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The peace process in cultural conflict: The role of the media[1]

Kurzfassung: Der vorliegende Artikel untersucht (1) den kulturellen Charakter des palästinensisch-israelischen Konflikts; (2) die "Nicht-Handhabbarkeit" von Kulturkonflikten; (3) Modelle des Konfliktmanagements: „Versöhnung" /"Beendigung des Konflikts" versus "Konflikttransformation" und deren Relation zu Kulturkonflikten; (4) die schwerwiegenden Konsequenzen, welche die Fehlzuordnung von Konflikten und Modellen nach sich ziehen kann, z.B. wenn das Versöhnungsmodell auf Kulturkonflikte angewendet wird (5) die sich verändernde Rolle der Medien für internationale Beziehungen und ihren Beitrag zur „Krise der Erwartungen" die im September 2000 im Ausbruch der Intifada ihre Früchte trug; (6) die Möglichkeiten der Medien, einen Beitrag zu Friedensprozessen zu leisten; und (7) einige der Implikationen, welche sich aus der Übernahme des Konflikttransformationsmodells durch die Medien ergeben.
Aufgezeigt werden der (im Unterschied zu anderen gewaltsamen Konfrontationen) grundlegend kulturelle Charakter des Nahostkonflikts, insbesondere in seiner palästinensisch-israelischen Spielart; die „Nicht-Handhabbarkeit" von Kulturkonflikten insofern, als sie nur schwer und möglicherweise überhaupt nicht gelöst werden können; dass es neben der Versöhnung auch die Konflikttransformation als konstruktive Möglichkeit des Ausgangs von Konflikten gibt; dass die Fehlinterpretation von Konfliktlösungsstrategien sowohl in der Politik als auch in den Medien und in der öffentlichen Meinung eine „Krise der Erwartungen" heraufbeschwören kann, und dass die Medien in all diesen Prozessen eine wichtige Rolle spielen.

Abstract: This article explores (1) the cultural nature of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; (2) the "intractability" of cultural conflicts; (3) conflict management models: reconciliation/"end-of-conflict" versus "conflict transformation" and their relation to cultural conflict; (4) the serious consequences of the wrong matching of models and conflicts, such as using the reconciliation model in cultural conflict; (5) the changing role of the media in international relations, and their contribution to the "crisis of expectations" that came to fruition in September 2000, with the eruption of the Intifada; (6) the possibility of the media contributing to peace processes; and (7) implications of the media adoption of the conflict transformation model.
The premises are that, unlike other violent confrontations, the Middle Eastern conflict is fundamentally cultural, particularly in its Palestinian-Israeli version; that cultural conflicts are "intractable", in the sense that they are very difficult, perhaps impossible to resolve; that reconciliation is not the only possible or desirable outcome of conflict: transformation is another viable option; that mistaken interpretations of conflict-resolution strategies can lead to "crises of expectations" in policy-making, in the media, and in public opinion; and that the media can play important roles in these processes.

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1   Updated version of the author's "Cultural Conflict in the Middle East: The Media as Peacemakers," published in E. Gilboa (ed.), Media and Conflict: Framing Issues, Making Policy, Shaping Opinions, Ardsley, NY, Transnational, 2002.

1.   The Middle East: A case of cultural conflict

One of the puzzling questions posed by the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is how to understand and explain the contradiction between the peace process based on the now defunct Oslo agreement and the violence that has accompanied it. Good illustrations of this are the surprise expressed over the eruption of the current Intifada in response to what had been seen by many Israelis and their supporters around the world as the generous offers made by Prime Minister Ehud Barak at the Camp David talks in 2000; and the criticism made by many Palestinians and their supporters of the lack of trust demonstrated by the Sharon government, and the excessive violence it has employed in response to Palestinian Authority declarations of readiness to renew talks.

In attempting to explain the contradiction, politicians, scholars and journalists have used a variety of terms and concepts. Arab/Islamic and Israeli/Jewish mentality, conflicting ideologies – nationalism, colonialism/anti-colonialism – and struggles over scarce resources such as land, oil, and water have been unconvincingly invoked as single or major factors. Although admittedly present in the conflict, none of them, neither singly nor in combination, has sufficed to fully explain the conflict's nature, contradictions and implications.

A fuller explanation of the contradiction can be achieved by combining the variables found in the positions of leading anthropologists, political psychologists, historians and others into an integrated cultural approach. Departing from the premise that the Middle Eastern conflict is anchored in profound symbols of the pursuit, formation, and preservation of Israeli and Palestinian collective identities, the present analysis is an effort to achieve the still-needed conceptual and operational application of this approach.

Thus, "essentialism" – the integration of primordial sentiments and inherited symbols of collective consciousness and identity, such as blood, race, language, land, or religion, offered by Clifford Geertz (1973) – can be regarded as a crucial cultural composite element in long-term highly-intensive conflicts. The complex cultural character of such conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, is highlighted by Herbert Kelman's argument that they are more than international or intergovernmental, as they affect the societies involved at the deepest levels of identity and existence. Anthony Smith's (2003) approach to culture as an integrative concept – which combines elements of subjective consciousness with ethnicity, "blood and origin," and long-term cultural characteristics with shorter-term civil and national affinities – offers a third important basis for a cultural approach to the understanding of conflicts and their contradictions. And, Michael Ignatieff (1993) highlights the centrality of identity symbols and traditional cultures in the civic and ethnic nationalism he discovered during his visits to the former Yugoslavia, Germany, the Ukraine, Quebec, Kurdistan, and Northern Ireland in the early 1990s.

2.   Cultural conflict: Exclusive, deep, long-lasting, total, global

Israeli-Palestinian relations suggest that cultural conflicts can be characterized by their exclusivity, depth, duration, totality and global nature.

The concept of "Jihad" illustrates the exclusivity of cultural conflict. Benjamin Barber (1992, 1995) has used this concept to describe the re-tribalization of human society, expressed in recent years by the dilution of nation-states, the establishment of new boundaries and the strengthening of specific identities. The Jihad's centrifugal movement has revived forgotten divisions, closed communities, and fundamentalist movements. Its essentialist nature rejects the centripetal character of Barber's second major current: "McWorld," the transnational socio-economic and cultural homogenization, inspired by globalizing markets, technology, and communications, and by a rapid diffusion of Western products. Michael Ignatieff (1993) gives indirect support to this view by making a conceptual distinction between a Jihad-inspired ethnic nationalism built around cultural symbols, and a more liberal and cosmopolitan, McWorldist concept of civic nationalism.

The "Jihadist" nature of cultural conflict is expressed in the total refusal to accept "the other." In cases such as the Middle East, this refusal can serve to culturally and symbolically fuel "highly-escalated conflict." Applied to territory, this is particularly interesting. As a resource or commodity, territory has been the subject of conflict, such as in the most recent Peru-Ecuador war of 1995, which was resolved by diplomatic negotiations and agreements, followed by reconciliation and the reestablishment of full relations. In contrast to such cases, territory in the Middle East represents a raison d'être and not just a strategic or economic resource, displaying symbols essential to the formation, existence, and preservation of collective identity. Jerusalem, Galilee, Hebron, Bethlehem, Judea and Samaria, collectively and individually, as well as the tracts of land between them, are exclusive symbols of being Jewish, Moslem, Christian, Palestinian or Israeli. The difficulty in making any compromises on such sentiments is central to the Middle Eastern conflict. Unlike conflicts in which violence and war are political, economic or ideological tools, the essentialist exclusiveness of Jihadist thinking and action fuels the view of war as a manifestation of acceptable primordial

sentiments, in which mutual recognition is almost impossible, suspicion and animosity permeate all spheres of life at all times, and violence is generally legitimized.

The strength of such feelings clarifies the depth of cultural conflict. Depth has to do with roots. The view of the Middle Eastern conflict as a mere national confrontation is artificial, irrelevant, and inadequate. Nationalism, a relatively recent European invention,[1] is capable of explaining cases of war and reconciliation in the context of territorial or economic conflict, but fails to explain the persistence of cultural conflict. Thus, the failure of all ideologies developed in the 19th century, including nationalism, to deal with cultural conflict, triggered a search for alternative, "tighter" frames of collective identity.

The continuity of cultural conflicts differs from the dynamics of conventional belligerence, in which war is an eruption of violence between more or less well-organized armies that interrupts periods of relative or absolute peace. Thus, unlike the Peru-Ecuador and similar conflicts, in cases of cultural conflict violence does not necessarily stop when peace agreements are signed. Israelis and Arabs have fought five conventional wars: in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982. In contrast, however, with the cyclical alternation of war and peace in conventional conflict, hostility has been uninterrupted in the area since the early 20th century, conducted by official forces, secret services, armed militias, terrorist/guerrilla organizations, and civilians. The "low intensity" and "irregular" categories of war elsewhere have found intense daily expressions in the Middle East: during the 1950s and 1960s they included the activities of Arab "infiltrators," Israeli retaliatory measures, and Israeli-Syrian or Israeli-Egyptian clashes; in the "war of attrition" that followed the 1967 war; in the rise of the PLO in the area, and the attempts made by Israel, Jordan, and others to destabilize the organization since the 1970s; during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in the 1980s and the withdrawal more than a decade later; in the first and second Intifadas; and in the terrorist/guerilla activities interspersed over the entire period. The pattern has not really changed during the peace process that resulted from the Oslo agreements. Israel and the PLO officially pledged mutual recognition and peaceful relations, but nevertheless violence has continued. In this sense, the cultural conflict approach strongly correlates with models in warfare research, where cultural elements greatly contribute to escalation.

Totality and globality are defined by span and space. Cultural conflict is not confined to official military battle zones, as in conventional war. In the Middle East, this has been demonstrated by Palestinian violence against airline passengers, Olympic athletes, and civilians inside and outside Israel; by the violence of Israeli occupation forces and settlers against Palestinians; by battles between Mosad and Palestinian organizations in which no difference was made between guilty and innocent. For the Israelis, the totality of war has been expressed in acts of terrorism against military personnel and civilians; in the universal long period of obligatory military service for men and women; in the constant state of alert; and in the number and frequency of deaths and injuries. For the Palestinians, the totality of war has been expressed in the infringement of human rights and humiliating contacts with military occupation; in daily physical danger of bodily harm and death; and in violent interventions by Israeli settlers and others. No Palestinian family has been sheltered from this reality.

These characteristics clarify the extent to which conflicts rooted in culture are difficult, perhaps impossible to resolve.

3. "End-of-conflict" and reconciliation versus transformation

Lessons from the Middle East – the Oslo agreements and the second Intifada, for example – allow at least two perceptions of peace processes: the first maintains that peace agreements mean "end-of-conflict" and reconciliation.

The other maintains that negotiations and treaties represent no more than a transformation of the conflict's nature. "End-of-conflict" and reconciliation are concepts applicable to one or more dimensions of conflict – territorial, political, economic, ideological, ethnic, religious. These concepts seem adequate to study conflicts that do not result from the search for identity symbols, and whose solution does not affect essentialist sentiments.

But they do not seem to function in the contradictory coexistence of peace treaties and eruptions of violence which are typical of cultural conflict. Thus, since the mid-1990s, doubt has accompanied the hopes aroused by the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. In doubt was the now irrelevant question of whether the Oslo peace process was irreversible. Indeed, doubts emerged with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin; with the political downfall of his partners, his party and his peace camp; with the victory of the Israeli right and its anti-Oslo positions in the elections of 1996 and 2001; with the escalating violence employed by Palestinians and Israelis, not always well-conceived, not always proportional, and always condoned by right-wing, left-wing, and national unity governments. On the other hand,

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1   This argument is based on the "modernist"/instrumental" historical approach offered by Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, and others to the concept of "nation" as a relatively new development in Europe during the late 18th and 19th centuries, rather than a pattern of social organization developed in the Middle Ages or earlier, as maintained by historians of the "primordialist" school.

hopes about the success of the process have been nurtured by the unprecedented and paradoxical return of large and important tracts of land to the Palestinians by Benjamin Netanyahu's right wing government in 1996-1999; by public expressions supporting the process, including Ehud Barak's election in 1999; and by a more or less viable Israeli-Palestinian coexistence, at least until September 2000. The contradiction of these tendencies has been expressed, first, in the gulf between declarations made by both sides in favor of peace vis-à-vis their radically opposed essentialist positions on the questions of Jerusalem, the settlements, or the Palestinian right of return.

A second expression of the contradiction, particularly since September 2000, has been the continual breaching of cease-fire agreements, mostly by Arafat, but also by Israel.

In order to understand this contradiction, adequate concepts are necessary.

The exclusivity, depth, continuity, totality, and globality of cultural conflict do not allow for viewing peace processes as full or even partial and gradual reconciliation.

This clarifies why the resolution of conflict is so difficult, why cultural wars do not end when the cannons fall silent, and why peace is not secured by the signing of agreements.

4. Conflict transformation

Another vision is that peace processes in cultural conflicts do not lead to reconciliation but rather to a transformation of the conflict (Burgess et al., 1997; Lederach, 1995; Vayrinen, 1991). The terms "conflict resolution" and "conflict management" serve to clarify this vision. The former implies the possibility and need to end conflict. This implication assumes that conflict is a short-term phenomenon that can be "resolved" permanently. The assumption behind "conflict management" is that conflicts are long-term processes that often cannot be quickly resolved. But the notion of "management" suggests that people in conflict can be guided or controlled. In addition, "management" suggests that the goal is to reduce or control conflict volatility rather than to deal with the real sources of conflict.

"Conflict transformation" does not suggest simply eliminating or containing conflict, but recognizes the complex nature of some conflicts, in which relationships are changed, communication and patterns of social organization are altered, and images of the self and of the other are transformed. Conflict transformation is also a prescriptive concept.

It suggests that while conflict is destructive, it can be transformed, and that self-images, relationships, and social structures can be improved. This involves transforming perceptions of issues, actions, and people or groups. Since conflict usually transforms perceptions by accentuating the differences between people and positions, effective conflict transformation can improve mutual understanding.

Even when interests, values, and needs appear to be irreconcilable, progress can be made if groups engaged in conflict can achieve a fairly accurate understanding of each other. Thus, the presidents, government ministers, politicians, diplomats, and journalists who took part in the celebrations of the Israeli-Palestinian peace agreements were undoubtedly participating in historic events. Together with millions of TV spectators around the globe, they witnessed the end of one era and the beginning of another. However, the optimism of the agreements, and the less euphoric reality of ongoing violence, did not signify conventional post-war peacemaking. They represent, at best, a changing pattern in the relations of long-standing warring parties. Instead of a direct confrontation, this new structure has featured an interaction of two coalitions, new in their transnational orientation, and rare in their intercultural composition.

On one hand, a hitherto impossible "*peace coalition*," made up of the Israeli and Palestinian official positions, and supported by the governments of Jordan, Egypt, North Africa, the Gulf, the United States, Europe, and others, has been making efforts to provide the peace agreements with acceptable and durable contents. On the other hand, an "*alliance of the extremes*," bringing together an unprecedented mix of radical right-wing Jewish Israelis, Islamic fundamentalists, PLO critics, and others, has been directly and indirectly supporting each other, through the use of verbal, diplomatic, and physical violence, to reject any agreement opposed to their essentialist-Jihadist convictions.

5. Peacemaking models and crises of expectations

The confrontation of the coalitions explains the violence that accompanies the process, shows the resilience of cultural conflicts, even when political agreement is reached, and demonstrates the stable nature of cultural conflicts, even in the context of political treaties between powerful entities.

Mistaken interpretations of conflict can have serious consequences. Viewing the Oslo process as reconciliation ignores the importance of these factors. This and the belief that the process represents the end of the conflict produced the

confusion, frustration and crisis of expectations that have been affecting all involved: right- and left-wing Israelis; settlers, and peaceniks; and Arafat's supporters and opponents among the Palestinians and in the Arab world.

Those who interpreted the spirit of Oslo according to the transformation model and considered the cultural environment and the realistic chances of reducing tension and violence, have lowered their level of expectations, which enabled them to perceive the crisis less radically, and react to violence more rationally.

Moreover, it can be expected that in addition to providing more realistic interpretations of reality, the transformation approach might contribute to the areas of policy-making, crisis management and education, and explain how to relate to the two coalitions, how to deal with the extremes and how to control polarization within the Israeli and Palestinian societies.

6. The media in war and peace

How are the media involved in these processes? What is their share in creating crises of expectations, and how can they contribute to easing them and to promoting realistic peace processes? We now turn to these questions.

International communications in recent decades can be described along two major axes: the first is a modification of media functions; the second is media preference for war and violence rather than peace coverage.

Modification of Functions

The roles of the media in international relations have changed. The traditional tasks of gathering and selecting facts, and of constructing, encoding, and representing realities (Tuchman, 1978; Hall, 1980) have been expanded. Journalists are no longer expected to simply present the news "fairly and without bias in language … unambiguous, undistorting …" (Fowler, 1991, 1).

In recent decades, the media have assumed new roles. The 1970s' Kissinger media diplomacy, elaborated in academic detail two decades later (Kissinger,1995), confirms Abba Eban's (1983) diagnosis of the impact open media diplomacy has had on the collapse of traditional diplomatic reticence. Media organizations and professionals now participate in international relations, both at-large and as catalysts and 'diplomatic brokers' (Larson, 1986; Gilboa, 1998).

As participants-at-large, the media take part in exchanges between journalists, policy-makers, and field staff (Larson, 1988), as illustrated by the TV sets in decision-makers' offices and 'situation rooms'; by briefings in official airplanes or in sealed compounds, such as in Grenada, Panama, and the Gulf War (Andersen, 1991; Servaes, 1991); and by media-monitored 'secret negotiations' such as in Camp David (1979); Dayton, Ohio (1995); Stormont Castle (1997, 1998); and Wye River (1998).

As catalysts, the media provide arenas and resources for international dialogue. They include shuttle diplomacy (Kissinger, 1995); 'tomahawk diplomacy' used in the 1998 Kosovo and Iraq crises (TIME, October 19, 1998); media exchanges (Clinton-Saddam, Rabin/Netanyahu-Arafat/Assad); and media events, such as summit meetings and the signing of peace agreements (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Gilboa, 1998).

As diplomatic brokers, the media conduct and sometimes initiate international mediation, in ways that often blur the distinctions between the roles of reporters and diplomats. This is illustrated by the participation of the media in diplomatic processes, such as Walter Cronkite's claim to having inspired Anwar Sadat's 1977 visit to Jerusalem (Cronkite, 1996; Gilboa, 1998); or ABC's Ted Koppel's live-on-air Jerusalem 'town meeting', conducted during the Intifada in 1988, and featuring unprecedented face-to-face Israeli-Palestinian negotiations (ABC News, 1988); and, by work behind enemy lines, such as CNN's Peter Arnett's reporting from Baghdad during the Gulf War (Arnett, 1991), Christian Ammanpour's in Iraq, during Operation 'Desert Fox' in 1998, and Al Jazeera's coverage of the war in Afghanistan in 2001.

Media preference for war and violence

Professional and historical reasons explain the preference for war as media subject matter and symbolic inspiration. War is more compatible than peace with media professional standards, conventional discourse and economic structures. War provides visuals and images of action. It is associated with heroism and conflict, focuses on the emotional rather than on the rational, and satisfies news-value demands: the present, the unusual, the dramatic, simplicity, action, personalization, and results (Galtung and Ruge, 1970; Bird and Dardenne, 1988). This preference is magnified by the vivid colors, clear-cut polarities, unexpected features, and primordial sentiments typical of cultural conflict; and its variety of images and voices exceeds that of conventional warfare, conveying Aristotle's "pity and fear" at their "best." The typical peace coverage of press conferences, "talking heads" and airport scenes, has much lower news value.

The history of international journalism adds weight to this preference.

Political constraints – mostly the Cold War's – caused the media to adopt the governmental rhetoric of power and violence in their "official discourse." "Peace talk" was labeled "communist" in the 1950s and 1960s, and "challenger discourse" until the late 1980s, with low popularity and entry into the general-audience media (Gamson, 1988; Meyer, 1995). This is also typical of communications research, where revisionist historians have been documenting the claim that the development of media research coincides with research done for official agencies since World War II. The work of some "founding fathers" was sponsored and funded by the Radio Bureau of the Office of War Information, the Information Division of the War Department, the US Air Force, and the CIA (Robinson, 1988, Bruck, 1989, Simpson, 1994).

Although there is no conclusive evidence of a direct and causal relation between warfare and research approaches, one cannot ignore that most of these researchers founded or joined leading communication departments and institutes (Rowland, 1983); that research on the media coverage of Vietnam and the Middle East deals only briefly with peace talks; and that, compared with the multitude of media studies on Middle Eastern wars, there are only few studies of the media in the peace process.

7.   A new media environment

The new powers of the media as actors in international processes have made a significant contribution to the crisis of expectations that has typified the peace process in the Middle East. The clarification of this argument calls for a discussion of the media climate since the end of the Cold War.

The features of this new climate – concerted peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts, together with the revival of radical and sometimes violent separatist movements and demands (Ignatieff, 1993; Barber, 1995) – have posed significant normative and practical challenges to the media.

One question is whether the media should use their new powers to promote peace. Conservative objections to a peace-oriented media on the grounds of loss of objectivity can be countered with the argument that the changing functions of the media in international relations are part of an ongoing erosion of mythical "objectivity" and of the acceptance of subjective reality-construction concepts. The question of "whose version of peace should be promoted?" can be answered by demanding that free expression, professional integrity and ethics should be guaranteed, just as in the coverage of conventional crime.

Even considering the differences in the news value of war and peace, professional integrity and ethics demand that, together with legitimate considerations of sales and ratings, the media orient themselves to values that match their critical stand on crime and drugs; and that in accord with the code-of-conduct which calls for media responsiveness to social changes, they should join current peacemaking efforts. Finally, if this position is accepted in general, it should certainly be adopted with regard to cultural conflict, because of both its frightening dimensions and the media potential to help in its transformation. In this sense, the media should be required to produce persuasive symbols of security, alternatives to those of war; to construct credible realities of change in the roles played by arch-enemies, once they become peacemaking partners; and to act as participants, catalysts, and brokers in the psychological adjustment – including in the reduction of dissonance, paranoiac feelings, etc. – to the unknown environment created by peace processes, that dramatically differs from a long-term climate of war.

8.   The media in the Middle Eastern conflict

Another question is how can and how should the media be involved in the new international climate. The performance of local and foreign media in the Middle Eastern conflict can provide considerable insight into this topic. Since the Oslo process became public, the media have been dealing with the dilemma of how to function in a peacemaking era, and of choosing a model to guide coverage. Two phases are characteristic of this dilemma. In the first, between the mid-1990s and September 2000, the end-of-conflict and reconciliation model inspired coverage. However, like the leaders and politicians who adopted this model, the media had difficulty in explaining the violence which had been accompanying the process from as early as 1996, after which the peace camp began to lose momentum.

In the second phase, starting in September 2000, the media have been forced, together with Israeli and other leaders and in the face of changing public opinion, to abandon the reconciliation model, at least in order to resolve the contradictions between the peace process and the ongoing violence.

Preference of the reconciliation model

Public opinion on the peace process, led by the Oslo negotiators and by the media – at least until September 2000 – has shown a preference for reconciliation, negotiation and mutual concessions. Also the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin served to fortify the consensus around the Oslo agreements (Wolfsfeld, forthcoming).

On the other hand, there are serious doubts about the belief, cherished by the Israeli right wing, that the open and full media mobilization behind the Oslo agreements resulted in a brainwashing process in which public opinion was captured. Wolfsfeld's contention that many critical positions were expressed by and in the media indeed reduces the validity of this argument. Nevertheless, it is equally acceptable to claim that the professional style and the general direction of the world's media coverage contributed directly and indirectly to the creation of a favorable public climate toward the Oslo process. This has been expressed, for example, in the wide coverage and in the tone of wondering admiration attached by the media to the main actors in the process, to the signing of the agreements, and to events such as the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Peace to Arafat, Peres and Rabin. Some additional findings provide good illustrations of the formation of this sympathetic climate. Wolfsfeld finds that the public and political environments and social consensual expectations have influenced the positions taken by the media, particularly the overall optimistic tone that has obscured imminent dangers. Other studies (Dente Ross, 2002; Mandelzis, 2002) point to the favorable discourse and framing of the Oslo process in the international press and the legitimacy given by the Israeli media to the parties in the process, particularly Yasser Arafat and his PLO movement. This is rather surprising, since it contradicts the traditional preference of the media for the action and drama of war and violence.

Background factors and professional reasons can provide at least some clarification. Background factors include the emotional openness of the public towards peace; the symbiotic relations between the media and governments; and inferences from earlier peace processes.

- Emotional Openness of the Public: When the Oslo negotiations became public, a climate developed characterized by emotional openness and psychological readiness to see the agreements in terms of reconciliation, particularly among the agreements' supporters. In this sense, it is interesting to note that the Israeli extreme right was more realistic than the left and than the media, with its reservations against interpreting Oslo in terms of reconciliation. Right-wing activists and parties have supported and promoted the notion that the conflict has deep cultural roots. Even those who reject their radical conclusions have to respond to the accuracy of this diagnosis.

- Media-Government Symbiotic Relations: The tendency of the media to adopt official views in return for an open flow of information is well known. In the wake of the Cold War, particularly after Oslo, the Israeli and international media could not afford to ignore the manifestations of governmental and public opinion supporting the peace process.

- Inferences from earlier peace processes: The peace processes with Egypt and Jordan gave the media and the public an idea of what peace should be. The inferences from these agreements to the Palestinian case seemed even more plausible with the recognition by the media that even though the former agreements have not developed into full normal relations, they have included gestures of reconciliation on the part of Anwar Sadat, King Hussein, Menahem Begin, and Yitzhak Rabin; and an "acceptable" amount of violence.

Professional reasons derive from the paradox that reconciliation has news value, particularly against a background of violence. A good example is the ample coverage given to King Hussein's visit to the Israeli town of Beth Shemesh in 1994 and the humble and conciliatory stance he took in apologizing to the families of young women killed by a Jordanian soldier in a border incident.

Thus the media could not ignore the developing climate in favor of reconciliation. The professional factors related to this dynamics include some aspects of news value: polarization and contrast; and media events.

- Polarization and contrast increase the news value of an item. In the reconciliation model, these practices seem to convert the coverage of violence into the exception that proves the rule. Examples include the massacre committed by Baruch Goldstein in Hebron's Cave of the Patriarchs in 1994; the violence which accompanied the opening of the Wailing Wall tunnel in 1996, and even the first stages of the Intifada. These were covered by the media in an alternating style, in which stories of violence were contrasted with coverage of the ongoing peace process, a factor that enhanced the news value of both types of stories.

- Media Events: Dayan and Katz's media events theory (1985, 1992) illustrates the emphasis on reconciliation in peace coverage. The perception of newsworthy reconciliation is evident in various types of media events coverage: The signing of peace agreements, in pre-planned highly performative and widely-covered rituals of new or renewed friendship, can be identified as "coronation events": "ceremonial parades … ritual transformation of the hero from one status to the next ..." (Katz and Dayan, 1985, 306).

Also a tone of reconciliation, accompanied by high news value, is present in "conquest events," where a "hero – facing insuperable odds – enters the enemy camp ..." (Katz and Dayan, 1985, 306), as in Sadat's visit to Jerusalem.

Examples of this type of matching between reconciliation and news value in the Middle East include the official and unofficial visits of Egyptian, Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli officials to each others' cities and sites during negotiations; the presence of Arab leaders at Yitzhak Rabin's funeral; Arafat's visit of condolence to Lea Rabin; the participation of Israeli leaders in King Hussein's funeral, etc.

The coverage of "contest events," "rule-governed battles of champions in sports and politics, such as the World Cup or presidential debates ..." (Dayan and Katz, 1992, 26), in terms of reconciliation, also enjoys added news-value.

This was demonstrated by Netanyahu's highly-promoted negotiation discourse ("if they give [security] they get [land]; if they don't give, they don't get"); or by the already famous scene in which Ehud Barak and Arafat play the role of gentlemen jostling each other at the entrance of the White House, in the best tradition of slapstick comedy.

Abandoning the reconciliation model

It is not surprising that the escalation of violence in the fall of 2000 did not support theories of reconciliation. Ehud Barak's spectacular defeat in the Israeli election of 2001 provides irrefutable evidence to that effect. The media, local, regional, and international alike, discontinued the promotion of such perceptions. They did not go all the way, however. Abandoning the reconciliation model did not mean adopting the conflict transformation model, because of the conflict's cultural nature.

Thus, since late 2000 most explanations given by the media about changes in Palestinian-Israeli relations have dealt with the failure to reconcile rather than with the deeper roots of the conflict. Media coverage of Israeli and Palestinian violence has focused on the vanished dream of ending the conflict rather than on its complex cultural nature and context. Here too, studies such as Wolfsfeld's (forthcoming) and Dor's (2003) confirm that the reasons are linked with the contradictory nature of the professional requirements of news value and efficiency, in the adoption and abandonment of the reconciliation model on one hand, and in the conflict transformation model on the other.

- *Results*: The adoption of the reconciliation model by the media created "end-of-conflict expectations." Abandoning the model made the media emphasize the escalation of violence.

These are clear and striking results. In contrast, the open-endedness of the transformation model does not allow for a decisive presentation of results, a fact that imposes additional work on media professionals, reduces interest and produces lower news value.

- *Complexity*: The transformation model demands the media to present, and audiences to understand, complex processes, whereas both the media adoption and abandonment of the reconciliation model focus on simple events which increase production efficiency and have higher news value.

- *Historical Duration*: The transformation model requires the media to describe (and audiences to perceive) the long course of events. Also historical insight must be provided and understood. This requires more work and reduces news value. In contrast, the adoption and abandonment of the reconciliation model emphasizes the present, demands less effort on the part of the media and their audiences and has higher news value.

- *Rationality*: As it emphasizes logic and rationality, the transformation model requires the investment of more effort by the media and by audiences.

The adoption and abandonment of the reconciliation model involves emotional factors which have higher news value and are less labor-consuming in media production and consumption alike.

- *Personalization and Concretization*: The transformation model focuses on collective values and abstract symbols, while the adoption and abandonment of the reconciliation model involves relations between people and concrete entities. The latter is clearly less labor-intensive and has higher news value.

The characteristics of the transformation model with regard to these news value criteria are considered less attractive by media producers and consumers, at least compared with the reconciliation model.

9. Discussion

At least until September 2000, the media did not show much interest in the cultural nature of the conflict. Inspired by professional norms of efficiency and news value, the media preferred to emphasize the openness of public opinion to

reconciliation, positive governmental attitudes in this direction, and historical deductions from previous peace processes. Two major professional strategies were used in this context: the first was polarization and contrast, focusing on reconciliation against the background of the violence that has preceded and accompanied the peace process. The second was the coverage of media events related to reconciliation.

By using these practices, the media have contributed to the arousal of hope before and disappointment of expectations after the failure of the process. The Intifada forced the media to abandon the discourse of reconciliation. Frustrated by the collapse of the process, along with the majority of the public, the media returned to focusing on the escalating violence rather than on the deep cultural aspects of the conflict.

The conclusion is that the media must take the crucial and necessary step in full: to internalize the cultural meanings of the conflict; to transmit these meanings to the public, in order to raise the consciousness of their significance and consequences; and to encourage public debate, first on peacemaking under constraining cultural conditions; and secondly, on the choice between an interminable violent feud and a great but acceptable burden imposed by the transformation of conflict.

Adopting this strategy can pose a dilemma, calling upon the media to make a choice between the ideology of contributing to peacemaking and the professional demands of efficiency and news value. Confronting this dilemma might help the media deal with the idiosyncrasies of the transformation model and with the professionally uncomfortable dimensions of cultural conflict coverage. The satisfaction of these demands is difficult, because it means departing from current norms and standards. But this is the real test of an ethics and morality that goes beyond the technical levels of media professionalism.

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