

# Truth Under Fire

## The role of media in achieving peace in Israel/Palestine

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- I. Introduction
- II. Background
- III. Biased Reporting, Propaganda, and Sensationalism
- IV. Misleading Definitions and Terminology
- V. The Implications of Media for Conflict Resolution
- VI. How Media Can Help Achieve Peace
- VII. Conclusion

## I. Introduction

Contemporary mass media, such as newspapers, magazines, books, radio and television undoubtedly affects every aspect of human life. The press has the power to shape public opinion and to change the behavior and attitudes of ordinary people. To varying extents, the media shapes our perspectives on current events and influences our decisions. The media influences how we perceive others and help us relate to one another. In today's information age, news disseminates quickly and reaches a wide audience, which only serves to increase the power of the press. For these reasons, mass media can be seen not only as a driving force for cultural and social change, but also as a key for political mobilization, nationally as well as internationally.<sup>1</sup>

Freedom of media is extremely important in our lives, as it is one of the foundation stones of democratic society. "Freedom of press" reflects the ideal of democratic media as that which allows citizens to educate themselves on major issues and events. Thus, the primary goal of free media should be to inform and empower people to form their own judgments.<sup>2</sup> In order to accomplish this, news media must operate according to a rigid code on conduct, upholding principles of independence, impartiality, truth, and accuracy.

Our success in upholding these principles in modern times has prompted some to call this era "the age of Orwell." Like Orwell's dialogue about "groupthink" and government control of media, many "democratic countries" have failed to institute the values of free press which they claim to uphold. In 1921, Walter Lippman, a well known news journalist, explained the modern role of democratic press by saying that the art of democracy requires the *manufacture of consent*. If the state cannot control public opinion by brute force, it must endeavour to control the flow of information that the public receives.<sup>3</sup> One technique is the manufacture of "open political debate," the dialogue can stay in the very narrow political margins as long as both sides of the debate can accept certain assumptions as *de facto*. These assumptions form the base of the propaganda system.

Since many media outlets do not have open discussions of political policies, readers are left to form conclusion based on news images and information. These conclusions are made based on information which is subtly biased.<sup>4</sup> Although the information may be true, it is not always the whole story. The book *Bad News from Israel* commences by stating:

*If you don't understand the Middle East crisis it might be because you are watching it on TV news. News images From the Middle East score high on images of fighting, Violence and drama, but low on explanation.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bad News From Israel – Gadi Wolfsfeld, 23 November 2005  
<http://www.usip.org/pubs/peaceworks/pwks37.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Global Issues, 14 October 2005

<http://globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/military.asp#DilemmaofJournalistsandWartimeCoverage>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.usip.org/pubs/peaceworks/pwks37.pdf> Gadi Wolfsfeld 23 November 2005

<sup>5</sup> Philo

In this report, we will look at how media is used as a tool to shape public opinion, and how media is used in times of conflict. Particularly, we are interested in how media and propaganda have affected the Israel/Palestinian conflict, and whether or not media can be used to further peace and reconciliation.

*The first casualty when war comes is Truth.*  
- U.S. Senator Hiram Johnson, 1917

## **II. Background: Media and Conflict Journalism**

*“To a person with a hammer, the world is a nail” – Mark Twain*

The point that Twain makes here is that we must never have pre-ordained solutions from the outside that make the situation fit the solution. The media, in the framing and reporting of conflict, must be acutely sensitive to the diversity of issues and inter-linkages that inform and shape the conflict.

At the outset, we must recognize that the media can play a central role in the promotion of peace. The media can emphasize the benefits that peace can bring, they can increase the legitimacy of groups or leaders working for peace, and they can help transform images of the enemy. However, the media can also serve as destructive agents in a peace process. They can choose to negatively report on the risks and dangers associated with compromise, raise the legitimacy of those opposed to concessions, and reinforce negative stereotypes of the enemy. It must also be remembered that these two roles are not mutually exclusive or inseparable. Few would disagree that the role of the media in this age of information has a role that can not easily be overemphasized. Journalists have colossal power because what they report and how they report it influences people’s views of the conflict, and reporters are generally perceived as being objective. However the media does not always work in the way that it ought to. Especially in times of conflict, the truth and bias sometimes intermingle.<sup>6</sup> According to Professor George Gerbner, author of *The US Media and the Middle East*, “Even the word media has lost its meaning of plurality. Media has turned into a seamless, pervasive, and increasingly homogenized environment that has drifted out of democratic reach.”<sup>7</sup> The news that we receive from mass media are characterized by fragmented perceptions; mass media uses selective perception mechanisms that are often based on historical prejudice. International news is often dominated by national, religious, or other particular interests.

However, there are three facets of the media that bear special mention in times of conflict and conflict transformation. The first is that due to a fundamental contradiction between the nature of a peace process and the media, the media will often play a destructive role in attempts at making peace. The second is that the greater the public confidence and level of political consensus in support of a peace process, the more likely the news media will play a positive role in that process. Finally, the greater the amount and severity of crises associated with the peace process, for instance the recent unrest in the East, the more likely the news media will

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<sup>6</sup> Palestine-Israel Journal Volume V No. ¾ 1998

<sup>7</sup> Gerbner 1997: Foreword

play a negative role in the process. Media behavior in protracted ethno-political conflict in many regions around the world has amply demonstrated these tendencies.

The role of the media in Israel/Palestine is significant. Israelis accuse Palestinian media of infusing the Palestinians with hatred against Israelis; Palestinians argue the Israeli media defends murder and excessive violence. In the early stages of the second Intifada, two powerful images, one from each side of the conflict, were shown to the public. One image depicted a young boy who was shot by an Israeli soldier while his father tried to shield him, the other showed an Israeli soldier being lynched by Palestinians. Both these scenes became important icons, exploited by their respective sides, in order to convey the enemies' brutality. The media often provides extensive coverage of ones own side, showing grieving families or details about killing, etc. On the other hand, victims from the opposing perspective often remain anonymous and receive much less coverage.<sup>8</sup> Professor Galtung has made 12 points which note generally where journalism often goes wrong when dealing with violence.

1. Decontextualizing violence: Media should not look at the irrational, but instead look at the reasons for the unresolved conflicts and polarization.
2. Dualism: Media should not reduce the number of parties in a conflict to two, since often more are involved. There are often additional, external forces like foreign governments and transnational companies involved.
3. Portraying one side as good and demonizing the other.
4. Armageddon: presenting violence as the only solution.
5. Focusing on individual acts of violence and failing to present structural causes, for instance poverty, government neglect and military or police repression.
6. Confusion: focusing only on the conflict arena but not on the forces and factors that influence the violence.
7. Excluding and omitting the bereaved, thus never explaining why there are acts of revenge and spirals of violence.
8. Failure to explore the causes of escalation or the impact of media coverage itself.
9. Failure to explore the goals of outside interventionists, especially super powers.
10. Failure to explore peace proposals and offer images of peaceful outcomes.
11. Confusing cease-fires and negotiations with actual peace.
12. Omitting reconciliation: conflicts tend to reemerge if attention is not paid to healing efforts in fractured societies. When news about attempts to resolve conflicts is absent, fatalism is reinforced. That can help engender even more violence, when people have no images or information about possible peaceful outcomes and the promise of healing.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Palestinian-Israel Journal No 2 2003, Wolfsfeld: 7ff

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Military.asp#DilemmaofJournalistsandWartimeCoverage>.  
Global issues, 14 Oct 2005

A study conducted by Gadi Wolfsfeld and Mohamed Dajani (qualifications) in 2003 examined media from both sides of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians; their research showed both sides routinely reinforce hatred. Fortunately, there is a growing awareness among journalists, commentators, the public etc, of the importance of media's role in conflict. In October 2000, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) called on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to stop manipulating the media in the battle for public opinion inside as well as outside the region. Furthermore, journalists were asked to act professionally.<sup>10</sup> The department of public information at the UN in June 2005 arranged an international media seminar in Cairo called "The role of the media in peace, conflict between Israel and Palestine." The director of the United Nations Department for Information, in his speech, said, "The role of the media is to promote the truth factually without fear or censorship."<sup>11</sup>

### III. Biased Reporting, Propaganda, and Sensationalism

*Propaganda is to democracy what violence is to totalitarianism*

*Noam Chomsky*

As is the case with all controversial issues, each party is likely to charge the media with bias anytime coverage goes against their cause. This has indeed been the defense of major news organizations that have been subject to criticism and condemnation for alleged bias.

Indeed, because the context and reality differs so significantly for the principal parties in the conflict, it is likely that accusations of bias aren't merely self-serving; they are likely to be sincere objections to the press presenting a reality that seems alien to those who are in it. Efforts to prove bias run the range from polemics that accuse reporters of pursuing their own political agenda, to fact-based analyses to prove one bias or another.

As the late journalist Walter Lippman once said,

*We must remember that in time of war what is said on the Enemy's side of the front is always propaganda, and what is said on our side of the front is truth and righteousness, the cause of humanity and a crusade for peace.*<sup>12</sup>

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has certainly attracted far more attention than any other conflict, for several reasons. First, since Israel is a democracy and an open society, it is much easier to report - and misreport - what is occurring there. Second, Jews are involved, and this can usually ensure a significant audience among those who for various religious, social, or political reasons support or oppose them. A third and most important reason for the primacy

<sup>10</sup> Monitor Volume 5 2001 (PHRMG)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2005/pil663.html#print> United Nations Information Centre 1 November 2005

<sup>12</sup> [www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Military.asp?p=1](http://www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Military.asp?p=1) 17 October 2005

of the Palestine issue is that it is, so to speak, the licensed grievance - the only one that can be freely and safely expressed in those Muslim countries where the media are either wholly owned or strictly overseen by the government. Indeed, Israel serves as a useful stand-in for complaints about the economic privation and political repression under which many Muslim people live, and as a way of deflecting the resulting anger.

However, because this conflict is one of the most well covered conflicts in the world, it becomes important to examine this coverage. Many parties have expressed concern over biases emanating from both sides of the conflict. Journalists are held to a standard higher than agents of propaganda or collaborators in armed struggle. Media is often subjected to various constraints by governments, military, corporate, and economic interests etc.<sup>13</sup>

Media bias is a term often used when talking generally about media, and particularly when discussing the Middle East. Every conflict in the world is probably fought on at least two planes: the battlefield and the minds of the people via information – the media or propaganda. Both sides of any conflict will attempt to improve their image, often through deceptive tactics. Distortions, exaggerations, subjectivity, inaccuracy and even fabrications are used in order to receive support and/or cultivate a sense of legitimacy for certain actions. Using propaganda can help rally people behind a cause, but often at the cost of giving misleading information in order to gain support. Additionally, both Palestinian and Israeli media consistently take advantage of the harsh images of children and adults being killed in clashes and suicide attacks. Thus, newspapers from both sides can be accused of using incitement.<sup>14</sup>

The following common tactics are used in propaganda:

- The portrayal of subjective stories and information as objective fact
- The use of partial facts and/or partial historical context
- The portrayal of threats to individual security as motivating and reinforcing actions
- The minimal use of expert sources to provide insights into a situation
- The treatment of official government sources as fact, rather than as a subjective opinion
- The demonizing of the enemy
- The use of a very narrow range of discourse. (This helps to serve the interest of the propagandist because this leads to judgments being made from the discourse itself, rather than from the framework in which these opinions are formed[*sic*]).<sup>15</sup>

A high level of sensationalism press in the media environment is also likely to have a negative impact on situations. Sensationalism refers to journalists constructing and presenting stories in a melodramatic style, placing high value on emotionalism rather than reason, entertainment rather than information, and specific events instead of long term process and personalities rather than institutions. The world that is constructed by sensationalist press is often a frightening place filled with threats and violence, where citizens need to be constantly concerned with security issues. The enemy is portrayed as powerful and unwilling to

<sup>13</sup> [www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Military.asp?p=1](http://www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Military.asp?p=1) 17 October

<sup>14</sup> Monitor volume 5 2001 (PHRMG) : 24f

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Military.asp#DilemmaofJournalistsandWartimeCoverage>. Global Issues, 14 Oct 2005

compromise. The atmosphere that sensationalist press creates is often not a suitable environment for creating long-lasting peace.<sup>16</sup> The media sways public opinion, which directly affects foreign policy and, ultimately, the outcome of the conflict.<sup>17</sup>

It is not only the media in Israel and Palestine that is important to discuss when having this discussion. International media is also partial; different countries are biased towards different sides. However, in this report we will not go examine which media is more biased, but rather analyze how media should act and why it is important to have an unbiased media.

#### **IV. Misleading Definitions and Terminology**

*The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a battle over language sometimes more than over anything else.*<sup>18</sup>

*Buttu, legal adviser to the PLO*

While language has tremendous power to heal and reconcile, it is largely used by media to shore up deeply-held, competing beliefs. Words matter most when it comes to the terms used to describe this conflict. Palestinians utilize the word “Intifada” or uprising, which fits their David-and-Goliath narrative of a people resisting an occupying power. Israelis, who have fine-tuned their word for the conflict several times, now call it “an armed conflict against terrorism.” Language often entails legal obligations. Avoiding the word ‘war’ frees Israel from international laws that govern war.<sup>19</sup> Terminology and definitions can be used in a way that implies accepted fact; the media injects bias under the guise of objectivity. The exact meaning of a word can be hard to pin down in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, because it often means different things to the two sides. More commonly, the two sides use different language to describe the same thing. Israelis and Palestinians are discussing a cease-fire, but even when they use the same word, their meaning differs. For the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, a cease-fire connotes an end to all attacks against Israelis while his army continues using helicopter gun ships to kill militants. To the hard-line group Hamas, a cease-fire means an Israeli pledge to end helicopter strikes while they continue attacks against Israelis.<sup>20</sup> Once physical conflict begins, militaries often draw on a rich vein of euphemisms. Military language provides the crucial function of legitimizing violent acts of soldiers that would be crimes in a civilian context. It also shields the public from the brutal business of war, helping people accept that which they normally wouldn’t.<sup>21</sup>

Here are some additional examples of how the Palestinians and Israelis use different language to describe the same organization, action, or circumstance:

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.usip.org/pubs/peaceworks/pwks37.pdf> 22 November 2005

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.honestreporting.com/a/About\\_us.asp](http://www.honestreporting.com/a/About_us.asp) Honest Reporting 19 Oct 2005

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.honestreporting.c/a/About\\_us.asp](http://www.honestreporting.c/a/About_us.asp) Honest Reporting 19 Oct 2005

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0618/p01s04-wome.html> The Christian Science Monitor 19 Oct 2005

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0618/p01s04-wome.html> The Christian Science Monitor 19 Oct 2005

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0618/p01s04-wome.html> The CHristian Science Monitor 19 Oct 2005

**Israelis:** Israel Defense Forces  
**Palestinians:** Israeli Occupation Forces

**Israelis:** Terrorist  
**Palestinians:** Shaheed or martyr. In the case of suicide bombings, the word glosses over the Muslim prohibition on suicide.

**Israelis:** Targeted killings  
**Palestinians:** Assassination

**Israelis:** Against unilateral action in the territories that changes their status. What they mean is they are against a Palestinian declaration of statehood.  
**Palestinians:** Against unilateral action in the territories that changes their status. What they mean is they are against the Israeli settlement expansion.<sup>22</sup>

*A language of peace emphasizes connection over separateness, a one-world consciousness – that what affects one affects me – and disengages from dichotomous language construction: me/other, us/them.*<sup>23</sup>

*Dr. Nancy Snow, Professor at Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Southern California.*

## V. The Implications of Media for Conflict Resolution

The media coverage of the Middle East is reported within the world view of the primarily western audience. Therefore, it is mainly reported from a paradigm of secularism. It is widely recognized and accepted by social scientists that people create psychological images of the “other” or “unknown” in order to secure their own identity. In addition, assumptions about “the other” easily lead to bias, misunderstanding, stereotyping, and hostility.<sup>24</sup> There are two main effects of social norms on images: increased homogeneity of images held by members of a group is fostered by simplified and undifferentiated social norms. These norms held by a group encourage maintenance of these structures, and at the same time this leads to a reinforcing and distorting the direct contact between different groups.<sup>25</sup>

*The mass media cannot be underestimated in terms of their power of perpetuating ethnic and racial bias: they are part of a cultural mechanism that promotes and exploits commercial stereotypes. Such images become dangerous when they materialize in the complex social narratives and foreign policies enacted simultaneously on the world stage and in the human mind and heart. Cultural stereotypes of national or ethnic character emerge in*

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0618/p01s04-wome.html> The Christian Science Monitor 19 Oct 2005

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0618/p01s04-wome.html> The Christian Science Monitor 19 Oct 2005

<sup>24</sup> Kamalpour 1995: 201f

<sup>25</sup> Kamalpour 1995: 4

*television, literature, art, film and other cultural expressions. The problem of gross racial and ethnical insult neither begins nor ends on the newspaper editorial pages, but it has there found a convenient – and perhaps unwitting – cultural form.*<sup>26</sup>

Cross cultural relations in general are to a great extent affected by media stereotyping and image creation. In this age of information, people's understanding of one another and their relationship are enhanced or diminished due to mass media impact. Since so many people rely on the mass media for information about the outside world, the media has become a powerful tool today in creating and promoting mental pictures about others, their nations, and their cultures. The images that peoples are given by the mass media are likely assimilated unconsciously into the minds of the people. Therefore, people might not respond objectively to situations but instead respond to their perception of the situation.<sup>27</sup>

Reasons for the effectiveness of propaganda:

- Natural desire of people to believe the best about themselves and their country
- Presentation of fears and claims as logical and factual
- Fear-mongering, especially about the threat to cherished values such as freedom and justice
- Professionalism of media management and public relations
- Management of thoughts by narrowing the discourse, leading to a decrease in the information available for people in order to make their standpoint.<sup>28</sup>

Another issue brought forward by Gadi Wolfsfeld is the influence that a shared media can have on the media environment. He writes that the greater the extent of shared media, the more likely it is that the news will play a more constructive role in the peace process. Journalists write stories within their particular framework. Presumptions existing about collective identity are an especially important element in the construction of news, since collective identity can provide a basis for dialogue. When discussing in a shared media the underlying theme is – what can be done to reach peace within “our” community? If on the other hand there are few or no shared media the perspective becomes much more ethnocentric, often instead talking about threats that “they” pose to “us”. The existence of a shared media further according to Wolfsfeld also has important influence on how political leaders and groups share their messages. Leaders use a less extreme form of rhetoric when they are talking to multiple audiences. Whereas those that talk only to their own people often emphasize sectarian loyalties in order to maintain their power base.<sup>29</sup> In Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories, the media are completely separate from each other and as a consequence they are also ethnocentric in their orientation. Some Palestinians monitor the Israeli press but there are virtually no Israelis monitoring the Palestinian press. Only stories that are insulting or very frightening are translated into the Israeli press. The lack of shared media can be traced to the fact that there is no collective identity among the two groups. This

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<sup>26</sup> Kamalupour 1995: 139

<sup>27</sup> Kamalupour 1995: 151

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Military.asp#DilemmaofJournalistsandWartimeCoverage>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.usip.org/pubs/peaceworks/pwks37.pdf> 22 November 2005

shows that the role that news media play in political conflicts is directly linked to the environment in which they operate. Therefore, the news media are least likely to actually have a constructive role where they are most needed.<sup>30</sup> Identification can be conditional on personal relationships, for instance contacts with friends or cultural/family history. People associate more easily with customs and lifestyles that are readily understood and recognized. International media often consider the basic principles of identity and association in order to convey a particular message.

*It's much easier for those of us in the west to imagine that a car bomb in the middle of a city is a tremendously terrifying thing...when you see a car bomb go off in the middle of a sophisticated city; the experience is much closer to one we can imagine.<sup>31</sup>*

## **VI. How Can Media Help to Achieve Peace?**

Responsible media can play an effective role. Responsible media can be an important part of the natural immune system of the body politic, which should be mobilized to prevent conflict and to help resolve factors which give rise to conflicts. Responsible media must demonstrate a strong commitment to moving beyond analysis and deeper understanding to actually undertaking concrete actions in their respective sectors. Globally, the media shows little interest in peace issues and among what has been covered; most is rather negative and wrong. The media does not seem to have given adequate attention to important issues that concern people's welfare. Gadi Wolfsfeld argues that there is an inherent tension between the needs of a peace process and the news routine. A peace process usually needs patience, whereas the news media requires immediacy. Peace is most likely to develop within a calm environment and the media tend to have an obsessive interest in threats and violence.

Audience research done by the Glasgow University Media Group reveals that a lot of people have little or no knowledge of the reasons and the origins of the conflict in Israel/Palestine. According to the authors of this book, television has consistently denied their audiences a complete picture of the origin of the conflict. In neglecting to convey a comprehensive account of the events and relationships within the conflict, they have contributed to the confusion of the viewers and reduced their understanding of the actions taking place. There is a large difference in perceiving the battle as a Palestinian fight against an occupying power and perceiving the conflict as a conflict over borders and land.<sup>32</sup> For the public to fully understand the current conflict, they must have thoroughly examined the religious and cultural history of the region. The public can not fully understand the rationale of the different participants in the conflict without a proper historical study. However, the history of the conflict is seldom offered via the media. Therefore, it is likely that the news often only further confuses the viewers. In the analyses made by the Glasgow Media Institute in bulletins examined from September 28<sup>th</sup> until October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2000, there were a total of 3500 lines of text about the conflict; however, only 17 lines referred to the history of the conflict.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.usip.org/pubs/peaceworks/pwks37.pdf> 22 November 2005

<sup>31</sup> Philo 237ff

<sup>32</sup> Philo 237ff

According to the authors of the book, this has led to the uncertainty of many people today about where the Palestinian refugees came from or how they have become refugees. It is essential to know the history of the region in order to understand reports on issues concerning the conflict.<sup>33</sup>

Media can also serve to disseminate information about peace and war by inspiring people to make opinions and decision on development and human rights in a society. The media can improve knowledge and shape perceptions and attitudes about a variety of subjects, and thus influence peace issues and behavior. It is imperative that the responsible media workers should have a positive attitude towards peace process issues. The government's efforts alone are not sufficient in dealing with the multiple causes of conflict because it is often party to a conflict. Media can further raise the legitimacy of groups and leaders working for peace and they can emphasize the benefits that peace can secure. However, if instead the media negatively report on the risks and dangers associated with compromise and give legitimacy to those opposed to concession, and reinforce negative stereotypes of the enemy, the media can serve as a destructive agent in peace processes.<sup>34</sup>

A free media is the foundation of democracy, peace development, and the establishment of a just society. Especially in a time of conflict, the responsibility of media is vital, since they will share the opinions of people, and present solutions to the present conflict. Journalists should convey the interests of the larger public in their work, especially when regions are suffering from tumultuous political conflict. The role of media is also to create a secure atmosphere. Media can intensify conflict, but it can also facilitate the peace process by educating people. By serving as a mediator, the media can play an important role in integrating truth and reconciliation into the agenda.<sup>35</sup> According to Gadi Wolfsfeld it is important that both sides of the conflict realize that the news media van can be just as important as the battle on the ground. Both sides know that they are also being reported on by international media, and there is a major struggle over who should be cast as the victim.<sup>36</sup> Headlines that focus on threats, accusations, and sensational confrontations generate anger on both sides. Disagreements can turn into crises, enemies become more frightening and opponents more vicious. When the media highlights the angry and violent forces, it becomes increasingly difficult for leaders, moderators, and civil society to carry out a reasonable debate over the issue.

The news should ideally be a forum where proponents and opponents can express their views openly and reasonably. However, it is important to identify the structures and processes that prevent constructive criticism and a healthy debate over the peace process.<sup>37</sup> Gadi Wolfsfeld believes that journalists have an ethical obligation to encourage reconciliation among hostile populations. At a minimum, he believes they should not harm possibilities for peace.<sup>38</sup> If journalists stated their own biases at the outset of what they have written, it would be easier

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<sup>33</sup> Philo 108ff

<sup>34</sup> [http://www.cplanka.org/research\\_papers/Role\\_of\\_Media\\_in\\_Peace\\_Processes.pdf](http://www.cplanka.org/research_papers/Role_of_Media_in_Peace_Processes.pdf) Centre for Policy Alternatives 22 November 2005

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0505/S00320.htm> 22 November 2005

<sup>36</sup> Palestine Israel Journal, Gadi Wolfsfeld, 5

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.cplanka.org/research\\_papers/Role\\_of\\_Media\\_in\\_Peace\\_Processes.pdf](http://www.cplanka.org/research_papers/Role_of_Media_in_Peace_Processes.pdf) Centre for Policy Alternatives 22 November 2005

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.usip.org/pubs/peaceworks/pwks37.pdf> 22 November 2005

for readers to detect problems rooted in prejudice. In possessing this ethical obligation, journalists should not blindly accept every peace proposal that calls for promise, nor should they act as propaganda organs for governments. The goals of journalists working in conflict areas should be to provide as much information as possible about the roots of the problem and to encourage a public debate that is rational and that explores different resolution possibilities. They should *not* cause harm by raising the level of hate, distrust, and violence between different communities.<sup>39</sup>

## VII. Conclusion

Our outlook reflects our experience and knowledge. What we know is affected by what we read in the media, but ultimately, we make our own judgments. When we read something, we bring our own biases into the interaction. If one is partial to a particular side, we are very likely to neglect information that presents a different point of view. The mass media is a very powerful force that tremendously influences people in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and around the world. Both parties of the conflict charge the other side's media with bias, and such charges are indisputable. However, arguing as to which party is responsible for sustaining a more biased media does not bring us closer to a future of peace. Instead, it is important to see how media can be used as a tool to achieve peace and to promote tolerance. Most peace processes are extremely lengthy and complex. Journalistic norms and routines dictate the selection of sources and the construction of storylines, and can have a very significant effect on the interpretation that appears most logical. The news media is the channel through which most citizens receive important information about the political climate surrounding a peace process: for instance is the peace process moving forward or back, is the other side keeping its agreements etc.<sup>40</sup> The media must provide sufficient context of the conflict in order to give readers a comprehensive understanding of the different factors at play. From this understanding, they can analyze and create their own standpoint regarding the conflict.

Communication is vital to coexist. However, it is often difficult to declare that the media is encouraging communication rather than focusing on the violence. Atrocity journalism will very likely promote atrocity. One can also easily fall into the discussion of the meaning of objectivity, and more importantly the meaning of objective media. Most probably, complete objectivity is impossible as we are a product of our surroundings. It is necessary to recognize that media plays a central role in the promotion of peace. The task of the journalist is very difficult. There is not one single account of what happens in the conflict because there are always two different sides that provide very different accounts of what occurs. Hence, the journalist has to try to balance these two sides against each other. This reality is further complicated when the journalist confronts additional division within the two major parties involved.<sup>41</sup>

As the Israeli writer David Grossman once wrote:

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.usip.org/pubs/peaceworks/pwks37.pdf> 22 November 2005

<sup>40</sup> [http://www.cplanka.org/research\\_papers/Role\\_of\\_Media\\_in\\_Peace\\_Processes.pdf](http://www.cplanka.org/research_papers/Role_of_Media_in_Peace_Processes.pdf) Centre for Policy Alternatives 22 November 2005

<sup>41</sup> Philo 1

*Few of us, Israelis or Palestinian, can be proud of what we have done during these past years...of what we have collaborated in whether actively or in passive acceptance of the noise – the collaboration of turning away our eyes, of suspending our souls, of anesthetizing ourselves. I often feels suffocated, claustrophobic, caught between the deceptive deceitful words that all interested parties – the governments, the army, the media – are constantly trying to impose on those of us who must live in this disaster area. Yet if we reformulate a situation that already seems beyond hope and set in stone, we are able to recall that there is in fact no divine decree that doomed us to be the helpless victims of apathy and paralysis.*<sup>42</sup>

When trying to analyze the media coverage in Israel and Palestinian Territories, there are many competing perspectives that need to be explained and understood. There are disputes over the history as well as of the origins of the conflict. While religion is a central factor in the region's problems, the conflict is far more all-encompassing. By perceiving the conflict only as a fight over religious lands and sites, shallow solutions often emanate. The religious tensions in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict are underscored by other social and economic problems.<sup>43</sup> Another point of contention regards the films that have emerged on both sides. In addition, the influence of language is a very important factor that needs to be taken into account when analyzing the coverage. In order to give readers a balanced report of what is occurring, the journalist should try to humanize the counterpart and to cover all actions with sufficient historical context of the events. The media is a central element used to exercise power in a society. The media can set agendas by highlighting some topics and, on the other hand, by limiting other information. Ideas are linked to interest and the competing interest will seek to explain the world in a way that their own position is justified.<sup>44</sup>

As noted by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan:

*...by giving voice and visibility to all people – including and especially the poor, the marginalized and members of minorities – the media can help remedy the inequalities, the corruption, the ethnic tensions and the human rights abuses that form the root causes of so many conflicts.*<sup>45</sup>

Media must stop promoting the conflict through violent and inhuman portrayals of “the other.” By using incitement they damage the process of reconciliation between hostile populations.

The myths, stereotyping, and language of both sides need to be examined in order to initiate the promotion of common ground and open communication between the populations. There is not yet a substantial body of scholarship that investigates what role the media conceivably could play in preventing or ameliorating international or intra-state conflict. In addition, there

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<sup>42</sup> Israel Palestine Journal: 94

<sup>43</sup> Philo: 134 ff

<sup>44</sup> Philo: 94 f

<sup>45</sup> [http://www.gppac.org/documents/Media\\_book\\_nieuw/a\\_c\\_introduction.htm](http://www.gppac.org/documents/Media_book_nieuw/a_c_introduction.htm) Geneva Humanitarian Forum

is little practical information available to help guide diplomats, mediators, parties in conflict, journalists, or media managers on how to minimize the often negative role of media in conflict, and how to use the power of the media to assist in conflict prevention.<sup>46</sup>

The breadth and depth of media reporting today often leaves the reader insufficiently informed. The media must expand its role and program. Media need training and educational programs on peace are absolutely vital, as is securing the financial assistance to establish such programs. The role of media in the peace process is critical. Consequently, extensive time and energy must be devoted to reforming the media in order to best serve the peace and security interests of the Israeli and Palestinian people.

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<sup>46</sup> [http://www.nyu.edu/cwpnm/media\\_conflict](http://www.nyu.edu/cwpnm/media_conflict) 22 November