

Media is for Peace, Love and Understanding?

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2010-10-13



Our Audience

There are different theories of what role the media should embrace. One of them is that the media should serve the audience and is responsible in seeking truth. With regard to conflicts this means that responsible journalism providing all relevant information can be a promoter of peace, love and understanding.

But is “objectivity” in journalism even possible? And where does a journalist draw the line between his identity and his professional duty to impartially inform his audience?

In the second session of the [Polis Media Dialogues](#) the journalists Amit Segal and Faisal J. Abbas come to very similar conclusions while approaching the question from different angles. They emphasise problems of investigative journalism today while at the same time stressing the need for responsible journalism in promoting democracy.

This report by Polis Journalist Anastasia Albert.

Amit Segal, who has reported on the Knesset and Israeli politics on Israel’s Channel 2, focused on the tension between following journalistic values on the one hand and being patriotic on the other. He asks how his identity influences his coverage of certain issues, especially when Israel and the Middle East Conflict are concerned.

The essence of journalism today is to constantly produce something new. The journalistic task of providing factual information does not suffice in the digital age, in which events are online the same minute they happen. It is about reporting from a certain perspective, analysing, commenting, framing and reframing.

Different Perspectives

Journalists can also be regarded as having constituencies in the sense that they serve their audience and need to satisfy their expectations. In this respect they have to provide them with all the necessary information, but at the same time a journalist does not need to question core values of the society he or she is living in. Consequently we should acknowledge the fact that there are differences in perspectives and that Al Jazeera reports differently about the Middle East Conflict than does Israel’s Channel 2.

The key problem is where to draw the line. For Amit the line is on the atomic level: “If the Hisbollah says that they are going to finish Israel, I will not say: Oh, interesting. Why?” We do not have to question our democratic values or the core values of our society. Here journalistic impartiality seems to end.

However, a journalist should not cover up for his country, but should be able to uncover any unethical behaviour, which is the purpose of investigative journalism. Seymour Hersh represents an example of a serious journalist, who was not accused of being unpatriotic despite having uncovered US military’s mistreatment of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison.

Damage Done

Faisal J. Abbas answers the question in a somewhat different manner, though he comes to the same conclusion as does Amit Segal. Faisal is an award winning journalist, blogger and social commentator. He has been writing for the

Huffington Post since 2008 and has worked previously as the media editor for the London based pan-Arab daily, Asharq Al Awsat.

Faisal very vividly presents four reasons why the media does not contribute to peace, love and understanding. Thus journalists can confuse facts thereby provoking reactions, which can on the opposite enhance conflict or foster hostilities. This can partly be ascribed to the accelerating speed in producing news, which for the journalist creates the tension between speed and accuracy.

Mutual Influence

Another point Faisal stresses is the fact that the audiences most of the time follow information that fits their beliefs. Consequently there is a mutually influence between audience, content and advertising, whereby the three elements feed each other. In terms of media objectivity this means that media has to satisfy the believes of its audience and therefore cannot be completely objective.

Furthermore the impact of our perceptions can again create serious misunderstandings, as in the example where an islamic website reported about a “bar” in the form of the Kaaba to be opened soon in New York. This bar in fact turned out to be the construction of the new apple store, which was covered before its opening. One can imagine that such news did not contribute to the understanding between the Western and the Muslim World.

So what is media for then?

Both speakers come to the conclusion that the media though not necessarily contributing to peace, love and understanding, must take serious responsibilities. In fact one of the greatest threats impartial journalism has to face according to Faisal is commercialisation.

Those who control the media, control perceptions and thus audiences. This is why we as the audience should be more careful and selective of our media sources. Nevertheless the freedom of speech and a free press are crucial to guarantee the workings of democracy. In this respect media might not be a peacemaker, but it is a protector of one of our core values, namely democracy.



Anastasia Albert

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There is another [very good report on this event here by Martina Scapin](#)

[The Polis Media Dialogues](#) are every Tuesday at 5pm in the New Theatre, Houghton Street, London.

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