

## 9. Conclusions

---

### 9.1 Summary

This study examined (1) which strategies of external communication conflict parties use during asymmetric conflicts and (2) what shapes the selection of these communication strategies. Empirically both research questions were examined by studying the external communication of the conflict parties in the conflict in Israel and Palestine, using their external communication in social media as an exemplary case. The study focused on the analysis of “external communication”, which is understood to be open and fully attributable unidirectional mass communication of an official organization representing a conflict party that is directed to a foreign audience, toward which the communicating actor has a friendly or at least neutral attitude, and in particular directed toward so far unaffiliated civil population.

To examine which strategies of external communication conflict parties use during asymmetric conflicts, a typology of the strategies of external communication used by actors involved in conflicts was introduced in chapter 2. Drawing on the literatures on naming and shaming, as well as on public diplomacy and further related literatures, it was shown that there are two types of strategies of external communication which are particularly promising for conflict parties: “branding” (positive self-portrayal) and “shaming” (negative descriptions of the opponent). In chapter 4, then, a research design and a methodological approach for identifying and analyzing strategies of external communication, consisting of a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods,<sup>1</sup> were introduced. Using the typology developed in chapter 2 and the methodological approach introduced in chapter 4, a comprehensive data set was created and analyzed in order to describe the strategies of external communication of the most important English-speaking social media channels of the government of the State of Israel on the one side and of Hamas and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) on the other side:

---

<sup>1</sup> The methods introduced in this study can be also used as a toolbox for identifying (external) communication strategies in other conflicts and in other communication contexts.

The results of the empirical analysis (as presented in chapter 5) show that the external communication on the Israeli channels is dominated by branding, while the external communication on the channels of the Palestinian side is consistently dominated by shaming. Only during some short and particularly intense stages of the conflict, the Israeli external communication was dominated by shaming as well. The variation of the strategies of external communication across platforms and amongst the different branches of the same conflict party, in contrast, is comparatively small. The observed results contradict the theoretical expectations of established theories from the research on blaming, which would expect a negativity bias, and marketing research, which would expect a predominance of positive communication.

Instead, in chapter 3, the thesis was developed that the selection of strategies of external communication is shaped by the (asymmetric) conflict structure. The plausibility of this thesis was empirically demonstrated in chapters 6, 7 and 8 by examining the external communication in the conflict in Israel and Palestine: All patterns of the theoretical model presented in chapter 3 could be also observed empirically. It was shown that the conflict parties in the conflict carefully and strategically select their strategies of external communication, using evaluation mechanisms to observe the success of their external communication. Furthermore, it was shown that the asymmetric distribution of capabilities among the different conflict parties shapes different interests (prioritization pathway), opportunities to convince (audience pathway) and opportunities to present (picturability pathway), making a branding-dominated strategy of external communication more attractive for the Israeli side and a shaming-dominated strategy more attractive for the Palestinian side.

**Prioritization pathway:** The asymmetric conflict structure shapes divergent *interests* of the conflict parties, which influence the selection of external communication strategies: The empirical research showed that the Palestinian side is strongly dissatisfied with the status quo of the conflict. Both the conflict and challenging the status quo are therefore making up the single number one priority for their external communication. The Israeli side, in contrast, is comparatively satisfied with the status quo, as it can enjoy various benefits from having a lot of capabilities, such as political control, wealth and easy access to the international diplomatic system. Israel is, therefore, interested in defending these privileges. The conflict is only one of a variety of interests for Israel, such as, for instance, fostering the Israeli economy and Israel's international status, and, therefore, not the only priority for its external communication. Consequently, shaming, allowing references to the conflict and challenging the status quo, is an attractive strategy for the Palestinian side as the underdog, and branding, allowing to sideline the conflict and showcasing one's economic and cultural strengths, is an attractive strategy for the Israeli side as topdog.

**Audience pathway:** The Palestinian side has far better *opportunities to convince* for the use of shaming: Research from cognition psychology (Vandello et al. 2007<sup>2</sup>) shows that neutral observers tend to support the underdog, i.e., an actor which is disadvantaged in comparison to its opponent, in a competitive constellation in which the underdog is confronted with a superior opponent. This underdog/topdog effect can be also observed for the perception of the conflict in Israel and Palestine abroad. The Palestinian side, being perceived as the underdog, profits from this effect, as it makes it for them much easier to acquire sympathy by using shaming and referring to the conflict than for the Israeli side as topdog. For the Israeli side, being the by far more powerful conflict party, in contrast, it is comparatively difficult to present itself credibly and convincingly as a victim. Instead, the Israeli side tends to select predominantly branding as an alternative promising strategy of external communication.

**Picturability pathway:** The Palestinian side has far better *opportunities to present* for the use of shaming, while the Israeli side has far better opportunities to present for the use of branding: It can be shown that its suffering from a comparatively large number of (civilian) fatalities and the occupation gives the Palestinian side particularly good pictures and stories for shaming. Both, in turn, are a consequence of the asymmetric distribution of military capabilities. The asymmetric distribution of capabilities makes the conflict parties adapt their combat strategies in a way, which causes a comparatively high number of fatalities on the Palestinian side and among these fatalities, particularly many civilian fatalities. Furthermore, having a lot of military capabilities makes the Israeli side powerful enough to control territory claimed and partially populated by a population identifying itself with the opponent as well. In contrast, having a lot of financial capabilities makes it possible for the Israeli side to invest in prestigious projects and to show off its economic attractiveness. Both offer attractive pictures and stories for branding. Additionally, having more social/institutional capabilities allows Israel also to show off its closeness to the international community and to frame itself as a stable, reliable partner with shared values, which again offers attractive pictures and stories for branding.

In conclusion, all three pathways explaining how the asymmetric distribution shapes the selection of external communication of conflict parties during asymmetric conflicts could be observed empirically for the conflict in Israel and Palestine.<sup>3</sup> The three pathways are intertwined and mutually reinforce each other.

2 Cf. also Yarchi et al. 2017: 360, 361, 364, 365, 366, 373; Prell 2002.

3 The observed empirical patterns (cf. chapters 5-8) clearly match with the theoretical expectations derived from the literature on the characteristics of the structure of asymmetric conflicts and the literature describing cognitive effects influencing the perception of these characteristics of the structure of asymmetric conflicts and that were formulated in the theoretical chapter (cf. chapter 3). For both sides of the conflict, the Israeli and the Palestinian one, empirical evidence matching with the theoretical expectations and explanations introduced

## 9.2 Theoretical core contributions

### To the conflict research literature

While many scholars of conflict research have acknowledged the relevance of external communication during asymmetric conflicts (in social media) in side-notes, so far, a study putting this subject at the center of a comprehensive study has been missing. This study has, for the first time, collected the knowledge about the issue splintered across the conflict research literature together and developed a comprehensive theory about this important dimension of modern wars and in this way contributes to closing this important research gap.

### To the public diplomacy literature

Scholars of public diplomacy have been pointing out that their field still lacks theorization and comprehensive, systematic empirical studies (e.g. Entman 2008: 87; Gilboa 2008: 56; Fullerton 2016). This study contributes to the theory-building within the field of public diplomacy by offering a theoretical model about the use of external communication in a major relevant context, the context of (asymmetric) conflicts. Unlike most studies in the field of public diplomacy, the analysis was not purely descriptive. An important variable determining the selection of the content used in external communication could be identified: the structure of the conflict. Following this specific example, examining external communication during conflicts, theory-building in the field of public diplomacy will be likely to profit from more generally examining the relationship between the operational environment and the selection of the external communication content.

## 9.3 Limitations and proposals for future research: Thinking beyond the conflict in Israel and Palestine

The empirical research of this study is limited to the comprehensive analysis of a single case, the conflict in Israel and Palestine, and only one communication con-

---

before in chapter 3 could be found not only for individual branches but across all the different branches. Similarly, when analyzing the press articles comparable evidence could be found across different media outlets, even if the political orientation of the corresponding media outlets differed (for instance, similar arguments could be found in the liberal Haaretz and the conservative Jerusalem Post). The patterns of the pathways, furthermore, could be observed across various different thematic fields. Altogether, the research results, measured against the methodological requirements of pattern matching, provide very strong evidence for the validity of the theoretical model developed in this study.

text, the context of external communication, and a limited time frame, 2008-2016 (in 2008 the first branches of the conflict parties started using social media for their external communication). Whilst the methods literature about within-case analyses convincingly demonstrates that single-case studies allow theory-testing by reconstructing the tested theoretical patterns as well (cf. also Hak & Dul 2009a: 937ff.; Gerring 2013: 5), as it was also done in this study, additional case studies could add additional confirmation and help to learn more about the applicability of the patterns shown in this study for a very ideal-typical case of an asymmetric conflict for cases with less ideal-typical conditions:

**The conflict between Turkey and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG)**, the dominant faction within the SDF, in Northern Syria in the context of Syrian civil war offers an example for a for non-dyadic conflict. SDF and YPG are not only involved in a conflict with Turkey but are involved in a conflict with Daesh at the same time, as well. Occasionally, furthermore, SDF and YPG have been involved in clashes with the military forces of the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad. Despite having combat experience from the war against Daesh and profiting from foreign arms deliveries, in comparison to the Turkish army, one of the biggest armies in the world (IISS 2017: 166ff.), SDF and YPG (IISS 2017: 406f.) have much fewer military capabilities. And the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES), to which SDF belongs, is not officially recognized as a state. Still being affected by the destruction from the war, despite the opportunity of oil sales, means that the economic & financial capabilities of the NES are more limited than those of Turkey as well.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the conflict between the two conflict parties shares the characteristics of an asymmetric conflict. Whilst, the conflict with the Syrian government could also be characterized as an asymmetric conflict, the conflict with Daesh, in contrast, cannot be characterized as asymmetric conflict. Being designated as a terrorist organization internationally, the international status of Daesh is even lower than the status of the NES and whilst Daesh was militarily more powerful than YPG and its allies in Syria during some stages of the conflict,<sup>5</sup> the superiority was not as decisive to characterize it as clearly asymmetric. This makes it possible for YPG, SDF and the NES to select for their external communication the most promising pictures and stories from both conflict lines. As presented in this study for a similar example, the conflict in Israel and Palestine, the conflict with Turkey can be expected to offer particularly promising pictures and stories for shaming for

4 Kurdistan 24, for example, reports about a rise in underage workers due to the "Poor economy in Syrian Kurdistan" (Kurdistan 24: 01.07.2019).

5 The siege of Kobane stopped the rise of Daesh. From then on, Daesh has lost more and more territory to SDF / YPG (cf. also Aljazeera 27.01.2015 describing the end of the siege of Kobane as "beginning of the end for ISIL").

YPG, SDF and the NES. As Daesh is highly unpopular internationally, in contrast, it does remain also attractive for YPG, SDF and the NES to showcase their military successes against Daesh and to present itself this way toward the Western world and the international community as an ally in the fight against Daesh (cf. also the description of the “Angel of Kobane” and the related explanations in chapter 1). Indeed, a first exploratory analysis conducted in the context of this study indicates that YPG and SDF choose for their external communication in the social media a mix of the corresponding pictures and stories.

The **civil war in Syria** between the Syrian government and opposition groups such as the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (SNC), furthermore, provides us with an example to examine the effects of changing power capabilities and levels of asymmetry within the relations between two conflict parties on the selection of external communication strategies. As several ten thousand soldiers from the Syrian Arab Army of President Bashar al-Assad’s government had defected to the opposition, the Syrian government lost the military dominance in Syria during the early stages of the civil war (Khlebnikov 2018), a dominance which an ideal-typical topdog has. The international image of the Syrian government and President Bashar al-Assad as its leader has been damaged severely as well. Both made the relations between and the opportunities for the conflict parties in the civil war less asymmetric. In the meanwhile, due to the support of Russian and Iranian military and paramilitary forces, the Syrian government has partially recovered its military strength, regaining the upper hand in the conflict and has been very successful in fighting back oppositional forces such as the FSA, regaining the control over the biggest cities and large parts of the country, whilst the opposition has been weakened.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the asymmetry between the conflict parties has increased. Following the theoretical model developed in this study, the opportunities for using shaming should have decreased for the Syrian government, as the asymmetry of the conflict has increased over time, and the Syrian government should be expected to adapt their external communication correspondingly by decreasing the share of shaming messages in its external communication. If such a trend could be observed indeed, this would show that the model developed in this study and applied as a static model for the recent stage of the conflict in Israel and Palestine is also applicable as a dynamic model. Indeed, a first exploratory analysis conducted in the context of this study indicates that the communication of the English-speaking channels of the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA),<sup>7</sup> one of the most important channels of

6 Cf. also World Politics Review 19.02.2019, also reporting about a first recovery of the Syrian government’s diplomatic status.

7 Link to SANA’s English-speaking website: <https://sana.sy/en/> (source accessed on: 14.07.2019).

external communication of the Syrian government, changed: The share of branding posts has increased, the share of shaming posts decreased. The social media channels of the oppositional SNC,<sup>8</sup> in contrast, have remained clearly dominated by shaming.

The case of the **conflict between the Chinese government and secessionist Uighurs** offers an example of a conflict with a clearly asymmetric structure, which takes place in a different region to the Middle East and which involves a superpower as topdog. As China is a superpower the asymmetry to its opponent concerning its capabilities is even larger than in the case of Israel and Palestine: China's army is even bigger than the Israeli one (IISS 2017: 278ff.), the access to the Chinese market not only attractive but essential for the trade of many countries<sup>9</sup> and the People's Republic of China is not only recognized as a state but it also is a permanent member of the UN Security Council. From observing this clear asymmetric character, from the perspective of the theory developed in this study, it can be expected that the Chinese government, as topdog, predominantly uses branding in its external communication, whilst the Uighur dissidents as the clear underdog, mostly use shaming. In contrast to the Israeli external communication, the Chinese, government primarily uses social media channels maintained by state-owned news channels such as Xinhua,<sup>10</sup> China Central Television,<sup>11</sup> and The People's Daily newspaper<sup>12</sup> for its external communication in social media (Li 2012: 2248) and not social media pages of embassies or other branches of the government and its administration (Gong 2014: 2ff.). Indeed, a first exploratory analysis conducted in the context of this study indicates that the Chinese state media's English-speaking channels publish almost exclusively posts with world news, familiar to other news channels, as well as a rich variety of branding posts. The World Uighur Congress, as one of the main representations of the Uighur opposition and diaspora, in contrast, publishes on its English-speaking Facebook page almost exclusively shaming posts.<sup>13</sup> A comprehensive analysis could verify these initial observations and in this way, by showing that the theoretically predicted patterns cannot only be observed for cases in the Middle East but also for regions with a different culture, provide additional evidence that the conflict structure is more dominant in shaping the selection of

8 Link to the SNC's English-speaking Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en/> (source accessed: 28.07.2019).

9 Cf. e.g. the GDP values as an indicator for the size of China's market: IISS 2017: 278.

10 Link to the English-speaking Twitter channel of Xinhua: <https://twitter.com/XHNews> (source accessed on: 14.07.2019).

11 Link to the English-speaking Twitter channel of China Central Television: <https://twitter.com/CCTV> (source accessed on: 14.07.2019).

12 Link to the English-speaking Twitter channel of The People's Daily newspaper: <https://twitter.com/PDChina> (source accessed on: 14.07.2019).

13 Link to the English-speaking Facebook page of the World Uyghur Congress: <https://www.facebook.com/uyghurcongress/> (source accessed on: 14.07.2019).

strategies of external communication by strategically acting conflict parties than cultures and identities. Furthermore, it can be observed that the Chinese external communication channels almost not at all address domestic conflicts. A possible explanation might be that the superpower status and international economic dependencies make it easier for the Chinese government to silence corresponding discourses than for a normal topdog.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, it could be considered that applying the theoretical concepts and methodological approaches developed for this study onto non-asymmetric conflicts or communication constellations other than external communication in order to further advance the theory-building about communication during conflicts also for other contexts could be beneficial. For less asymmetric conflicts e.g., providing more or less equal opportunities for the conflict parties, more mixed strategies could be expected from the point of view of the theoretical ideas developed in this study. Furthermore, historical cases could be examined as well. While already prior to the 1990s many conflicts had an asymmetric conflict structure (e.g. the war in Vietnam), these conflicts were often embedded in the larger context of the Cold War. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore if for these cases the regional conflict structure remained the dominant influence shaping the external communication of the conflict parties or whether the context of the Cold War with a strong ideological background on both sides overshadowed the influence of the regional (asymmetric) conflict structures partially.<sup>15</sup>

The knowledge of how the structures of a competitive operational environment influence the selection of strategies of external communication during asymmetric conflicts gained in this study, moreover, might also help to get an improved understanding of communication processes in non-violent competitive and conflictive settings with actors with asymmetric power relations and divergent opportunities and constraints, such as the campaigning of political candidates before elections, for example. Indeed, scholars studying campaigning have observed that challengers (which, using the terminology from this study, could often be considered as underdogs, while the incumbency often gives candidates a bonus making them to topdogs) tend to use more negative campaigning than incumbents and shame frequently their incumbent opponents for (alleged) failures of their political work. Incumbents, in contrast, tend to emphasize their political successes and present themselves as statesmanlike instead (cf. e.g. Haynes & Rhine 1998; see also

---

14 It might be possible, for example, that the strong dependencies increase the ability of China to silence parts of the discourse. Indeed, Sikkink and Risse (2013: 287, 289f.) argue for the discourse about the diffusion of human rights that it is more difficult to pressurize governments of states to comply with international norms that are authoritarian and not vulnerable to material pressure.

15 Cf. also the shift from ideology and broader public interest in the "old wars" to identity and particular policies in the "new wars" described by Mary Kaldor (Kaldor 2013).



Peterson & Djupe 2005; Lau & Brown Rovner 2009: 294). Like the conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts, the competing parties, furthermore, tend to focus on their strongest topics, except if a certain other topic receives particularly more attention (cf. e.g. Denter 2013).<sup>16</sup>

## 9.4 Practical recommendations

From the research results of this study, however, not only lessons for theory-building can be learned, but we can also learn lessons for the practical work of practitioners. The following sections summarize and present the most important corresponding recommendations. As this study promotes a humanitarian, pacifist normative perspective, the recommendations do not focus on how one party can become even more efficient and win against another one, but on how the knowledge gained in this study can contribute to conflict resolution.

### 9.4.1 Practical recommendations for the media, international donors and practitioners involved in conflict resolution and advocating for peace

The conflict-conserving and partisan messages dominating reporting on the conflict in Israel and Palestine need to be complemented by reporting from a constructive perspective, identifying both problems and solutions, which could be used to overcome these problems.

This study has shown which strategies of external communication are used during asymmetric conflicts, studying the conflict in Israel and Palestine as an example. It has been described which types of communication tactics are predominant in the external communication of the conflict parties: branding and shaming. None of these strategies are very useful to promote conflict resolution and peace-making.

16 Furthermore, the 2018 House of Representatives elections in the USA and the 2018 Bavarian parliamentary elections are good examples for cases in which the ruling party lost badly after focusing their campaigns on negativity and (alleged) problems in the country instead of presenting successes of themselves leading the government: In his campaigning for the 2018 Congress elections US President Trump focused his campaigning on alleged migration problems instead of highlighting the promising economic situation. This led to a loss of his Republican Party in the nation-wide House of Representatives elections by a large margin. Similarly, in the campaigning for the 2018 Bavarian parliamentary election, the ruling CSU party focused in their campaigning on alleged migration problems and even attacked the German chancellor from its German sister party CDU despite being part of the federal government itself. This strategy led to huge public protests and the worst election result of the party for decades.

On the contrary, both branding and shaming strengthen the already existing polarization and the limitation on the mutually excluding categories of “Pro-Palestinian” or “Pro-Israeli”, helping to export this fragmented way of thinking to foreign audiences and creating walls of words and a political gridlock situation there, too.

At the same time, the analysis also shows what types of messages are not used by the conflict parties in their external communication at all or, at least, only very rarely: Messages that could help to overcome the gridlock situation and contribute to conflict resolution such as messages that thematize peace efforts, cooperation and signs of sincere goodwill toward the opponent.

For the conflict in Israel and Palestine the reason for this is not that such initiatives do not exist. Quite the contrary, between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authorities even cooperation in the sensitive field of security actually exists. Even though such groups do not represent a majority by far, within both civil populations initiatives advocating for reconciliation and peace do exist. Within Israel, for example, initiatives like “Peace Now”<sup>17</sup> advocate for more Israeli efforts in the conflict resolution process and other initiatives facilitate the exchange between the Palestinian and Israeli civil population, fostering reconciliation. The Parents Circle – Families Forum (PCFF), for example, brings together family members of victims of conflict-related violence from both sides of the conflict, grieving together and working toward peace and reconciliation.<sup>18</sup> In Neve Shalom Palestinians and Israelis have even decided to move together and to live in a binational community, demonstrating that peaceful coexistence is possible.<sup>19</sup>

However, the conflict parties themselves are not interested in referring to the corresponding initiatives or publishing messages contributing to conflict resolution, they are constrained to use corresponding themes in their external communication: The PLO & the PNA tend to avoid showcasing their cooperation with the Israeli authorities so as to avoid domestic criticism because the English-speaking external communication can be also observed by Palestinian domestic audiences, where cooperation with the Israeli side due to the ongoing occupation tends to be not very popular and is even framed by domestic opponents as treason. Similarly, the different branches of the Israeli government engaged in external communication avoid corresponding messages. On the one hand, featuring cooperation with the Palestinian side is perceived by Israeli practitioners as risky, as featuring cooperation with the PNA might harm the reputation of the PNA, who are the more moderate and cooperative opponents for Israel, among the Palestinian population

17 Link to the English-speaking website of the initiative: <https://peacenow.org.il/en> (source accessed on: 14.07.2019).

18 Link to the English-speaking website of the initiative: [http://theparentscircle.org/en/about\\_eng/](http://theparentscircle.org/en/about_eng/) (source accessed on: 14.07.2019).

19 Link to the English-speaking website of the initiative: <https://wasns.org/> (source accessed on: 14.07.2019).

and create opportunities for more radical alternatives such as Hamas to attack the PNA and further undermine their domestic reputation (cf. COGAT: 45, 47; Isr GPO1: 111-114; PLO MA: 196, 198; Pal UK 298-302). On the other hand, many of the peace initiatives from within the Israeli civil population are perceived critically by high-ranking Israeli politicians.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, corresponding references are also not featured in the Israeli external communication.

The lack of alternative constructive reporting is particularly problematic, as, like the conflict parties, the international media as another important group of actors reporting on the conflict has, so far, done little to fill this gap (though often but not always the international media outlets are at least less partisan in their reporting than the conflict parties themselves): So far they mostly tend to focus on the violence of the conflict, short-term politics and single events of confrontational behavior, neglecting to report about the underlying problems and possible solutions to overcome these problems and existing initiatives dedicated to conflict resolution (cf. e.g. Kempf 2012: esp. 43 for an assessment of the reporting about the conflict in Israel and Palestine in the German media). Promising ideas for an alternative to these traditional journalist patterns for reporting on conflicts, which are partially labeled as “war journalism”, are ideas from “peace journalism”, a journalist approach aiming not only to be more critical toward their own reporting and its context but also to give more attention to peace initiatives and opportunities for conflict resolution (Çiftcioğlu 2017: 2f.; Lynch & Galtung 2010).

Similar reflections would also be helpful for practitioners involved in conflict resolution and advocating for peace for evaluating their external communication. Moreover, initiatives that are contributing to conflict resolution but that are not yet engaging in external communication should consider setting up a media presence to increase the visibility of their important work and the related message of peace, which so far remains underrepresented. International donors, in turn, should prioritize supporting initiatives that adapt constructive communication strategies over initiatives that spread polarizing messages.

---

20 Israel's 2016 NGO law (full official name: “Transparency Requirements for Parties Supported by Foreign State Entities Bill”) was perceived, for example, as an attempt to hamper the work of critical NGOs including pro-peace groups (Voice of America 27.12.2015).

## 9.4.2 Practical recommendations for the educational system

The sensitivity in assessing conflicts and their medial representation as well as identifying opportunities for conflict resolution needs to be increased by adding corresponding modules to the civic education curricula.

This study has illustrated with the example of the underdog/topdog effect, that cognitive effects influence how audiences perceive conflicts. As the practitioners of the conflict parties in charge of the external communication spend a great deal of time working on the conflict of their conflict party and its medial presentation, they can develop a sensitivity for such effects. Not dealing with conflicts and their medial representation professionally, however, a majority of the viewers and readers abroad typically do not have a sensitivity for assessing conflicts and their medial representation.

Nevertheless, almost everybody is confronted regularly with reports on conflicts, even though they may not be confronted as extensively as professionals and only sporadically (cf. also Yarchi 2016: 293): Reports about conflicts are in the news almost every day. It is almost impossible, therefore, to not get confronted with such reports. Moreover, as recent attempts of extremists such as radical right-wing and Islamist groups using social media as a tool for radicalization demonstrate, even stable societies are not immune to hate-speech and the emergence of conflicts mediated by such hate-speech. For these reasons, assessing conflicts and their medial representation and (for the reasons explained in the previous recommendation) opportunities for conflict resolution should not only be taught in societies with on-going conflicts or post-conflict societies. Educational systems that have not yet introduced citizenship education and media education classes to their curricula should add corresponding classes. Educational systems that have already introduced civic education and media education classes to their curricula should evaluate whether they already include modules increasing the sensitivity in assessing conflicts and their medial representation, as well as identifying opportunities for conflict resolution. Such educational activities should include learning to assess and contextualize media contents, foster critical thinking and awareness for basic mechanisms of media and to provide an understanding of the complexity of conflicts, introducing examples of successful conflict resolution and conditions for conflict resolution.

While the currently existing education systems are constructed in a way that allows reaching out most easily to young people, not only young people should be educated and sensitized about the medial representation of conflicts and conflict resolution. Especially decision-makers such as policymakers in the ministries of foreign affairs, who decide about possible interventions into foreign conflicts, and multipliers such as media makers, who significantly contribute to shaping the

image of conflicts abroad, should critically reflect whether their work might be influenced by cognitive effects and possible biases resulting from these effects.

### 9.4.3 Practical recommendations for the Israeli authorities

Words cannot replace deeds completely. A full restoration of the image of the State of Israel, therefore, also requires a change of policies.

In the early days of the State of Israel, external communication was not a large priority for the Israeli decision-makers (Medzini 2012). Reportedly, for example, the founder and first Prime Minister of Israel David Ben-Gurion was rather skeptical about the effectiveness of Israeli public diplomacy. For example, the following statement has been attributed to him: “Never mind what the gentiles say, what counts is what the Jews will do” (Medzini 2012: 1). This study, in contrast, has shown that the assessment of the Israeli elites on the importance of external communication has changed since then significantly, also due to the experiences of PR disasters such as the 2006 Lebanon War.<sup>21</sup> In the meantime, the Israeli authorities are well aware of the importance of external communication and that it can make a significant difference. They are further aware that they have hardly a choice but to engage in the struggle for the international opinion, if they at least want to contain the damage caused by opponent external communication.

At the same time this study, however, has also shown that the power of words is not unlimited. Words matter greatly, but at the same time policies and deeds of the conflict parties and their observable implications matter, too (cf. also sections 7.2.-7.5.). Without deeds words are not “worthless”, as Ben-Gurion was quoted saying as well (Shilon 2016: 139), but their power to distract from policies that are perceived as unjust or disproportional is only limited. Indeed, the first Israeli practitioners have already started to acknowledge this:<sup>22</sup> The Deputy Director-General for Media and Public Affairs at the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later ambassador of Israel to Italy Gideon Meir for example observes: “Public diplomacy is not a cure-all for all of Israel’s problems in the arena of public opinion. There are many factors, not just what we say, that influence the perception of Israel abroad. But Israel’s public diplomacy can make a contribution and does – if not always in the immediate and short term, then certainly in the long run” (Israeli MFA 24.05.2005; cf. also

21 On the negative coverage Israel which has received during the 2006 Lebanon War cf. also Kalb & Saivetz 2007: 10ff.

22 And commentators in the Israeli press (e.g. Ynet 10.07.2009; Haaretz 04.06.2015; Moment Magazine 2008) and other studies (Haaretz 30.12.2012 about the study of the think tank Mo-lad on the Israeli public diplomacy; Medzini 2012: 8) draw similar conclusions as well. Cf. also Goodman 2017.

Kruse 2013: 31). Similarly, the former IDF pilot and Israeli expert for intercultural communication Reuven Ben-Shalom acknowledges in the conservative Jerusalem Post: “we must admit that sometimes the problem isn’t explaining the policy, but the policy itself” (Jerusalem Post 12.06.2014) and even former Israeli prime minister and president Shimon Peres was quoted by Gilboa “if the policy is bad, the best PR in the world will not help” (Gilboa 2006: 735; Griffin 2013: 21; Gilboa 2013: 122).

In conclusion, whilst branding remains the most efficient strategy of external communication for the Israeli side as topdog, it is no panacea for Israel’s reputation, and Israel will require real policy changes, if it wants to safeguard its reputation from a long-term perspective.

#### 9.4.4 Practical recommendations for the Palestinian conflict parties:

The Palestinian conflict parties need to think already about a post-conflict strategy of external communication.

The empirical analysis in chapter 5 has shown that the external communication of the Palestinian conflict parties is strongly (and partially even almost exclusively) dominated by shaming. Currently, the Palestinian image abroad is mostly built upon its role in the conflict, accusations toward an enemy / opponent (Israel) and the Palestinian victimhood and resilience. When one day a sincere peace agreement between the conflict parties is made, the Palestinian side will not be able to, and should not be able to, use the corresponding themes for its external communication any more for the following reasons:

1. When Israel changes its military policies, this will reduce the extent of the damage and fatalities on the Palestinian side and, therefore, the number of opportunities to present for the use of shaming will decrease for the Palestinian side.
2. A Palestinian strategy of external communication that builds up the image of the Palestinian side primarily based upon its enmity to Israel would risk undermining efforts for peace. If the agreed peace should be sustainable (and ideally lead to a positive peace and not only a negative peace, defined as the mere absence of violence<sup>23</sup>), corresponding messages, therefore, need to be avoided.
3. A resolution of the conflict will also change the operational environment, including the interests and opportunities of the Palestinian side. A fully independent and recognized Palestinian State and a resolution of the conflict, for example, would provide better opportunities for state-building and the Palestinian economy. The external communication could be used to support corresponding efforts, e.g. by pointing out economic opportunities and the attractiveness

23 On the distinction between positive and negative peace cf. Galtung & Fischer 2013.

of the Palestinian culture and attracting this way more tourists and foreign investors.

Therefore, the Palestinian side should include in their plans for a strategy of post-conflict policies the crucial aspect of communication, developing a plan for the transition of its external communication for adapting to a post-conflict setting as well. Indeed, the first practitioners within the PLO & the PNA have already started thinking about such a strategy of external communication for a future providing better conditions. The General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, for example, has thought about possibilities to promote tourism and facilitate economic cooperation (cf. also General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific 2019). So far corresponding efforts, however, are not prioritized in the external communication, as the conflict is perceived as the single number one priority (cf. e.g. Pal Aus: 190ff.).

