



Ilam: Media Center for Arab
Palestinians in Israel

Incitement to Racism
and Violence in the
Hebrew Media
December 2012



*I'lam: Media Center for Arab Palestinians in Israel
Incitement to Racism and Violence in the Hebrew Media – December 2012*

*Research: Rana 'Awaisi, Suma Abu Tayeh
Writing: Meghan Monahan, Dr Amal Jamal, Nasser Rego*

Cover Illustration: 'racism', mixed media on canvas, 900x1200mm,2009 by rudi.experimental (provided by FatPaint via Flickr Creative Commons License)

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, particularly in a prolonged conflict, such as that in Israel/Palestine. Therefore, it possesses the dual capacity to resolve conflicts and to build mutual understanding, as it does to prolong and aggravate instability and war. In that vein, equally relevant is both, the comment by award winning journalist and media commentator, Ross Howard, who notes, “The media may well be the most effective means of conflict resolution and preventing new wars,” and the appreciation of the media’s destructive influence in the Rwandan genocide in aiding and supporting violence.

Appreciating the media’s influence, and in the aim of holding it accountable to ethical reporting standards, I'lam as a media rights NGO monitors the Israeli Hebrew media as part of its flagship programming and regularly [publishes](#) on its findings. This report is a compendium of select weekly monitoring of racial incitement against Palestinians and Muslims in the mainstream Hebrew media¹ from 2011 until the first quarter of 2012.

So, for example, on matters involving the military or ‘security’, certain media practitioners ask few critical questions, particularly when the rights of Palestinians are violated. A reason for this is that the media promotes the consensual core values of Israeli Jewish society, which is based on a sense of existential threat that feeds the militaristic political culture.

Why is this lack of critique of the military and security issues problematic? How can we read it alongside articles that incite to racism and violence against Palestinians and Islam? Such reporting contributes to the dehumanization of Arabs, exacerbating stereotypes of this homogenized other, fueling violence against the community, who are increasingly confined to the space of ‘threat’ to security and military strategy. Such reporting is antithetical to ethical journalism, projects a distorted view of the political reality, and closes down possibilities for greater understanding of the other.

I'lam notes five dominant patterns regarding racial incitement in the media. The first is that the media is not the objective, impartial fourth estate that it should be, but instead tends to relay the government’s take on issues as opposed to conducting a critical reporting of the facts. Second is the media’s tendency to generalize about Palestinians, creating homogenized others out of a very diverse community. This tendency ties into the third theme of incitement which is the media’s portrayal of Arabs as immoral, primitive and backwards, a practice known as constructing primitiveness. Fourth, and one of the most dangerous patterns in the Hebrew media, is to incite religious tensions between different groups, specifically stoking tensions between Jews and Muslims. Finally, there exists the trend, an understandably natural gravitation of the preceding patterns, for the intentional use of violence against Palestinians/Muslims.

¹ The media monitored are the newspapers - Ha'aretz, Yedioth Ahronoth, Israel Hayyom, the online news websites – Ynet, NRG, NFC, news on the television stations - Channels 1, 2 and 10, the religious newspapers – Hamodiyah, Yated Na'man, Makor Rishon, religious news websites - Hadareh Haredim, Kikar HaShabat and news programmes on the radio stations - Galei Tzahal and Reshet Bet.

Lack of Objectivity and Racist Opinion Pieces

Two principal features of this trend should be noted. First, that on average, news in the mainstream media is not indicative of pluralism, but rather is nationalistic, unfair, and not respectful of difference. We acknowledge that individual bias is inevitable in journalism, but a commitment to reporting the facts and not concealing inconvenient ones, is a cornerstone of ethical journalism. This is so that consumers can get a fair view of events and come to their own conclusions and opinions. Second, opinion pieces are often misused as platforms for racist expression.

During the week of November 10 - 18 there were two instances. The first was an opinion piece written by Yoav Shork, the editor of the literary supplement in the religious newspaper Makor Rishon. Shork's article was published on the website Ynetnews and concerned the eviction of settlers from the West Bank. Shork stated that the evictions were an "immoral injustice" and went on to explain how and why the settlements had not been built on private Palestinian land. Shork clearly presented his view and selective facts to buttress his assertion that Palestinians had no right to the land, and that no human rights were being violated in settlement construction, even though settlements are illegal under international law. The second article was written by Nadav Sergey and published in the newspaper Israel Hayyom. Sergey's report was racist and instigated against Palestinian Bedouin that live in the Naqab. The journalist used the opinion platform to incite against Bedouin, whom he blamed for the situation whereby the three dozen villages where some seventy thousand Bedouin live are not recognized as legal settlements by the state and so are denied basic services. Sergey made claims against the Bedouin that were unsubstantiated and once again an article with clearly racist overtones could be mistaken by the reading public for legitimate news.

The Problem of Generalizations in Service of Legitimizing Occupation and Suppression

In addition to a lack of pluralism, the Israeli media also suffers from an epidemic of using generalizations and stereotypes in their reporting especially when referring to Arab Palestinians. This is an issue because when journalists use generalizations about people or a situation, the public loses since they miss out on the complexities of the persons and issues being covered. Furthermore, there is also harm to the dignity of the persons implicated in such racializations.

On March 23 2012, the religious newspaper Hamodi'a published an article by Yosef Lavi where he generalizes and accuses all Muslims of being terrorists. He also claims that the religion teaches violence and that it "urges its followers to kill Jewish children and celebrate their death", and that Arab Muslims are on "a modern day bloody crusade." A major theme in Lavi's article is his claim that Palestinians' main goal is to murder Jewish children and that the entire community is full of barbarians that want nothing more than to commit awful crimes against the Jewish people and do not care about decency or even the well being of their own children. Articles like the one written by Lavi are both dangerous and unethical because it presents a very general and stereotypical view of the Palestinian people and accuses them of unspeakable crimes. Unfounded accusations and generalizations such as these further fuel the fans of misunderstanding and mistrust of Palestinians.

In another article published by Hamodi'a on March 30, and written by Yaakov Sheinfeld, similar views are expressed, whereby it is asserted that all Muslims are insane and will eventually become terrorists. Sheinfeld claims that "Their lack of power, frustrations and subconscious inferiority towards Jews have all left deep residue, which is making all the Muslims go crazy one by one, leaving them nothing but one hope and dream: the Jihad, becoming martyrs, to kill and die." This kind of rhetoric paints all Muslims as terrorists and future suicide bombers. These kinds of generalizations and stereotypes reinforce the occupation by justifying the fear of and persecution of Palestinians and render the conflict as an intractable clash of civilizations.

Primitiveness: the Portrayal of Arabs as Primitive

Related to the issue of generalization and stereotypes in the Israeli media is primitiveness or the portrayal of Arabs as belonging to a primitive culture or a 'lesser race'. Portraying Arabs as primitive is a common way to dehumanize them and render them as irrational and inferior, justifying ethnic violence against them.

During monitoring between October 25 and November 10 2011, Ariel Kahana published two articles in the newspaper Makor Rishon that were racist and instigated against Palestinians, both articles de-valued Palestinians as people and painted them as worthless barbarians. In one of the articles he called for a strike against Gaza and rationalized it by saying "killing Palestinians is not worth attention. Israelis don't care about those who get killed on the other side; the only thing that matters to them is stopping missiles that target them." By saying this, Kahana dehumanized millions of Palestinians in the OPT. He then went on to say that "I wish that they would value life like we do. What we need to do now is clean Gaza."

Following an incident, in which the Knesset member Anastassia Michaeli spilled water over the Knesset member Ghaleb Majadele during a dispute in the Knesset, the news website Ynet published an article by the editor and journalist Yigal Walt, where he asked: "How can we distinguish the 'good' from the 'evil' when the Knesset member Anastassia Michaeli embraces the ways of our Arab neighbors?"

In the January 9 2012 article, Walt admonished the guilty party but did so by comparing the offending MK to an "uncivilized" Arab. Walt claimed in his piece that the female MK was dishonoring the Jewish society by acting like no more than "a crazy slut from Ramallah" and decried that the Jews were losing their "superior" cultural authority and were adopting the primitive ways of their Arab neighbors. Walt bemoans the old days of parliament when "once it was easy to distinguish the 'good', the Jews of course, ('the people of the holy book', 'the cradle of civilization', 'the only democracy in the Middle East') from the 'evil', our Arab cousins ('barbarians', 'primitive', violent', 'understand nothing but force')." In the article Walt basically admits that he holds racist views that the Arabs are violent and primitive and warns the other MKs that they need to practice more decorum lest they become like the "evil" Arabs.

Incitement of Religious Tensions

A disturbing recurring theme in the Hebrew media is incitement against Islam. Here, writers make the claim that Islam as a religion is dangerous and a threat to Judaism. The kind of incitement raises the religious tensions between Jews and Muslims by asserting that the two religions are not compatible and are at war with each other, essentially painting the conflict as not a land dispute between two opposing groups but as a war of religions that (according to the inciters) cannot live together peacefully.

During monitoring between December 23 – 30 2011, this phenomenon was demonstrated in an article published by Israel Today, written by Reuben Barcoin. Barcoin claimed that the rising Islamist movements in the Arab world wanted to revive the Saladin myth that Palestinians believe in as well. He generalized that the Palestinian people as a whole are extremist Islamists and because of this it was pointless to negotiate with them. He also claimed that Muslims practice a hateful religion that preaches murder and hate. Barcoin even goes so far to refer to the religion as "Islamic witchcraft" and warns that "Those in Israel, who urge to compromise with the Palestinians under these circumstances, are subjecting themselves to mockery from both Palestinians and Islamist extremists."

The religious newspaper Yated Ne'eman, published a racist editorial on March 25 2012 where it accused Islam of being a hateful and dangerous religion whose goal was to destroy the West. "The most dangerous ideology is the Islamic fundamentalist ideology, and its primary goal is Islamic conquest of the West" states the paper. The editorial doesn't even bother to say Palestinian Muslims but implies that the entire faith is built on hatred and is dangerous to western ideals. By claiming that the religion of Islam itself is dangerous, Yated Ne'eman is supporting language that fuels religious tensions.

Incitement of Violence Against the Palestinian People

Direct incitement of violence against the Palestinian people has become increasingly common in a subset of the Hebrew media. Direct incitement consists of journalists suggesting that violence against Palestinian Arabs is necessary, desirable or acceptable given a certain situation. Needless to say this kind of language is unacceptable from a human rights perspective and journalists inciting to violence against any group in their reporting are crossing a red-line in ethical journalism.

A prime example of inciting actual violence against Arabs can be seen during monitoring between July 8 – 15 2011. Alon Marom published an article on the NRG website where he justified war and even ethnic cleansing against Palestinians. Marom claimed that the amount of settlements springing up in the West Bank will make it impossible to separate the Jews from the Arabs. He argued that separation was necessary since without it, the well being of the Jewish state was in danger, stating “This is impractical in Israel because the Arabs’ rights jeopardize Israel’s Jewish character.” He goes on to suggest that the only solution is to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from the West Bank through deportation on the grounds that they will help Arab armies that may invade Israel. Marom makes this appalling statement justifying the murder of Palestinians “It’s okay if the units slaughtered or committed massacres occasionally, but the Israeli army will not kill. When the hypocrite Gentiles call to return the refugees, we’ll claim that their return will form a vast minority in the Jewish state, and that is anti-Semitic.” The newspaper bears the full responsibility for running the article that justifies the murder of Palestinians.

As this report details, such patterns in Israeli Hebrew media exacerbate conflict and incite to racism and violence. Such practice is absolutely unacceptable from a human rights and ethical journalistic standpoint. Aside from individual journalists and contributors being held to account to such writing, the media houses that carry such articles and editorials should also be taken to task. In this zeitgeist of increasing media censorship and harms to press freedoms in Israel, the force of journalism that incites to racism and violence is only amplified.