

Considering Thought Control in Corporate Journalism: Canada's Conservative Government and the Israeli State

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Perhaps it's time to have a "real" discussion about the role of corporate journalists in our society; including those at the CBC. The main value of the CBC is not nation-building but its provision of a modest counter-weight to the lack of historical context and genuine balance offered by the big players in the news business. The CBC's opponents refer to this alternative viewpoint as "bias." Sun Media, Post Media and other media corporations derive their bias from their dependence on advertising revenue and the vagaries of the stock market. They are thus obliged by necessity to defer to the ideological stances of those who enrich them. Should the provision of news, ostensibly a vital public service in a functioning democracy; be left to the fickle nature of what some call the free market? Full-time professional journalists are no more bias-free than anyone else in society and most corporate journalists claim freedom to write and say what they please. This is actually true because they generally owe their positions and journalistic freedom to their established record of faithfully reflecting and reinforcing the worldview of those who pay and promote them. As Daniel Goleman wrote in *Vital Lies, Simple Truths*, "Journalists, then, deceive others by conforming to the needs of power while deceiving themselves that they are responding solely on the basis of independent, rational thought." The fact that you will never read an article like this in the corporate press offers some evidence of Goleman's claim.

The theory of cognitive dissonance suggests that exposure to uncomfortable facts leads people to change how they perceive those facts. This discomfort is often remedied by the bias of exclusion which is itself a powerful form of censorship. The misleading lack of historical perspective is particularly notable in coverage of Israeli-Palestinian issues which are presented as if the situation is a recent phenomenon. In no corporate newspaper will you find mention of Israel's Plan Dalet; the illegal pre-1948 campaign of wholesale expulsion (800,000 Arabs), land seizures, civilian massacres by the likes of Yitzhak Rabin and Menachim Begin and the intentional destruction of over 530 Palestinian villages. I have even heard corporate broadcasters justify the Naqba (Palestine's Holocaust) by reminding listeners that Palestine under the Ottomans was not an "official" country and thus was fair game for takeover despite the presence of over 1.6 million Palestinians. Surely this is cause for resentment and determined resistance?

Comment in the corporate press is only allowed within the high, narrow walls of those presuppositions and assumptions acceptable to power. As Noam Chomsky wrote of acceptable public discourse, "One of the most effective devices is to encourage debate, but within a system of unspoken presuppositions that incorporate the basic principles of the doctrinal systems. These principles are therefore removed from inspection; they become the framework for thinkable thought, not objects of rationale consideration."

You will never read in the *National Post* that the seizure of Palestinian territory was accomplished by intentionally stealthy increments starting as early as 1880. This incremental tactic is well established. It started long before the creation of modern Israel following the

annexation of Palestine in 1948. “Those familiar with the history of Zionism will recognize the method, dating back to the 1920s: dunam after dunam, arousing as little attention as possible.” (Chomsky, 1996) The modern equivalent was expressed in the 1996 Israeli cabinet minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer’s description of illegal Israeli expansion into the West Bank, “I build quietly. My goal is to build and not encourage opposition to my efforts. What is important to me is to build, build, build and build some more.” (Ibid) The Israeli government, with full U.S. support, has traditionally chosen this subtle and gradual path of seizing Palestinian lands and perhaps more importantly, water resources. It continues to this day, again with full U.S. backing. This is the reality of what is euphemistically referred to as the peace process.

Nor will one find dissonant comments like the following remarks from Israeli general and parliamentarian Moshe Dayan candidly admitted in 1955, “What cause have we to complain of their fierce hatred for us? For eight years now they sit in their refugee camps in Gaza, and before their eyes we turn into our homestead the land and villages in which they and their forefathers lived.” A common theme in Canada’s corporate press is its thinly-disguised racist apologetics for the conduct of the Israeli military, who are after all, just like us: rational and peace-loving; unlike those emotional and capricious Arabs who refuse to meekly accept colonization. In Canada’s corporate press, Israel always “responds” to attacks, invasions are “incursions” and civilian atrocities are “unfortunate errors” committed in the course of pursuing “terrorists.” Canada’s corporate journalists march in lockstep with the Harper government’s unconditional support for Israel’s territorial expansion and the inevitable violence. It has been said that Canada’s government and corporate allies are more Zionist than most Israeli citizens who are only too aware that peace must eventually be made with their Palestinian neighbors.

Here’s a headline from Post Media’s *Ottawa Citizen*:

“ Hamas a ‘dangerous cancer,’ retired Israeli general says.

I will contrast it with an alternative headline of my own creation, which will never appear in the corporate press:

Israeli expansion into the West Bank and Gaza a ‘dangerous ‘cancer,’ retired Hamas leader says.”

As a vivid example of exclusion bias; I offer the total absence of mention in Canada’s major newspapers of Israel’s military actions in Gaza prior to its murderous December 2009 attack that eventually killed over 1400 Palestinians, mainly civilians and 13 Israeli soldiers. If nothing else; the sheer magnitude of the casualty ratio is worth noting. Not until 2012 have reports appeared that Israeli soldiers were routinely refusing commands to kill unarmed civilians. Unreported in Canada’s corporate press was the fact that Israel had previously broken a four month ceasefire on November 4, 2008 then accused Hamas of doing the same on December 27 to justify its subsequent blitzkrieg. The January, 2009 Gaza attack, which employed white phosphorous and cluster bombs against civilians; was conveniently timed to derail the Cairo peace talks between Hamas and Fatah which might have unified the two Palestinian parties and it was also scheduled to end before the U.S. presidential elections.

With utter contempt for democracy; the Israeli government was punishing the people of Gaza for daring to legally elect Hamas, a party hostile to Israel. Canada's corporate press simply nodded sagely as if this were perfectly alright. The Gaza invasion with its massive bombardment was falsely portrayed as a war between military opponents fighting more or less conventionally. No mention was made of the ludicrous imbalance of force: Palestinian rifles, mortars and crude rockets versus Israel's modern fighter bombers, attack helicopters and long range artillery. No Canadian corporate journalist mentioned the fact that in the period 2001-2009, fourteen Israelis had been killed by Palestinian rockets versus the 5000 Palestinians killed in Israeli attacks. Delaying political accommodation through military violence is a proven way to facilitate the illegal seizure of territory so horrific massacres makes sense to conquerors and those who arm and support them. The logic of slaughter dictates that it, "...enrages, divides and demolishes the political threat of peaceful negotiation."

Canada's corporate media largely played their proper role in the Gaza invasion and the punitive sanctions that followed; tut-tutting about the sad but inevitable cost of Palestinian "terrorism" and rallying around poor little Israel; a nation with nuclear weapons and military forces superior to any of Europe's NATO members. The whole event was presented as just another case of Israel tidying up its neighborhood. Can you imagine Western media reaction if the Palestinians had gotten their hands on advanced weapons and laid waste to Tel Aviv? There would be no room on the newspaper pages and television screens for anything but 24-7 outrage and howls for vengeance.

Rather than seek to change the pervasive reality of the corporate media, one can instead ignore it or pay greater attention to the lessons of its intentional exclusions. However, this requires energy, curiosity and an informed perspective. Individual citizen are perfectly capable of reaching their own conclusions by reading alternative publications, internet sources and networking with like-minded people in social justice organizations. Isolation, apathy and ignorance the main enemies of freedom; are not difficult to defeat. We all have the power to think our way to whatever reality we seek to embrace.