6. The Role of the Media

Introduction

Advocates of nonviolent resistance have highlighted a crucial insight concerning struggles against occupation — the most punitive costs that can be inflicted upon an invader or occupier are not necessarily those that can be counted in material terms (the number of lives lost, tanks captured, installations destroyed, and such like). Of potentially greater significance is the cost an oppressor can be made to bear in terms of social and political division at home and censure from abroad. Thus, a major concern of tacticians of nonviolent struggle is to create situations that can cause moral outrage. The aim is to "stir sluggish consciences" by means of what has been termed "shame power". By creating situations in which the occupier is revealed as transgressing those values to which they lay claim (democracy, respect for human life and human rights, etc.), it is hoped that the seeds of moral doubt can be sown amongst the ranks of oppressors and onlookers. The fomenting of dissent and dissatisfaction amidst the occupying forces, the erosion of the occupying power's claims of legitimacy, the threat of social and political division on the home front, the loss of the support of allies and other third parties in the international arena — all these costly trends can be set in motion by means of nonviolent forms of resistance, such that even if the occupier is immune to moral qualms, expediency and self-interest can undermine their political will.

The effectiveness of such undermining activities crucially depends on communication. The stories and images that reveal the barbarism of the opponent, the illegitimacy of their cause, and the unjustified suffering for which they are responsible, need to be transmitted to as wide an audience as possible. In the modern age this involves gaining access to the mass media and the electronic channels of communication. In the case of the Intifada, this has meant that both sides have engaged in a battle for public opinion in which they have sought to present their respective versions of reality. It has been a war over words and pictures every bit as vital as the "real" struggle on the ground. The purpose of this chapter is to examine some of the features of this "symbolic struggle": the fight to convey competing images of the Intifada to the wider world.

Background

In any conflict situation the parties involved will seek to purvey their own version of the truth. Indeed, there was considerable debate in Israeli government circles following the 1967 war as to whether or not a Palestinian press should be allowed to operate in the newly occupied territories. Eventually it was decided to allow newspapers to publish — as a safety valve for Palestinian political expression and as a valuable source of insight into the thoughts and

feelings of the subject population. However, the freedom thereby granted was severely circumscribed. Since the formation of the state in 1948, Israel has sought to control the flow of information into the public arena by means of regulations inherited from the British Mandate period, including the 1933 Press Ordinance and the 1945 Defence (Emergency) Regulations. These endow the government and military authorities with broad powers to restrict or prohibit the import, export or printing of material which is deemed to threaten security or public order. Under the regulations the relevant authorities have the right to review materials before publication with a view to partial or full censorship. In addition, all newspapers, printing and press offices within Israel require a licence from the Ministry of Interior. The publishing of material without prior submission to the censor which occasions official disapproval can result in such licences being revoked or suspended without explanation, although censorship decisions themselves can be appealed against through informal negotiations or formal channels to the chief censor in Tel Aviv.

In theory these regulations apply equally to all journalists based in Israel. This means that what applies to the Israeli and foreign media (every Israeli-accredited journalist is required to sign a document agreeing to abide by the censorship rules) should also apply to the Palestinian media based in East Jerusalem, annexed by Israel in 1967. The practice has proved rather different. The distribution of newspapers in the occupied territories requires a permit from the military authorities, whilst the military can also confiscate any publications that they deem to be a threat to security or public order, even if they have already been passed by the censor.[1] Moreover, with regard to censorship, the chair of the Foreign Press Association (FPA) in Israel, Bob Slater, has observed:[2]

> Palestinians have to submit everything or they are closed down. Israelis technically should show everything, but even if they are accused of censorship violations they face less harsh reprisals. The foreign press has an unwritten understanding that we submit the material we feel may infringe on Israel's security system.

Thus, between 1980 and 1986 the licences of six Palestinian publications were revoked, invariably on the grounds that they served as propaganda outlets for the PLO. In addition, during the same period, three of the four Arabic language dailies published in East Jerusalem (*al-Sha'ab, al-Quds and al-Fajr*) had their publishing licences suspended for periods ranging from several days to a month, on the grounds that they had violated the censorship regulations. By such means the Israeli authorities were able to exercise tight control over the content of the Palestinian media, arguing, as did the State Attorney in April 1987:[3]

> The areas of Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip are subject to military government and accordingly there does not exist there the fundamental right of freedom of expression in its various kinds and forms, and most certainly not that of an equal status to that existing in the State of Israel.

With regard to the Israeli media, the controls over their functioning have traditionally been exercised by informal negotiations and tacit understandings, such that the formal legal powers have rarely been invoked. Israel is a small-scale society, many journalists are reservists in the IDF, and they share the security concerns of a country that has been involved in successive conflicts with its neighbours. In addition, there are regular meetings between government and military officials, the editors-in-chief of the daily newspapers and the Israeli Broadcasting Authority, who receive regular off-the-record briefings in return for their cooperation in "eliciting support for the government's policies and actions."[4]

The real problem for the Israeli authorities has been how to control the activities of the foreign correspondents based in Israel. Claiming to be the only democracy in the Middle East, Israel is particularly sensitive to how she is portrayed to the outside world. A small, vibrant and democratic society that has succeeded in making the deserts bloom, whilst threatened on all sides by hostile Arab states who refuse to make peace but seek the destruction of the state and its people -- this is the image that the Israeli authorities seek to convey to the world in general, and to the members of the Jewish diaspora in particular. Obviously, one of the most important channels through which this picture has been portrayed has been the 2-300 strong corps of foreign correspondents based in Israel and accredited by the Government Press Office (GPO). The GPO seeks to assist foreign correspondents by providing daily translations of all major news, features and editorials from the Israeli press, acting as a distribution point for all government press releases, providing access to photographic archives, arranging interviews, and alerting journalists to upcoming stories. According to a senior official, "Journalists are grateful for this help. And we *want* them to be grateful. Our philosophy is to make his life as easy as possible."[5] Foreign correspondents on a long-term posting to Israel know that if they offend the Israeli authorities in some way, then they risk losing those services of the GPO that makes their lives that bit easier. Therefore, whilst over the years few foreign journalists have taken the trouble to submit their reports to the censor as formally required, they have become sufficiently attuned to render the official procedures virtually unnecessary.

Such has been the practice in what we might term "normal times". In "abnormal times", such as during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon and more recently since the outbreak of the Intifada in 1987, Israel has had cause to regret the limitations on its ability to keep a tight rein on the foreign media. Abnormal times in a world trouble spot like Israel attract hordes of correspondents who fly in to cover specific stories for a limited time period. Such people do not depend upon the long-term cooperation of the GPO for their livelihood. They are beholden to their editors in London, Paris, New York or wherever -- not to the Israeli censor. They are employed by organisations that have become increasingly transnational in scale and commitment -- media conglomerates with interests and consumers to satisfy far beyond the borders of a single state, particularly a small state like Israel. They are driven

more by a fear of "missing a story" than by any sensitivity to the security concerns of the Israeli state. Therefore they are far more likely to risk by-passing the censorship regulations and, like other nation-states, Israel has had to acknowledge that its ability to control the flow of information to the outside world has been drastically circumscribed over recent years.

One of the main reasons for this has been the radical transformation in the nature of communications technology itself. It is a cliché to remark that TV has brought the world into the living room, but it is no less true for all that. Satellite links, the miniaturisation of cameras, long-range lens and directional microphones are just a few of the technical innovations that have enabled viewers around the world to witness events virtually as they take place. Communication satellites transcend national boundaries and make it extremely difficult for governments to exercise political control over the material transmitted. Likewise, direct dialling telephone technology has meant that information -- pictures and images as well as words -- can be transmitted without the intervention of an operator. Using the same telephone links computers can transmit and receive lengthy reports in a matter of seconds. Israel is not alone amongst nation-states in having to face up to their relative impotence to censor information transmitted to the outside world. As a British Ministry of Defence spokesperson observed to a committee on censorship:[6]

> Modern communications are making it easier for a journalist to pass his information, with or without approval, and making it more difficult for any authority to control the passage of information or even know that it is being passed.

The Israeli public relations disaster

Within a week of the outbreak of the Intifada television screens around the world were filled with pictures of the confrontations between the Palestinians and the IDF -- unarmed civilians, including women and children, standing firm against the shootings, gas attacks and beatings. The Intifada became *the* news story. During the first few months there were well over a thousand foreign media people milling around Jerusalem, filing front-page stories, with pictures to match. It was an exciting time, not just for the hotel owners, but for Palestinian journalists who acted as guides, contacts, and information sources for the newcomers from abroad.

Just as the Israelis had no clear policy for dealing with the Uprising, they were similarly bemused about how to cope with the media. The familiar threat of terrorism was one thing -- they knew how to deal with it, and "Palestinian atrocities" commanded little sympathy in the world outside. But mass resistance and civil disobedience -- how could Israel portray itself as a fundamentally decent and moral society and state when its military were using all their might to suppress demonstrations by unarmed civilians? The nadir, from the Israeli point of view, came early in 1988. In mid-February reports sped around the world that the brutality of Israeli soldiers had reached

new depths with the burial alive of four Palestinians. Commenting on the atrocity, General Mitzna, the army commander of the West Bank, confessed: "Even in my worst dreams I would never imagine such a thing". This story coincided with the publication of a report from the Boston-based Physicians for Human Rights group which blamed the Israelis for "an uncontrolled epidemic of violence in the West Bank and Gaza". Just a few weeks later, in early March, a CBS television crew filmed four soldiers subjecting two Palestinian youths to a calculated beating, in which heavy rocks were used to break their limbs. Within a day it was being shown on news programmes throughout the world. "Bone-cracking soldiers break US Jews' hearts" was one headline above a story on the response of North American Jews to the Intifada,[7] whilst the European Parliament passed a resolution condemning "the instances of torture, arbitrary arrest, reprisals, expulsions and all acts of violence committed by the Israeli army against the Palestinian population".[8]

In an effort to counter the "distorted image" of Israel being portrayed to the outside world, an information centre was hurriedly established at the GPO in Jerusalem. It was a failure. According to Ian Black:[9]

> ... the daily bulletins it published tended to be late, laconic and partial. Army accounts of violent clashes often jarred with what journalists had seen for themselves. The Palestinians had a far better grasp of the importance of the information war. And on balance they won it.

Attacks on the "oxygen of publicity"

Much of the discussion amongst Israeli decision-making circles during the early weeks of the Uprising focussed upon how to control the media's coverage of events. Indeed, there was a tendency in some quarters to blame the media for the events themselves, with allegations that the confrontations and demonstrations were merely performances presented to satisfy the media's thirst for news. "What has the Intifada achieved? Only a media achievement," claimed Shimon Peres in the spring of 1988.[10] Such attempts to deny the substance of the Uprising could not mask the significance of this "media achievement". The portrayal of Israeli brutality and repression in the press and on the television screens around the world had restored the Palestinian issue to the fore on the international agenda, and had seriously undermined Israel's standing in world opinion.

It was clear that something had to be done to cut off the oxygen supply of publicity upon which the Palestinians seemed to be thriving. There were three related strands to the strategy adopted by the Israelis in "managing the media": 1) Restricting the dissemination of information in the public domain, 2) Restricting journalistic access to information, and 3) Various forms of "disinformation" and "psychological operations".

"After the fact restrictions": the attempt to prevent the public dissemination of information

In any civilian Uprising against occupation the indigenous media plays a crucial role as a means of keeping the population informed, maintaining morale and unity, and countering feelings of isolation. Hence, one of the first reactions of the Israeli authorities was to restrict the distribution of Palestinian newspapers and magazines throughout the occupied territories. Thus, as early as 14 December 1987, in the first week of the Uprising, all East Jerusalem newspapers were confiscated. Since that time all four daily papers have been served with orders banning their distribution in the occupied territories for varying periods of time. For example, between December 1987 and July 1989 *Al-Fajr* was banned five times for a total of nearly 100 days. Invariably such bans have been imposed as penalties for publishing material that the censors deemed should have been submitted for clearance.

For years Palestinian newspapers and magazines have sought to avoid the wrath of the censor, not always successfully, by using material that had already appeared in the Israeli media. Since the outbreak of the Intifada the incidence of publications being banned for carrying material that had already appeared in the Israeli press has increased.[11] In addition to denying the population access to the printed word, the bans obviously carry with them serious commercial costs for the publications affected. Moreover, there is the ever-present fear of permanent closure, as happened to the weekly *Al-Awdah* which was closed down on 1 May 1988 on the grounds that it was funded by, and supported, a "hostile organisation" — the PLO. As a consequence, editors have had to act with great caution in order to cope with the increasingly stringent censorship. To reduce the chances of a permanent ban, the owner and editor of the weekly *Al-Bayader Al-Siyassi*, Jack Khuzmo, began to submit everything to the censor during the Uprising.[12] Other editors have estimated that during the Uprising the average amount of material prepared for publication which was censored was somewhere between 30 per cent and 60 per cent, a figure which occasionally rose to 80 per cent.[13]

What should be borne in mind, of course, is that this censorship took place following a process of careful self-censorship on the part of journalists and editors. Such self-monitoring is a characteristic of the media throughout the world, but for the editors of the Palestinian press the cautiousness brought about by the fear of closure has led some to feel as though they are "hired pens", working for the censor rather than their publication. As Sa'eb Eraqat, one of the editors of *Al-Quds* remarked, "We are not the editor-in-chief, the head censor is.... It is not an exaggeration that the chief censor is the editor-in-chief of all Palestinian papers."[14]

The cumulative result of all these pressures undoubtedly has been a very inadequate coverage of events and issues of interest to the population in the occupied territories, and a general decline in the quality of the Palestinian press. Potential feature writers are reluctant to submit articles that they know will be censored. The repeated frustration consequent on having work cen-

sored affects the morale and creative effort of journalists. They become resigned to writing pieces on innocuous topics. Moreover, the very tactics used to avoid the censor's pen such as understatement, the use of a virtual code-language of "writing between the lines", the structuring of the writing so as to keep stronger statements in low profile, can result in a frustrated readership who find it difficult to understand just what it is the journalists are trying to communicate.

As was remarked above, a traditional tactic of the Palestinian press in coping with censorship has involved drawing upon items that have already been covered by the Israeli media. This practice has increased during the Intifada, with journalists feeding stories to the Hebrew press, then quoting the Israeli interpretation of their original material for inclusion in their own papers. Such are the contortions in the flow of information occasioned by occupation. However, even the Israeli media have not been immune to the impact of the censor and the restrictive regulations governing the publication of information. In May 1988 the Israeli afternoon daily *Yediot Ahronot* appeared with a blank space in its columns -- an article condemning the extent of censorship in the Israeli press had been censored. Another Israeli paper that has suffered unduly from the attentions of the censor has been the Arabic language daily *Al-Ittihad,* published by the Israeli Communist Party (Rakah). According to its editor 20-25 per cent of its material has to be submitted, including everything related to the occupied territories, the armed forces and police.[15] In addition it had its publishing licence suspended at the end of March 1988, for the week prior to the Day of the Land , when Israeli Arabs commemorate the death of six of their number, shot by Israeli troops in 1976 whilst protesting against land expropriation. In early March 1989, the licence of the Nazareth-based *Al-Raya,* published by the Abna'a al-Balad movement, was withdrawn after allegations that it was financed by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Concern at the tightening controls on the media, and the realisation that the restrictions imposed upon the Palestinian press were beginning to filter across the "green line" into Israel, led Israeli journalists in June 1988 to organise a symposium on the dangers posed by the erosion of press freedom in Israel. This followed the publication by over 100 Israeli journalists of a joint protest against the banning of the left-wing Israeli weekly *Derech Hanitzotz* which had been closed down by the Minister of the Interior the previous February. Published in Hebrew and Arabic, the magazine had only a limited circulation, but it was widely respected as an authoritative source of information on the situation in the occupied territories, and had long been a thorn in the side of the military government with its damaging reports of Israeli brutality in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The closure of *Derech Hanitzotz* was not on the grounds of censorship violations, but because of the alleged political affiliations and sympathies of the journal and its staff, who were later convicted of membership of a "hostile organisation" -- the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.[16]

None of the foreign correspondents covering the Intifada suffered such

draconian measures. Although technically subject to censorship, most of them felt free to file what they wanted. Occasionally, however, the authorities felt obliged to rebuke some of their number, if only to serve as a reminder to the others that there was a line beyond which they should not stray. Thus, two North American journalists had their press credentials suspended in the spring of 1988 after they had published leaked details of the Israeli assassination of Abu Jihad. The same fate befell three British journalists in October 1988 after they had filed stories on the Israeli "death squads" operating in the occupied territories, whilst in June 1989 Reuter's chief correspondent in Jerusalem was threatened with having his visa revoked if he persisted in wiring material without submitting it to the censor. In all these cases the correspondents were based in Israel, and as such were sensitive to such threats to their continued professional activity. Less amenable were the hundreds of media personnel who were mere "transients", on temporary assignment to cover the Intifada.[17] In order to cope with them the Israelis had to develop another ploy. Rather than trying to restrict what they published, a serious attempt was made to deny them access to the information and events themselves.

"Before the fact" restrictions: the attempt to prevent access to information

One way to stem the flow of hostile information is to prevent the people with information passing it on to journalists who want to report and disseminate it. On occasions the Israelis tried to "censor at source" by issuing specific orders forbidding personnel in such institutions as hospitals from talking to journalists. They realised, however, that such orders were virtually impossible to enforce. If you cannot stop people divulging information, then the obvious next step is to prevent the media from gaining access to the source of the information.

On 29 March 1988 the Israeli authorities took the unprecedented action of closing off the whole of the West Bank and Gaza Strip for three days as a precaution against the disturbances that were expected to take place on 30 March, the Day of the Land. The Israeli Arabs had declared a nonviolent general strike for that day as an expression of solidarity with their fellow Palestinians, and the leadership of the Intifada had called for a general strike and demonstrations against "the forces of occupation and settlers". By declaring both the West Bank and Gaza Strip as closed military areas, the authorities sought to prevent any contact between Palestinians and the Arab citizens of Israel, and also to deny the media access to the occupied territories unless accompanied by military escort. In so doing they were merely implementing on a larger scale a practice that was to become increasingly common in their attempts to manage the media.

Under the military regulations the military commander of a region can declare an area closed at any time. In January 1988 this power, along with the power to declare curfews, was devolved to the senior officer on the scene. This meant that if a soldier noticed the unwelcome presence of the media,

he could order them to leave by producing a written order signed by a senior officer. As one correspondent commented:[18]

> They all seem to have these papers ready anytime ... If a soldier spots you, he tells you to leave. If you challenge it, he just brings his officer who can sign a closure order on the spot.

The frequency with which this method was used to keep the media away from the news rose markedly throughout 1988. Such "pocket closures" have proved almost impossible to challenge, insofar as the orders have been issued on the scene, whilst the action is taking place, and if necessary the onlookers have been forced away at gunpoint. The media might lodge their complaints after the fact, but by then it would be invariably too late. The Israelis appear to have been particularly wary of film crews and photographers, aware that an image can convey far more than the written word in many cases. As a result camera-men and photographers developed the practice of filming as soon as they arrived on the scene, in the expectant knowledge that they would have only a few minutes before they were ordered to leave. Another ploy that has been practised with some success has involved training local people in the use of small video cameras, so that even when the foreign film-crews have been denied access they could still get their footage "second-hand".

The Israeli practice of turning foreign correspondents back at road blocks, even when others, including tourists, have been allowed through, has been similarly frustrating. Likewise, the media have been denied access to areas under curfew. Occasionally the military has permitted a pool of journalists to enter if accompanied by a military escort, with the result that the journalists only get to see what they have been allowed to see, with little opportunity to check the army's version of events. Thus, following the slaughter of seven Palestinians just south of Tel Aviv at Rishon Lezion by an Israeli civilian on 20 May 1990, foreign correspondents issued a statement through the Foreign Press Association protesting that they had been prevented from covering the subsequent events in the occupied territories except under close military escort and then only within a very restricted area. They went on to complain that such restrictions had rendered them unable to fulfil their role as impartial observers, insofar as "military escorts have prevented direct contact with the civilian population, as well as with soldiers engaged in the events."[19]

Such restrictions have impacted less heavily on the Palestinian press. No curfew or siege is hermetic, particularly for those with an intimate knowledge of the locality. Moreover, Palestinian journalists have such a wide range of contacts that even if they themselves are denied access, they can always obtain reports from their "stringers" in the field. Even when the Israelis have cut the telephone links from certain areas and confiscated the fax machines of journalists, the reports get through by one means or another -- there are always people prepared to make the journey to the nearest telephone that is in operation, crossing over the border into Israel if necessary, or making the journey to East Jerusalem itself to report in person.[20] Thus, although the

attempts to restrict the access of foreign journalists to newsworthy events were aimed at forcing journalists to rely upon military spokespersons for their information, one unsought for consequence was that correspondents began to rely more heavily on Palestinian sources of information, given the scepticism with which most of them came to regard the veracity of official Israeli sources.[21] As one correspondent observed:[22]

> we find ourselves depending on Palestinian sources since the territories are usually closed to the press.... The Palestinian sources turned out to be more reliable.

In an attempt to disrupt the symbiotic relationship that developed between Palestinian and foreign journalists, the Israelis began to target the Palestinian press agencies. During the early months of the Intifada one of the main secondary sources of information for foreign correspondents was the Palestine Press Service. In March 1988 it was closed down for a period of two years. The same fate befell the Holy Land Press Service which was closed for a similar period in June 1989. Other press offices have been closed for shorter spells of time. In addition, it seemed to many that those Palestinian journalists who specialised in accompanying foreign correspondents and film crews around the occupied territories were made a particular target for harassment and intimidation by the Israeli authorities.

Palestinian journalists have, of course, been subjected to the whole range of sanctions resorted to by the Israelis, ranging from administrative detention through to deportation. Foreign journalists have not escaped intimidation either. By January 1989 the Foreign Press Association had been informed of over 150 incidents ranging from verbal abuse to physical assault and threats at gunpoint. They included occasions when film was confiscated and equipment and cameras smashed, instances of short term detention and other forms of harassment. Often this was at the hands of soldiers and military personnel, sometimes it was the work of Israeli civilians. Thus, after a bomb explosion in the Mahane Yehuda market in West Jerusalem on 28 May 1990, bystanders attacked journalists who were photographing border police detaining Palestinians, accusing them of ruining Israel's image abroad. Cameras were smashed and two photographers required medical treatment for wounds to the head.

West Bank settlers have been particularly active in the fight against the press. Thus, one group began distributing car-stickers promoting "The People Against Hostile Media" and carrying an illustration of a snake flicking its forked tongue at a shield bearing the Star of David. Of greater concern to correspondents have been the direct cases of intimidation and violence perpetrated by such "people against hostile media". Michael Rosenbaum, the director of CBS Television in the Middle East, recalled one such incident in an interview he gave in June 1989 in which he expanded on some of the problems involved in covering the Intifada:[23]

> Israeli soldiers and the military authorities often carry out measures against TV crews, such as preventing them from entering areas where

> incidents are taking place. We also face harassment and even assaults from Israeli settlers. Just last week, settlers attacked and smashed the windows of a car which a crew of ours was using in the village of Izzariyeh. They prevented them from entering to film what was going on there.

Joel Greenberg, one of the best informed Israeli journalists covering the occupied territories, expressed his fears concerning the erosion of press freedom within Israel, and the damage to democracy and human rights that this entailed. He focused in particular upon the growing hostility towards the media which, he felt, was orchestrated by the government and the IDF.[24]

> Beyond the restrictions hindering news coverage, a palpable anti-media mood has been created in response to the graphic coverage by the press and foreign television of ugly confrontations in the territories and excesses by soldiers. The media is perceived as "hostile" -- focusing on the negative, serving Israel's Arab enemies ... The government and IDF, perceiving themselves to be at war, have clamped increasing restrictions on journalists for what they believe are overriding reasons of security ... The energy of the authorities, however, appears to have been directed primarily at restricting and chastising the press, rather than tackling the root problems reflected in the correspondent's reports. The authorities, it seems, are immensely concerned over Israel's image, especially abroad, as if the Uprising were primarily a public relations problem.

This hostile attitude of the Israeli authorities fed, and to some extent reflected, the feeling amongst certain sectors of the Israeli public. However, one has to assume that the Israeli authorities had no part to play in the worst cases of intimidation of journalists. In March 1988 the CBS television network felt the need to hire security guards for one of its Israeli camera-men and its Tel Aviv office after receiving threatening telephone calls following the showing of their film of the soldiers beating two Nablus youths with rocks. They were not over-reacting. A month previously an extreme right-wing underground organisation called the Sicarii had attacked the home of Dan Margalit, a columnist with Israel's leading daily newspaper *Ha'aretz*. Taking their name from a band of Jews who used daggers to assassinate suspected collaborators in Roman-occupied Judea 2,000 years ago, the Sicarii struck again in April 1989 with an arson attack on the Tel Aviv home of Amos Schoken, the publisher of *Ha'aretz*. In a telephone call to the IDF radio station they explained that the attack was because "Schoken is harming national morale", presumably a reference to the critical stance adopted by the newspaper with regard to Israeli policies in the occupied territories.[25] A year later the home of *Ma'ariv* correspondent Baruch Me'eri was targeted for an arson attack and threats were made against *Al-Ittihad*.[26]

However horrified the authorities might have been by such outrages, they were indicative of what Joel Greenberg depicted as "a public atmosphere of hostility to the press, encouraged from time to time by official statements

directed against journalists".[27] As such, the authorities had to shoulder some of the responsibility for the extremism of so-called "hot-heads". It was one of the by-products of a third strand in their overall approach to controlling the media: the attempt to undermine the credibility of the sources of the damaging information, to discredit the media in the eyes of the public in Israel, overseas, and in the occupied territories themselves.

"Disinformation and dirty tricks"

In one of the British army manuals reference is made to the importance of "psychological operations" (or "psyops") as a means of isolating the enemy from their civilian support. Psychological operations were defined as "the planned use of propaganda or other means, in support of our military action or presence, designed to influence to our advantage the opinions, emotions, attitudes and behaviour of enemy, neutral and friendly groups".[28]

Like the British army in Northern Ireland, the IDF has sought to use the media to send "signals" aimed at undermining the unity and morale of the insurgent Palestinians, and to bolster public support at home and abroad. Most of the time these aims have been pursued by attempting to control the flow of information directly, through the strategies outlined above. Blatant falsehoods have been resorted to much less frequently. One of the main reasons for this is that if untruths are discovered, then the overall credibility of the official public relations campaign can be seriously undermined.

Indeed, what might appear to be deliberate deception on the part of official spokespersons can be the result of genuine human error, the failure to check the facts, and various chain of command problems. It can also reflect a form of military self-deception, whereby deceits and inaccuracies at each level of a bureaucratic process of news transmission add up to a complete distortion of the truth by the time the information is made public. Such would seem to have been the case with regard to an increasing proportion of IDF reports during the Intifada. In order to avoid the risk of being charged with violating army regulations concerning the treatment of "rioters" and "suspects" in the occupied territories, soldiers adopted the practice of "whitewashing" their operational reports in an effort to camouflage their "law enforcement" tactics. Thus, in one case concerning the killing of a Bethlehem youth shot by Border Policemen in December 1989, the evidence of a videotape filmed by the ABC TV network revealed that the IDF spokesperson's version, based on the account of the men involved, had been a tissue of lies. The police claimed they had fired warning shots in the air and that the youth and his companions had been threatening them with axes and metal bars. The film showed they had not been carrying weapons, and that no warning shots had been fired before the young man, Fadi Zabakly, was killed. As an IDF spokesperson remarked, the film posed a "challenge to the army's credibility".[29] Quite so — such are the potential costs of deception.

Moreover, it would seem that in the misrepresentation of events, the soldiers in the field have had at least the tacit support of their senior officers.

Thus, at his trial, charged with ordering paratroopers to break the bones of West Bank villagers, Colonel Yehuda Meir alleged that a double standard was in operation. When senior officers spoke in public "there was an attempt to say things which would appear all right", ie. the official policy was to restrict beatings. But "in the field they say other things", ie. they advocate beatings as a punishment for stone-throwers and graffiti writers.[30] Meir accused his commanding officers, right up to the Defence Minister himself, of being a party to such subterfuge. The IDF has always prided itself on the candour of the communications between the ranks, believing that if commanders are to draw the necessary lessons from mistakes, honest communication is a fundamental requisite. This has been eroded during the campaign to suppress the Uprising, to the extent that it seems as if dishonesty has become institutionalised -- a part of everyday military life, with virtually everyone laundering reality to suit their own and what they presume to be the military's interests.

Whilst the institutionalisation of dishonesty and hypocrisy can clearly have long-term deleterious consequences for the defence capability of Israel, in most cases the costs of disinformation campaigns are far more immediate and depend primarily upon whether or not the deceit is uncovered. Moreover, even if the discovery of "dirty tricks" causes public embarrassment and leaves official spokespersons with a credibility gap to bridge, this can seem a small price to pay for the damage inflicted on the enemy whilst the ploy is in operation. Thus, one of the more successful Israeli tactics for managing the media involved the impersonation of the press by Israeli security forces. Beyond gaining access to Palestinians for the purposes of information-gathering and arrest, the aim was clearly to plant the seeds of suspicion in the minds of the Palestinian community, to create a barrier between the information-givers and the disseminators of that information, and thereby help stem the flow of hostile news emanating from the "other side".

Rumours of Shin Bet operatives masquerading as journalists had been rife since the start of the Uprising, but it was not until early July 1988 that the allegations entered the public domain when it transpired that Israeli civilians, posing as an ABC television film crew, had entered the West Bank village of Salfit, requested an interview with a youth, and then arrested him. Some nine months after this incident, on 23 March 1989, a crew from the Visnews television network filmed two Israeli policemen using a car with foreign press signs while arresting a Palestinian girl in the Wadi Joz area of East Jerusalem. A few days later, on Land Day, there were reports of a Palestinian in Hebron being shot by settlers who were cruising the town in a van carrying "press" signs. The result was that life for the non-Palestinian correspondents covering the Intifada became much more difficult. The incidence of Palestinians stoning press cars increased. Palestinians became much more reluctant to talk to the media, often insisting that journalists produce the press cards issued and accredited by the Arab Journalists Association in East Jerusalem before agreeing to be interviewed. As Glen Frankel, correspondent of the *Washington Post*, observed, "The level of fear and hostility, if you could

chart it, has gone up and up ... Everyone seems to perceive that we are somehow part of the enemy."[31]

Another form of "psyops" adopted by the Israelis, has been the publication of false communiqués and leaflets. For example, in July 1988 rival versions of Communiqué No.21 were published. Palestinians insisted that one was a fake, produced by the Shin Bet to create confusion and convey the impression that the leaders of the unified command were divided amongst themselves. Another example came to light during the battle of wills that took place between the Israeli authorities and the village of Beit Sahour over the non-payment of taxes in the autumn of 1989. For a few weeks this predominantly Christian village symbolised all that was laudable about the resistance struggle of the Palestinians against occupation: unarmed civilians facing up to military might by means of civil disobedience, making their stand on the democratic principle of "no taxation without representation". As a public relations exercise for the foreign media the civil disobedience campaign at Beit Sahour was a resounding success. It also did wonders for Palestinian morale at a time when it was sagging. As part of the attempt to break the will of the villagers, the Israeli intelligence sought to foment division by issuing a fake communiqué in the name of Hamas, attacking the "wealthy Christians of Beit Sahour" for trying to "ride the wave of the Intifada".[32] The problem faced by the Israelis in such operations is that Palestinian society in the occupied territories is a small-scale one permeated by a whole web of communication systems. Given the widespread awareness of the Israeli strategy of trying to break the resistance by fracturing its unity, and given the intimate relationship between the leadership and the wider community, Palestinians have been on their guard against such attempts to weaken their resolve.

On the other hand, as anyone who has spent time in the occupied territories during the Intifada could bear witness, in a situation where open communication is severely restricted, Palestinian society is peculiarly prone to rumour. There have been occasions when the Israeli intelligence services have tuned in to such rumours and sought to amplify them, raising allegations (not always false) about PLO officials abroad building themselves luxurious mansions with the money intended to support the victims of Israeli repression, and the like. In a similar vein, the Israelis have ensured that meetings between officials of the Israeli administration in the occupied territories and Palestinian community leaders received widespread publicity. According to Palestinians, such meetings were orchestrated to mislead international opinion that an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue was taking place. Reports of such gatherings also served to increase the concerns of Palestinians that some of their number were negotiating with the Israelis over the heads of their own community -- thereby helping to create divisions in the Palestinian ranks within the territories, and between the leadership inside and the legitimate representatives in Tunis.[33] On such occasions a huge responsibility has fallen on the shoulders of the Palestinian leaders who have had to engage in considerable "repair work" to mend the damage inflicted by such "psy-

chological operations". As for journalists (and researchers for that matter), caught in the midst of a miasma of rumour and hearsay, unable to check facts against stories, the situation can be a confusing and worrying one. After all, there is always the possibility that they themselves are being compromised, used by their "special and confidential sources" (Israeli and Palestinian) as unwitting tools in the battle for the hearts and minds of publics and constituencies at home and abroad.

The power of the media in such a battle is often over-emphasised. Occasionally one has the image of a hypodermic syringe that injects ready formed opinions and attitudes into those same hearts and minds. In fact, research seems to indicate that its power resides more in the area of setting public agendas, in selecting from the flow of events and occurrences those items to be elevated to the status of "public issues", matters of concern and debate around and about which people adopt points of view and make judgements. It is in this area of public agenda-setting that the activities of the media advisers and spokespersons of both the Israeli and Palestinian camps have been particularly active, with both sides doing their utmost to draw the attention of the media to those issues which they consider to be most deserving of interest, whether it be the latest example of "Palestinian terrorism" or "Israeli intransigence", the most recent diplomatic statement of President Arafat or the rise of anti-semitism in Eastern Europe. Thus, in an interview shortly after his appointment as director of the GPO, Dr Yossi Olmeri expanded on how he saw his future task. One of his main priorities was "to try and broaden the agenda of the foreign press in terms of emphasis on reporting matters from Israel", and he cited the incidence of "inter-Arab murders" and the link between them and terrorism "which the PLO has vowed to renounce" as examples of issues he would like to see covered. He continued:[34]

> One gets the impression, especially in the West, that because of the emphasis on the Uprising, the Intifada is the only problem in the Middle East, or certainly the only problem confronting Israel in terms of security and strategic standing. This simply isn't true, especially when you bear in mind the arms race in the Middle East and the potential dangers posed to Israel by countries such as Syria, Iraq and Libya.
>
> The emphasis on the Uprising impacts unfavourably on Israel and international attitudes regarding the Palestinian issue. In this context, Israel appears much stronger than the Palestinians, and people therefore expect the stronger side to be conciliatory to the underdogs. The bottom line is that excessive coverage of the Uprising at the expense of any other issue is extremely damaging to Israel.

A few months later, in March 1990, Israel imposed military censorship on reports about Soviet Jewish immigration to Israel. Although no official explanation for the move was given, it was assumed that it reflected growing concern at the possible American and Soviet response to the mounting Arab diplomatic offensive against the exodus, which was then running at somewhere

in the region of 6,000 a month. Whatever the reasons, it marked an about-turn on the part of the Israelis in terms of agenda-setting. As Ian Black of *The Guardian* commented:[35]

> Ironically, the decision comes after several months in which the Israeli authorities have been encouraging the foreign press to cover all aspects of the wave of immigration. They have considered it an attractive alternative to the grim and often unflattering coverage of Israel's response to the Palestinian Uprising, until recently seen as one of the strongest stories in the Middle East.

Sometimes, this public agenda-setting activity entails the actual creation of an event around which it is hoped the media will flock. Thus, in March 1989 an International Jewish Solidarity Conference was held in Jerusalem. It was organised by the Israeli authorities as a public (and publicised) affirmation of their policies, in an effort to counter the mounting international isolation Israel was experiencing at that time in the light of her reluctance to make serious moves towards peace. More than 1000 Jewish leaders from around the world were invited to spend three days listening to speeches about education, the Israeli economy, immigration and international affairs. Very little time was allotted in the programme for discussion of such issues as talks with the PLO and the principle of exchanging territory for peace. The Jewish playwright, Harold Pinter, dismissed the conference as "a public relations exercise where Jewish leaders will be instructed to endorse Mr Shamir's policies".[36]

Unfortunately for Prime Minister Shamir, the attention of the media had shifted by the time it came to the press conference to mark the end of the exercise in solidarity. Whilst he was informing the assembly that peace with the terrorists of the PLO would only produce "a peace of the graveyard", someone had leaked to the press a military intelligence report which warned that in the long run there was no alternative to dealing with the PLO[37] — a reminder that no party or faction within either the Israeli or the Palestinian camp enjoys a monopoly of power when it comes to creating issues and setting agendas. Rather, there is something akin to a market place within which the media, as consumers of the issues on offer, enjoy different levels of autonomy according to the kinds of institutional, financial and political links that they have with the competing suppliers of "the news".

Presentations of reality

By way of an illustration of the way in which pressures and affiliations can help determine a publication's perspective on what constitutes "news", it is instructive to examine the relative prominence given to two crucial events that took place within a few days of each other in the early summer of 1990 by two partisan publications, the *Jerusalem Post International Edition* (JPIE) and *Al-Fajr Palestinian Weekly* (AFPW). On 20 May seven Palestinian labourers were killed at Rishon Lezion by a lone Israeli civilian and a further seven Palestinians were killed in the subsequent demonstrations that convulsed the

occupied territories. Ten days later, on 30 May, Palestinian guerrillas affiliated to the Palestine Liberation Front launched an assault on a beach near Tel Aviv, four of them were killed and another seven were captured; there were no Israeli casualties. Following a take-over by the Canadian based Hollinger corporation and the subsequent resignation of its editor, Erwin Frenkel, the *Jerusalem Post* has been characterised by what one commentator has depicted as "a general endorsement of official state policy, except when the paper crusades for positions right of the Likud".[38] By contrast, the English-language *Al-Fajr* is a Palestinian weekly published in East Jerusalem and is closely aligned to the main stream of Fatah within the PLO.

In the issue following the killings at Rishon Lezion, the JPIE (26 May 1990) devoted four column inches to the story at the bottom of the front page, under the headline, "7 Arab labourers slain, Jewish suspect held". The AFPW (28 May 1990), for its part, placed the story in the middle of the front page, under the heading, "Rishon massacre leads to widespread protests", and devoted a total of 138 column inches to the murder and the subsequent events, covering the reactions in the occupied territories, within Israel and in the United States and Jordan, in addition to an editorial leader on the outrage. By contrast, in the issue immediately following the Palestinian sea-borne raid on the Tel Aviv beach, AFPW (4 June 1990) made no reference to the event. Its lead story concerned the decision to boycott contacts with US officials taken by prominent Palestinians in protest against the United States veto of a UN Security Council resolution to despatch a commission of inquiry to the occupied territories. In the subsequent issue (11 June 1990) it devoted 57 column inches to the story, but most of the space was given over to consideration of the threat by the United States to break off its dialogue with the PLO as a consequence of the raid and the PLO's reluctance to dissociate itself unequivocally from the action. The JPIE of 9 June devoted virtually the whole of its front page to the story, including a full width photograph of the scene where the attack took place. In total, 67.5 column inches of text were devoted to the issue, including its impact on the United States-PLO dialogue and the condemnation of the raid from around the world.

In the respective space and prominence given over to the two events by these two avowedly partisan publications, we can see the struggle being played out over what constitutes an issue, what constitutes the news. It serves to remind us that the news, like social reality, is created and constructed -- and in the context of the Intifada that process is never a neutral one, but is an integral part of the wider conflict. In their treatment of the two events, neither publication was involved in what one might consider to be deliberate distortion. What was involved was the partial presentation of reality, each viewing and portraying the world from their own perspective.

In this regard it is perhaps important to emphasise that the Palestinian press and media are no "cleaner" than their Israeli counterparts. Most of the Palestinian press within the occupied territories depend, more or less directly, upon funding and support from the PLO. They undoubtedly define

their role primarily in terms of the national struggle for liberation. Therefore they all engage in various forms of self-censorship when it comes to covering issues that might present the Uprising in a critical light. This has been particularly apparent with regard to the issue of violence in the Uprising, specifically in relation to the activities of the street youth of the strike forces and the killings of alleged informers and collaborators. Most Palestinians in the occupied territories know of instances where the strike forces have gone beyond the bounds of "acceptable vigilance": like torching the shop of someone who dared to remonstrate with them for setting fire to tyres outside their home, like threatening to label as informers those teachers who dared to fail them in their school exams. Little of this appears in the Palestinian press. Similarly, it was clear to many people that the killing of alleged collaborators had gotten out of hand during the third year of the Uprising -- but it received only muted comment in the media. For example, on 14 April 1991 the *Jerusalem Post*'s main editorial concerned the attempted slaying of a 40 year old advocate in Ramallah. A group of masked youths had reportedly attacked her with staves and axes in front of her ten year old son, and left her for dead. Her "crime" was to ignore the instructions of the leadership forbidding plea-bargaining with the Israeli authorities. According to the report in the *Jerusalem Post*, several of her colleagues had planned to publish a condemnation of the assault, but withdrew it for fear of incurring the wrath of her attackers. This was at a time when the number of Palestinians killed as alleged collaborators was estimated to be in excess of 400. The reason the *Jerusalem Post* gave such prominence to the issue was clear -- to "prove" to the world that the revolt in the occupied territories was sustained only by terror, not by popular support. However partial its interpretation, the basic facts of the case were true. To the best of my knowledge no Palestinian newspaper gave the story any prominence. To do so would have been deemed prejudicial to the national cause. By such sins of omission and commission, the Palestinian media seek to portray a particular version of the reality of the Uprising, and as such cannot claim to be any more impartial than their Israeli counterparts.

The significance of language

The major tool that we have at our disposal when it comes to defining and interpreting the world about us is language. Where there are competing interpretations of that reality, then language itself becomes a subject of struggle, with both sides seeking to portray their own preferred image by means which involve the selective use of words and phrases. Should the occupied territories be referred to as "Palestine" or as "Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip"? Is the PLO "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people'"? Or is it a "terrorist organisation'"? Is a stone-thrower a "demonstrator" or a "rioter'"? Is a Palestinian killed by Israeli forces a "martyr" or a "casualty'"? Was the killing at Rishon Lezion a "slaying" or a "massacre'"? Were the subsequent events in the occupied territories "massive

protests" or "stone-throwing incidents and other disturbances"? Was it a "sea-borne attack" carried out by "terrorists" that took place on 30 May 1990? Or was it a "sea-borne raid" carried out by "guerrillas"? These are not questions of "mere words", they are at the core of a struggle to impose particular definitions of reality upon the public. Just as the process whereby the "news" is created is not neutral, neither are the words used to convey that news. As such, the lexicon becomes a crucial weapon in the armoury of psychological warfare.

With regard to the question of language and vocabulary, the state-run Israeli broadcasting authorities have been subjected to almost as much pressure as the Palestinian press. Thus, following the Palestinian Declaration of Independence at the Algiers Conference of the PNC in November 1988, a meeting of the directorate of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority heard demands that the terms used on state radio and television should be changed: "collaborators" should become "Arabs who had contact with Israelis"; "execution" should be replaced by "murder"; "the national leadership" should be "the leaders of the rioters"; whilst the term "Palestinian state" should be preceded by "so-called".[39] In protest against these and other restrictions, an Israeli journalist resigned. In his letter to the Broadcasting Authority he explained that he was "not prepared to lend a hand in laundering reality, by using sterile words imposed from above".[40] Frequently, however, journalists lend themselves unwittingly to partisan portrayals of reality, as the *Hadashot* correspondent Zvi Gilat confessed:[41]

> Unable to confirm facts, not wishing to rile, attempting to remain neutral, the press unwittingly adopts the lexicon of the protagonists. The announcements of the IDF spokesman, a central source of information, often include not only a report of the incident, but the army's justification for it too. Here's a typical example: "A Kalkilya youth met his demise last night in a clash with an IDF force. The soldiers were forced to open fire after identifying a youth who intended to throw a heavy stone and endanger their lives." The "youth" is sometimes a 13-year old. "Met his demise" is a tender way of saying "was shot and killed." "The soldiers were forced" -- Really? Was there no other alternative? "Intended to throw" -- how do they know? Was there really a danger to their lives? "A heavy stone" -- how much did it weigh? Journalistic language is sometimes corrupted, unawares, into a style whose purpose is to blur the facts ... The language of "Arab sources" is no less one-sided and tendentious, and is at times an intentional perversion of the truth. In its reportage, the press unwittingly lends a hand to the corruption of language and the distortion of reality.

Satisfying the thirst for news

The fact that the media is used by both sides to portray a particular image of the Intifada is in itself unremarkable. In my experience, however, correspondents who cover the Uprising are fully aware of their problematic status. Most

of them have their own sources that they trust and by whom they are trusted. The relationship is based on a kind of circumscribed reciprocity. On many occasions I have sat in offices in East Jerusalem and elsewhere as a witness to such encounters. Both sides use the occasion to extract information from each other. The Palestinian will divulge his or her version of events and stories, and check it out with the information the journalist has gathered from other sources on both sides of the "green line". The news gatherer is thereby cast in the role of news disseminator on a reciprocal exchange basis -- "I'll tell you what I know, if you will tell me what you've heard" is the common pattern of proceedings. Of course, such a relationship can only be founded upon trust established over time. Both parties know that they are being "used", but above and beyond that they also know that both can benefit from the exchange of information.

A responsible journalist will always try and verify a story with more than one source. In similar fashion Palestinians have grown accustomed to checking information from as many sources as possible. Like most people who have participated in some event or other that has become "news", Palestinians are thirsty for feedback about what the world is saying about them, what reverberations their actions are having around the world. They also want to know what is happening in the Intifada itself. In a situation where there is censorship of the press and distorted communication through other channels, Palestinians have to get their news any way they could.

A major source of news and information is the TV and radio. Most people on the West Bank can check out the coverage of Israeli TV against that of the Jordanian. In the Gaza Strip the Egyptian channels can be received. When it comes to radio the range of alternative sources is wider. The main Arabic stations from Israel, Jordan and Egypt are all acknowledged to be propaganda channels, likewise the PLO's *Voice of Palestine* broadcast from Baghdad which can only be heard late at night, and is barely audible in the Gaza Strip. One Palestinian journalist has dismissed the PLO station as "full of rhetoric, for which people have little time", playing outdated military marches and anthems to armed struggle, and devoting half its airtime to the transmission of coded messages to activists in the occupied territories which, of course, most listeners are not meant to understand.[42] *Radio Monte Carlo* is considered to be a more authoritative source of information, whilst, for those who speak English, the World Service of the BBC was held in high regard until the Gulf war, when its broadcasts were perceived as little more than a mouthpiece of the coalition forces ranged against Iraq.

In the early months of the Intifada, the most popular radio station was *The Voice of Al-Quds*, which began broadcasting from southern Syria on 1 January 1988. The station was run by Ahmed Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine -- General Command, a faction in bitter dispute with the mainstream of the PLO. Despite its political affiliation the station was hugely popular with Palestinians throughout the occupied territories. The immediacy and accuracy of its reports on confrontations, strikes, and other Intifada-related events, was a source of wonder and pride to Palestinians. As

such it played an important role in maintaining morale amongst the population. Not surprisingly, the Israelis eventually decided to jam the broadcasts, by the simple expedient of opening a new Arabic language channel on an adjacent wavelength. In the summer of 1989 the jamming stopped, a move which was widely assumed to reflect the Israeli desire to promote divisions within the Palestinian ranks by allowing a voice to Jibril. A few weeks later, in mid-September 1989, the station was jammed once again after it had begun broadcasting appeals to Palestinians to burn forests and fields inside Israel along with detailed instructions about how to set about such arson attacks. It has remained a cause of concern to Palestinians that the PLO has not succeeded in establishing a credible alternative station to that of *Al-Quds*, a concern that is barely assuaged by the proffered excuse that any truly autonomous Palestinian radio station would be vulnerable to Israeli attack.

Confronted by censorship of the press and the airwaves, Palestinians have had to resort to other modes of communication. The underground press of leaflets and other literature has been a vital means of communication and political debate. In addition to such "semi-clandestine" methods of communication, other channels have been relied upon. Perhaps the most important in such an essentially small-scale society is face-to-face personal contact. As anyone who has spent any time in Palestinian society is aware, Palestinians always have time for coffee and conversation. A lot of the most sensitive information is conveyed in this manner, by word of mouth. Moreover, most activists are linked into so many different social and political networks that the information is quickly passed along, and so will eventually reach its target.

The telephone and fax machine are widely used, albeit with a certain degree of circumspection. Most activists assume that any communication through such channels will be monitored by the security forces. For those who do have access to such equipment, however, they can be important means of obtaining and delivering information, in the spirit of "I know that they (the Israelis) know that I know that they are tapping this line ..."

In addition, the Palestinians have their own "wall newspapers", in the form of the political graffiti that covers just about every vertical surface in the occupied territories. The Israelis, for their part, have sought to censor the walls by having the slogans painted over, even resorting to spraying some of the walls of Gaza City with a black greasy substance. This "battle of the walls" has been an on-going feature of the Intifada. Each morning the military commandeer householders and passers-by to paint over the graffiti that has mushroomed overnight. Each night the wall artists return to resume their craft. Layer upon layer, image upon image, slogan upon slogan -- the walls of the occupied territories have come to constitute a fundamental part of the popular culture of the Uprising.[43]

Ranking alongside the artwork of the walls as an expression of popular hope and struggle has been the music of the Uprising. There has been a burgeoning market of clandestine cassette tapes. Images of stones, children, soldiers, and burning tyres recur in the lyrics of the songs. Much of the

material produced has been little more than a sloganising "muzak" of the struggle -- as one songwriter explained, "When life itself is rich, you don't need creativity ... When someone is shot and killed in front of you, you don't need a newspaper to report it or a song to remember it".[44] Whatever their artistic limitations, the songs and the music of the Intifada have proved a potent force in expressing the emotions of the population, celebrating in particular the conquest of fear. The cassette has also been the most common medium for avoiding the problems of the censor in the circulation of poetry and short stories during the Uprising, much of it written by detainees imprisoned in the Israeli detention camps.[45]

With regard to other art forms, the Palestinian theatre has been left with virtually no role to play because of the Israeli restrictions on performances throughout the occupied territories.[46] The public display of the work of Palestinian graphic artists has been similarly circumscribed. Quite a few of the paintings have been reproduced photographically, and have been distributed clandestinely in the occupied territories. Beyond that, a number of Palestinian artists have established links with progressive artists in Israel and have succeeded in having their work displayed in galleries in Tel Aviv and elsewhere in an effort to influence Israeli public opinion.

With regard to the Palestinians in the occupied territories, the most powerful symbol of their struggle, in "fine art" as much as in "popular art", has remained the four colours of the Palestinian flag (red, green, white and black). These are displayed not just in the graphics on the walls, but also in the embroidery work of the village women, in the scarves and other items of apparel worn by women, and in the *keffiya* (headdress) worn by the men.

"Destructive ambiguity"

The wearing of the *keffiya* and the display of national colours in their dress by Palestinians is reminiscent of the actions of the Norwegians and Danes in their resistance to Nazi occupation during the Second World War. The Norwegians took to wearing paper clips whilst the Danes wore knitted hats of red, white and blue (the colours of the Royal Air Force) as symbols of their refusal to acquiesce to occupation. The target of such displays was more their fellow-countrymen than the Germans. It constituted a relatively low-risk manifestation of their sympathies that could be recognised by all who knew the "code". As such it was a significant statement of solidarity in struggle, and an important factor in maintaining morale. In similar fashion the Palestinians have been sending signals of strength and steadfastness to each other by means of their apparel.

However, as the Intifada proceeded into its third year, the main target of communication, according to leading spokespersons like Faisal Husseini, had become the Israeli public in an effort to sway opinion in favour of peace negotiations. In interviews with the media and at public meetings in Israel and elsewhere he and others did their utmost to convince the Israeli people

that their long term interests resided in recognising the minimal demands of the Palestinians. As they extended the hand of friendship they sought to portray a future in which the two nations would live alongside each other in peace and cooperation.

One of the major obstacles that has hindered this initiative has been the fact that there are a host of different communication channels emanating from the Palestinian camp, and they do not all carry the same message. The spokespersons of Islamic Jihad and Hamas proclaim their goal of establishing their Islamic state between the river and the sea, whilst George Habash and others have made no secret of their opposition (however "loyal") to the historic concessions made by the PLO since the start of the Intifada. Meanwhile there have been extremist factions from the PLO launching armed assaults on Israel and Israelis. The attack on the beach at Tel Aviv in May 1990, and Arafat's subsequent failure to condemn the raid, did little to assuage Israeli fears concerning the duplicity of the Palestinian leadership. As a leader writer in the *Jerusalem Post* expressed it:[47]

> The intended slaughter of bathers and vacationers on the Tel Aviv beach can hardly be called part of an "armed struggle" against military or police targets, nor can it be blamed on fringe groups, Syrian controlled "rejectionists" or Iranian fanatics. The operation is nothing short of "smoking gun" evidence of Arafat's complicity in terrorism.

The reports of Palestinians on their roofs cheering as the *Scud* missiles fell on Tel Aviv during the Gulf war was sufficient evidence for many Israelis that Palestinian talk of accepting the existence of Israel was just that -- talk, and nothing more. In a similar way, the prominence given by the Israeli media to the killing of collaborators by Palestinians has served to reinforce the old images of the Palestinian/Arab as blood-thirsty, authoritarian, prone to extremism and, above all, not to be trusted.

The consequences of this fundamental ambiguity in the content of the messages that have been communicated to the Israeli public by Palestinians will be returned to in the next chapter. At this point it is sufficient to emphasise the fact that if the Israeli "folk-myth" of the Palestinians as terrorists seeking the destruction of Israel is to be "de-demonised", then a fundamental prerequisite is a heightened degree of consistency in the content of the communications emanating from the Palestinian camp. No matter how emphatically Palestinian spokespersons have denied that the incidents of armed attacks by Palestinians against Israelis have been part of the Intifada, no matter how strenuously they have sought to point out the disproportionality in the injuries inflicted and the casualties suffered, experience has shown that one incident of "terror" and its subsequent amplification by the Israeli media can have a much greater impact on Israeli public opinion than any amount of Palestinian civil disobedience. As one Israeli woman retorted, when I tried to convince her of the sincerity of Palestinian protestations of their commitment to peaceful co-existence, "It's alright for you, you don't travel on the 405 bus each day between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem!". A reference

to the horror of July 1989 when 16 passengers were killed after a young Palestinian had caused the bus to crash down a hillside.

Conclusion

A Canadian supporter of Israel has observed: "Israel's moral standing is its strongest strategic asset, and the belief in the justice of its cause is the underpinning of its military prowess".[48] Both the moral standing of Israel in the wider world, and the belief in the justice of its cause in relation to the Intifada within the country itself, has suffered severe damage during the course of the Uprising. Although the external threat of Saddam Hussein and Israel's restrained response brought temporary respite during the early months of 1991 in the shape of national unity and home and prestige abroad, the burgeoning of restrictions on the press and the media in general has continued to cause fears concerning the state of democracy within Israel. Thus, the restrictions on the media entering the occupied territories during the war were left in place after the cessation of hostilities. The fog of war has been used to impose a thicker curtain between the outside world and events and developments in the occupied territories.

For many Israelis a free press is the life-blood of its democratic system, and what they have witnessed during the Intifada has been a severe haemorrhaging of that system. Indeed, an opinion poll of March 1990 revealed that 63 per cent of the Israeli adults interviewed believed that pictures and words about soldiers mistreating Palestinians should be censored because they harmed Israel's image.[49] What a painful paradox -- the preservation of the democratic image by means of censorship!

In tracing abuses of human rights, such as freedom of expression, a crucial role has been played by human rights monitors. In a situation where the free activity of journalists is severely restricted, where reports are censored, and where many of the sources of information are avowedly partisan, the importance of human rights monitoring groups such as the Ramallah-based Al-Haq, the Palestine Human Rights Information Centre, and the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (B'Tselem) has been inestimable. Relying upon the work of trained fieldworkers spread throughout the occupied territories, such groups have maintained a steady supply of authoritative reports on every aspect of human rights abuse during the Uprising.

From the Palestinian perspective the significance of the work of such groups has increased in proportion to the decline in the media coverage of Intifada-related events. As the weeks and months of resistance have turned into years, so there has been a marked decline in the intensity and scope of media attention to the Uprising. The 1,000 or more "tourist-trade" journalists who flew in to cover the first months, and saturated the world's media with news, interviews, profiles and prognostications, had moved on by the first summer of the Intifada. This left the 300 or so permanent correspondents to continue the coverage. For a journalist, a key determinant of what is

considered to be "news" is what their editor decides will interest their consumers, whether these be readers, listeners or viewers. There are only so many ways to report a curfew, a military siege, a beating, a gassing or a shooting. These have been the surface events of the Intifada which have lent themselves to news reporting, and as time has passed this currency has been devalued as far as the media has been concerned. Moreover, by 1990, under the new Minister of Defence Moshe Arens, the Israeli forces had begun to avoid direct confrontations with the civilian population as much as possible, in an effort to overcome much of the negative publicity that such actions had brought upon their heads during the previous two years. The result has been that reports no longer occupy the same prominence and the same space in the world's media.

US Secretary of State James Baker, referring to the network evening news, quipped that "reality happens here once a day -- and it is at seven o'clock". As items about the Intifada slipped from the TV screens and the pages of the press, so the feeling grew amongst Palestinians that the world had once again forgotten their suffering and their struggle. This sense that the world had grown accustomed to the level of violence within the occupied territories presented a serious dilemma to the leaders of the Uprising. By the summer of 1990 a powerful current of feeling had emerged within Palestinian circles that if they were to recapture the attention of the world, then they needed to heighten the drama of the Intifada. One way to achieve this, it was argued, was by the "vertical escalation" of the resistance to embrace armed struggle. Critics of this argument, on the other hand, urged the "horizontal escalation" of the Intifada, advocating an approach which would draw more and more people into forms of civil disobedience, involving the construction of counter-institutional structures to meet the basic needs of the population. They urged modes of struggle that would increase and strengthen the Palestinian disengagement from the occupying forces, laying the basis for the future Palestinian state in the process of resistance to Israeli rule. A major problem with such a focus on the deep restructuring of Palestinian society in its relation to the Israeli state, apart from the sheer enormity of the task in the light of the parlous state of Palestinian economic, educational, cultural, and health-related institutions, is that it does not lend itself to news reporting. It is not so much a series of events to capture attention, but rather an on-going process that lacks the drama and the immediacy of confrontation.

These discussions and arguments re-emerged with renewed intensity in the aftermath to the Gulf War. One thing is certain: if the strategy of vertical escalation is adopted, then any hope of bringing about a change in the attitude of the wider Israeli public towards the Palestinians and a future Palestinian state alongside their borders will be lost. As the spate of stabbings that followed the Al-Aqsa killings revealed, such a development would undermine the legitimacy of the struggle in the eyes of the world, and it would play into the hands of right-wing politicians in Israel who see a simple solution to the problem of the Palestinians: get rid of them, transfer them across the border into Jordan. It is a nightmare scenario.

However, the alternative of "horizontal escalation" offers only a distant prospect of any "dream-time". Media coverage of the struggle is crucial in terms of appealing to public opinion in Israel and beyond. It is equally vital for the maintenance of morale amongst Palestinians, inasmuch as it provides people with the feedback necessary to convince themselves that their actions are sufficiently significant to make the world sit up and take notice. The dilemma facing the supporters of horizontal escalation is not only how to construct a solid infrastructural base for an independent Palestinian society and state, but also how to devise a constructive mode of unarmed struggle that will generate enough news to satisfy the hunger of the media (and indirectly the morale of the Palestinians themselves), when the very means of struggle they are advocating is not in itself "newsworthy", at least according to the criteria applied by the majority of media personnel around the world.

One of the great gifts of Gandhi as a political organiser was his ability to mobilise people around specific issues, to devise forms of resistance that confronted some of the worst evils of the British occupation of India in a constructive and dramatically "newsworthy" manner. In his campaigns he focused on issues that were of immediate relevance to the people of India, and used these as a vehicle for mobilising people for the wider struggle to transform Indian society. Thus, in his resistance to the Salt Tax he sought to combine non-cooperation with an unjust law with the constructive practice of people making their own salt. Likewise, with the boycott of imported cloth: alongside the resistance campaign and the symbolic burning of British manufactured clothing, he also encouraged people to spin their own cotton and weave their own cloth, thereby helping to lay the foundations for a truly self-reliant India. Palestine is not India, but perhaps there are still lessons to be learnt from one of the most famous practitioners of people power.

Notes

1. The weekly papers *Ati-alia*, *Al-Fajr (English)* and the English and Arabic versions of *Al-Awdah* have never been able to obtain permission to distribute in the occupied territories.
2. Quoted in Reporting Harassment, Jerusalem: Jerusalem Media & Communication Centre, 1989,p 33.
3. Ibid., p 3.
4. Dina Goren, quoted in D Mercer et al, *The Fog of War*, London: Heinemann, 1987 p 283.
5. Ibid., p 265.
6. Ibid., p 10.
7. *CSM*, 14-20 March, 1988.
8. *G*, 11 March 1988.
9. I Black, "Arabs upstage Israelis in media battle", *G*, 8 April 1988.
10. Quoted by Jim Muir, *MEI*, 14 May 1988, p 6.
11. Conversely, much of the news censored from the Arabic press appears in the Israeli press.
12. *Reporting Harassment*, op. cit., p 5.
13. Ibid., p 15.

14. ibid., p 17.

15. ibid., p 13.

16. A Palestinian staff member, Ribhi al-Aruri, was committed to six months administrative detention and later adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience.

17. It has been estimated that during the early months of the Intifada there were up to 1,300 media personnel covering the story, compared to the normal figure of 2-300 foreign correspondents.

18. Quoted in *Reporting Harassment*, op. cit., p 27.

19. *AF*, 4 June 1990, p 6.

20. On 16 March 1988 all international telephone links from the West Bank and Gaza Strip were suspended. In August 1989 the military issued an order banning the sale, purchase or use of facsimile machines in the Gaza Strip in a further attempt to reduce the flow of information coming out of the area.

21. At a Tel Aviv University symposium on "Media coverage of the Intifada", Israeli army spokesperson General Efraem Lapid explained the relative inaccuracy of army reports compared with Palestinian sources by saying that normally there were 70-100 metres between the army and demonstrators, which made it difficult to know exactly how many people had been injured or killed. *Al-Ittihad*, 30 March 1988, cited in *AF*, 3 April 1988.

22. Quoted in *AF*, 11 December 1989, p 5.

23. *AF*, 26 June 1989, p 16.

24. *JP*, 24 June 1988.

25. *G*, 26 April 1989.

26. *Sicarii* threats and attacks were not confined to journalists; politicians were also targeted. The S icarii were alleged to have been responsible for a bomb that was found in the car of Shimon Peres' wife. See *AF*, 7 May 1990, p 9.

27. *JP*, 24 June 1988.

28. *Land Operations Volume III - Counter Revolutionary Operations*, British Ministry of Defence, August 1969, quoted in Liz Curtis, *Ireland and the Propaganda War*, London: Pluto Press, 1984, p 229.

29. *JPIE*, 27 Jan 1990, p 5.

30. See *JPIE*, 7 July 1990, p 7.

31. Quoted in *JP*, 3 April 1989.

32. See D Kuttab, "Battle of wills at Beit Sahour", *MEI*, 20 October 1989, p 10.

33. See, for example, the report in *AF*, 10 April 1989, p 3.

34. *JPIE*, 11 November 1989, p 9.

35. *G*, 3 March 1990.

36. Quoted in *G*, 21 March 1989.

37. One of the people attending the Solidarity conference was the British publisher, Robert Maxwell. A prominent shareholder in the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv*, he rebuked the editor for publishing "that kind of rubbish" concerning the intelligence report, whilst calling on the world's media to moderate its treatment of Israel. See *G*, 23 March 1989.

38. Dan Leon, *New Outlook*, May-June 1990, p 7.

39. *Hadashot*, 17 November 1988, quoted in *AF*, 28 November 1988, p 11.

40. David Grossman, quoted in *Ha'Aretz*, 18 November 1988.

41. Zvi Gilat, "The Intifada and the Israeli Press", *New Outlook*, November-December 1989, p 39.

42. D Kuttab, *Mideast Mirror*, 24 August 1989, p 10.

43. See P Steinberg and A M Oliver, *The Graffiti of the Intifada*, East Jerusalem: PASSIA, 1990.

44. H Barghouti, quoted in *G*, 11 July 1988.

45. The detainees themselves face the usual idiosyncratic forms of censorship confronted by prisoners

around the globe, with camp authorities reportedly refusing to admit parcels of books including Hamlet, an anthology of Celtic legends, and a biography of Tolstoy. See Peretz Kidron, *MEI*, 20 October 1989, p 9.

46. In East Jerusalem where the censorship rules are more lenient, the theatre group of Al-Hakawati have been able to stage some public performances.

47. *JP*, 31 May 1990.

48. Irwin Cotler, *JP*, 2 April 1989.

49. *I*, 8 March 1990.