — a violation of a social norm.
- Communication to relevant audiences.

Backfire can be inhibited by:

- Cover up the action.
- Devalue the target.
- Reinterpret what happened.
- Use formal procedures.
- Intimidate or bribe people involved.

Backfire can be promoted by:

- Expose the action.
- Blame the responsible body.
- Emphasise intuitive interpretation of the action.
- Mobilise public concern (and avoid formal procedures).
- Resist and expose intimidation and bribery.

(Source: Martin,2004)

Appendix C: Questionnaire

Interview questions on the Australian understanding and interpretation of the Chechen conflict. Question responses categorized into deviant, normal, double-casting, contextual interpretations of the conflicts violence.

** University Ethics approval not required as interviews were conducted within the authors network of friends and family and with consent of publishing the results.*

Questions:

- Q1: Do you have an understanding of the conflict in Chechnya?** (If no, then conduct research from Q3 after participant has read the 4 media sources used in this essay).
YES/NO/Never heard of Chechnya
- Q2: What is your primary source of media information on the Chechen conflict?**
- Q3: Who do you believe is responsible (if any) for the conflict in Chechnya?**
- Q4: What do you think about the violence described in the media (specific to Chechnya)?** (look for answers to be categorized into acceptable/deviant/unacceptable/ambiguous violence)
- Q5: Have your views on the Chechen conflict changed over-time?**

Appendix D: Perspectives – An Interview with a Russian Optimist (Extract: Padma, 2000)

Yegor Gaidar was one of Russia's principal architects of economic reform.

Q: Do you think that President Putin will turn authoritarian, even anti-Western, in view of the nationalistic surge related to the war in Chechnya that contributed to his election?

A. Here in the United States and in the West, and even in Russia, the connection between the Chechen war and Putin's victory is misunderstood and oversimplified. What we have now in Russia is not a strong nationalistic wave. It is something else. During eight years of extremely difficult transition, after the collapse of the earlier regime, of the empire and ideology of the past, we are a country that passed through a revolution—largely a peaceful revolution but still a revolution, and revolutions are unsettling. During this period of dynamic and difficult change, we had successive governments that were weak because governments tend to be weak during times of revolutionary change. Those who had a chance to live through the revolution found it trying though romantic. But after every revolution, whether in France or Mexico or Britain, people begin to think, "Well, splendid, but we are tired, we need peace and order, we need a predictable government, we need a government that functions, a government that will deliver on its promises. We need a person who can be tough, who will make decisions and implement them." Such feelings are strong after any revolution.

Q. What brought about the dramatic change in your position on the Chechen war, which you opposed in 1994-96?

A. It was the change that happened with Russian society in general. Russians' attitude about this war differs from that about the previous war. This is another story because it is another war. The situation, as it is perceived in Russia, is quite different from what it was in 1994-96. If you look at the polls, you will notice that the best educated, the young, the most articulate groups in Russia strongly support the continuation of the current war. Exactly the same groups strongly opposed the previous war. What was the original situation? It is difficult to understand the difference if you are not familiar with the events. Russians cannot be crazy in being so strongly against that war and so strongly in favor of this one. What happened? The war in 1994-96 was viewed in Russia in approximately the way the Vietnam War was perceived here in the United States. Americans found it difficult to understand why they were there. It was a faraway place involved in a nasty, dirty war, where they sent their sons to die. For Russians, too, the earlier war involved difficult questions about whether people have the right to be sovereign, or whether the principle of self-determination should become subordinate to the overriding demands of the nation-state. But this issue should not be settled on the battlefield. This was the perception of the Russian public in 1994-96. That is why Russians were strongly against the previous war. That is why they practically pushed the Russian authorities to end the war, leaving them no choice but to end it in

the summer of 1996. It was exactly the same as here in the United States: America had the resources to continue the war in Vietnam, but it did not have public support.

But here the similarities end and the differences begin. The difference is geography Vietnam is in a splendid location, 20,000 kilometers from here. Americans could withdraw from Vietnam and more or less forget about it. Chechnya is in Russia. After the war, Chechnya started to be an increasingly serious problem for Russia with kidnapping, imprisonment, and selling of people for cash. American friends of Russia and journalists do not understand why the Russian press, so supportive of Chechnya in 1994-96, has given up supporting it. But remember how many Russian journalists were kidnapped in Chechnya in the past three years and sold for money to their employers. Take

the example of Elena Masliuk, a reporter for [NTV](#) She was extremely pro-Chechen and brought out the suffering of the Chechens, allowing them to express their opinions. She was kidnapped after the war, kept for half a year in horrible conditions, and finally sold to her TV station. Of course, this episode changed the attitude of Russian journalists. But still Russian public opinion remained manageable with the view "Let us keep them at a distance, let us not interfere there, maybe somehow the situation will settle down. Maybe they will be able to stop the kidnapping and even to organize themselves." But the situation changed dramatically when we had a few thousand well-armed and trained people entering Dagestan from Chechnya. Of course, it is very difficult for the American public, which is not even aware of the existence of Dagestan, to understand what the aggression against Dagestan in August meant for Russia. Dagestan is part of our life, part of our country, part of our reality. The Dagestani people do not wish to be enslaved by Chechens. They took up arms, they asked for Russian military support, and then, of course, Russian public opinion changed drastically The issue was no longer the Chechen people's right to self-determination. It was the problem of whether Russian citizens should be protected by their own government. It was not simply the problem of pushing the Chechens back to Chechnya from Dagestan, and which other regions would come under attack in the future, but rather of putting an end forever to such a possibility. That brought about the radical change before the current war actually started.