

Dávid Kaposi: *Violence and Understanding in Gaza. The British Broadsheets' Coverage of the War.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 220.

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“*War is the continuation of politics by other means*” – a proverb held by the military strategist, Clausewitz. This sentence is highly relevant in our understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which has had its own life-cycle since the beginning: when negotiations collapse a military phase begins. In the year 2014 the region saw more violence than diplomatic negotiations to solve the long-lasting conflict. The failure of the significant efforts of John Kerry to achieve a final status agreement for the West Bank and Gaza Strip until the spring of 2014 forced both Israelis and Palestinians to increasingly influence the international audience to support their truth. On the one side the renewed conflict in Gaza in the summer of 2014 prompted the Palestinian Authority to portray Israel as an oppressor, which breached the basic tenets of international humanitarian and war law. On the other side the Netanyahu government argued with using the right of self-defense in Gaza against a terrorist group¹, Hamas.

The international and the national media are quite important tools in the conflict, offering different discourses for the same story. Not only do the Palestinian and the Israeli societies have their own narration of the story, but international stakeholders and the international media provide their own “truth” of the conflict. Electronic and printed media are important players shaping international public opinion together with decision makers.

In the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one of the earliest books of its kind was written by Edward W. Said (*The Question of Palestine, Covering Islam*), the author of *Orientalism*. The book offered a rather biased picture on how the lenses of the media influence the narration of the given topic. Among the recently published books, the work written by Luke Peterson entitled *Palestine-Israel in the Print News Media: Contending Discourses* is worth attention.² The book compares the difference between the American and British narration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the print media, arguing how cultural and social embeddedness influence the context of the articles. According to the main findings of the book, the American printed press is more pro-Israeli, while the British is more Palestinian-oriented. In this regard the American press reflects the historical US-Israeli relations and the American society has more sympathy towards the Israeli security challenges. Great Britain, which was the mandatory state in Palestine, has recently become

¹ A recent ruling of the court of the European Union decided to remove Hamas from the list of terrorist organizations.

² Luke Peterson (2014): *Palestine-Israel in the Print News Media: Contending Discourses*. New York; Oxon: Routledge.

more critical towards Israeli occupation and more emphatic towards Palestinian suffering. The recent UN vote in December 2014 shows how the American and British policy differs in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The United States used its veto power to curb any unilateral decision for the final status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but Great Britain abstained due to their more positive attitudes towards the Palestinian Authority.

One of the latest publications in the field of the never-ending Middle Eastern conflict is the book written by Dávid Kaposi, a professor in psychology at the University of East London. The fundamental question of the book is how the British national broadsheets portray the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from different angles. The book is aimed at exploring “*the presence of meta-discourse... acts of purification, that the British media operate.*”(p.16.) The introduction of the book is a non-biased summary of the recent developments of the Operation Cast Lead and its aftermath. The author chose to focus in his book on the 2008/2009 Gaza War, which has been drawing the attention not only of the Israeli and Palestinian public, but also the Western audience. The Gaza War itself raises fundamental questions like whether the Israeli military has the right to use force and if it was proportional or unproportional. Is using White phosphorous is illegal according to international law or not? And the most controversial question: who is a civilian in Gaza? These are the questions that the book raises from the very beginning without the intention of answering those questions.

This book is about how the British broadsheets address the above-mentioned questions. The quantitative analysis includes five British dailies and four Sunday editions. Our first general impression before reading the book was that one can easily distinguish among the conservative (Daily Telegraph, The Times) and the liberal (Financial Times) and the (left-)liberal (Guardian, Independent) newspapers regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We assumed that the conservative newspapers are less critical of the actions of Israel, and the liberals are more sympathetic towards the suffering of the Palestinian population. Reading the book helps us to understand that there is no “clear-cut, black and white picture of the national broadsheets’ coverage of the conflict” (p.41.), but rather unexpected divergences appear. For instance, as far as the question of fatalities is concerned, it was the Telegraph and the Independent that made the most references to it. This result goes beyond the expected ideological axis of liberal and conservative newspapers. The liberal Financial Times was the most critical about both sides during the Gaza War, but has somehow failed to address the question of Hamas’ rocket attacks on Israel which were one of the catalysts of the Operation Cast Lead.

Recent public opinion polls show how the British public criticizes Israel during the latest wave of Israel’s military incursion in the Gaza Strip during the summer of 2014. According to the survey, 52 % of the respondents says that Israel’s action was a disproportionate answer to Hamas’ rocket attacks³ Understanding the changes in British public opinion, the Houses of Common decided in a non-binding vote to recognize the State of Palestine in October 2014. One important question is what role the British Broadsheets play in the transformation of British public opinion. The book addresses this question using the example of the 2008/2009 crises in the Gaza Strip.

Action and death in war, historical context, criticism and the new anti-Semitism are the main topics for the empirical investigation in the chapters of the book. The empirical part is followed by a qualitative analysis at the end of the work. The book is an objective empirical journey into the discourses of British media on war and conflict. This book is a must-read not

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/12/uk-voters-israel-disproportionate-gaza-poll>

only for those who have an interest in the Middle East and/or the role of the printed media in portraying armed conflicts, but also for experts focusing on British internal politics as well.