
Foreword

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Foreword

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- 1 This issue of the *Bulletin of the French Research Center in Jerusalem* makes available most presentations made during the international conference “The Dynamics of Images in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” which took place on November 7, 2011, at the French Research Center in Jerusalem, and on November 8, 2011 at the Department of Communication, Tel Aviv University.
- 2 We are quite aware that the topic of the media coverage of the conflict is a highly controversial one and has been so for a long time. In addition, in the years 2000s, the Internet has revived the controversies by allowing increased media monitoring and criticism. While we make no claim to be neutral observers or outsiders (this would be absurd, one organizer being a French Israeli Academic living in Tel Aviv, the other a French researcher living in Jerusalem) we did try to avoid polemics and controversies.
- 3 However, we decided not to focus on the moot¹ questions of “fairness” and “objectivity”. Much work on the role of the media in the conflict is, ultimately, of this kind, static for the most part and focusing only on coverage at a given moment. It ultimately aims at demonstrating that this article/newspaper/journalist/country is pro or anti (Palestinian/Israeli). We try to avoid a static/political approach and to analyze the way media representations are moving, across borders, media, periods, and are produced, discussed, appropriated within a complex network of actors, and often in unpredictable manners. We have invited historians, discourse analysis, sociologists but also journalists, bloggers, people who both analyze media and who work inside the media, in order to understand the part representations play, before judging them.
- 4 In recent years, the so-called digital revolution has made media coverage, *lato sensu*, even more fluid and hard to follow. It has changed journalism and the way it is consumed around the world and in Israel/Palestine². The new media added much to a still remarkably high production of news, for a relatively small territory: it is estimated that there are 1 400 foreign journalists based in Israel in 2012; and the number is higher in times of crises³. At the time of this conference, the use of new media was by political actors was in its infancy, but rising quickly. The Israeli government, after the failure of the second Lebanon War (2006), started investing in new media seriously, although this

did not always mean successfully, be in the first Gaza War (2008-9), or the Gaza flotilla raid (2010), which were much discussed during the conference. The use of social media was even more noticeable during the Gaza battle of last November⁴, resorting to the whole gamut: YouTube, Facebook, Tweeter. With much less resources, the Hamas did not neglect the social media. ”

- 5 Only part of the interventions of the conference is published here⁵. It will be noted by readers that in this conference there is more discussion either of Israel’s image, or of Israel and Palestine together, than of Palestine itself. We did try to have some Palestinian speakers, or experts on Palestinian media and representations, but two factors prevented this. On the one hand, many Palestinians do not wish, at this historical juncture, to participate in a conference side-to-side with Israelis. On the other, few media researchers focus solely on the image of Palestine and Palestinians, and most analyze the conflict as a whole, or focus solely on Israel
- 6 This did not prevent some controversy to occur, obviously, and some differences of perspectives will be noted by the reader, including and not surprisingly, among Israeli researchers and media practitioners. In addition and unsurprisingly, criticism came from the outside⁶.
- 7 The first part of the proceedings is dedicated to foreign media coverage of the conflict. Jérôme Bourdon presents a historical overview of Western representations. He comes back on the reversal of sympathies which started with the Six-Day War in 1967. Most Western media so far had glorified Israel and Zionism. This sympathy was partially transferred to the Palestinians, especially in Europe, much less so in the U.S. Since the 2000s, we might have entered a third period, where the degradation of the image of Islam at large affects the Palestinians’. European public opinions seem more confused than before, once the US media and public opinion remain, overall, staunchly pro-Israeli. The power of representations is discussed by Marius Schattner, former AFP journalist, and researcher, who shows the semantic dilemmas which confront the French and Anglo-American journalists when they describe places, people and actions. The interest of its article also is to shed some light on the role of words in an “unbalanced conflict” which cannot be solved by the power of weapons alone. If words do not kill, however, they can contribute to delegitimization or incitement to hatred, argues Roselyne Koren, who points out the danger of analogies with the “paragon of historical evil”, nazism. She makes a plea for an “ethical commitment” of a non-neutral analyst of media discourse, which gives food for thought about the position of the journalist. Wilhelm Kempf discusses the potential but also the limitations of peace journalism, of which he is one of the pioneers, and which he defines as followed: “when editors and reporters are aware of their contribution to the construction of reality and of their responsibility to ‘give peace a chance’ ”. He illustrates this with a study of German media coverage of the second Intifada and the Gaza War. The question of the freedom of speech is at the heart of Delphine Matthieussent’s presentation. Commenting on her experience as author of a blog in a French daily newspaper, she explains how much she enjoyed the freedom provided by the Internet. However, although her blog was dedicated to everyday life in Israel/Palestine, she found herself exposed to violent criticism about alleged bias.
- 8 The question of visual images is discussed in the second part of the proceedings. Analyzing the role of maps in the representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Christine Leuenberger shows to what extent supposedly “illustrative”, “background” maps unfold within a complex social, cultural, and political context. Her article shows

striking divergence between maps on British, American and Arab news sites. Tal Morse's article exposes the results of a study of 21 years of photojournalism in Israel on the image of death. Focusing on the production of images, but also on the way journalists reflect on them, he describes the conflict between professional norms, the public interest and privacy, and shows how the Israeli media distinguish between categories of victims. Photographs have much in common with cartoonists, tells us cartoonist Michel Kichka: they are war reporters, although on a different frontline; they both create icons, and they have to choose an angle, if not to take sides. He illustrates this with numerous drawings of his colleagues, authors which sometimes chose to criticize both sides or to take a stand. Kichka also offers us a precious testimony on the history of cartooning and on his own career.

- 9 The third part of the volume, entitled "Israel: commitments", focus on the debates which started inside Israeli society (in the Academy, the literary world, the army), although they came to be "exported" outside Israel. Ilan Greislaammer presents the disputes opened by the Israeli "New historians", who dared to question the Zionist myths and the official narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Especially from abroad, the literary authors affiliated to the Peace Camp are still too often seen as hegemonic but, as Cyril Aslanov explains, this perception is biased. He analyzes, in an original research on the ideological and aesthetic history of the Israeli literature, the difficulties of what he terms a right-wing dandyism facing a left-wing Bohemianism. Yael Munk, a cinema researcher, shows the links between Israeli cinema and the clips recorded and broadcast, on the net, by the organization "Breaking the Silence", which encourages Israeli soldiers to report on war crimes. Evaluating their contribution to the representation of the conflict and to public debate, she describes how these clips help to illuminate the ethical dilemmas of soldiers who feel victims of their own nation.
- 10 Israel's communication policy and strategy are the focus of the fourth part. Zohar Kampf discusses the discourse of apology, regret and expression of sorrow produced by Israeli authorities, and how journalists participate in constructive this discourse in a positive way (as promoters of reconciliation) or a cynical one (as tellers of melodramatic stories). He reveals how Israel, who played a leading role in the promotion of the 'age of apology' as the representative of Jewish victims, rejects the position of the offender or accepts it only partly, in order, ultimately, to restore its image. The history of Israel's Information policy (known as "hasbara" in Hebrew) is presented by Meron Medzini, an Academic who is also a former head of the GPO and spokesman for the Prime Minister's bureau. He recounts the key changes of policy since the origins – when secrecy was the norm – until the aftermaths of the creation of the Ministry for Public Diplomacy in 2009. Underlining the difficulties with which still confront the heads of Hasbara to portrait Israel, the author incriminates the absence of a global strategy of public relations.

NOTES

1.

Moot here as: quite debatable, not as irrelevant; although sometimes, as our readers will notice, the question of bias is either not relevant, or not directly relevant, to the dynamics of images.

2. According to the International Telecommunication Union, the number of users of Internet in Israel grow up from 18,2% in 2000 up to 70% on November 2012, whereas in the Palestinian territories (West Bank only) this number grow up from 3,41% in 2000 up to 58,9 in 2012; there is actually 48,7% of users of Facebook in Israel and 39,1% in the West Bank. Statistics available on: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm>

3. During the November 2012, the events were covered by 2 100 journalists, working for 450 media foreign outlets. Source: Communiqué of the Israeli Government Press Office (11/18/2012).

4. "The blogosphere and new media are another war zone", according to Avital Leibovich, spokesperson for the Israeli army, quoted in Max Socol, "IDF launches You Tube Channel", *The Jerusalem Post*, December 30, 2008, available on: <http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Article.aspx?id=126931>. The effect of this new "deployment" remains much debated. See for example: <http://972mag.com/marketing-israel-is-it-the-campaign-or-does-the-product-suck/63041/>

5. The other presentations were: Leon Barkho, Jonköping University, Sweden, "A Critical Analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian Media Images as Presented by the BBC and Al-Jazeera English"; Daniel Dor, Tel Aviv University, "Politics, Ideology and discourse analysis: the Israeli coverage of the conflict"; Jonathan Rynhold, Bar Ilan University, "Framing the Conflict: Narratives in the West"; Ariel Schweitzer, Tel Aviv University, University of Paris-8, "Between Aesthetics and Politics: The Reception of Israeli Cinema in France. A testimony"; Tamir Shaefer, Hebrew University, Israel, "Mediated Public Diplomacy", and Rebecca L. Stein, Duke University, U.S., "The Arab-Israeli Conflict on YouTube". In addition, we had presentations by four journalists, Qassem Khatib, Correspondent in Israel for the MBC channel, and three journalists from *Haaretz*; Avirama Golan (on her book *Hope for an Israeli Spring: Letter to a Palestinian Friend*); Avi Issacharoff, "The conflict on the net", Gideon Levy, on his book *The Punishment of Gaza*.

6. Rather audaciously wrapping up 4 of our speakers as post-zionists, a so-called "Israel Academic monitor" denounced "a biased conference. " We'll take this as an illustration of the difficult of working on this topic, and on the conflict at all.

AUTHORS

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Medium, Israeli Collective Memory and the show “This is Your Life” (with A. Ben Amos). *Jewish Social Studies* 2012.

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