

# Socio-Cultural Influences on Media

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## ABSTRACT

*Both Arab and Western media have different styles of presenting news to their audiences. Their views are limited and influenced by their respective culture, understanding, and geographical knowledge and also by their religious beliefs. This paper has studied media dependence on regional establishments, cultural and religious links, and its impact on general public. Various websites, newspaper clippings, published interviews, books, journals and channels have been studied in detail. Newspapers headlines and leads were also examined from a linguistic viewpoint to analyze what kind of structures each media would prefer in dealing with the same story. Media people are also governed by emotions, priorities and loyalties. Strong and powerful elite groups too, attempt to abuse this vital link between public and government to serve their narrow interests. While national interest is important, a line has to be drawn between national and public interests. Under the pretext of patriotism media must not become subservient to vested interest groups. It is duty bound to ensure that truth prevails. Meetings or summits provide an excellent platform for scribes of the world to debate and resolve conflicting international issues. They provide useful opportunity for exchange and appreciation of different cultural traits that should lead to the much-needed international understanding. Will the powers in command allow media to play its role in bridging the gap?*

**Keywords:** Credibility, Objectivity, Culture, Media, Influences, Race

## **Introduction**

Following September 11, 2001 during the war in Afghanistan and Iraq the Qatar-based Al Jazeera television station established in 1996, gained popularity for its news projection. The news coverage earned the channel a hall of fame in the Arabic and the Islamic world. The channel very soon gained trust and loyalty of Arab and Islamic nations. Some controversial coverage also placed the channel in direct competition with CNN and BBC. In the West it was seen and often criticised as a mouth piece of Al Qaida. Those so far exposed and conditioned to a traditional monopoly style would probably dub the channel as anti American or American bashing. But in the Arabic world, CNN and BBC reporting sounded more like sanitization of news. At the end of it all, it was hard to predict which side was telling the truth as both were involved in sensualisation of issues close and vital to their respective homes.

Western and Arabic media often hold different view points while reporting or analysing identical issues. Their views are limited and influenced by their respective culture, understanding, and geographical knowledge and also by their religious beliefs.

Arabic media is subjected to government pressure and censorship that curbs freedom of expression. Newspapers in Arab countries can be put into three categories - government owned, semi official papers owned by political parties, and independent press commanded by a section of the ruling family or business men enjoying close ties with the ruling family. The 'new media' Internet is also treated with heavy restrictions and censorship in most Arab nations. Television stations too, in Arabic countries are owned or run by government and are subjected to similar norms of filtration of news. Debates and programs which question their culture and religion are discouraged. Western media, on the other hand though powerful and regarded unbiased are owned by companies who too have their own political and commercial interests. At times these vested interests come in the way of objective assessment of a situation. This can be observed more often during war, economic crisis, elections, etc.

The conflict between Arab and Western media reporting is not confined only to war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Their aggressiveness looks more like a clash of two civilizations. One of the notable issues is conflict between Israel and Palestine. Middle East crisis looks like a never ending saga and has been going on since the establishment of Israel, a Jewish state on Arab land. The focus has now shifted to

Israel-Palestine conflict with Arab nations supporting the latter. America in this issue though a negotiator between the two parties, is not regarded an honest broker and is often criticised by the Arab media for siding with Israel.

Here too, the conflict which initially was political has assumed loud religious proportions. On one side we have Palestinians who are Muslims. The other party is Jews supported by Christian Zionists because of their religious allegiance.

Sharply opposite views do rounds when the two sides report on events in the area. Arabic media reporting on bomb blast in West bank by a Palestinian equates him with a freedom fighter. Western media puts the suicide bomber in the category of individuals involved in terrorist acts.

### **Problem Statement and Objective**

At times some establishments feed tailor made information to journalists as per their political and social interests. The practice of embedding journalists formalises releasing information only what the government wants the people to know. This makes the scribes mouth pieces of establishment where they are reporting a story not necessarily true. In war situations, there have been instances when some government public relations agencies worked over time and influenced embedded journalists to pump stories about people who did not even exist.

Anthropologists and linguists distinguish several culture areas (**Nida, 1964**) that “determine the texture of our lives” (**Sapir, 1920**). There are areas where ‘cultural equivalences’ are hard to find and if they are lexically available their use leads to misunderstanding, cultural shock, failure in communication and resentment. These equivalences or lack of them are under three headings: politics, religion and style.

The objective of this paper is to study, understand and rationalise the discrepancies in cross-cultural journalism especially practised in the West and the Middle East. The project also studies the political and cultural influences on the style of reporting when addressing a subject close to home or hearts and to analyse the after effects or repercussions such dissemination sparks.

This paper revolves around the following issues:

- How culture and religion influence the reporting style of journalists and its rationale.
- Government role in sanitizing news from the point of national security, culture and religion.
- Features common to Western and Arab media while reporting on identical sensitive subjects and how far that affects media credibility.
- Reaction and impact on readers' and viewers' mind while receiving news coverage involving their own culture or country.

### **Significance and Methodology**

Global newspapers are full with the two groups criticizing each other and their international policies. As the conflict involves a sizeable populace directly and rest of the world indirectly, the subject is significant and suitable for research. The analysis is drawn between Western countries (US and allies) and Arab nations. The countries selected are on the basis of political structure, culture, religion, and the norms followed by media in respective areas. Media dependence on regional establishments, journalists' cultural and religious links, and its impact on general public have been studied through websites, newspaper clippings, published interviews, books, journals and channels. Apart from cultural contrasts, the headlines and leads have also been examined from a linguistic viewpoint to see what kind of structure each media would prefer in dealing with the same story.

### **Research tools and Data Collection**

The research tool formed in this study aims at giving maximum degree of intercultural validity. A detailed study of books, journals and newspapers from both Western and Arab media exposes the ground realities. The highlight issues concern about government involvement with media and censorship. Influence of culture and religion while reporting on a certain sensitive subject are analyzed threadbare. The study also figures in detail the issues of embedded journalists, war reporting, and how embedded media could strike a balance between hospitality provided and objectivity of news reports. That involves upholding its credibility and at the same time not hurting public sentiments.

The paper has tried to be as inclusive as possible in capturing the various spheres of news work. It has selected journals covering hard news as well as those involved in sports, travel and celebrity reporters.

## **Western media and political issues**

Global image of western media is powerful. Enjoying high credibility, traditionally it has also been perceived impartial and unbiased. Of late, rapid technological advances have added to media's unforeseen range and power. Role it played in the fate of the some of the most powerful Presidents and Prime ministers of the world are historical facts and all big people now generally try to keep it on their right side.

In US, corporations that also manufacture arms and nuclear power - General Electric and Westinghouse, own prominent television companies NBC and CBS. Several oil companies like Exxon, Texaco and Mobil are also represented on the boards of these news organizations. Time-Warner and CNN merged in the late 1990s to form one of the biggest news and media monopolies in the world. Rupert Murdoch owns the largest number of television stations in US. Originally an Australian citizen, Murdoch's American citizenship was "fast-tracked" by the Reagan administration that allowed him to own television stations in the country.

Rupert Murdoch has largest share in UK's News International and through it controls many magazines and widely circulated dailies including the Times and the Sun. Sky Television a major satellite operator in Europe also works under Murdoch banner. The empire also embraces satellite and television in China, Star Television (covering Asia) and publishers like Harper Collins. About 90 per cent of the world's news comes from just three agencies: Associated Press (USA), Reuters (UK) and Agence France Presse (France).

Murdoch managed to corner Hughes electronics and its Direct TV satellite in return for open support and help extended to George W Bush in the latter's election campaign in 2001. The closely contested \$6.6 billion deal that Murdoch won 3-2, was undertaken by Federal Communications Commission and Michael Powell, former US Secretary of the State Collin Powell' son. Murdoch's machinery fits well into the government needs and requirements for propaganda where truth is secondary. In turn Murdoch is showered with favours like regulatory relief, tax savings, market control, and many others(**Winter, 2007**).

An analysis from 1990 of how President Bush won public support for Iraq war is appropriate here. News networks almost blacked out public opposition to Iraq invasion. From 8 August to 3 January only 28 minutes were doled out to public opposition out of 2,885 minutes of TV coverage on the war. Many institutions raised the issue and the Times Mirror survey in early January overwhelmingly demanded that “Americans wished to hear the views of other Americans who opposed the government to send forces to Gulf”.

Meanwhile, the blackout strategy was successful in casting its spell. After January 16 beginning of Desert Storm, the public opinion turned supportive of their troops fighting enemy in an alien land. A patriotic wave gripped all and general view got polarised as the country’s soldiers were marching to sacrifice their lives against an alien repressive regime. During the Gulf war too, people would just not brook anything negative and media danced to popular martial tune.

As media stories helped in turning the tide in favour of war, selective and controlled release of information by White House also effectively blunted opposition attack. There was little material or ammunition available to convincingly oppose the government stand. Not taking any chances, the official public relations machinery worked overtime infusing patriotic and nationalist feelings.

The drought of information leading to poor opposition attack tied media’s hands too, as they got little to write against the government or the war. Media had to choose between positive stories or observing silence by not writing. People thus exposed to only one set of opinion, the government machinery saw to it that whatever little the opposition stated also did not reach the masses. Media also helped by ignoring lack lustre anti-war protests and demonstrations.

According to Noelle – Neumann “What does not get reported does not exist, or state more cautiously, its chances of becoming part of ongoing perceived reality are minimal”. **(Allen, O’Loughlin, Jaspersen & Sullivan, 1994)** As per Noelle – Neumann theory media is powerful and has potential to change public opinion. By strongly presenting a point of view, media can convert thousands. Normally, those supported by media are loud and vocal that helps in faster dissemination of their stand and polarising people. People holding views opposed to a vocal school an enjoying media support, get isolated as they prefer to keep silence for fear being exposed as a minority. That puts them in background. While a

particular set of opinion monopolises visibility, the other gets banished as it opts silence and consequently remains little heard or exposed. Media thus has power to create and convey an opinion leading to its general acceptability.

Whether it is war or sports, people applaud only the winners. US public is no exception. “When the public believes that the mission will succeed, it continues to support the mission even as the cost mounts. When the public think victory is unlikely even the small costs will cause support to plummet” **(Klarevas, Gelpi & Reifler, 2006:15-16)**.

Political support cemented with availability of huge resources and wealth, have placed the western media in an unassailable position **(Katsiavriades & Qureshi, 2004)**.

With western media gaining in strength, there has also grown fear of little or almost no control over their functioning. A mechanism to check dissemination of information does exist. But political muscles make it subservient to vested interests. In an ongoing power game, these groups come to control the media itself.

This spectacle became more acute as during Iraq war many discrepancies came to light in Western media’s dissemination of news and information about the Arab world and their culture to the rest of the world.

An analysis of the Western media coverage on American and British perspective on Iraq should not be out of place. Arabs hold that the Pentagon's destruction of Iraq's civilian infrastructure, power sources and water and sewage plants together with the imposition of a barbaric embargo, produced a degree of sufferings never fully comprehended and appreciated in the West. The US-UK combine wilfully blocked humanitarian supplies from vaccines and plasma bags to simple painkillers. All these Iraq had already paid for and the Security Council had approved their supply.

General Hussein Kamel the West's "star witness" and defector was Iraqi dictator. He had stated categorically: "I ordered destruction of all chemical weapons. All weapons - biological, chemical, missile, nuclear - were destroyed." All that remained, he held, were the blueprints, computer disks and

microfiches. According to Newsweek, CIA and Britain's MI6 knew that Iraq had been substantially disarmed for at least eight years.

After General Kamel was killed in 1996, his "evidence" was selectively made public. In his presentation to the UN Security Council on 5 February 2003, US Secretary of State Colin Powell said that the truth about Iraq's nerve gas weapons "only came out after inspectors collected documentation as a result of the defection of General Kamel, Saddam Hussein's late son in law". Powell omitted that Kamel had told them that all the weapons had been destroyed (**Pilger, 2003**).

Post September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre, there was a shift in how American government would like to see the news flow in media. As the Bush administration intended to control the information flow, US government and military stated that they would not allow rebellious voices to be heard in public when they go to war against countries responsible for spreading terrorism. Clear Channel a corporate media outlet having about 1200 radio stations, was used to rally opinion against war critics and to generate pro-war atmosphere by playing songs like 'Bomb, Bomb, Bomb' repeatedly over the airways. The channel also called for banning a band Dixie Chicks for criticizing the President. Bill Maher, commentator on Politically Incorrect who almost lost his sponsors as well as program spot said: "We have been the cowards lobbying the cruise missiles from 2,000 miles away. That's cowardly." To this former White House spokesperson Ari Fleischer stressed: "You should watch what you say" (**Andersen, 2007, p. 203-204**).

According to UK's the Guardian (17 October 2001) Pentagon in order to hide from Western media houses and public the fall out of bombing in Afghanistan, spent a fortune. Millions of dollars have rained to block and to manage that precise and accurate satellite pictures are not printed or published. These pictures taken from satellite *ikonos* are of very clear resolution and bodies on the ground after the attack can be easily seen. Pentagon bought exclusive rights of pictures from the company called Space Imaging who manages *ikonos*. Because of the heavy civilian casualties in Darunta, Afghanistan the images were decided to be barred completely (**Ibid.**).

## **Arab Media and Politics**

Comparative analysis of global media development considers the Middle Eastern media the world's most controlled system. In Arab countries, media is owned or controlled by ruling families, government or a powerful business house with close links with the establishment or the ruling family. Censorship regulations are heavy and news stories presented to public are vetted and pre-decided.

Ministers of Information are responsible for the conduct of state run media in the Arab world and decide what the public should see and hear. They are held personally responsible for the contents and order of the news and current affairs programming. They also decide who should be invited as guest speakers and who is kept away (**Kuttab, 2008**).

Saudi Arabia's strict domestic media laws prohibit criticizing the ruling family. The kingdom has systematically used its networks of ownership and informal influence to keep pressure on media. According to Said K Aburish, author of *The Rise, Corruption and Coming Fall of the House of Saud*, many Arab and foreign journalists were on the payroll of Riyadh in the 1970s, '80s and '90s to produce positive articles and commentaries, as well as to counter coverage that goes against the agenda of Saudi Arabia (**Cochrane, 2007**).

During a two-day forum in Doha (Qatar) organized by Al-Jazeera's Public Liberties & Human Rights department and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), various Arab journalists called for greater press freedom in the region and in their respective countries. The journalists criticized the establishment for fostering a "censorship culture." Nidal Mansour, the head of the Center for Defending Journalists noted: "If we look at the constitution of each Arab country, we would find the most beautiful phrases that hail and promote the freedom of speech. On ground, none of that is practiced. We have hundreds of Arab journalists killed, injured, jailed or humiliated in their countries every year" (**Al Jazeera, 2009**).

Morocco allows limited press freedom where opposition can criticize or comment on the political system and King till they follow and remain within the official line. However, media is controlled by the government who are pro-royalists (**Amin, 2001**).

Egypt has the most advanced Press in the Arab world where in 1996 a new press law was introduced. It replaced 1995 law according to which journalists faced imprisonment if they spoke or wrote against the royal family.

In Sudan, the military government has imposed rigorous censorship. After the coup of June 1989, government controlled newspapers like *Injaz Al-Watan* and *Al Sudan Al Hadith* were published towing official line (**Amin, 2001**).

Radio and Television too are subjected to strict censorship and control of government like in print media. Broadcast media is used as a political and propaganda tool to control and influence the public. Countries like Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Sudan. think that the sole purpose of the broadcast media is to launch political campaigns and propaganda in the name of national unity and support (**Amin, 2001**).

In Palestine too like other Arab nations, journalism has played a pivotal role in promoting nationalism and is used by political leaders to express their viewpoints and to reach certain social elites (**Jamal, 2005**).

The journalists on occasions have been severely reprimanded by the government and failure to abide by rules can result into closure of newspapers, detention and refusal of essential press cards or travel permit. According to journalist Walid Batrawi: "If the law says that nothing should be published against Palestinian unity, or national unity, but they do not give a definition of what national unity means, I start thinking when I begin to write may be this sentence might harm the national unity. Ultimately it leads you to self-censorship, which is extremely dangerous thing. The PA does not ask you to submit your articles to censor, but in a way or another, the Palestinian press restricts you".

Journalists have also confessed that most of them cannot speak or voice protest against the harsh treatment they have been subjected to as they know that the union meant to protect them is a dummy and

has no powers to help them in adversity. Journalism has taken a back seat as the scribes can only call on politicians or can write about their accomplishments. This results into dull and repetitive writings (Jamal, 2005).

### **Embedded Vs Non-embedded Media and Publicity**

During the 2003 US and UK invasion of Iraq, a murky situation emerged. Reporters could only travel with the military, being housed, fed and protected by the later. This made it difficult to cover the conflict from the other side. A few Western journalists did refuse to be embedded. They were arrested. Independent Arab journalists fared even worse as their offices were bombed and their reporters killed. Iraqi newspapers calling for the end of the occupation were closed (Katsiavriades et al, 2004).

The word ‘embedding’ was coined by the US Assistant Defence Secretary Victoria Clarke who had earlier worked for PR Company Hill and Knowlton. The same company is known for promoting false baby incubator story from the First Gulf War. The idea was given to journalists to get an intimate view of the war and watch it from close quarters. This excited many and hundreds of journalists listed themselves to be embedded. This solved twin purpose of the military. They got full control over the media and this also ensured positive coverage of their operations (Andersen, 2006).

There are times when US military public relations machinery fabricated quotes and used bogus press releases to hide the truth by giving wrong figures on actual number of civilian death toll in Iraq. To avoid hurting their mission, they also pressurised news papers and journalists to publish these news items. Veteran war Correspondent Chris Hedges has called embedding ‘insidious’ as it leads to loss of journalistic independence. Journalists are always in company with soldiers and this creates an emotional bond, which might act as a hindrance in reporting facts truthfully.

In Afghanistan, some soldiers threatened to shoot a Washington Post journalist if he continued to investigate civilian casualties caused due to aerial bombing. In Iraq too, journalists operating independently have come under fire and many lost their lives. As per the BBC report (13 March 2003), US military issued warning to independent reporters covering Iraq war because they were disrupting the news flow as per the requirement of the US military through their satellite uplinks. Veteran British ITN

reporter Terry Woods was reported fatally injured in a cross fire. It was later on found that he was not killed in cross fire but died on way to hospital when fired by a US helicopter gunship. Bodies of cameraman Fred Nerc and translator Hussein Osman were never recovered. Reuters journalist Taras Protsyuk and Jose Couso from Spanish network television Telecino were killed and three others were injured on April 8, 2003 when US tanks fired at the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad. The attack happened despite the fact that Pentagon knew the hotel was home to scores of journalists. A report published in 'Reporters without Borders' said, US military fired and killed journalists as a deliberate action in cold blood (**Andersen, 2006**).

During the Iraq war, critical reports were not welcomed and faced angry rebuke from both sides. Iraq expelled two Al Jazeera journalists who ignored the official stand and highlighted views opposed to it. New York Stock Exchange fired a few of their own men when some of their reporting was considered objectionable and unfriendly. Former US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld publicly criticized media for giving undue and uncalled for publicity to stories of public disorderliness, robberies, and anarchy following the fall of Baghdad (**Ghosh, 2003**). While the original idea was to extend protection to journalists from enemy's bullets during war, it soon came out that the safety guarantee was only notional. The initial casualties in Iraq war were of embedded journalists in 'friendly fire'.

The media back in America showed their support with the US government by producing reports about American soldiers in Iraq in a patriotic and sanitized manner. President George Bush questioned the loyalty of main stream media and expressed his frustration suggesting media should stop asking questions that display skepticism on government and coalition war plans in Iraq. To this remark, one of CNN articles felt that such comments from Bush were disheartening for people at CNN. As the organization has echoed the government's view point, it has shown Americans at war in exactly the sanitized, 'patriotic mode' desired by the Defense Department. The article stated the government should be contended with warm and fuzzy stories that totally obscure the bloodbaths taking place in Basra, Umm Nasr and Nasiriya (**Shah, 2007**).

Recently, a public relations company 'The Rendon Group' notoriously known for creation of dummy Iraqi National Congress against Saddam Hussein to help US invasion on Iraq in 2003, started vetting

embedded journalists to counter those writing negative stories against US military. It is also said that the same company was given a three weeks government contract after September 11 against media opposed to Bush's war strategy. The main aim of the firm was to provide false information to media and hide its source. Col. Sam Gardiner, a retired Air Force officer, John Rendon, owner of Rendon Group at a 2003 conference in London said: "Well, there were three things we tried to do, and we did well on two, but not the third. The first was to make the news be theirs 24/7, and they did that by the morning briefings from Baghdad or from Kuwait and then the afternoon press conference from the Pentagon. We wanted to control the printed media, and that was primarily done by the embedded program. The one thing we failed at was we didn't have people who provided the context. We lost control of the military analysts, and they were giving context." US military affairs newspaper Stars & Stripes, was barred from embedding a report with the 1st Cavalry Unit in Mosul, Iraq, because it 'refused to highlight' a news item on Iraq that the US military wanted to emphasize (**Tencer, 2009**).

Similarly, US media while reporting a civilian death in war in Afghanistan made sure that the viewers were continuously reminded that the American citizens were sufferers and the war was in retaliation to what happened to Americans especially emphasizing Sep 11 attacks. As per the memo sent to CNN staff from the organization's Chair Walter Issacson, reports of civilian deaths and sufferings caused to public because of the US and its allies bombing should be toned down. Thomas Friedman of New York Times even went up to suggest that Afghans did not mind being killed by US bombs: "It turns out many of those Afghan civilians were praying for another dose of B-52's to liberate them from Taliban casualties or not".

However America was in for a bigger problem – how to hide civilian casualties in Afghanistan and avoid public outrage back home. The situation was made complicated by Al Jazeera and other Arabic media outlets in the aftermath of US bombing. Once again US hired an advertising specialist Charlotte Beers whose aim was to change the anti-US perception in the Arab world. She supervised printing and publications of glossy magazines, brochures, posters, etc. Many of these showed images of Muslims enjoying respect and Islam treated with tolerance in US. The material was distributed in Arab countries to create a favorable opinion (**Andersen, 2007**).

For publicity, one child Ali Ismaeel Abbas who lost his arms and also his parents in a missile injury was flown to a Kuwaiti hospital. Western media gave adequate coverage to this gesture (**Pilger, 2003**). There are complaints that US troops in Iraq killed innocent people often not discriminating between kids and adults. An American Marine murdered a woman because she happened to be standing next to a man in uniform. "I'm sorry," he says, "but the chick got in the way." (**ibid.**)

On the other hand, Qatar-based Al Jazeera satellite view is often criticized for its 'Arab centric' reporting and completely ignoring American stand on war. The channel had highlighted horrific civilian casualties while the Western media like BBC focused mainly on struggle of coalition forces and the ongoing military struggle. Al Jazeera also raised the issue of media, politics and bias and stirred emotions of viewers with provocative reporting.

The channel related the 'martyrdom operations' to act of heroism during the Intifada in 2000 and brought the news right inside Arabic audience drawing rooms. A 2004-2005 survey in Cairo revealed that 46 per cent of Arab households watched satellite TV and of these 88 per cent watched Al Jazeera. (**Seib, 2008**).

Both Western and Arab media want to highlight the stories which cover perspective of their own people. Many have said that showing wounded and dead soldiers and civilians was not an intelligent and sensitive journalism and would stir emotions on both sides of the fence. Fouad Ajami, a New York Times journalist called Al Jazeera "a dangerous force." Ajami felt the channel's promo which included scenes that portrayed a clear sympathy for the Palestinians was "shameless". He also criticized Al Jazeera for focusing too much on the tragedy of a single individual like the 12-year-old Muhamed al-Durra, a Palestinian shot and killed in Gaza.

However MSNBC or CNN were not far behind in creating heroic tales of coalition army in order to infuse a sense of patriotism and support. The best till date was the heartwarming heroic tale of Jessica Lynch, a single American POW who was the main focus of media circus. It was later revealed that her wounds were not because of bullets but due to the accident of lorry in which she was traveling (**Shah, 2007**).

### **Issue of style**

Having been exposed largely to a different upbringing, people in the West are prone to some misconceptions about the Arab culture and religion. These natural limitations accentuated with deliberate and calculated efforts to widen misunderstandings, block objective assessment of a situation. A journalist should look beyond the norms and practices prevailing in his society and must get over prejudices, some inherited and many acquired, while writing about an alien society.

Arab media has different sources and perspective on the Middle East crisis compared to the West. Palestinians fighting against Israeli forces are reported freedom fighters in Arab media and terrorists in the Western. Their sources differ too, largely due to language inaccessibility and varied religious beliefs **(Gulf News, 2004)**.

International coverage in mass media is often characterized by fragmented perception. Media falls for the selective perception based on historical prejudices. Much of fiction and novels published in West such as V.S. Naipaul's 'A Bend in the River' and John Updike's 'The Coup' or grade school history textbook, comic strips, television serials, films and cartoons reflect a set attitude. Here, the iconography of Islam has been uniformly ubiquitous drawing material from the same time-honored view of Islam. No wonder, readers find caricatures of Muslims as oil suppliers, terrorists, and more recently as bloodthirsty mob **(Said, 1997)**.

Both Western and Arab media held varied interests and priorities in the war in Iraq. Same issues therefore, were highlighted differently. When the war began, the American media coverage was exhaustive and comprehensive. However, media back home ignored, played down or edited the news, catering to their controllers' interests and directives **(Knightley, 2004)**.

Styles and method of reporting also differ when we compare BBC or CNN with Al Jazeera. According to **Barkho (2006)** while CNN and BBC used passive voice and noun combination in reporting and also in their headlines, Al Jazeera used plain and direct voice.

CNN: Dozens dead in fighting at terrorist 'haven'

BBC: Heavy US bombardment of suspected insurgent positions

Al Jazeera: American bombardment kills 45 people and injures more than 80

(2 September 2004)

CNN: US strikes insurgency safe houses in Falluja

A US air strike targeted two safe houses used by followers of reputed terror mastermind Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Fallujah, US officials said.

BBC: At least 17 die in Fallujah raid

At least 17 Iraqis have died in a US air strike on the city of Fallujah, hospital officials have said. US officials say the strike was a deliberate, "precision" attack aimed at followers of the wanted militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Al Jazeera: American raid kills 18 in Fallujah

At least 18 people, among them three children, were killed in an American air raid targeting two houses in the residential district of al-Jubail in Fallujah, west of Baghdad.

The American army alleged in a statement issued yesterday that the raid targeted hideouts of followers of the so-called Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in what has been described as a precision operation.

(7 September 2004)

CNN: 15 Palestinians killed in air strike

Israel says target was a terrorist training camp

Israeli helicopters fired four rockets at a camp in Gaza City where they believed

Palestinian militants were having training, killing at least 15 people, Palestinian medical sources told CNN.

The Israel Defense Forces said the training at the camp was led by senior Hamas terrorists who have been involved in carrying out deadly attacks and attempted attacks against Israelis.

BBC: Gaza strike kills 14 militants

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At least 14 people have been killed and 20 wounded in an Israeli air strike on an alleged night training exercise by Palestinian fighters in Gaza City.

The Israeli defense force said in a statement it had “targeted a training field during training of Hamas terrorists.”

Al Jazeera: 15 martyrs fall as Israel targets Sheikh Yassin Stadium

There are various other reports and words used differently in identical subjects. BBC and CNN refer to Israeli troops as Israeli Defense Forces or IDF while Al Jazeera calls them ‘Israeli occupation troops’. Both BBC and CNN describe anti-Israeli groups and actions as ‘militant’; but Al Jazeera described these groups and actions as ‘struggle and resistance’

Whenever the word ‘Hamas’ is mentioned in BBC or CNN, the networks describe it a Palestinian ‘Islamic fundamentalist’, ‘militant’, ‘radical’ or ‘terrorist’ group. This has angered many Arabs and Muslims who regard Hamas a doctrine of Islam fighting against oppression. Al Jazeera refers Hamas as the Islamic Resistance Movement.

Suicide bombers or suicide bombing, reported in CNN and BBC is ‘martyrdom operations’ for Al Jazeera. The same goes while reporting on Iraq, Afghanistan and the Muslim insurgencies in the Philippines, Thailand or Kashmir in India. While CNN views them as ‘terrorists’ and the BCC as ‘militants’ or ‘radicals’, Al Jazeera calls them ‘resistance fighters’ or ‘Jihadis’.

In 2003 Al Jazeera called US troops ‘invaders’ and US action against Iraq ‘invasion’. The US and allied troops were referred to as ‘occupation forces’. On the other hand, CNN and BBC preferred to call them ‘US-led multinational forces’.

Shortly after the start of the 2003 Iraq war, Newsweek’s J. Alter (2003:49) stated that both, Arab & Muslim and Western eye had different views on Iraq war with different perspectives of the situation: “This war, on American television, is alternately ‘the war on Iraq’ or ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom.’ The war, broadcast by the media of the Arab and Muslim world is ‘the invasion.’

It is also interesting to see how the Jewish media while covering and reporting on Palestine issue misrepresented and molded the facts as per their interest. The news presented to its audience generated a lot of bad blood between Jews and Arabs. The whole purpose of the Jewish media was to blame Palestine government for the clashes and riots while making sure the Israeli government officials remained unscratched and looked committed to finding a peaceful solution to violence.

About two weeks after the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising, on Friday, 13 October 2000, the local TV supplement of Israel's most popular daily Yediot Ahronot, published a survey conducted by the Gecoartographia Institute of Arab and Jewish residents of Jaffa. The purpose of the research was to find how far the city that had so far witnessed co-existence between Jews and Arabs had been affected by the latest clashes.

The survey came out with revealing facts. About 34 per cent of Jews entertained feeling of anger, fear and hatred against Arabs after the incidents. About 30 per cent of Jews said that if violence continued they might support drastic measures against Arabs. Forty per cent of Jews expressed their concern that in case of war between Israel and Arab nations, Jaffa's Arab residents would attack them. More than 60 per cent of Jaffa's Arabs and about 55 per cent of Jews confessed that since the outbreak of Intifada, they feared for their lives. But 83 per cent of Arab residents and 55 per cent of Jewish residents believed that 'co-existence will resume its course'.

Curiously, editor of Tel Aviv chose to represent the facts in a partisan manner and a headline of the story was 'IN CASE OF WAR - JAFFA'S ARABS WILL ATTACK TEL AVIV'. To support their headlines the over line was stated in a small size of words - ACCORDING TO GEOCARTOGRAPHIAS POLL, 40% OF JAFFA'S JEWS BELIEVE'. A picture showing dozens of people standing on side of the city's street in front of two private cars bashed and overturned by the mob, was also pasted with the story. This gave an impression to readers that Jaffa Arabs were opposed to peace.

It later on found that the story was not true. There was a factual error in headlines, wordings were misused and location of the place was not clearly stated. The story had a number of flaws. It comprised beliefs by people who were questioned. The beliefs of respondents excepting Jews were not reflected.

The views were also not of the entire Jewish community as the statements were selectively chosen and consisted of views of minority of the Jews. The survey also failed to mention what was actually mentioned by those Jews. Ironically, the rioting crowd in the picture was of Jews and not Arabs. The editor by distorting facts created hatred and fear and also wittingly provoked attacks on Arabs from Jews **(Dor, 2004:1)**.

Besides instigating violence, Jewish media also appeared biased while filing political stories involving Israel and Palestine on Intifada. To resolve the issue peacefully a summit in the third week of Intifada in Sharm el-Sheikh (Egypt) was attended by former US president Bill Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Chairman Yasser Arafat. The meet ended on 17 October 2000 with a deadlock. A look at the media reports filed during and after the summit makes an interesting reading.

It is revealing how facts are misrepresented in 18 Oct 2000 editions of three Israeli newspapers.

Yediot Ahrnot headline states

‘ARAFAT PUT TO TEST’

In the summit both sides were equally responsible for bringing in peace. However, the message in the above headline indicates that Palestinians’ future depends on Arafat and if the agreement collapses, Arafat alone would be to blame.

The sub headlines of the same newspaper read ‘TENSE ANTICIPATION IN ISRAEL: IS ARAFAT WILLING AND ABLE TO CEASE FIRE’. Once again onus is put on Arafat who would be solely responsible if the summit fails. The overline, on the upper right side of the page reads: ‘CEASE FIRE IN SHARAM, GUN FIRE IN GILO IN JERUSALEM’. The two overlies state contradiction in Arafat stand on peace. At one end there is Arafat declaration to have cease fire and on the other hand creating violence to make the situation volatile shows his 'real intention' as his own people were involved in shooting in Jerusalem.

Some other headlines in the news pages also make interesting study. ARAFAT HAS 48 HOURS TO CALM DOWN THE FIELD (PG2-3), PALESTINIAN CABINET: WE WILL CEASE FIRE ONLY AFTER ISRAEL DOES ITS SHARE (PG 2), ARAFAT TAKES HIS TIME (PG. 3); WAR IN LIVING

ROOM (PG4-5, dealing with shooting at Gilo); BULLET PIERCES POLICEMAN'S HEART (PG 6); A NIGHT OF SHOOTINGS ON HEBRON, PSAGOT, AND IDF OUTPOSTS (PG6); WE HAVE AGREEMENT, BUT THERE'S NO TRUST (PG 7).

On page 14 a story about an Arab grocer killing a Jew was published as 'PALESTINIAN KILLED BY SETTLER'S FIRE'. Curiously, in the whole text the word 'murder' has not been used. When the same headlines are compared with the death of an Israeli police officer, the narration mourns - 'BULLET PIERCES POLICEMAN'S HEART'. Formulation of these two headlines indicates the importance given to the victims. Besides leaving a depressing feeling in readers' mind, the narration betrays writer's prejudice in using words while defining the story.

*Ha'aertz*, another Israeli newspaper also reported on similar lines ignoring the Palestinian side by either omitting or obliging the story as a snippet.

On 18 Oct the newspaper's main headline was

'BARAK STEPPING UP PREPARATION FOR UNILATERAL SEPARATION FROM PALESTINIANS'

However Barak's 'unilateral' separation plan did not exist in reality. No one worked on it and it was far from being feasible. Barrack used the settlement plan through the media to cultivate public standing that helped increasing pressure on Arafat.

The positioning of news and size of letters are crucial in order to understand what Israeli media was intending to portray. By altering the contents and serving the information to the readers in a distorted format, newspapers not only curbed the public right to have an independent interpretation but also violated the sanctity of autonomy in journalism. The news if presented correctly could help in tracing Jews' and Arabs' perception and mind frame on the whole issue. It could also give a feel to readers about the actual ground situation that would help in subsiding violence appreciably (**Dor, 2004, p. 11-14**).

Palestinian media has also not been far behind. Three main Palestine newspapers *Al Quds*, *Al Ayyam* and *Al Hayat Al Jadida* towed the Palestinian Authority (PA) officially prescribed line. The focus of the newspapers remained autocratic practices of Israel against Palestine and its failure to provide peaceful solution. The papers also criticized biased US conduct favoring Israel in the peace process. Stories published during the outbreak of second *Intifada* following the failure of Camp David Summit (July 2000) vehemently criticized Israeli policies and military aggression. According to the Palestine media, Israel has no interest in finding a realistic solution for settlers in West Bank and Gaza strip (**Jamal, 2005**).

The three newspapers also avoided reporting on human rights violations by the Palestinian security forces though Israeli forces' human rights abuses figured prominently. One may feel that as per Palestinian journalism norms, writing anything against Israel is legitimate and is not liable under laws of freedom of privacy, expression or political imprisonment. Hamas fiercely opposing both PA and Israel has also used media without any qualms. In its communications it opposes Israel- PA peace negotiations irrespective of merit and its dispatches openly instigate Islamic fundamentalism. One finds no scope of objectivity in Al-Watan reports openly sprouting bias while dubbing the PA peace strategy with Israel a sham. After the closure of Al Watan on 1 January 1997, Hamas affiliated a weekly newspaper Al Risalah. However, there was no change and Hamas' official line continued to prevail. Al Risalah came up with stories criticizing both Israel and PA. (**Ibid.**).

### **Media and Religion**

There has always been a running debate in the Arab world especially after the tragic episode of Sep 11 why the Arabs are linked to terrorism and militancy to Islam. At times, many innocent Muslims in western countries have gone through racial backlash due to failure of media in feeding objective information to readers.

On the evening of Saturday, 15 SEP 2001, a gunman killed a Pakistani Muslim store owner in Dallas, Texas. In Huntington, New York, Adam Lang, reportedly a drunken driver, 75, allegedly tried to kill a

Pakistani woman under his car. He later followed the woman into a store and threatened to kill her for "destroying my country" **(Robinson, 2001)**.

Arabic press questions referring 'Mujahedeens' as Islamic terrorists. "If The Irish Republican Army are not called Catholic terrorists, the Ulster Freedom Fighters not Protestant terrorists, America's White Aryan Resistance not Christian terrorists and South Africa's AWB not Calvinist terrorists, why 'Mujahedeen' are called Islamic terrorists", they argue.

It is for media to ensure impartiality and accuracy. Prejudice, be it unintended or deliberate, reduces journalism to propaganda and transforms a journalist into a demagogue **(Conte, 2001)**.

After Sep 11, the world got unwittingly divided into two warring camps - Christian and Arab, which to an extent also divided the media. Induced and influenced by circumstances, journalists churned out slanted stories. In the Middle East, the Western media during the recent war on Iraq looked giving more credence to regional Arab media players such as Qatar-based Al Jazeera Satellite Channel, Abu Dhabi Satellite Channel, Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation and Al-Arabia Channel. Internet-based news operations like Jazeera.net and Islam-Online though also significant sources of information on war developments were ignored. The war in Afghanistan and Iraq was given a religious angle as the terrorists involved in Sep11 were Muslims and the country they attacked (US) is largely Christian **(O'Donnell, 2003)**.

'Terrorist' groups, Yasser Arafat, Iran authorities and other Arab countries had all issued timely statements condemning the September 11 attacks. However, these dispatches only appeared in the inner pages of newspapers or towards the end of the news programs.

Like an institutional management strategy, religious sentiments of people are freely exploited during war. Arabs used strong terms like infidels against US forces who were made to look hating and attacking Islam. US projected the forces as fighting evil and its nexus. Michael Gerson the chief speech writer of US President George Bush from 1999 to 2004 made it a point to include Biblical epithets and other gospels to run down and criticize the Iraqi forces in almost all President's speeches. Full of religious epithets, the speeches sought justification for use of force with quotes from the Bible. That inspired masses to lend moral support to troops made to look fighting against satanic fundamentalism and

anarchy. The appeal helped polarize people and President Bush' policy on Iraq got massive support at home. *Sacralization ideology* talks about people who feel that their religion should be part of and influence public policy debates. Those who participated in debates blatantly advocated using force against the nexus of evil to justify their religious stand **(Froese, Mencken, 2009)**.

Not lagging behind, Islamic fundamentalists also played a significant part and preached Sacralization ideology against the opposing forces. According to them religion is supreme and the essence of life. Taliban in Afghanistan and Al Qaida left no stone unturned in faithfully executing their role. Islamist thinkers Maulana Abul Ala Maududi and, Sayyid Qutb propagated Islamic struggle jihad and jahilliyya. Dubbing their rivals un-Islamic, atheists or pagan these religious scholars called for destruction of the criminal political thugs and actors. It was unabashedly preached that non-believers should be liquidated. This opinion was shared by politically active groups like Hamas in Palestine who had no qualms about justifying violence. Such blatant campaign licensing violence to uphold their religion was extensively covered and exposed in Western and global media that helped equating Islam with violence. V. S. Naipaul commented: "Muslim fundamentalism has no intellectual substance to it therefore it must collapse." Israeli documentary 'Inside the mind of suicide bombers' was shown repeatedly on American networks. Almost all Islamic militants figuring in interviews by Israeli interrogators glorified violence and innocent killings not excepting children and women in the name of Islam.

What looked like too obvious a division on religious grounds, independent Arab media also inflamed Muslim emotions by screening massive destruction of homes and property in Iraq and other Muslim countries. Images of burnt Islamic monuments, slain women and children, and looting of the injured and disabled by alien troops disturbed viewers in general and moved even fence sitters and moderates. The Iraq war increased the number of radical Muslims who now believed that in the clash of two civilizations fighting was unavoidable for their existence. They came to regard violence as the only option to protect their faith and heritage. Adding to an already volatile and complicated situation, television images of blindfolded Muslim prisoners and stories of violation of human rights worsened the situation. The world was clearly divided in two groups - us (Muslims) and them (Western) **(Haqqani, 2003)**.

## **Media and Culture**

Cultural influences play a pivotal role in media reporting. Assault on long accepted social norms affects audience sentiments. Impact of the events like Sep 11, war in Iraq and Afghanistan can be analysed in the light of Samuel Huntington's theory of 'clash of civilisation'. According to Huntington, clash of 'Western and non-Western' cultures has created chaos in the new world order. Biased media reporting has multiplied racial division and ill will, exhibited when people come across alien or new cultural nuances. An example is Cronulla 'race riots' in Sydney in Australia in 2005 when fights broke out between white and Lebanese Australians over manning the beach. **(Gale, 2006)** The Daily Telegraph came out with provocative stories and headlines like Fight for Cronulla: we want our beach back", "Gangs turn Cronulla into war zone" and, "NOT ON OUR BEACH: Cronulla police vow to defend Australian way **(Michaels, 2006)**.

The Sydney Morning Herald also reported several Middle Eastern youths armed with chains, knives and baseball bats vowing to eliminate white Australians and waging a 'holy war' yelling 'death to convicts'. This exacerbated feelings of racial division and instigated the white Australians to lash back. "My suggestion is to invite one of the biker gangs to be present in numbers at Cronulla railway station when these Lebanese thugs arrive. It would be worth the price of admission to watch these cowards scurry back onto the train for the return trip to their lairs", a statement said **(Sheehan, 2006)**.

The Australian media while defining terrorism has often linked violence with Islam. This has infused anti-Muslim sentiments in general. Post September 11 as the war on terrorism had been in progress, Australian media focused on differences between the 'white Australians' and people of Middle Eastern region particularly their appearances. Some sections have even tried to form a connection between asylum seekers and terrorists suggesting intense border security and 'discretion' while dealing with immigrants. Such irresponsible reporting has infused anti Muslim sentiments in the country.

Wittingly or unwittingly, media projections on terrorism and the Iraq war have created a false binary divide between the West and Islam as a clash of two alien societies. The 'war on terror' is being identified with Islamic fundamentalism. Many media reporting equate combating terrorism and

fundamentalism with a war on Islam. This has created a feeling of insecurity and fear in the minds of people of different cultures in Australia and the world (**Gale, 2006**).

According to Bashy Quraishi, Chief Editor of Media Watch and author of various books on ethnic minorities in Europe, western media portray a negative picture of the Islamic world. He argues, on 15 September 2000 Olympic inauguration was held in Sydney, Australia. A commentator of German TV channel covering Olympics was mentioning each country by its sporting achievements. However, every time a Muslim country delegation appeared, mention was made of terrorism, fundamentalism or civil war. Quraishi alleges here a deliberate effort to mix religion with sports.

Immediately after September 11 attack, without much concrete proof, finger was raised on radical groups in the Middle East. An American military expert William Taylor, interviewed on CNN on 16 Sept 2001, said: "There is no concrete proof as to who has done this but I think there is a great possibility that militant Muslims are involved in this." Gradually the media focused and involved Islam in discussions. TV reports, newspaper articles, radio broadcasts and Internet chats were flooded with words including Islam, fundamentalism, terrorism and war. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi even declared that Islamic civilization was inferior compared to the Christian West. On 5 October 2001, the leader of the Danish People's Party spelt out war against Islam from the stage of the Danish Parliament (**Qureshi, 2001**).

The Danish cartoon controversy (2006) shows how media ignorance and lack of sensitivity to other cultural norms and religious practices lead to avoidable global controversies. The cartoon of Prophet Mohammed published in Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* and subsequently in other Danish and European newspapers did not intend to hurt any religious sentiments. But the episode sparked commotion world over. Post *Jyllands-Posten* sparking a sensitive issue, Muslims residing in Denmark felt aggrieved and complained to high ranking officials including Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen. The meeting failed to bring any productive results. Media picked up the thread and gave wide scale coverage to the event. There were disturbances all over the Arab world as religious sentiments got involved. The resultant protests led to boycott of Danish products in Muslim nations and heat associated with it assumed international dimensions (**Seib, 2008**).

While examining Western media attitudes towards Islam, it is important to recognise the cultural background of Western journalists. Though healthy to debate contrary opinions, generalizations have no place.

US had conviction that Al Jazeera had a mission to run down American culture. Accordingly, the channel has been telecasting provocative and prejudicial visuals igniting false anti-American sentiments and chauvinism in the new Arab generation. To counter Al Jazeera campaign US launched a new channel "Iraq and the World". The US Air Force initiated the programmes in Iraq. Later the job was done by Al Hurra satellite for beaming it throughout Middle East. US researchers analysed that because of the backwardness of the region in satellite transmission field, they had to start from the scratch. Instead of sophisticated transmissions, it was decided to revert to transistor days as the box had access to all Middle East homes compared to television. American 'modernisation theory' planners shrewdly used the device for friendly cultural lessons throughout the Arab land.

The carefully prepared broadcast material impressed upon the listeners that lack of information about US primarily accounted for Arab hatred against them. Under the pretext of understanding Americans, massive propaganda was beamed to undo the damage done by Al Jazeera operations.

An article published in the US Army war college quarterly journal Parameters by Retried Major Ralph Peters stated that people should adapt to the New American Century. According to him America has 'culture with killing power' and is spreading globally making people accepting and softening to it. US establishment believes that communication agencies should be part and parcel of the country's foreign policy (**Morley, 2006**).

People when viewing television or reading a magazine or newspaper do not take the information as it comes. They take a subjective view and modify the information with their beliefs and knowledge about the subject. The universe is an extensive gallery of varied cultural portraits. Schemas which one culture has can substantially differ from the others. Hence it is imperative for film makers and television international news programmers to handle their presentation with great care, tact, and precaution. Misunderstanding of cultural differences or ignorance about them can lead to disastrous results(**Harris, 1999**).

Partisan or false nationalist chauvinism propagated through media leads to spread of erroneous beliefs and wrong convictions. Media should avoid taking sides and report facts truthfully. An example is the US media coverage before and during the Iraq war. Taking a nationalist line, the media followed the lead provided by US state department and Pentagon. Working on the cultural vulnerability of Americans the Fox News channel put on fire people's patriotic fever and thus managed high audience rating.

According to the polls conducted, 60 per cent of Americans nursed at least one of the three misconceptions. Many believed that US found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Others held that Saddam Hussein was the author of September 11 attacks. To cap all, a sizeable US population believed that US attack on Iraq had global approval or the nations were evenly split in their support to it. None of these beliefs were true. No weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq. Saddam had no involvement in September 11 attacks on New York's Twin Tower while majority of world community was opposed to US war on Iraq. The polls also found that 80 per cent of Fox news audiences had this misconception while 78 per cent of viewers came to this conclusion from viewing CBS News (**Morley, 2006**).

Differences in media's regional perception are no heartening sight. Media irrespective of cultural and religious variations has to hold its credibility high. Even an international summit intended to uphold cultural ethics organized in Dubai (UAE) on 03 May 2002 failed to make the desired impact. Attended by above 500 delegates from the global press, media students, academicians, and politicians, the summit debated cultural and other issues and ways to bridge the gap. There were both pro and anti war speakers and also a mention of journalists killed during the war coverage. Probably on this issue, media workers of all viewpoints could have reached a consensus and bring a concrete proposal. It did not happen. Prejudices and varied interests had the last laugh (**O'Regan, 2002**).

### **Conclusion**

It is media's job and obligation to confront readers with facts. They have to essentially moderate if not bury their differences of religion, country and culture while highlighting plight of sufferers and exposing wrong doers. Western media has been perceived partisan and repeatedly accused of bias and non-

sensitiveness in its reporting on Arab affairs. Media objectivity in Arab-Israeli conflict is the most passionately discussed subject.

According to analysts Middle East problem is mixed up and complicated and it would be naive to attribute the conflict to a single factor like the oil prosperity or Israel. It will also not be correct to hold that United States became target of Sep 11 attacks solely because of its support to Zionism. Mighty television growth from 1980 to 1990 did accentuate rivalries by beaming visuals regarded offensive and objectionable in the region. But telecasts in general report only events and developments taking place around the globe. Solving complex political problems and global differences is not their job. Attributing conflicts and violence to media is unfair. Origin of strife lies in varied socio-economic and political complexities where media has little role to play (**Moorcraft & Taylor, 2008**).

Frequently when journalists have attempted to present a true picture before readers, their efforts have met disapproval of authorities. Many independent writings have faced censorship and the writers rebuked by authorities. Quite a few have been attacked and killed.

Feeding stories to media through a pool of stories is no doubt helpful to scribes who lack means and other resources to report on war developments. But a centralised information flow system blunts initiative for breaking new grounds and makes stories monotonous. Hence many decided to quit the embedding system as it hurt their initiative and skill. However, this opposition lead to physical assaults on independent journalists and many were even eliminated. London Observer journalist Faraz Barzofit was hanged in Iraq. He was found guilty of moving alone inside the country without permission (**Moorcraft et al, 2008**).

Doug Cuthand, a columnist for Regina Leader Post who compared Palestinians to Canada's indigenous people, had his story eliminated by Izzy Asper whose family owns CanWest and latter's writings were mostly pro-Israel. Stephen Kimberly a columnist for 15 years with Halifax Daily News had to quit his job as his story faced rejection and was spiked. Asper family as owners believed their newspaper and employees were subservient to their interests and should act as tools to pin down their rivals (**Winter, 2007**).

CNN correspondent Peter Arnett was dubbed a traitor back home when he reported coalition pilots bombing of a baby milk plant in Iraq. It was argued that the bombing was by mistake and keeping the country's interest paramount the journalist should have avoided writing about it (**Moorcraft et al, 2008**).

It is common to find even established and celebrity newsmen justifying partisan views when it comes to their country. Speaking on NBC and CBS Dan Rather an icon known as 'Dean of American television journalism' stressed that his patriotic spirit obliged him to support the Bush government and military spokesman with closed eyes and mind (**Winter, 2007**).

As per Herman and Chomsky model, big business and government are natural allies and perceive common enemy in an unbridled media. In order to keep their business and political activities away from public scrutiny these elite powerful groups maintain strategic control on flow of public information. Common people remain unaware of their own stakes in the issue (**Klaehn, 2005:25**).

Many times media have attempted to soften coalition troops' harsh and inhuman actions by using low key expressions. Words like 'collateral damage' covered up civilian deaths. Media analyst Norman Solomon called this 'linguicide' while a British commenter called it a manipulation of words to hide the truth and to salvage the conscious (**Moorcraft et al, 2008**).

In a society heavily relying on media for information, coining of expressions that influence the users fast has been a consciously played game. Suitable terms were invented to differentiate between pro-American good guys and those not with America as bad guys. Unabated use of such words gradually convinced the people about the inevitability of US action to avoid a national tragedy. Going to war was softened to a corrective step necessary for world peace. The simulated exercise convinced viewers that terrorists indulged in crimes against humanity and therefore, should not be portrayed as heroes or a revolutionary (**Jackson, 2005**).

Role of media is of utmost significance during a crisis. It informs the importance of an issue and prepares ground for soft landing of a hard delivery to people. It also provides evaluation and feedback vital to authorities so that they decide their future course of action. This explains why authorities always try to manipulate information flow through media.

As far as bias is concerned, Arabic media is also not far behind. Arabic newspapers leave no chance to pin point Western media faults but keep Arab offences and weaknesses under wrap. Highly exaggerated stories about US forces' excesses in Abu Gharib prison found place in Arabic press. Arab violations of human rights and treatment of prisoners never came in print. Arabic press even made hero of Muntather Al Zaidi, a journalist who threw shoe at President Bush in a press conference in Baghdad.

Instances of Arab media's slant and bias are several. A Berlin based Lebanese journalist commented: "Arab media are filled with sentiments rather than facts. Journalists who stick to facts are accused of being biased and risk losing their job." Waleed Qabalan, former editor at Al Jazeera TV revealed: "The fact that images tell thousands of words is a daily reality in all Arab TV channels. They go selectively with these images and spend much money on retaining them. They shun mentioning the root causes of the Israeli offensive, namely Hamas rockets for example. Besides, in terms of language they formulate reports and news in such a way that America and Israel are discredited" (Alrabaa, 2009). When US air strikes began in Afghanistan, Al Jazeera while reporting used the word 'enemy' for US airplanes. (Crawford, 2005)

There is no denial that media reporting from both sides are largely influenced by culture, religion and politics. Media people too, are governed by emotions, priorities and loyalties. With subjects close to home and heart, chances of bias and partisan reporting enhance. At the same time, media has ethical responsibility for disseminating factual and correct information to people.

It is inevitable that strong and powerful elite groups will attempt to abuse this vital link between public and government to serve their narrow interests. While media cannot ignore national interest that is no doubt important, a line has to be drawn between national and public interests. Media has to guard that under the pretext of patriotism it does not become a tool subservient to vested interest groups. Media is duty bound to ensure that truth prevails. Journalists have responsibility towards people to uphold the truth without bowing to any pressure.

Meetings or summits like the one in Dubai provide an excellent platform for scribes of the world to debate and resolve conflicting international issues. They provide useful opportunity for exchange and appreciation of different cultural traits that should lead to the much-needed international understanding.

Will the powers in command allow media to play its role in bridging the gap? Those who control should answer.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

Said, E.W. 1997, Islam and the West - In *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, London, Vintage, pp. 3-35

In this book the writer holds that the modern western media's main aim is to control and manipulate information about Islam and the Muslim world. They arbitrarily decide what non-Muslims should or should not know about Islam and the Muslim world. They have misrepresented Muslim religion before their readers. According to the book, the modern western media filters and taints virtually all information about Islam and the Muslim world.

Conte, W. 2001, *British Media Portrayals of Muslims? InRe:constructions: reflections on humanity and media after tragedy*, 28 September at <http://web.mit.edu/cms/reconstructions/communications/ukmuslims.html> accessed on 30th April, 2005

As per the website, lots of innocent Muslims were degraded and even killed after Sep 11 in the United Kingdom. The UK and foreign media misinterpreted Osama bin Laden as a Muslim fundamentalist instead of a cult leader. This complicated the problem as the Muslim word was misrepresented as emotive and Muslims were characterised wrongly only as Arabs. Basically, the word Islam and Muslim remained

the same for the foreign press as it existed 30 years ago betraying zero growth in the western media perception of them.

O Donnell, P. 2003, The Clash of Civilizations an interview with Ira Rifkin in beliefnet at [www.beliefnet.com/story/124/story\\_12452.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/124/story_12452.html) accessed on 1 May 2005 (3 pages)

The website carries an interview of prominent religious journalist Ira Rifkin. According to him, Muslim world feels that America is introducing Western culture and curbing Islamic values in the name of globalization. It also discusses how Islamic and Christian bodies have spiritual aspirations. The journalist also warns that there are chances of clash of civilizations. Therefore changes if brought about, should be gradual. While introducing new norms, local values should remain intact.

Quarasihi, B. 2001, Islam in the Western Media? in the Multicultural Skyscraper News, 1(3), 12 October at [www.multicultural.net/newsletter/article/issue3-bashy.htm](http://www.multicultural.net/newsletter/article/issue3-bashy.htm) accessed on 1 May 2005.

Here, the writer discusses condition of Muslims who though live in Western and European countries and are their citizens, are discriminated because of their religion. He also tells about problems Muslims face and how they are racially discriminated, and how the western media connived with anti-Muslim stories and precipitated the conflict. He also advises that there should be communication between both religions

that would help in softening the issues. He also emphasizes that the media should use its power ethically and justifiably.

Al-Khoei, S.Y. 1997, Islam and the West: Western Media Coverage of Islam a critical review at

<http://www.honestreports.com/documents/islamaphobia.pdf> accessed on 1 May 2005

In this article, the writer Sayyed Yousif al-Khoei states how the western media have portrayed Muslims in negative light, which has soiled their image in the eye of the western public. It also tells how Muslim community did and should counter the negative stereotype.

Knightley Phillip (3rd edition – 2005) First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Mythmaker from the Crimea to Iraq.

In this book, writer Phillip Knightley details greater degrees of government manipulation and media complicity, as evidenced by the "embedding" of reporters in military units and their one-sided "patriotic" coverage of these conflicts in the post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The book speaks about freedom of the press, journalistic responsibility, and the nature of modern warfare.

Pilger John 31 Jul 2003 THE WAR ON TRUTH

<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=21&ItemID=3517>

accessed on 1 May 2005

Pilger John 22 Apr 2003 The unthinkable is becoming normal. The saving of one little boy must not be a cover for the crime of this war and we should not forget its true horror.

<http://pilger.carlton.com/print/132938> accessed on 1 May 2005

Pilger John 06 Apr 2003.

We now get a glimpse the forbidden truths of the invasion of Iraq. A man cuddles the body of his infant daughter; her blood drenches them. A woman in black pursues a tank, her arms outstretched; all seven in her family are dead.

<http://pilger.carlton.com/print/132879> accessed on 1 May 2005

Pilger John 13 Mar 2003 : The Blair Government has known, almost from the day it came to office in 1997, that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction were almost completely destroyed following the Gulf War.

<http://pilger.carlton.com/print/132823> accessed on 1 May 2005

All these stories highlight the autocracies of US and UK troops in Iraq and how they used their media to project their deeds in positive light “for the benefit of human kind”.

O'Regan Mick, 12th Sep 2002. The Media Report: Through Arab Eyes Dossier Reading, Reading 1.6

In this Mick O' Regan speaks to prominent Arab journalists from Jordan, Qatar, Dubai and Australia to get their view of Western media during post Sep 11 and during the Middle East crises.

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