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Constructive

Media work in asymmetrical, intercultural conflicts

Discourse Transformation

The case of the Middle East

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction

The role of the media in the dynamics of conflict-torn societies is widely acknowledged, as is the need to take into account the potential of the media for conflict transformation. Media work[1] as a part of conflict transformation can be of great value, as media-based projects remain flexible and adaptable to the circumstances, even after the infrastructure for a particular project is installed. Depending on the time of intervention in the conflict, the media can be employed in various ways, from prevention of crises to escalation and ultimately to post-war peacebuilding. In addition, media-based projects can address all levels of society, from Track I to Track III, depending on the format, the chosen medium, or form and content, amongst other aspects. They have enormous potential to achieve macropolitical change in the realm of society. The media can be used as an instrument for 'building bridges' and in strengthening conflict resolution capacities, as well as achieving more power balance within asymmetrical conflicts.

However, all this cannot be fruitfully achieved without substantial critical reflection. In the worst case, a poorly reflected approach to media intervention might not simply have no effect, but in fact have dangerous repercussions. The media act in a complex field of 'truth', significance and meaning, emotionally charged and culturally saturated. As this takes place within different cultures and power relations, it is crucial to be critical towards one's own underlying theories and values, and to question one's own assumptions. This is even more important if the endeavour is made in a context where earlier encounters between peoples, e.g. during the history of colonialism, are known for their lack of respect and acceptance.

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[1] The term 'media work' in this article refers to media-based projects aiming to contribute to constructive conflict transformation.

The effectiveness of media in the field of conflict transformation is due to their possible power to contribute to social change. Although this power should not be overestimated,[2] it requires responsible and critical application.

In the debate about 'media and conflict', the question whether journalism which strictly follows a professional code of conduct is sufficient for constructive media intervention, or whether a different kind of media reportage is needed to support constructive conflict management, can be seen as the point at which scholarly opinion diverges. Proponents of the former argue that the journalist's objectivity and impartiality are an essential element of the professional creed and that the very idea of media-based action violates this norm. Others – such as the 'Transcend School' or New York University's *Centre for War, Peace and the News Media* – seek pro-actively to promote a different kind of peace journalism and a comprehensive media strategy.

My own point of departure, rooted in post-modern ideas, is based on the assumptions formulated by Robert MANOFF, who argues that although the ideal of objectivity is essential in order to maintain the credibility and social status of the media and the journalist, 'objective' reporting is an ideal, which is aspired to, yet unobtainable.[3] I suggest that the philosophical work of MICHEL FOUCAULT and his concept of discourse offer a useful analytical frame in order to overcome the ambivalent relation towards objectivity. FOUCAULT's work helps to bring into perspective some of the difficulties in accepting the social construction of 'truth' and thus explaining the impossibility of objective reporting, without falling into relativism.

While conducting a field study about local radio in Palestine, my attention was drawn to certain aspects in the complex field of 'media and conflict' which I would like to add to this debate. One is concerned with cultural differences, and how two conflicting parties express things in mutually exclusive ways. Another aspect accentuates one's own location in a certain discourse, about being sensitive to certain facts while ignoring others. This acknowledges the question of which 'truth'

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[2] See D. Reljic, 'The news media and the transformation of ethnopolitical conflicts', in *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*, Berlin, 2001.

[3] See R. Manoff, 'Role plays. Potential media roles in conflict prevention and management', *track two*, December 1998, p. 12.

actually enters the medial discourse, and which is omitted, thus telling us how our own knowledge is constructed. This is especially important for working in asymmetrical conflicts such as the Middle East.

In spite of the increasing recognition of the media as a significant factor in the context of violent conflicts, a theoretical framework for using media constructively in third- party interventions is hardly discussed.[4] The necessity for a theoretical discussion is apparent in light of the encounter with different cultures, which is the case in most conflict interventions. I will highlight two aspects in 'media and conflict' which I believe practitioners should be sensitive to: cultural differences in expression and narration on the one hand, and the hidden consequences of asymmetrical power relations on the other hand. From analysing aspects of the battlefield of meaning with the Foucaultian concept of discourse, I will then proceed to apply the idea of conflict transformation as a form of discourse transformation in the framework for media interventions. Within asymmetrical conflicts, constructive conflict transformation firstly demands capacity-building and empowerment for the weaker party before the process of conflict resolution can take place.[5] In terms of constructive 'discourse transformation', this means that meanings and images of the living conditions of the weaker party are implanted into the prevailing discourse, which is thus altered by acknowledging the perspectives and realities of the weaker party. Also, the media should be recognised in their potential for 'conscientisation', a concept influenced by PAULO FREIRE in his 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'.[6]

Three dimensions of the media will be considered in this article, with a view to strengthening the weaker party in a conflict: The *first dimension* is that of media outreach, which refers not to the audience of a particular broadcast or press article, but to the general public discourse, which media work addresses. Here it is useful to distinguish between two discourses, which are potentially addressed: the local and the global discourse. The local discourse should be divided further into the weaker and stronger discourses in an asymmetrical conflict. Needless to say, media work in conflicts, as any other form of third-party intervention, should be guided by the

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4   For an overview of literature on Media and Conflict, see the online bibliography compiled by Line Dybdal Rasmussen at: http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/cds/themes/line.html.

5   See D. Francis, 'Culture, power asymmetries and gender in conflict transformation', *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation,* Berlin, 2001.

principles of identifying interest groups across both conflicting groups and strive towards an impartial portrayal. However, the difference in asymmetrical conflicts is that they demand an involvement with the weaker or less manifest discourse first, with a focus on capacity-building and empowerment. The *second dimension* pertains to media conventions. Here, great sensitivity to local applications of news formats and conventions for entertainment are called for. The *third dimension* is that of media production, which targets the strengthening of capacities of journalists, aiming to enable them to make their own 'statements' within the global discourses as well as enriching the local one with their voices through training in international standards and through material support.

This essay will not discuss media theories in general. However, it must be clarified that I do not understand the media as vehicles that convey events to a purely receptive audience. On the contrary, they constitute an ambiguous *medium* which both forms and is formed by society. On the one hand, journalists have to fit their story into the given patterns of meaning of the existing discourse. On the other hand, it is actually the media themselves which produce these patterns of meaning prevailing in society.[7] Of course, the rules and constraints of the chosen medium and the media system and the availability of resources condition the way in which an utterance can be framed. Uncovering the complex relationship between the medial level of discourse and the entire discourse of society, however, is beyond the scope of this article.[8]

The transcription of the Arabic script into English is in accordance with the *Hans Wehr Arabic-English dictionary.* The original quotations from the work of MICHEL FOUCAULT appear in the footnotes. The English translation is by the author.

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[6] See P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, rev. ed., New York, 1994.

[7] To stretch it to an extreme, it is in fact the coverage which gives the event its meaning (see W. Gamson, 'Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: a constructivist approach', *American Journal of Sociology,* vol. 95, no. 1, 1989, pp.1-37.

[8] For this discussion, see S. Jäger, *Kritische Diskursanalyse. Eine Einführung*, Duisburg, 1993; K. Merten, J. Schmidt & S. Weischenberg (eds.), *Die Wirklichkeit der Medien*, Opladen, 1994.

2 The battlefield of meaning in the Middle Eastern conflict

2.1 Theoretical Assumptions: Michel Foucault's concept of discourse

As the term 'discourse' is used in a diffuse and diverse range of contexts, I feel it is important to outline my understanding of MICHEL FOUCAULT's concept of discourse. It should be stressed that FOUCAULT's concept of discourse does not refer purely to the level of language. Rather, it refers to both language *and* practice, thus integrating the traditional distinction between what one says (language) and what one does (practice).

FOUCAULT's theory of discursive formations is carefully developed in his 'Archaeology of Knowledge'[9]. In this work, he demonstrates how just one particular utterance comes to surface and no other. The principal unit of discourse is the statement *(l'énoncé)*[10]*,* on the basis of which the reconstruction of the entire discourse proceeds. The question posed is:

"What is actually being said in that which was said?"[11]

This means that it is not the spoken or the uttered, but the *stated*, which is not to be confused with the *spoken,* which must be revealed.[12] The statement is not immediately visible, yet it is not hidden. In spite of always appearing in a corpus of words and texts, the statement is not discovered by searching for the semantic structure of language, which anyhow is a constant reference to something else. It is

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[9] See M. Foucault, *L'archéologie de savoir*, Gallimard, 1969.

[10] See M. Foucault, *L'archéologie de savoir*, p. 105.

[11] [qu' est-ce qui se disait dans ce qui était dit?], Foucault, *L'archéologie de savoir*, p. 40.

[12] See Foucault*, L'archéologie de savoir*, p. 112.

also not identified by merely declaring what was not said to be the stated.[13] Language is the external appearance of the statement. The body of language which clothes it is transversal, and is not the immediate context. Through the sentences and the prepositions, the statement appears and is made expressible.

> "The words, the sentences and the prepositions, that underlay the corpus must be chosen around the diffuse hot spots of power and resistance."[14]

The statement is not separable from the dimensions of *power* and *resistance*. In principle, it is the most obvious, that which is actually said, when one speaks. The statement is the smallest unit of the discourse. In order to describe the discursive formations, the relations between the statements, spread out across time and space, must be elaborated. In fact, it is not even a question of describing the relations between the statements, but more of extracting the determining relation beneath their distribution.[15] That is to say: the unity of a discourse is inherent in a certain *system of dispersion*. This system can be described, if one can describe the rules followed by the formation of its units, which are clearly laid out by FOUCAULT.

> "Whenever a similar system of dispersion can be seen within a certain number of statements, whenever a regularity can be determined amongst the objects, the types of utterances, the concepts and the thematic choices, it can be generally said that there is a *discursive formation*."[16]

In 'Archaeology of Knowledge', FOUCAULT is primarily devoted to the study of discursive formations. The discourse is however not just shaped by and does not only shape the statements alone, but the non-discursive milieu as well.[17] Out of the two dimensions 'words' and 'light' ensue the *expressible form* and the *visible form* respectively.[18] Analysing this line of thought, it follows that the words are actually as far away as the objects *per se*.

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[13] See Foucault, *L'archéologie de savoir*, p. 145.

[14] G. Deleuze, *Foucault*, Frankfurt a.M., 1987, p. 30.

[15] See Deleuze, p. 51.

[16] [Dans les cas où on pourrait décrire, entre un certain nombre d'énoncés un pareil système de dispersion, dans les cas où entre les objets, les types d'énonciation, les concepts, les choix thématiques, on pourrait définir une régularité (...), on dira par convention, qu'on a affaire à une *formation discursive*.] Foucault, *L'archéologie de savoir*, p. 53.

[17] See Deleuze, p. 50.

[18] See Deleuze, p. 49 f.

> "…I would like to show by way of precise examples that even in the analysis of discourses, one sees the apparently strong embrace of words and things loosening, and an ensemble of characteristic rules disengaging from the discursive practice."[19]

Both forms, the *expressible form* and the *visible form,* are constantly in contact with each other, influencing and determining one another.[20] In spite of this, there is no conformity between the two. The *visible forms* and the *expressible forms* are irreducible to one another:

> "We say in vain what we see and what we see never lies in what we say. And it is in vain that we try, using images, metaphors and comparisons, to show what we say…."[21]

In the Middle East, one witnesses a practice of ongoing denial of fundamental rights such as freedom of movement, freedom of expression and physical integrity. This violation of fundamental rights even takes extreme forms such as confiscation of land and property, torture and killing. However, the visible form of these practices (e.g. 'breaking down houses') takes on completely different expressible forms. The visible 'image' of 'broken houses' could be expressed as the 'unwarranted demolition of houses' or as 'evacuation of terrorist cells'. Regardless of the particular mode of clothing a visible fact in language, the visible and expressible forms are irreducible to one another. It may sound trivial, but the dominance of the written word, our conventions of scholarship, and the flood of medially transmitted information make us increasingly forget the importance of experiencing events first-hand. In fact, the expressed form says more about the discourse in which the utterance is placed than about the actual happening which was physically experienced.

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[19] [Je voudrais montrer sur des exemples précis, qu'en analysant les discours eux-mêmes on voit se desserrer l'étreinte apparemment si forte des mots et des choses, et se dégager un ensemble des règles propres à la pratique discursive] Foucault, *L'archéologie de savoir*, p. 66.

[20] That explains how, for example, martial law produces prison detainees and prisons in turn produce crime.

[21] [Mais le rapport du langage à la peinture est un rapport infini. Non pas que la parole soit imparfaite, et en face du visible dans un déficit qu'elle s'efforcerait en vain de rattraper. Ils sont irréductibles l'un à l'autre: on a beau dire, ce qu'on voit ne loge jamais dans ce qu'on dit, et on a beau faire voir par des images, des métaphores, des comparaisons, ce qu'on est en train de dire] Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, Gallimard, p. 25.

FOUCAULT's concept of discourse extends to the concern about the production of knowledge, integrating social practice and the relations of power into semiotic approaches. Power makes knowledge possible, insofar as it defines 'truth' and 'lies', so truth and knowledge determine and mutually influence each other.

> "One can assume that power creates knowledge (and does not just support, use, exploit), that power and knowledge conclude from each other, that there exists no power relation which does not constitute a certain field of knowledge and there exists no knowledge which does not constitute and is not conditioned by certain power relations."[22]

Power is thus not understood attributively, but rather relatively, i.e. it is nothing one can possess, but is something which is constituted through relations. In this sense, it is not judged as negative, since it is power which "produces truth in the relation to knowledge, in so far as it makes possible to speak and see."[23]

Knowledge is put to work through certain technologies and strategies of application, in specific situations, historical contexts and institutional regimes. In the Middle East, for example, institutions such as prisons, the imposition of collective punishment, curfew, house demolition, confiscation of land and all sorts of discrimination including direct use of weapons, are rooted in an accepted realm of 'knowledge' and 'truth' and given social meaning by the prevailing discourse. Therefore FOUCAULT does not speak about the 'truth' of knowledge in an absolute sense.

> "Truth isn't outside power…. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general' politics of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned … the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true."[24]

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[22] [Il faut plutôt admettre que le pouvoir produit du savoir (et pas simplement en le favorisant parce qu'il le sert ou en l'appliquant parce qu'il est utile); que pouvoir et savoir s'impliquent directement l'un l'autre; qu'il n'y a pas de relation de pouvoir sans constitution corrélative d'un champ de savoir, ni de savoir qui ne suppose et ne constitue en même temps des relations de pouvoir. Les rapports de 'pouvoir-savoir'] Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, Gallimard, 1975, p. 63.

[23] Deleuze, p. 116.

[24] M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, Brighton, 1980, p.131.

This understanding of 'truth', which is connected to knowledge and power, is, in my opinion, suitable as a whetstone to sharpen the concepts for media intervention aiming at constructive conflict management. FOUCAULT's understanding of discourse does not neglect the facts, the practices and happenings on the ground, which are often ignored in other understandings of discourse. The actions and facts on the ground tell their own stories, when witnessed, containing information which can never be fully transmitted verbally as a statement about them, as the statement is always subject to the rules valid for the particular subjects placed within the discourse.

One can view Palestinian militants as 'freedom fighters' or as 'terrorists'. It is a fact that they are fighting. But what does this struggle mean?[25] It is the meaning given to this struggle by the discourse that constitutes the crucial point of difference.

> "The struggle is complex and interesting, because it is not only about soldiers and cannons, but also about ideas, about forms, about images and meaning."[26]

This is where the media enter the battlefield: as weapons used in the struggle over meaning. Meanings are not given to events as such, but are derived through a signifying practice.

> "It is the social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful, to communicate about the world meaningfully to others."[27]

Meaning is produced by practice, the 'work' of representation, of which language is an important part. For FOUCAULT, meaning and meaningful practice are constructed within discourse.[28]

In spite of the dominance of the discourse of those justifying the above-mentioned practices, resistance to this discourse could not yet be neutralised, thus

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[25] The same is actually valid for the Israeli Defence Forces as well, but – interestingly enough – here the naming of their struggle as 'fighting' is never questioned.

[26] E. Said, *Culture and imperialism*, New York, 1993, p. 7.

[27] See S. Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London, 1997, p. 25.

[28] See Foucault, *L'archéologie de savoir*, p. 115 ff.

making an open conflict inevitable. This is due to the fact that those experiencing such practices as unjust not only manage to express their stories in their language, but also succeed in forming their own discourse, which can establish a regime of 'truth' (this means eliminating unwanted stories), opposing the dominant discourse with another 'truth', a different knowledge and pointing to another reality. Looking for statements uttered in the Palestinian Arabic dialect, one identifies another series of dispersion of statements, another discursive formation, formulated through its own objects, modes of expression, notions, concepts and strategies.[29]

The asymmetry of power relations between the two discourses becomes apparent, on the one hand, in the disciplinary practices of the dominant discourse, namely the unabated military occupation and ongoing discrimination. On the other hand, it is noticeable in the peculiarity of the Palestinian discourse of resistance, which does not appear on the surface. Archaeological work, in the Foucaultian sense, needs to be done to identify its specific modes of expressions, objects, notions and strategies, which cannot simply be defined and examined as the opposite of the 'dominant' one. In order to explore the subtle mechanisms of asymmetrical power relations established through cultural differences, in a context where the intervening party in the conflict is culturally closer to one side, I would like to take a look at the discursive formation of the Palestinians.

2.2   Reading patterns of meaning in the local media discourse: the 'martyrs of Palestine'

During the summer of 1999, whilst working on a research paper on the process of news-making in Palestinian radio in the West Bank, I was witness to several demonstrations and protest actions, organised in response to the steadily increasing Israeli settlement activities and demolitions of Palestinian houses. One example was the 'Day of Anger', declared by the Palestinian Authority on 4th May

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[29]See Foucault, *L'archéologie de savoir*, pp. 55-85.

1999, in seven Palestinian-controlled cities and in Jerusalem. This was an attempt to create an event to bring the settlement activities to the attention of the media and the international community. The result was that the event hardly received any mention on an international level and if at all, in a manner that vastly differed from the intentions of the Palestinian Authority, who orchestrated the 'Day of Anger'. There were at least two reasons for this. One has to do with the Palestinian Authority and its style of exercising power: the fact that this event was initiated from above, but should appear to be a public uprising was all too obvious. The other reason, and this is of primary concern to me here, relates to the Palestinian discourse itself, which is reflected in their own media coverage.

The notion of 'martyrdom' and the use of the word 'martyr' in the news is one interesting example of the nature of the local media discourse. In attempting to unearth and understand this concept that often appears in the Palestinian media, certain nuances of the socially configured worlds behind this word can be made apparent.

The killing of one person on the 'Day of Anger' was referred to in all Palestinian media reports as a martyr's death (*'istašhada*). This was not a special case, since anyone who dies in the confrontation with the occupying powers is referred to as a *šahīd,* martyr. In contrast to the connotations evoked in translation for Western readers or listeners, the word 'martyr' in Arabic does not sound exaggerated, archaic, strangely overloaded or flowery. It is also not immediately viewed in the context of suicide attacks, as many people in the West would assume nowadays in referring to the Middle East. Moreover, in its Arabic use, it is related to the hundreds of civilians who have lost their lives due to occupation. In the Palestinian discourse, the word marks the rhetorical figure of a catachresis, a dissolved metaphor, which has been re-defined as a collective image.[30]

Originating from Islamic religious discourse, the concept of the martyr found its way into the Palestinian national discourse, and thus underwent a change in meaning. In the Islamic context, the one who gives his or her life in the struggle to uphold God's command is referred to as *šahīd* (plural *šuhadā'*), which is commonly translated as martyr. The word comes from the root verb *šahada*, which means "to confirm, affirm, bear witness to". Theologically, the *šahīd* is guaranteed entry into

paradise. Within the Palestinian discourse, a transformation took place – in the sense of BENEDICT ANDERSON[31] – from 'God' to 'Nation', to the land of Palestine. Thus, whoever dies in the fight for Palestine becomes a martyr, and is guaranteed immediate entry into the mythical eternity of the Palestinian nation. The religious terminology is thus not necessarily of a religious nature. On the contrary, it is employed by people from various backgrounds and reflects manifold philosophical or political viewpoints.

In the Palestinian discourse, the term *šahīd*, martyr, refers to the sacrifice of life in the struggle against occupation. It characterises the killing of a person as an offering of death for one's home land, for the father-land (*al-waṭan*). Therefore the loss of life is viewed as a sacrifice on the path towards winning back one's home land and soil. The martyr symbolises the people's relentlessness, their perseverance against occupation in spite of all the sacrifices. Of course, as soon as the fight for the land of Palestine is equated with the struggle for protecting God's commands, the national struggle can also be religiously legitimised.[32] As the discourse is fluid and dynamic and the struggle ongoing, terms such as 'martyr' emerge, substituting earlier terms such as the *fidāʾiyyn* (fighters)[33], becoming emotionally charged in response to the events on the ground, and also disappear. Since the eruption of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, as the situation escalates in violence, the discourse too has become more radical and polarised, altering the meaning and connotation of crucial terms such as *šahīd*.

For the time being, one can state that through the Palestinian discourse of martyrdom (*ʾistišhād*), the huge number of deaths and killings are given a value, because through this name, the futility of the deaths under Israeli occupation is

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[30] As explained by the Duisburg school of discourse analysis, see Jäger, p. 157.

[31] See B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 1983.

[32] The struggle to uphold God's command is referred to as 'jihad' (*ǧihād*), often mistranslated in English as 'holy war'. The term *ǧihād* comes from the root *ǧahada*, which means 'to struggle'. In a religious context, *ǧihād* refers to the efforts and struggle to follow and achieve the commands of God. According to the specific incorporation of the religious discourse into a certain socio-political framework, this term can and has been differently interpreted into deeds ranging from efforts to fight against the evil within oneself to personal engagement for a just world, as well as to military interventions and attacks.

[33] Derived from the term *fadā*: to sacrifice.

given a new meaning. By placing a religious concept within the context of the struggle for national self-determination, it is possible for the death of a friend or family member to be made bearable and significant, and not painfully futile or arbitrary. The term 'martyr' can thus be seen as an element of a survival strategy, which helps give meaning and sense to the brutal experience of the senseless death and killings of people on a daily basis.

The notion of the 'martyr' is highly emotionally charged. It is a symbol, containing the essence of a whole range of experienced stories. The narration of the story is essential to survive brutal experiences:

> "When we have made an experience of a chaos into a story, we have transformed it, made sense of it, transmuted experience, domesticated the chaos."[34]

In the Palestinian case, the political circumstances have restricted and continue to restrict the modes of expression, forcing people to communicate their stories in an indirect, metaphorical way, charging and selecting words with all the meanings and emotions of their experience, in order to transcend the barriers of censorship[35], proscription and punishment. Decoding their stories has to be seen in this light.

Narration is an essential cultural and social process. How narratives are constructed and where and when they are told is determined by social conventions, political circumstances and culturally specific patterns of belief and behaviour. These patterns determine not only the content of the narrative, but also the chosen form, whether things are expressed directly or indirectly, implicitly or explicitly, emotionally or rationally, formally or informally, in private or in public. Thus they can differ strongly from Western assumptions of media objectivity and the assumptions of the dominant discourse.[36]

Through this example, I would like to plead for an awareness of differences to established Western methods and conventions of expression in public forums as

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[34] Ben Okri in L. Fordred, *Taming chaos. The dynamics of narrative and conflict, in: track two,* July 1999, p. 12.

[35] by the Israeli side and, since Oslo, also by the Palestinian Authority.

[36] See C. Moore, *Mapping cultures. Strategies for effective intercultural negotiations*, in: *track two*, July 1999, p. 8

well as their universe of signification and references. The differences cannot simply be overcome through translation, since every word

> "... is capable of evoking and communicating from one person to another, and from one generation to the next, a unique range of specialised references, resonances and associations. The mother tongue in some ways is the glue binding a society together by providing it with a common universe of meaning."[37]

The semantic fields, the connotations and denotations of words, and the set of emotions related to them, differ so significantly that they cannot always be transferred into a different environment. Rather, they require a steady attempt by outsiders to understand the complex references.

2.3 Asymmetrical power relations in the battlefield of meaning: the Day of Anger

Asymmetrical power relations in the battlefield of media, meaning and signification constitute a great obstacle for constructive conflict management. As case studies in the Middle East have shown, cultural differences become the greatest obstacle in situations, when the one side fears that the other side is seeking to impose its culture or is using it to dominate the other.[38] Thus it is not sufficient simply to be sensitive to cultural differences: the same sensitivity is required towards acts of domination and subtle oppression. The obstacle of asymmetrical power will not be overcome until we realise its importance within the field of 'media and conflict', seeing its tragic and brutal effects and identifying the subtle mechanisms of its operation. For FOUCAULT, these mechanisms constitute an important element for the formation of the discourse, manifest not only in the use of the language, but also in

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37 R. Cohen, 'In theory. Resolving conflict across languages', *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1, January 2001, p. 20.

technologies, institutions and social needs. In the following, I would like to highlight two examples of how asymmetries manifest themselves in the medial depiction of a story: namely through the power to choose which events are to be portrayed and given social importance, and through the power to name events, to allocate a specific meaning to them and hence the power to discredit events pro-actively by discrediting their significance.

The asymmetries of power relations are visible in the selection of events given a place in the international discourse, as can be analysed within the mainstream media coverage of the Middle East. Although this protracted conflict occupies so much space in international media coverage, it does not reflect the social construction of reality of both parties or both discourses in an equal way. The experience of fear and insecurity of the one side is widely conveyed with the coverage of suicide attacks. The insecurity and fear of the other side, however, are reduced to the portrayal of certain forms of direct physical violence, such as mass arrests, shootings and bombardments. But the insecurity deriving from a deeper-rooted structural violence of occupation, prevalent long before the current acute escalation of violence, is hardly recognised.

This extends further to the definition of what the conflict is about. The pictures often presented about the conflict are the ongoing clashes between 'soldiers' and 'stone throwers', the bombings or the suicide attacks. The asymmetries of the discourses are already entrenched by the selection of the places shown, where events occur. The places where Palestinians would situate the conflict might not only be at demonstrations, bombings or suicide attacks, but rather in the daily encounters at the checkpoints, in prisons and in front of their demolished houses. In spite of the UN Resolution 242, the 4th Geneva Convention relating to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War (Articles 33 and 53)[39] and the Oslo Agreement,

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[38]See J. Salacuse, 'Implications for Practitioners', in: G. Faure & J. Rubin, *Culture and Negotiation*, London, 1993, p. 202.

[39] "No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited." (Article 33); "Any destruction by the Occupying Power of real or personal property belonging individually or collectively to private persons, or to the State, or to other public authorities, or to social or cooperative organisations, is prohibited, except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations." (Article 53), see: Geneva Convention, http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/92.htm

the confiscation of land, the construction and expansion of new settlements, the building of bypass roads and the uprooting of plantations continue unabated.[40] Houses have been demolished[41] and the daily movement of ordinary citizens from one part of the fragmented territory to another for work, trade or private purposes is collectively hindered and extremely restricted, in fact made impossible because of the curfew.[42] However, this discrimination and structural violence are much more difficult to portray in the media than physical aggression. The stereotyping of Arabs/Muslims as people prone to violence,[43] often employed to frame events, is a further obstacle to the portrayal of the Palestinian perception of the problem.

The 'Day of Anger' was actually a campaign addressing the international community, calling them to recognise the impact of the continuous settlement activities on the daily lives of ordinary Palestinians. Yet the event was hardly mentioned in international media coverage. The reason for this is not only the difficulty of reporting such unspectacular events as the settlement practice. It is also difficult to make the consequences of the settlement activities for the local population comprehensible to an international audience. The event was thus portrayed in the international media according to the discursive regularities that depicted Palestinian demonstrations on the 'Day of Anger' as violent and destructive. The statements uttered by Palestinians to push the discussion of settlement activities into the forefront were not in line with the international discourse. These were statements in line with the local Arabic discourse, with modes

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[40] Precise and comprehensive statistical data are hard to come by, not only because the figures are mounting daily, but also because the resources to process and compile them are restricted. However, there are a number of organisations providing regular reports and figures on the current situation. For detailed information on settlement growth and land confiscation, see, for example, the websites of the Applied Research Institute Jerusalem: http://www.arij.org/or Foundation for Middle East Peace: http://www.fmep.org/.

[41] Since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, more than 2600 Palestinian houses and apartments have been destroyed. Many houses were demolished without any military obligations – but as an act of collective punishment. Others were razed to the ground for officially stated reasons of "city planning and development", since they were apparently illegally constructed. Behind such acts lie a series of discriminatory policies that systematically reject applications for house constructions by Palestinians. During house demolitions, several dozens of neighbouring houses and constructions are often also damaged." See Amnesty International,
 http://www.amnesty.at/cont/laender/israel/israel_aktion9.html

[42] See for example Palestinian Center for Human Rights: http://www.pchrgaza.org/facts/fact5.htm

[43] See for example J. Hippler & A. Lueg (eds.), *Feindbild Islam*, Hamburg, 1993.

of expression such as 'martyrs' and slogans such as 'no peace with the settlements'. For the local community, there is no need to be informed by the local media about the dimension of the settlement and land confiscation activities in figures, since every member of the Palestinian population sees their expansion, and experiences their negative consequences in their daily lives. Instead, the statements accompanying the demonstration served to express pent-up emotions, accumulated through repeated humiliations. The power relations between the Israeli soldiers and the Palestinians often prohibit the Palestinians' anger from being expressed in the very moment of direct confrontation itself, at checkpoints, during raids, when houses are demolished or land confiscated. In such life-threatening situations, an affective response can have fatal consequences: hence the need for a specially commemorated 'Day of Anger', an occasion for the public expression of what is constantly experienced but never openly conveyed. Utterances such as 'no peace with settlements!' should, in that particular context, be seen less as aggressive slogans than as words of self-empowerment. Tragically, they stand in complete contradiction to the actual power relations in the region, leading the international community and worldwide media audience to see the words, not the actual daily deeds.

The *Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace* (CMIP)[44] can be seen as one institutional example of how the dominant discourse fights the battle over meaning and truth. This Israeli NGO lists and documents all the statements of the Palestinian media which it considers obstructive or contradictory to Israel's own 'security measures'. Here, not only Palestinian historiography and their naming of places are labelled as 'untrue', but also words such as 'martyr' are seen as impermissible, falling under the category of 'incitement'.[45] It thus denies Palestinians the essential need for their own narration, their own history. The labelling of expressions as 'incitement' has proved to be an effective weapon, serving not only to discredit the other side, but also to legitimise further violation of the basic human rights to

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[44] See http://www.edume.org/

[45] See http://www.edume.org/

freedom of expression and opinion, a weapon employed by the Palestinian Authority as well.[46]

The reflection on the discursive world behind the word 'martyr' disclosed the fact that in an intercultural encounter, small words might spark off completely different associations and lead to misjudgements and the reinforcement of prejudices. If the intervening third party is closer to one party than the other in terms of styles, modes of expression and rhetorics, as would probably be the case in any intervention by Europe or the US, an asymmetry is easily created or cemented. The cited example of the 'Day of Anger' exposes the subtle mechanisms by which power imbalances are perpetuated within the battlefield of meaning. In asymmetrical conflicts, it must therefore be a key concern to unearth and publicise the 'hidden transcripts'[47] within society. This constitutes a great challenge for constructive conflict transformation.

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[46] See Applied Research Institute Jerusalem: http://www.arij.org/, Foundation for Middle East Peace: http://www.fmep.org/; Free Voice (ed.). *Misuse of Journalistic Freedoms on Palestinian Soil. Annual Report 1998* (*Intihakāt ḥurrīyat aṣ-ṣaḥāfah fi-l-ʾarāḍ al-filasṭīnīya. Taqrīr as-sanawī 1998*), Ramallah, 1999.

[47] See J. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts*, London, 1990.

3 Applying Discourse Analysis in Conflict Transformation with the Media

3.1 Constructive 'discourse transformation': specificities of media work in asymmetrical, intercultural conflicts

So far, this paper has used the Foucaultian concept of discourse to analyse subtle mechanisms of the exertion of power in asymmetrical conflicts in the battle over meaning. Yet scrutinising aspects of this battlefield from a scholarly distance is one thing. Designing and implementing a media project in such a context is a different challenge altogether. Several international NGOs have, however, been successfully meeting this challenge in conflict regions worldwide, such as *Media Action International, Fondation Hirondelle, Centre for War, Peace and the News Media* and *Search for Common Ground* (SFCG).

In an article: 'Using media for conflict transformation: The Common Ground experience'[48] in the *Berghof Handbook for Constructive Conflict Transformation*, Sandra Melone, Georgios Terzis and Ozsel Beleli discuss the guiding assumptions informing the design and implementation of media projects of SFCG. In fact, their article triggered this present contribution on media work in conflict areas. On the one hand, it sheds light on the key issues and steps guiding media work in conflicts such as Angola, Burundi, Greece/Turkey and the Middle East. Yet on the other hand, the article reveals the absence of a firmly-grounded theory for media-based engagement in conflict regions. As the title suggests, 'conflict transformation' is one of the main concepts within which SFCG situates its work. Reading the examples closely, I could not, however, avoid the impression that the actual guiding

concept for project design is that of conflict *resolution*, which should not be confused with *conflict transformation*.

Conflict transformation is, on the one hand, modest in its objectives, as it does not assume that one can solve the conflict, but aims to transform it. On the other hand, it goes beyond conflict resolution, as the shift in terminology implies a shift of the focus from an imagined status to a process, to the dynamics and developments of conflicts. In this regard, conflict transformation opens its horizons to a broader understanding of society and takes forms of capacity-building and empowerment for the weaker party into its view.[49] Of course, the stronger party should not be left out of the equation. Strengthening the weaker party influences the social fabric of the conflict and must be done in a way which ensures that relations between the two parties do not suffer as a result of such intervention. In conflict transformation, the main aim is not merely to alter the positions of the conflicting parties, with methods such as bringing together the conflicting groups (joint workshops, internships in the other side's media organisations, co-authorship of articles etc.), but rather to embed the alteration of mindsets within a broader concept, which is more open to power asymmetries between the different parties.[50]

Indeed, conflict in itself is not viewed as something negative in the field of conflict transformation, as it highlights existing injustice and triggers social change; only its violent settlement must be challenged. This implies that latent conflicts actually need to be intensified to make them more visible, in order to raise issues for social change through non-violent means.[51] Simultaneously, the capacities for handling conflicts constructively within a society must be strengthened. Constructive conflict transformation enhances a society's confidence in its civic institutions, cultures and capacity to manage conflict non-violently.[52] A balance in

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[48] See S. Melone, G. Terzis & O. Beleli, 'Using media for conflict transformation: The Common Ground experience' in: *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*, 2002.

[49] See J. Lederach, *Building Peace: sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*, Washington, 1997; J. Lederach, 'Conflict transformation in protracted internal conflicts: the case for a comprehensive framework', in: J. Rupesinghe (ed.), *Conflict Transformation*, London, 1995, p. 201-22.

[50] See H. Miall, 'Conflict Transformation: a multidimensional task', in *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*, 2002.

[51] See S. Fisher, J. Ludin, S. Williams, D. Abdi, R. Smith & S. Williams, S., *Working with Conflicts. Skills and strategies for Action*, London, 2000, p. 5.

[52] Miall, p. 14.

power relations between the conflicting parties is crucial to enable sustainable and genuine negotiation. The weaker party must therefore first be empowered, before measures seeking to vitalise and enrich skills and techniques of conflict management are taken.[53]

In asymmetrical conflicts, the framework given by the weaker party is an appropriate point of entry for an external organisation at any level, because its perception of the context, problems and issues are far less accessible, since they are often not expressed verbally. Scott describes such invisible patterns of meaning as hidden transcripts, which conceal a discourse on patterns of resistance.[54] The nature and characteristics of these hidden patterns must first be revealed or unearthed, *before* any plans for their transformation are devised or envisaged. This hidden discourse must be met with respect by the intervening party and safeguarded, in accordance with the social needs of those wanting to be represented by that discourse. The discourse is further enriched and strengthened through the process of conscientisation. Conscientisation is a process of becoming aware of one's own situation within the society, of realising one's oppression. This is a starting point for mobilisation and verbalisation, which precede the ability to formulate positions and to become aware of one's underlying interests, the crucial point of negotiations formulated by the Harvard Concept.[55] In other words: the process of conscientisation is part of creating a less vulnerable and more diverse discursive formation of the weaker party, enabling greater flexibility in shifting from positions to interests.

At the same time, strategies to encounter the dominant discourse need to be implemented in order to bring about change in a non-violent way. This means that methods have to be developed to insert statements from the weaker discourse into the prevailing one, to broaden the horizon of issues discussed and evaluated, and to widen and increase the possible perspectives to prepare for a fair dialogue. As it is the prevailing discourse – which might even be strongly influenced by the diaspora – which primarily shapes reality, this is the one which must be transformed.

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[53] See Francis, p. 8.

[54] See Scott, p. 3.

[55] See R. Fisher & W. Uri, *Getting to Yes*, Boston, 1981.

Constructive conflict transformation is thus a form of constructive 'discourse transformation'.

Therefore, parallel to the endeavour to strengthen the weaker party, the logic of the prevailing discourse needs to be addressed. Constructive 'discourse transformation' in a Foucaultian sense implies that the media highlight interconnections of 'images' and 'statements' which are not normally brought into perspective together. In asymmetrical conflicts, the 'visible forms' of the weaker party must be inserted into the prevailing discourse. The underlying structures and the violence in these structures should accompany any statement about these structures. This can be done by portraying the laws and regulations justifying a certain practice and connecting the notions and concepts derived from these laws to their implication for the people concerned. For example, according to the laws in Jerusalem, Palestinians are *de facto* not permitted to construct houses.[56] As these regulations are not discussed within the prevailing discourse, it allows for drastic measures, such as house demolitions, to be taken against 'illegal builders'.[57] To alter the prevailing discourse, the portrayal of 'illegal builders', for example, can be accentuated through individual cases, spotlighting the institutionalised practices towards them, giving space to 'statements' made by persons affected, and by portraying their actual circumstances. In this way, the daily situation experienced by persons affected can be made intelligible and an understanding of the urgent need for structural change can be developed.

Media intervention must integrate both the *alteration of structures and laws* as well as the *alteration of mindsets*. Where this is not the case, media intervention in asymmetrical conflicts could easily strengthen the prevailing discourse and along with it the maintenance of the status quo. In the case of the Middle East, this means that it is not enough to break down the Israeli public's stereotypical portrayals of Arabs as criminals who illegally build houses in Jerusalem by depicting them in the media as warm and hospitable people; it means pointing to the laws and violent structures that make the construction of houses in Jerusalem for Arabs illegal in the first place. Similarly, for the Palestinians, raising awareness

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[56] See Israel Committee against House Demolition: http://www.icahd.org/

[57] For further information see also Passia: http://www.passia.org/; or Btselem: http://www.btselem.org/, LAW: http://www.lawsociety.org/

through the media about the existence of structural violence, cemented through laws that prohibit house construction for them in Jerusalem, would go a long way in changing the stereotypes of the Israeli soldiers as evil *per se*.

3.2   Three dimensions of media work

In the following, I will try to apply the Foucaultian theory as an impetus to sensitise media work for constructive conflict transformation. The medial level of discourse stands in a complex relationship with the discourse embracing the whole society:[58] On the one hand, journalists have to fit their narration, which constitutes part of the medial discourse, into the patterns of meaning given by the social discourse. They do so by applying norms and conventions of the chosen journalistic genre defined by the media system.[59] On the other hand, these very patterns of meaning prevalent in society are generated by the media, who select and frame the events.[60] However, like other forms of representation, the media can act as useful instruments in the creation, promotion and support of local and global peace constituencies.

> "It is of critical importance that the international community explore the potential of the media to prevent conflict - precisely because, taken together, the diverse mass media technologies, institutions, professional, norms and practices constitute one of the most powerful forces now shaping the lives of individuals and the fate of peoples and nations."[61]

To use this powerful force for conflict transformation in circumstances defined by asymmetries, I will highlight three dimensions of media work in the following: 1)

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[58] See Jäger, p. 150.

[59] See G. Wolfsfeld, *Media and political conflict. News from the Middle East*, Cambridge, 1997, p. 34; R. Entman, 'Framing: Towards clarification of a fractured paradigm', *Journal of Communication*, Autumn 1993, pp. 51-58.

[60] To stretch it to an extreme, it is in fact the coverage which gives the event its meaning (see Gamson, pp.1-37.

[61] Galtung, p. 12.

media outreach, 2) the cultural determination of media conventions, and 3) empowerment of journalists as a means of media production. These dimensions, to be borne in mind in planning and executing third-party media interventions, are primarily concerned with the view to strengthening the weaker party in the conflict.

i) Media outreach: distinguishing between local and global discourses

I would like to distinguish between two levels of media work, instead of talking about 'the media' *per se*: one level is the communication directed to the local communities (or the local discourse), and the other addresses the international community (the global discourse). The same broadcast or print article often simultaneously addresses both the local and the international community, yet the same 'discursive fragment'[62] makes different statements in the local or in the international discourse. Returning to the example of the 'Day of Anger', in the local Palestinian radio it was broadcast as a people's uprising and demonstration; it was decoded by the public as an order from the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to rise up and protest. Yet the same broadcast on an international level was widely seen as another example of aggressive Palestinians demonstrating. The distinction between the two levels of global and local processes of communication seems in my view appropriate, in order to give space to the nuances of the local discourse as well as to the local practices of disseminating information. Simultaneously, it is necessary to extend the scope of conflict transformation measures in a specific region into other parts of the world, as globalisation exerts an increasing impact, via transnational trade practices, on local conflicts. For example, the fact that certain multinational companies support the growth of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, is an 'event' to be reported about on a global level, in order to challenge the authorities who actively endorse or passively condone these strategic actions.

In an asymmetrical conflict, at the local level of discourse, one cannot only trace the prevailing discourse, but must also make efforts to focus attention on the weaker one. Although it is actually the prevalent discourse which needs to be altered, the weaker discourse is required to influence the direction that the change

takes. The questions to be raised in third-party interventions are: Which level of discourse is being addressed in a certain project, the local or the global? If it is the local one, is the weaker party being strengthened in the process? Is the stronger, prevailing discourse being challenged, and if so, how?

ii) Media conventions: the cultural determination of news and entertainment formats

One common division within the different mass media (print, television, radio) is the distinction between 'information' or news, and 'entertainment'. I consider this distinction to be useful, since the expectations of the relationship between the statements and the occurrence of events are very different within the category of 'news' as compared to the category of 'entertainment'. This is due to the contract between the journalist and the audience, which stipulates that news say something true about recent events. While the conventions for determining what is valid as entertainment are left open, the conventions for news reporting are ethically charged and demand a certain code of conduct, striving to guarantee 'objectivity', an envisioned parity between a real event and its coverage in the news. This becomes apparent in the efforts by journalists to represent an event as soon and as accurately as possible upon its occurrence. This endeavour is strongly fuelled by the desire to uphold the 'truth' and is hence embedded in the realm of the creation of knowledge. The expectations towards and the relevance given to 'news' in terms of their influencing of knowledge constitute an important level for 'discourse transformation'.

The distinction between 'news' and 'entertainment' is, however, not an objective one. The line separating both categories is itself culturally determined, and thus needs to be modified according to different contexts. It is not necessarily a given fact that information is always transmitted via news formats, or that a clear distinction can be made between informing and entertaining. The proliferation of audio cassettes of poetry or graffiti writings are examples of other formats of disseminating information in Palestine. However, this distinction can still be useful

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62 I refer to Siegfried Jäger (1993) in my usage of the term 'discursive fragment'.

as a point of departure in working towards a universally applicable theory for reflections on media work.[63]

As stated in the introduction with reference to Manoff and backed up theoretically with the concept of discourse, 'objective reporting' is an unobtainable but desired ideal. Nonetheless, denying the possibility of objective reporting does not imply denying the usefulness of maintaining standards of journalism, although they are not applied as much in practice as they are defended in debate. Rejecting the notion of objectivity merely points to the fact that the way a journalist portrays an event is shaped not only by local convention and professional standards but also, and to a substantial extent, by his or her situation in a discourse and by the discursive particularities. Striving for objectivity, whilst recognising the impossibility of being objective, allows for reflection on both the discourse in which the journalist or his/her audience is situated, his or her status in it, and journalistic conventions and mechanisms. Such an awareness awakens the urge to discover other discourses, other 'truths', and hone the standards of journalistic writing accordingly. The realisation that what one sees (visible forms) is essentially different and never substitutable with what one writes, emphasises the necessity of physically discovering and experiencing the places to be reported, with the aim of really *seeing* what is happening. It reinforces the impossibility of rediscovering meanings by merely relying on written news sources, other texts or anecdotes. Why is this effort necessary, if objectivity is never attainable and the statements and the 'visible forms' are never interchangeable? It is the simple fact that 'nothing has meaning outside of discourse' which makes this effort necessary. Events have to be represented and statements about them need to be uttered within the discourse, otherwise they occur without any meaning, allowing suffering and killing to happen in the same way as the accidental squashing of a mosquito, without anyone taking notice, and without any purpose or significance. The strength of investigative journalism lies precisely here: in the discovery of the smells and colours of unseen and unheard-of places, and the insertion of these pictures into the discourse. Furthermore, the journalists must be aware that statements uttered in regions other than their own belong to different discourses. If they want to discover the meaning

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[63] Thus in a way developing a theory in line with Edward Said's 'travelling theory' (E. Said, *The world, the text and the critic*, London, 1983, p. 226 ff.)

for the people affected, they also have to dive into the local discourse to understand it. A power-sensitive selection of events and statements can disrupt hierarchies, by situating the powerless beside the elite. In this way, different meanings of repeatedly reported events come to the surface by being differently framed. An examples of this is: if statements of the Israeli political elite urging the need for 'strong measures' are cited in line with statements describing the actual experiences of those affected by the occupation and giving space to oppositional voices such as the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions.[64] Journalistic work can thus strive towards the integration of the voiceless into the discourse and strengthen the awareness of pluralistic perspectives and interpretations of events. As Johan Galtung says:

> "The news techniques journalists need would present the story and the facts as only one possible construction among many, opening the possibility of constructing them differently."[65]

The technique of reporting news is accepted as being of universal value, since this genre of reporting makes a pluralism of opinions possible. In fulfilling the functions of informing and educating, of providing a platform for discussions and of taking the role of watchdog of state activities and civil society actors, they create a form of knowledge which is needed within a democratic society. Such knowledge is useful for the process of democratisation, where each individual is called upon to act politically. The experiences with the standards of journalism developed over the years in the West have been positive in this particular social context of democratisation.

> "This should serve to remind us of the obvious point that journalism is a specific social practice that has a history, and that this history is one of unending social invention. ... [In] discussing 'media & conflict' issues, it is important not to fall prey to an ahistorical essentialism that presumes that today's form of journalism is, or ought to be, tomorrow's."[66]

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[64] For further information see International Committee against House Demolition http://www.icahd.org/

[65] See Galtung in: http:// www.conflictandpeace.org/6pub/2pub.html

[66] See Manoff, p. 13.

These standards inherit certain values about how a society should organise itself. They define what kind of 'news' is valid and reliable and what an appropriate portrayal of an event is. They define it as good-quality journalism to say, for example, "one youth dead", but not to say "martyr attains martyrdom"[67]. The establishment of standards has led to a certain practice of journalism which, in spite of vast differences from one media form to another and one journalist to another, is socially respected and judged as high-value.

However, in parts of the world living under totalitarian or authoritarian regimes, applying such standards might be very counter-productive. Take, for example, the practice of 'investigative journalism'. Certainly, access to reliable news of how a certain event has occurred is of great value and importance. Yet in areas with dangerous security situations, omnipresent secret services or strong social sanctions against speaking out or asking directly for information, great sensitivity in the process of acquiring information is called for. The potential negative consequences of publishing and disseminating information must be carefully considered and weighed up. In the process of searching for information, too, great sensibility and caution are called for. In Palestine, for example, almost every young or adult male has spent some time in prison, being subject to brutal humiliation, interrogation and torture.[68] As both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority aim to erase any voices of opposition, the society is infiltrated with security forces and spies, and people are dragged through brutal mechanisms into the dependency of collaboration with such forces. The principle of *ġumūd*, covering with a smoke screen, guides public speech and is important for survival in such times. The fact that the Arabic word for 'interrogation within prisons' is the same as the word used for 'journalistic investigation' (*taḥqīq)* reveals the need for a sensitive procedure in collecting information.[69] Furthermore, the cultural separation between public and private demands some respect for 'private information', which can harm the persons involved if publicly discussed. The standards of 'good journalism' in the

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[67] Literally: *ʿistašhada*

[68] See Addameer http://www.addameer.org/; The Public Committee against Torture in Israel, http://www.stoptorture.org.il/

[69] See M. Al-Kisawânî, 'The Palestinian society is not used to revealing itself to journalists' (*al-muǧtamaʿ al-filasṭīnī lam yaʿtad ʿan yaktašif nafsihi ʿamām aṣ-ṣaḥāfa*) in: *Ṣaḥāfī,* April 1997, no.1, p. 3.

West demand that a reporter thoroughly delves into a question. But in the current Palestinian context, such a modus operandi might be perceived, for the above reasons, as completely inappropriate and if done insensitively, only creates mistrust and fear, resulting in vague responses. The problematic issue is that such an atmosphere is likely to reinforce self-censorship, as is the case in Palestine, which can become a great obstacle for the development of a free press and media.[70] However, several committed professionals in the region know quite precisely where the fault lines between sensitive coverage and censorship lie, and how far they might be transgressed, like for example the journalists trained at the *Birzeit Media Center*.[71]

The practice of seeking information, transmitting news and conserving history is a strategy of constituting an own discourse. Very different medial forms are used for this purpose. In Palestine, it is fascinating how people manage to transmit their 'news' in spite of all the existing restrictions, through graffiti, pamphlets, cassettes with songs, poems and speeches, legends, jokes and other oral forms of communication, so the distinction between 'news' and 'entertainment' is blurred. Experiences can be told through stories, thereby invading the controlling system of occupation. The loading of some words with strong emotions is one strategy to circumvent such a system. One very pertinent example is that of the 'right to return'. The term *ḥaqq al-ʿauda*, 'right to return', carries a tremendously strong connotation, as it is one of the very few term remaining, which express the historical truth experienced by Palestinians in 1948. Thus it has to carry and preserve thousands narratives of people dispelled from their homes in 1948 and is consequently loaded with moments of pain, humiliation, fear, doubt, shame and the longing for justice. Although every personal story was very different, all of them – which have not yet been condensed into formalised historical writing – are concentrated within that notion. Denying the usage of this word is equal to denying the events that happened and to attacking the identity of those who experienced them. The rediscovery of personally experienced stories and their materialisation in a medium, in pieces of broadcast or in local art forms, transform their heaviness and strengthen people's

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[70] See Free Voice (ed.), Misuse of Journalistic Freedoms on Palestinian Soil. Annual Report 1998 (*Intihakāt ḥurrīyat aṣ-ṣaḥāfah fī-l-ʾarāḍ al-filasṭīnīya. Taqrīr as-sanawī* 1998), Ramallah, 1999.

[71] See Birzeit Media Institute: http://www.birzeit.edu/centers/media.html

collective identity by opening up spaces for the diversity of the different moments and experiences.[72]

As practitioners have pointed out, for effective media intervention, an assessment of the local use of the media and local forms of communication is of crucial importance.[73] This is so easily said, and so much more difficult to translate into practice, for the categories can be so different that one overlooks them and the important 'hidden transcripts' are difficult to grasp. The manner in which events are reported, stories are told and meaning is given to the world differs, as evident in the example of the usage of emotionally charged words such as 'martyr'. Creative conflict transformation is interwoven with an alteration of the discourses of the different parties. However, since the change cannot be dictated from outside, media interventions can only open the space for other stories to be told and disseminated, point to other causalities, which are not talked about, and can thus provide a forum for critique and discussion. They have to operate in accordance with local cultural patterns, leaving as much room as possible for stories to find their own form and rhythm, not defining them by a particular format.[74] They should serve as a 'medium' in which stories can be narrated and the experience and emotions can be expressed, without immediately being judged. This is of crucial importance for groups and communities which have been oppressed and have thus never told their stories or narrated their facts.

Instead of distinguishing between 'good/objective' and 'bad/non-objective' journalism, I would suggest the distinction to be made in terms of the rhetorics used: between the use of a sober language employing figures and facts to persuade the audience on the one hand and the application of emotional rhetorics on the other. Although I believe that conveying only the emotions felt in a particular situation through symbolic language, for example, is as 'true' as a dispassionate, factual description of that situation, the latter style gives space for others with a completely different mindset to agree upon the 'truth' of that particular situation, without viewing it in the same way. The circumstances and actions can be

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[72] See the work of the Arab Resource Center for Popular Arts, Al-Jana: http://www.oneworld.org/al-jana.

[73] See for example R. Hay, *The Media and Peacebuilding. A Discussion Paper*, Ottawa (IMPACS), 1999.

[74] See U. Kayser, 'Storying Identity', *track two*, July 1999, p. 36.

interpreted and perceived differently, without denying the 'truth' of their occurrence. An emotional depiction does not leave much room for discussion, because if something was felt in a certain way, then it was indisputably felt like that, and there is nothing left to discuss. But if the emotions are the only knowledge left about an occurrence, since its factual description could not be transmitted, as is the case for many Palestinians who experienced dispossession in 1948 during the *nakba*[75], questioning the emotions becomes tantamount to questioning the truth of the occurrence of that experience.

Factual description can serve as a common point of departure for the conflicting parties to move towards resolution. Emotional description can serve to unite persons from different standpoints by acknowledging the common experience of emotions, such as loss or mourning.

I propose conceiving media formats not in the binary categories of 'news' and 'entertainment', but more as a continuum with dispassionate, accurate and direct language at the one end, and emotionally charged, lyrical and indirect language on the other.

The question to be raised in third-party media interventions in regard to this is: What are the local formats in the continuum, best suited to fulfil the project aim? When the aim is directed more towards problem-solving, a format closer to the one end of the continuum should be selected; whereas if healing is of utmost concern, a format nearer to the other end is chosen.

The selection and use of the appropriate media is a strategy of materialising structures to express statements of discourses. Training people to enable them to narrate their stories is thus an important form of capacity-building, for uncovering the hidden transcripts and the discourse of the oppressed, and altering the prevalent, local and global discourse for 'discourse transformation'.

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[75] Arabic lit. 'catastrophe, misfortune'

iii) *Media production: empowerment of journalists through recognition, strengthening skills and material support*

On the question of teaching journalists and striving to establish standards of journalistic practice, I believe an acknowledgement of not having any universally valid standards can serve to avoid a sense of arrogant superiority towards local practices.

The standards of journalism developed and taught, but not consistently practised by the West,[76] can be fruitfully transferred to other places as well. However, the history of Western domination and the awareness of power relations demand a respect for what is practised locally. I believe the question should not only be: how can we teach our standards there, but also: what can we learn from their practices and standards? How can we appropriately portray these places? And not least, how can we enrich our own forms of communication with the aim of strengthening peace constituencies?

ABIDOUN ONADIPE and DAVID LORD point to the importance of news-making and the training of journalists.[77] This is significant in regard to translating the local discourse into the global discourse and strengthening the international peace constituencies. Those trained according to the standards of the international media can express their point of view and raise their issues in such a way that it can be recognised and understood by an international audience. Nevertheless, journalist training has an effect on the dissemination of reliable information in the conflict region itself, which is necessary for developing local capacities for peace.

In conducting training for journalists of conflicting parties in asymmetrical and intercultural conflicts, it makes sense to start by holding separate training for each side. Otherwise, inequality is cemented if the intervening party is closer to the culture of the stronger side. In this case, joint workshops with journalists from the opposing sides at best reinforce the status quo.[78] Particularly if the one side feels that the other side imposes its culture upon it, a factor which crucially influences the

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[76] As David Lord said: 'We tell them to do what we say, not what we do!' in Onadipe, A. & Lord, D., *African Media and Conflict, Reconciliation Resources*: http://www.c-r.org/occ_papers/af_media, 1999.

[77] See A. Onadipe & D. Lord.

[78] as exemplified in the documentary film *Roads to Peace*, Tel Aviv, 1999.

outcome.[79] As mentioned, special recognition needs to be given to the weaker party and their capacities strengthened. Thus, the questions to be asked are: is the time ripe for an encounter, or is the apprehension of the inequality in status still too dominant? And if yes, does an equal encounter really take place within the workshop and are the chosen formats and content definitely not more accessible to the dominant group? Have some formats also been chosen in which the weaker party can display its strength?

Of course, international support in media production in conflict regions also includes material and infrastructure-based support. During the recent escalation of the Middle East conflict, all private and public-service radio stations in the Palestinian areas have been systematically demolished, transmitters bulldozed, equipment completely destroyed and communication systems paralysed.[80] Legal restrictions prohibit the issue of licences beyond a certain narrow wave-length, a measure preventing the outreach of media coverage from the Palestinian perspective to a broader audience.

The internal functioning and constitution of the media system, including standards and conventions of journalism, different journalistic genres, rules and regulations of selecting events, 'news factors', norms of journalistic education and training, legal system concerning the media and political interpretations of questions of censorship, must also be taken into consideration, alongside constraints of market competition, availability of material resources and technical infrastructure.

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[79] See Salacusen, p. 202.

[80] See documentation in: *Informationsprojekt Naher und Mittlerer Osten*, inamo, vol. 30, no. 30, Summer 2002, p. 33.

4   Concluding remarks

> The truth has two faces,
> and the snowfall
> on our city is black.
> *Mahmud Darwish, 1994*

The situation in Palestine/Israel has reached a degree of escalation where the need for third-party intervention can hardly be denied. The existential threat has reached a point where normal life has become a strenuous existence on the brink of survival. In Israel, people live in fear of bomb explosions, while those living in the occupied territories (other than the settlers) are held under curfew, threatened by military attacks, raids and detentions. The Palestinians in the occupied territories are expected to obey military orders from the State of Israel as if they were laws of a Palestinian state. Yet the state which imposes these orders and whose army controls the territories, land, water and resources does not see itself as responsible for the welfare of the Palestinians living in the territories occupied by them: Palestinians are not citizens, so the state is freed of the obligation to fulfil its obligations like a normal state and it also does not need to behave like an occupying power, since the Oslo Agreement freed it of that title. The conflict therefore cannot be dealt with as a conflict between two states, nor between two equal societies with similar access to institutionalised power. Constructive conflict transformation demands the employment of all capacities available in the region, within the territories, inside Israel, and in the diaspora communities, to work towards more power balance between these different societies.

This article sought to introduce Michel Foucault's concept of discourse as a useful philosophical and theoretical whetstone on which the guiding assumptions behind media-based work in regions defined by asymmetrical, intercultural conflicts could be sharpened. The media enter the battlefield as weapons used in the struggle over meaning. For Foucault, meaning and meaningful practice are constructed within discourse. Meanings are not given to events as such, but derived through a signifying practice. Since Foucault's concept of discourse integrates the traditional distinction between what one says (language) and what one does (practice), it

implies that media work, i.e. projects and programmes led by third-party interventions, aiming to use media strategically in conflict transformation, must address both the *alteration of mindsets* as well as the *alteration of structures and laws* which constitute an important part of the discursive formation. Applying discourse analysis to media work in asymmetrical conflicts implies creating a less vulnerable and more diverse discursive formation of the weaker party, enabling greater flexibility in shifting from positions to interests. At the same time, it implies implementing strategies to encounter the dominant discourse. Where this is not the case, media intervention in asymmetrical conflicts could easily strengthen the prevailing discourse and along with it the maintenance of the status quo. Constructive conflict transformation is thus a form of constructive 'discourse transformation'. To transform the prevailing discourse constructively, I argued that archaeological work, in the Foucaultian sense, needs to be done first to identify the specific modes of expressions, objects, notions and strategies of the weaker discourse, the 'hidden transcripts' in an asymmetrical conflict, which cannot simply be defined and examined as the opposite of the 'dominant' discourse.

Through the example of the discursive worlds behind the word 'martyr' in the local Palestinian media discourse, the plea was made for an awareness of differences from established Western methods and conventions of expression in public forums as well as their universe of signification and references, which cannot simply be overcome through translation and must be safeguarded and respected by any intervening party. Great caution is called for, in order to not fall into simplistic categories, in the analysis of the Palestinian discourse and of social movements, which overemphasise the religious aspect and promote an overall discourse distinguishing the 'West' from an 'Islamic world'. Such a binary view is likely to reinforce the division and obscure the similarities. In my view, Islamic revivalism in the Middle East should not be viewed as standing in contradiction to modernity, but is actually an integral part of the modernisation process. It carries much broader cultural demands, including political and socio-cultural ones. Rather than being straitjacketed as a religiously motivated revivalism, it can be viewed as a new formulation of the Arabic nationalistic or anti-imperialistic dynamic with an

indigenous Arabic vocabulary, as pointed out by Francois Burgat.[81] Overcoming the polarities between the 'West' and the 'Islamic world' also implies not judging the use of violence with double standards and not legitimising various forms of violence from the West, whilst categorically condemning others for their use.

Foucault's understanding of truth, a concept closely connected with power and knowledge, is a further important theoretical idea which implies that a journalistic striving for objectivity, whilst recognising the impossibility of being objective, allows for a reflection about the discourse in which the journalist and/or his audience is situated, as well as the journalistic conventions and mechanisms. It also awakens the urge to discover other discourses, other 'truths', and hone the standards of journalistic writing accordingly.

The case of the Middle East demonstrates that cultural differences become the greatest obstacle to constructive conflict transformation in situations when the one side fears that the other side is seeking to impose its culture or is using it to dominate the other. Therefore it is not sufficient simply to be sensitive to cultural differences: the same sensitivity is required towards the acts of domination and subtle suppressions. By focusing on the example of the medial depiction of an event, the Day of Anger, this study highlighted two instances of how asymmetries manifest themselves in the media: namely through the power to choose which events are to be portrayed and given social importance, and through the power to name events, to allocate a specific meaning to them and hence the power to discredit events pro-actively by discrediting their significance.

The article introduced three dimensions of media work of particular relevance in asymmetrical conflicts. The first dimension distinguished between the levels of global and local discourse, and further divided the local level of discourse into the stronger and weaker discourse, the latter being the prevailing local discourse, which is to be challenged. The second dimension of media work distinguished between the formats of 'news' and 'entertainment', whilst at the same time recognising that these distinctions are sometimes blurred. By conceiving media formats not in the binary categories of 'news' and 'entertainment', but as a continuum, with dispassionate, accurate and direct language at the one end, and emotionally charged, lyrical and indirect language on the other, media work allows for the use of

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[81] See F. Burgat, *L'Islamism en face*, Paris, 2002.

different formats according to the aim of a particular project. When the aim is directed more towards problem-solving, a format closer to the 'news' end of the continuum should be selected, whereas if healing is of utmost concern, a format nearer to the 'entertainment' end is chosen. The third dimension of media work emphasised the need to recognise the strengths of the weaker party whilst seeking to improve their skills and provide material support.

The value of the work with media in conflict regions cannot be over-emphasised. The success of organisations like SFCG or *Fondation Hirondelle* serves as proof of this value. However, if the 'close connection and collaboration with the local actors, who should be the compass that guides our activities'[82] is truly aspired to, one cannot progress without continuously questioning one's own situation, one's own interests and legitimisation to intervene. I believe this is a field where several questions emerge, demanding to be answered in one way or the other. If it is seriously intended not "to impose one's own value system"[83], while implementing the project this theoretical discussion is required. The reflection about one's own accepted patterns of meaning, without claiming their universal validity, or claiming ownership over their inherent values or their institutionalisation, or failing to recognise the existing power relations, might open one's eyes for different forms of expression and social organisation. This in turn can be channelled to strengthen the communication within the peace constituencies and support the local capacities for peace, both locally as well as in a globalising world.

The author is keen to stimulate further academic debate on the issues raised in this paper, and greatly welcomes comments or criticism from other academics and practitioners.

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[82] Melone, p. 14.

[83] Melone, p. 14.

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