

Opinion | When the Gaza War Ends, Israel's Media Will Have a Lot of Explaining to Do

Let the reporters and editors explain how their professional ethics fit with the shameful decision to keep from Israelis what we're inflicting on the people of Gaza

Michael Sfard May 23, 2024 12:12 am IDT [🔔 Follow](#)

The news division of an Israeli television station is working on a major investigation examining the Israeli army's open-fire policy in the war in Gaza. The journalists are trying to understand how so many Gazans, including tens of thousands of children and women, have been killed by Israeli airstrikes and artillery.

The reporters are going all out, fearing that the competitor will scoop them with an investigation its reporters have been working on themselves: exposing the deliberations of the General Staff and the war cabinet, which approved the striking of [hospitals](#), food factories and schools, as well as academic and government buildings, to turn the Gaza Strip into a pile of construction waste. It's very likely that these investigative reports will air in the coming days and set off an earthquake in Israel.

Well, not really. [No investigations and no earthquake](#). I must have been hallucinating in the pre-summer heat.

The maximum "journalistic" treatment of the shelling of Gaza that we can expect from Israel's mainstream media is the story of an artillery officer who, on October 7, was skiing abroad with colleagues from his startup and immediately left the resort, crossed the Alps on foot, caught rides to the shore with neo-Nazis who didn't know he was Jewish, and swam across the Mediterranean to show up at the reserve

base where he serves – without even saying hello to his family. Today he is shelling Gazans.

The viewers' tears are reserved for after the commercials, when we see the moving reunion of the officer with his 3-year-old daughter who has come to visit him at the base.

When the Israeli-Palestinian conflict finally ends and truth and reconciliation commissions are established, I will run for the position of a prosecutor on the commission that examines the responsibility of Israel's media for the crimes of the occupation, apartheid and the wars on Gaza. (There is no prosecutor on truth and reconciliation commissions, but I'd like to deviate for a moment from the South African model.)

I fantasize that at my request, the commission will summon the editors and hosts of the news and current affairs programs, as well as the military reporters and commentators, to explain some of the features of their coverage of the occupation, especially the current war in Gaza. Let them explain, for example, how their ethos and professional ethics fit with the shameful decision to withhold from Israelis documentation of what's happening in the Strip.

Not only are images of Gazans suffering withheld from us, there are no interviews with Gazans. Seven months of Israel displacing, shelling, starving, killing, crushing and crowding together about 2 million people – and on the Israeli channels there's nothing. Absolutely nothing. They've decided that the public doesn't need to see and hear what we're inflicting on the people of Gaza. Then Israelis are shocked by what people say about us in Western capitals, where the media still believes that its job is to reveal, not conceal.

I will also demand that senior Israeli media figures explain why opinions against the war – not only the military

strategy but also the destruction of Gaza as a response to the crimes of October 7 – were completely excluded from the studios. How is it that the studios have become addicted to retired generals, the military spokesperson and various inciters to war crimes, but there is no discussion on the morality of the kind of war we're waging? I would make the accusation that a sucking-up to the consensus, fiery nationalism and mere kitsch are the principles that have shaped their broadcasts.

Then there's the astounding lack of coverage of settler crimes in the West Bank. Any Israeli student who felt that he or she was being looked at funny on a campus abroad can get a fawning interview, but 18 Palestinian communities uprooted from their land in the past six months by violent Jewish terrorist gangs get zero minutes. Settler violence, which enjoys the protection of the army and is therefore state violence, is at an all-time high, while the most popular news channel focuses on a populist attack on a Palestinian academic who was arrested on grounds that the Soviets would have been ashamed of.

I would also ask the editors how it is that when Haaretz's Hagar Shezaf revealed on March 7 that 27 Gaza detainees had died in custody at Israeli military facilities since the start of the war, not one editor picked up this horrifying news or bothered to send reporters to ask the army and the government why Gazans were dropping like flies at our detention facilities. And of course nobody examined what was happening at a prison that is turning out to be an Israeli torture chamber. Oh, that's a job for CNN.

And of course, I would try to understand what was going through the minds of the mainstream media when, instead of fighting like lions for freedom of expression – which provides the basis for all its work – and denouncing the closing of Al Jazeera in Israel, the media's stars were waging a campaign to silence this network because of its bias (a bias

that, though of course the opposite, is completely symmetrical to the one at the Israeli stations).

Take Channel 12's Danny Kushmaro, who asked several times, "How is it that this channel is still broadcasting from Israel?" Or Oded Ben-Ami and Amit Segal, who said on the day the order to close Al Jazeera was issued that Israel was a sucker compared to Arab countries that blocked the Qatar-based network's broadcasts long ago. I would ask them how much they can lack self-awareness, these media people advocating the closure of Al Jazeera when they themselves, the reporters and editors at Channel 12, are being called by the Bibi-ists "Al Jazeera 12."

"Thus, even though some of the media may have opposed the government," the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission wrote about the media's role in apartheid's crimes, "the social and political system created by apartheid was sanctioned by the media. The media analyzed society from inside that system and did not provide alternative perspectives and discourses from the outside."

We're in a different place at a different time, but this formulation also accurately expresses the Israeli media's responsibility for the crimes of the Israeli occupation. Let's translate this passage into Israeli:

"Even though some parts of the media may have opposed the government and its leader, the social and political system created by the Israeli occupation and its intensive settlement project, mainly the erasure of the Green Line, the labeling of any criticism of Israel's moves as antisemitic, the assertion that the Israeli army is a moral army and even 'the most moral in the world,' and, to a very large extent, the notion of Jewish superiority and the dehumanization of the Palestinians were sanctioned by the Israeli media. The Israeli media analyzed the reality and society from the Jewish ethnocentric perspective and did not provide alternative viewpoints."

Are you convinced that the media has a lot to explain? Wait until we talk about the Israeli justice system.

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