

## ***Book Reviews***

**Intifada Hits the Headlines.** By Daniel Dor. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, pp. 184+viii. ISBN 0-253-21637-0

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For a very long time, Israel's contributions to the Israeli-Palestinian violence were not debated in the Israeli public. There is, however, some realisation now that the reports of violations of human rights in the occupied territories were suppressed by most of the country's mainstream media, particularly the newspapers. This development, as Daphna Baram points out in *The Guardian* (digital edition, November 7, 2005), may be explained with Noam Chomsky's theory of "manufacturing consent" – that corporate media inherently tend towards the government line. Since the collapse of the Camp David talks in July 2000 and outbreak of violence in Israel and the occupied territories, excessive bloodshed has been a daily experience for every Israeli and Palestinian. This has posed challenges for the Israeli media and has called its response to the ongoing violence into question.

In *Intifada Hits the Headlines*, Daniel Dor, a lecturer in Communications at Tel Aviv University, provides an alternative to Noam Chomsky's theory of "manufacturing consent" while explaining the Israeli newspapers' response to the second *Intifāḍah*. In his book, Dor argues that the beginning of the second *Intifāḍah* saw the Israeli collective consciousness withdraw into the defensive. The society was enraged because it saw its dream of peace vanish with the failure of the Camp David peace talks, and instead of peace, it was confronted with yet another round of Palestinian uprising. Therefore, Dor argues, public discourse in Israel re-invented itself in a new form and, basing itself on a new *narrative* which was

instantaneously subscribed to not only by the right but also by the majority of the traditional left. According to this narrative, Ehud Barak's government did everything possible at the Camp David talks to achieve a final status agreement with the Palestinian Authority, but Yasir Arafat rejected the "generous" offer.

In the book, Dor shows that the Israeli newspapers have played a key role in the dissemination of, what he terms, the "constitutive frame" within Israeli society. Since the beginning of the current Palestinian uprising, the newspapers in Israel have presented their readers with a one-sided, partial, censored, and biased picture of reality – a picture which has supported the new hegemonic narrative, without conforming to the events as they unfolded in reality. Much more importantly, Dor finds that there was a stark contrast between this constructed picture and the actual reports sent in by the reporters. The editors systematically suppressed certain elements of reality and put emphasis on others, such that it craftily fed and ingrained the collective consciousness of the Israeli nation with the dominant narrative.

Undoubtedly, there are two (or more) sides to the stories of every intractable conflict in this extraordinarily complex world. No other long-running conflict better fits that description than the one involving the Palestinians and the Israelis. In more than fifty years of their conflict, the two sides have never agreed on interpretations of events such as the killing of Israeli civilians by suicide bombers in Israel or the killing of Palestinians in Gaza or the West Bank by Israeli aircraft or soldiers. More importantly, the two sides have never agreed on what had exactly led to the break down of the Camp David negotiations in July 2000 and the subsequent events that sparked off the second *Intifādah* in October 2000.

The Palestinians are convinced that those talks broke down because Israeli negotiators at Camp David, having links with the extreme right-wing politicians in Israel, deliberately sabotaged the talks by insisting to continue to hold on to Jerusalem. The Israelis, on the other hand, believe that the late Yasir Arafat never intended to achieve peace with the state of Israel. Arafat was not trustworthy; he was viewed by the Israelis as a "terrorist" who had not given up the use of violence for achieving his political goals. Shlomo Ben-Ami, who took part in the Camp David talks as Israel's Foreign Minister in

Ehud Barak's cabinet, points out in his *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), that a respectable two-state deal was there for the taking at Camp David but Arafat, "elusive, non-committal, the master of double talk," was not willing to grasp it.

As to the origins of the second *Intifāḍah*, the Israelis once again put the blame squarely on Arafat. According to the Israelis, it is Arafat who deliberately started the uprising of the Palestinians following the breakdown of the Camp David talks, and he could have stopped the violence if he had wanted to. The Palestinians, on the other hand, firmly believe that it was Ariel Sharon who had sparked off the second *Intifāḍah* by visiting the premises of the holy *Al Aqṣā* mosque on September 28, 2000.

How are such conflicting views of the incidents formed? Religious and social stereotyping of each other almost certainly contributes to the creation of such contrary perceptions. But a more pertinent question would be: how could such perceptions be sustained for decades? Daniel Dor presents the Israeli side of the explanation to this puzzle. He attempts to provide some answers to this vexing question in *Intifāḍah Hits the Headlines*. The book is written clearly enough to appeal to both academics and general readers. In his methodologically sound book, the author goes to show how a group of Israeli newspaper editors helped cultivate and reinforce the distrustful view of Palestinians in the Israeli society during the crucial early days of the second *Intifāḍah*. Using discourse-oriented analysis, Dor examines reports published in three Israeli newspapers – *Yediot Ahronot*, *Ma'ariv*, and *Ha'aretz* – during October 2000, the period which saw an escalation of violence between the two sides, and criticizes the "highly destructive role" of the Israeli print media in shaping the nation's collective cynicism towards Palestinians.

Dor maintains that "The newspapers systematically suppressed certain elements of reality and emphasised and accentuated others, in a way that provided the 'factual' platform for the new narrative [which has] become ingrained in the Israeli collective consciousness ever since" (p. 5). In his book, Dor cites *Ha'aretz* of 2 October 2000 as an example, in which a headline read: "Israel: Araft Responsible for Riots" (p. 22). There was also a special box on the front page, with the title, "The Main Facts." It stated that Prime

Minister Ehud Barak had convened a special consultation at his home and told Arafat that his “immediate and personal” intervention was required to quell the situation. It was reported that the U.S. was trying to stop the violence. The newspaper readers were reminded that the cease-fire agreement reached the day before was not observed by the Palestinians. The paper also reported that the U.S. was of the opinion that Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount had triggered off the Palestinian outbursts. Dor concludes that the message was clear: “Arafat is responsible for the violent outbreak and is doing nothing to stop it, and the claim that Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount caused the riots is an *American* claim.” On October 3, 2000, *Ha’aretz* added another piece of information, with a similar heading: “Sharon in a letter to Albright: The violence began before my visit to the Temple Mount” (p. 24). As in *Ha’aretz*, the headlines and the treatment of the news of October 2, 2000 riots were equally politically motivated in *Yediot Ahronot*, *Ma’ariv*.

Dor follows the events of October 2000 on a day-to-day basis and by deconstructing the narratives of the newspapers as well as by reconstructing them in a more balanced fashion. With full reports sent in by reporters, he exposes the negative role of those editors in his book. It is a fascinating study showing the manipulative powers of editors and the print media. Instead of being part of the solution, these editors became part of the problem. But a larger question looms here: why did these editors behave in such a manner? Was there a conspiracy among them to strengthen the general view of Palestinians being untrustworthy?

Dor does not imply any conspiracy theory. He explains that this behavioural pattern of the editors was a result of a complex combination of converging influences and dynamics, which targeted reporters and editors in different ways: the surge of public fear and anger; the undercurrent of racist stances; the almost exclusive reliance of the flow of information from the Prime Minister’s entourage and from senior officials in the defence establishment; the automatic adherence of the media to the task of national unity vis-a-vis what appeared as the clear and imminent danger of a “general conflagration”; the systematic disregard of the fact that the Palestinians in the territories still live under occupation; and the deep conviction that Barak did everything that could have been done for

peace, and therefore, did not and could not have contributed to the deterioration of the situation.

Journalists are part of a society. As ordinary members of a community, they are presumably subject to the same pressures of the values and views of the society. But they are also the shapers and keepers of conscience of a society. It is in this role that those editors of the three Israeli newspapers had failed. The vast majority of the Israeli people might have been part of the collective sense of fear experienced by the Israeli society or share, in Dor's own words, racist views about Palestinians and know nothing about the consequences of the occupation. Perhaps, it is due to the "constitutive role" of editors, as played by those of the three Israeli newspapers cited above, that the following facts have been fenced out from the collective Israeli consciousness: that since the Oslo peace process began, the Israeli government has expropriated at least 70,000 acres of Palestinian land, largely for Israeli settlement expansion and the construction of new settlements and settlement infrastructure; that since 1993, nearly 4,000 Palestinian houses had been demolished; that Israeli settlers in the West Bank and Gaza have used more water for keeping their lawns green than the Palestinians have for carrying out their daily basic needs such as drinking, washing, and cleaning, and for other necessities of life.

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**Reflections on the Qur'ān: Understanding *Sūrah*s *al-Fātiḥah* & *al-Baqarah*.** By Irfan Ahmad Khan. Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, 2005/1426 AH., pp. 782+xiii. ISBN 0 86037 455 6.

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Though the Holy Qur'ān was first translated into English in 1649 by Alexander Ross, it remains a close text to most of the English readers, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The book under review marks a departure from earlier efforts. It would definitely assist a