

Reassessing Documentary Narratives in *Encounter Point*: A Critical Analysis of Grassroots Peacebuilding in Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Representation

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ABSTRACT

Directed by Ronit Avni and Julia Bacha, the documentary *Encounter Point* provides a profound exploration of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, focusing on the personal narratives of individuals directly affected by the ongoing geopolitical struggle. Unlike mainstream media, which often presents sensationalized and polarized narratives, this documentary shifts the focus toward grassroots peacebuilding efforts and the everyday realities of those striving for reconciliation. This study aims to critically analyse this documentary film within the contemporary context, particularly in light of recent escalations in the Gaza conflict, to assess the effectiveness of documentary storytelling as a tool for conflict resolution and peace discourse. The study employs a qualitative content analysis approach, using narrative analysis and framing theory to examine the documentary's representation of conflict, identity, and peacebuilding initiatives. By dissecting the film's cinematic techniques, personal testimonies, and framing strategies, this research highlights how *Encounter Point* constructs an alternative discourse to dominant political narratives. This documentary challenges binary oppositions in conflict reporting by showcasing shared human experiences, fostering empathy, and offering a counter-narrative to mainstream media portrayals of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The findings present a nuanced perspective, emphasizing the role of grassroots activism and interpersonal reconciliation in peace efforts. This research underscores the relevance of documentary films as critical media artifacts that contribute to rethinking traditional conflict narratives. As the Gaza crisis continues to evolve, revisiting *Encounter Point* in 2025 highlights the enduring significance of peace-oriented storytelling in an era of heightened geopolitical polarization.

Keywords: *Documentary analysis, Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution, peacebuilding narratives, media framing, grassroots activism.*

INTRODUCTION

The Israel-Palestine struggle among their inherited identity claimants has become one of the conflicts with such enduring complexity, emotional intensity, and political divisiveness that its impact resonates locally and globally. In today's media-saturated world, the real and the surreal are no longer separate realms but co-dependent forces to understand humanity. Together, they form a composite lens to encounter the human condition's layered complexity. Documentary films and encounter-based media through dramatized reenactments and cinematic storytelling have blurred these boundaries. This paper critically examines the documentary's narrative structure, cinematic techniques in the context of peace journalism framing, and conflict resolution.

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Encounter Point (2006), directed by Julia Bacha and Ronit Avni, centres around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lens of peace activists from both sides. Unlike traditional war documentaries, grassroots efforts for reconciliation (Galtung, 1990) under the peace media and conflict transformation (McGoldrick & Lynch, 2016) are the unique approach of this film. Avni, a filmmaker and human rights advocate, is known for leveraging media for conflict resolution (2007), particularly through Just Vision (Shapiro & Daniel, 2003), an organization dedicated to peace-building storytelling, while co-director Bacha, a Brazilian filmmaker, has focused on documentaries that emphasize nonviolent resistance, social justice, and media activism (Jamshidi, 2021). Their backgrounds have shaped this film's commitment to peace narratives around the conventional conflict-driven story in the socio-political ambiance of the documentary.

Primarily in Hebrew, English, and Arabic, this documentary falls within the political, observational, and participatory genres, offering a multifaceted portrayal of grassroots efforts within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Nichols, 2024, p. 136). The observational *vérité* style allows for *fly-on-the-wall* intimacy, capturing moments without narration and overt mediation with *cinéma vérité* traditions that seek to minimize intrusion (Winston, 2019), providing raw access to daily life's political sensitivity and conflict-ridden contexts.

Simultaneously, the participatory aspect seen in intercut interviews and the visible presence of the filmmakers directly with subjects (Nichols, 2024, p. 234) enhances the narrative's credibility and ethical reflexivity of human stakes within political frameworks (Aufderheide, 2007, p. 91), often missing in purely expository or poetic forms (Renov, 2012, p. 15). Moreover, linguistic diversity of translation, audience access, and power dynamics in representation (Cronin, 2013) allow the documentary to embrace pluralistic perspectives, becoming more dialogic than monolingual works.

Historical Origins of the Israel-Palestine Conflict

The growing conflict culminated in the United Nations Partition Plan of 1947 and the subsequent establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, triggering the first Arab-Israeli war and decades of violence, occupation, and displacement (Morris, 2008).

Bottom-up initiatives in various historical narratives (Nets-Zehngut, 2013, pp. 232-248) have played a vital role in fostering dialogue to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through grassroots reconciliation and narrative transformation, despite military and political tensions. PRIME's dual-narrative textbooks offer a parallel approach to humanizing the "other" via shared testimonies; Zochrot's efforts focus on public memory and the acknowledgment of the Nakba to challenge entrenched biases; History's Double Helix and Shared Narratives, while Van Leer and IHJR emphasize the significance of unofficial peace efforts in shaping public consciousness. *Encounter Point*'s vitality lies in its cinematic representation of humanizing protagonists, emphasizing coexistence and conflict resolution as a mediated counter-narrative (Bar-Tal, 2013), in challenging deep-seated hostilities of alternative pathways as discussed in *Iraq for Sale: The war profiteers* (Greenwald, 2006) and ethical issues (Dilts et al., 2012) before the viewers. As Lehrs (2022) states:

Since 1948, with the establishment of the State of Israel, the conflict has included numerous rounds of war and violence, and for many years it was characterized by the absence of official communication channels between

the parties. Against this background, Uri Avnery, editor of the weekly Haolam Hazeq, worked to build dialogue channels with Palestinian and Arab actors and to promote his ideas for peace in the Middle East (p. 206).

Aim of the Study

1. To analyse the portrayal of grassroots activism, personal testimonies, and intergroup dialogue.
2. To explore the cinematic and rhetorical strategies employed for conflict resolution framing in storytelling, interviews, and narrative structuring.
3. To evaluate how the documentary challenges or reinforces existing discourses on peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through its nonviolent resistance showcase.

Problem Statement

Foundational circles of violence amid the traditions of conflict transformation, *Encounter Point*'s narrative empathy invites viewers to experience the catharsis (Wallace, 2020) and recognition ethics (Kyriakou, 2024) of individuals from both sides of the divide, wherein 'the other' is tolerated and deeply understood through the journalistic pragmatism of its real story. Moreover, the documentary shows transcending political rhetoric and fostering the space of appearance, where human beings reveal themselves through speech and action (Spoo & Stern, 2025). By situating historically burdened individuals: bereaved parents, former combatants, and peace activists within a shared cinematic frame, *Encounter Point* has become a pedagogical vision of peace, challenging deliberate ignorance through affective, moral imagination (de Haas, 2024, p. 103).

LITERATURE REVIEW

From Reconciliation to Resistance: The Shift toward Post-Realist Documentary Narratives

Recent scholarship notes a shift from reconciliation narratives to post-realist documentaries exposing systemic violence (Nichols, 2024; Pappé, 2006; Chanan, 2007), rejecting the spectacle and binaries to cultivate a new, radical audience (Godmilow, 2022). Documentaries like *The Present* (2020) and *Tantura* (2022) have a more confrontational approach toward occupation, dispossession, and historical revisionism to challenge the effectiveness of peace initiatives (Huss, 2023, pp. 1-7; Kosmatopoulos, 2024, p. 168), critiquing without systemic political change (Shehadeh, 2023, pp. 157-179). The renewed escalated hostilities between Israel and Palestine in 2023 have reignited debates about documentary filmmaking's role in contemporary polarized conflict representation (Al Ahmad, 2024, pp. 57-101) while *Born in Gaza* (Zin, 2014) and *Gaza Fights for Freedom* (Martin, 2019) take a more explicit stance, documenting war crimes and structural violence, making *Encounter Point* relatively restrained in comparison (Hine, 2023; Kim & Friedlander, 2023).

Undoubtedly, social scripts of debate are important for an intellectual exchange that vary across cultures to restore our own or the others' face" (Lee, 2025, p. 25). *Wajib*'s portrayal of Palestinian life within Israel (Jacir, 2017), *It Must Be Heaven* (Suleiman, 2019)'s a humorous take on identity and displacement in the Palestinian diaspora and, *Jenin, Jenin*, Bakri's (2002) capturing of the Israeli military's incursion into the Jenin refugee camp, visualize destruction and its outcomes leaving space for the bereaved ones and survives of the attack's testimonies. In the documentary *The Take* (2004), Lewis and Klein focus on

Argentine workers reclaiming control of abandoned factories through economic justice and grassroots activism. *Israel's Second Front* (Shah, 2024), a Frontline documentary, is also a good example depicting rising tensions between the West Bank and Gaza due to regional dynamics. Moreover, *A Year of War: Israelis and Palestinians* (Barnwell, 2024), a Frontline feature, presents firsthand accounts from individuals affected by the October 7th Hamas attack and the subsequent war in Gaza, investigating personal narratives amidst the broader conflict but not on peace-making.

Colonial Genealogies and Cycles of Displacement

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is widely understood in the literature as a product of British imperial restructuring and contradictory colonial promises, particularly through the Sykes–Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration, which redefined Palestine through external geopolitical interests (Pappé, 2006; Khalidi, 2020; Haidar et al., 2024). The establishment of Israel in 1948 and the Nakba institutionalized mass displacement, embedding trauma within the social and political fabric of the region (Selenica, 2025, p. 121).

Rather than a linear oppressor–victim relationship, scholars describe the conflict as a cyclical structure of dispossession and retaliatory violence, sustained through competing narratives of historical legitimacy and survival (Said, 1992; Zertal, 2005; Hjelm et al., 2019). This cycle normalizes antagonistic identities and perpetuates collective trauma across generations. It is within this recursive structure that *Encounter Point* intervenes, not as a historical documentary, but as a cinematic disruption of repetition. By foregrounding relational testimony and shared vulnerability, the film aligns with peace journalism’s constructive orientation toward dialogue, moral imagination, and alternative narratives of coexistence (Bacha & Avni, 2006; Kempf, 2012; Tan, 2023).

Cinematic Truths: Disrupting the Aesthetics of Conflict

Since its release, *Encounter Point* (Bacha, 2006) has been praised for its humanistic approach and criticized for what some scholars consider an ‘oversimplification of asymmetric power structures’. Its emphasis on individual transformation contrasts with structural critique-based films. It grips a lineage of peacebuilding documentaries that prioritize socio-historical deconstructions. Amid its contemporaries, it conveys an unspoken wisdom, revealing how laws, borders, and national identities are not organic truths but constructed fictions, upheld through political bargains and sustained by militarized or ideological force as “cultural violence” (Galtung, 1990). Inflicted by actors in a given context, its analysis provides a critique of how the conflict has been rendered before the viewer (Dilts et al., 2012).

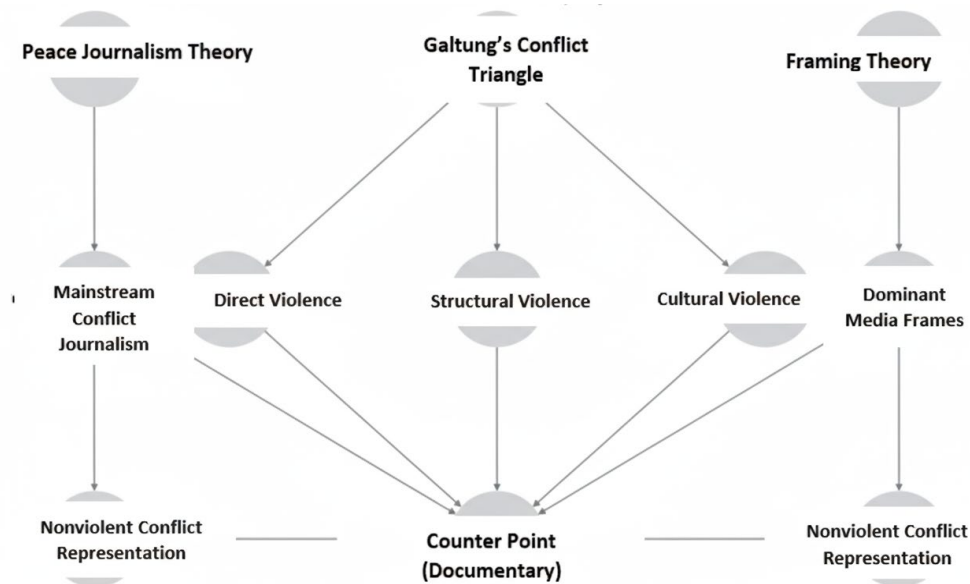


Figure 1: Theoretical insights and comparative perspectives

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intersecting Narratives of Peace and Representation

To critically analyse this documentary within the broader discourse of Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts, the conflict triangle (Galtung, 1990), nonviolent conflict representation under peace journalism theory (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007), and framing theory (Entman, 1993) as shown in Figure 1, have emphasized analytical strengths in unpacking the layers of conflict representation in peacebuilding, and strategizing narrative. Galtung's model is composed of three interconnected dimensions: (1) Direct Violence (harm in physical and overt forms: killing, beating, bombing), (2) Structural Violence (Systemic inequalities depriving certain groups of basic rights: occupation, segregation policies, and coercion), (3) Cultural Violence (aspects of culture: religion, ideology, language, art, or media that justify or legitimize direct and structural violence, making it seem acceptable or normal). All three forms of violence address conflict resolution and 'direct confrontations,' portraying grassroots activism in resisting structural and cultural violence through dialogue and nonviolent engagement (Lasmana & Sripokangkul, 2024). Lynch and McGoldrick (2007) have reframed an alternative approach to nonviolent conflict responses instead of emphasizing violence, elite perspectives, and binary oppositions of us vs. them (Yohannes, 2022; Banjac, 2022). Bereaved families Forum workers' peace efforts, personal narratives of grief, transformation, and call for a constructive, solution-oriented reconciliation process (Arregui et al., 2022) have been further analysed through this theory.

Moreover, in this study, framing theory (Entman, 1993) has encircled the film's role in constructing peace narratives that play an important role in shaping audience interpretations by emphasizing certain "critical frames" (Richards & Biron, 2024). Four framing functions: (1) problems presenting the conflict as an unsolvable cycle of violence vs. an opportunity for peace, (2) causes diagnosing that attributed blame solely to political leaders vs. recognizing systemic inequalities, (3) Ethical discernments resisting as terrorism vs. legitimate activism and (4) Suggestive remedies, advocating for military action vs. promoting grassroots reconciliation, have supported the analysis.

Documentary Narrative in Conflict and Peace Framework

Encounter Point employs a peace-centred perspective, especially in its choice of historical framing (Chomsky, 1999; Shinar, 2007), that encourages audiences to reconsider their views on conflict, public discussion, and policy preferences (Schmid, 2021). According to Moeller (2002), personal storytelling and intimate cinematography, as “compassion fatigue,” can desensitize viewers, while highlighting individual transformation stories within systemic power imbalances (Hammond, 2007). While supporting the liberal peace paradigm, it assumes peace-building is a moral choice rather than a response to “power asymmetries” (Pappé, 2006). Postcolonial scholars like Said critique this approach for ignoring historical colonial legacies and the geopolitical structures that have sustained conflict.

Documentary films like *Five Broken Cameras* (Burnat & Davidi, 2011) employ handheld footage to enhance the raw realism of a Palestinian farmer’s resistance against Israeli settlements, while *Waltz with Bashir* (Folman, 2008), an animated documentary, explores Israeli soldiers’ memories and trauma of the Sabra and Shatila massacre. *The Gatekeepers* (Moreh, 2012) exposes former Shin Bet leaders’ disillusionment, revealing how state security perpetuates violence rather than resolves it. In contrast, *Encounter Point* (2006) employs testimonial storytelling to resist mythologizing the Israeli state and the racialized framing of Palestinians as “noble savages” and “unruly masses” (Sexton, 2023, pp. 159–167), offering a hopeful, relational vision of peace through shared vulnerability. This study has focused on the following research questions:

1. How does *Encounter Point* construct narratives of peace and reconciliation?
2. What cinematic and rhetorical strategies does the documentary use to frame conflict resolution?
3. How does the documentary challenge or reinforce existing discourses on peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) and testimonial documentary methodology (Fisher, 2020, pp. 143-177) to analyse how *Encounter Point* constructs its argument through personal stories and the transformative journeys of its subjects through storytelling, character arcs, and emotional appeals. TDM has focused on first-person accounts from individuals directly affected by conflict, telling their lived experiences as the foundational narrative (Renov, 2004; Görmar, 2024, p. 2342). Combined with testimonial methods of documentary filmmaking, it uses subjects’ personal stories as evidence for larger sociopolitical themes, both focused on the thematic deconstruction of dialogues, visual storytelling, and symbolic representations (Lieblich et al., 1998; Aufderheide, 2007) where “story” describes an account of specific events, places, and people, and “narrative” for structure and presentation of the content (Roth, 2020, p. 84) have been used.

Research Design

This study investigates how stories are woven around the personal journeys of key figures such as Robi Damelin (Israeli bereaved mother and activist), Ali Abu Awwad (Palestinian peace activist and survivor), Sami Al Hundi (Palestinian peace worker and Survivor), Rutie Atsmon (Israeli dialogue facilitator), George Sa’adeh (Palestinian bereaved father), Tzvika

Shahak (bereaved Israeli former soldier), Aziz Tanji (Palestinian peace facilitator), and Shlomo Zagman (Israeli settler and peace advocate). In contrast, TDM identifies dominant and counter-discourses within the film's language, visuals, and framing strategies of forgiveness versus revenge, humanization versus demonization within testimonies and imagery. The study triangulates findings of both methods: narrative insights from QNA to be contextualized within broader discourse patterns by TDM.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis (Trangbæk & Cecchini, 2023) consists of verbal elements (spoken dialogue and testimonies), visual components (symbolic imagery, archival footage, cinematography), and structural aspects (narrative sequencing, scene transitions). Key scenes that anchor the analysis include Robi's letter to her son's killer, Ali's transformation journey, and settler-led tours, explaining narrative and discursive dynamics.

Data Collection

Data collection involves repeated viewings of *Encounter Point* with detailed note-taking on narrative progression, emotional tone, and cinematic techniques. Important dialogues and monologues are manually transcribed as the language was mostly Hebrew and Arabic, and scene coding sheets were used to map intersections between narrative and discourse features. Film stills and timecode-based sampling frame (HH:MM:SS) to isolate specific units of analysis within the 01:23:31 runtime have supported precise referencing, with a reflective journal, capturing the researcher's positionality (RP) and responses (Cleton, 2023) throughout the analysis.

Coding Procedure

The coding procedure employs a two-tier strategy: initial open coding guided by QNA identifies core character arcs, emotional shifts, and turning points in the narrative. Subsequent axial and selective coding within the TDM framework grouped these codes into thematic clusters: shared humanity, moral agency, grassroots reconciliation, and media counter-narratives. Operational definitions of key terms include "character arc", transformations in worldview or behaviour, "moral positioning", alignment toward forgiveness or justice, and "discourse themes", recurring patterns shaping interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

Respecting the lived experiences of bereaved individuals and activists portrayed, the study avoided voyeuristic treatment of trauma narratives for critical reflexivity through ongoing self-reflection on the RP regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict. Since no direct human subjects were involved, the documentary's publicly available consent processes were sufficient for this interpretive study.

A QUALITATIVE NARRATIVE ANALYSIS (QNA) AND THEMATIC DISCOURSE METHODOLOGY (TDM) INTERPRETATION

1) *Personal Loss and Conflict Context*

a. *Israeli Military Checkpoints Tension*

Sami Al Hundi and Shlomo Zagman open the film by contrasting perspectives on Israeli military checkpoints that immediately ground the security rationale in the lived reality of the conflict. Sami, a Palestinian peace worker, voices the ongoing cycle of retaliation and reliance on luck and constant life under occupation. Shlomo, an Israeli settler and peace advocate, articulates the security rationale behind these checkpoints as necessary measures to prevent terrorist and suicide bombing attacks. He acknowledges both the need for security and the recognition of Palestinians' legitimate reasons. The director uses four bold, on-screen textual inserts against non-diegetic music to externalize internal conflict, guide viewer interpretation, and underscore the documentary's central themes without relying on voiceover.

00:02:40 – ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS HAVE BEEN LOCKED IN A BITTER CONFLICT FOR GENERATIONS.

00:02:50 – PALESTINIANS STRUGGLE TO END ISRAELI MILITARY OCCUPATION AND CREATE AN INDEPENDENT STATE.

00:03:05 – ISRAELIS ACT TO SECURE THEMSELVES AGAINST ATTACKS BY PALESTINIANS, NEARBY STATES, AND MILITANT GROUPS.

00:03:17 – PEOPLE FROM BOTH SIDES SEARCH FOR NON-VIOLENT SOLUTIONS.

i) *Tel Aviv, Israel*

A subjective tracking shot in response to the doorbell, without revealing the character (of Robi Damelin), appears while the Israeli Radio host inquires about her son's death. This disembodied point-of-view (POV) approach mirrors a mother's psychological state, as an entry point into wider political critique, when she says:

So, what do you do with this pain? Do you take it and look for revenge and keep the whole cycle of violence going, or do you choose another path to prevent further death and further pain to other parents?

(Robi Damelin, 00:05:40, *Encounter Point*)

ii) *Jerusalem: Bereaved Families Forum Meeting Place*

In this sequence (00:06:30 – 00:08:06), the film presents the Bereaved Families Forum (BFF) as a shared space of collective testimony, where individual narratives of loss of 250 Palestinians and 250 Israelis are woven together in a joint moral and political counter-narrative. Voiceover montage, "We are 500 families... looking for... dialogue") evokes a deeply personal yet communal sensibility in a collective atmosphere of sorrow, reflection, and determination. This stylistic choice positions the viewer in a reflective, almost meditative relation to the subject matter, rather than a reactive one, as in conflict reporting. Through direct address ("My name is Robi..." / "I am Elham..." / "I am Rami..." / "I lost..."), the film provides a chorus of testimonies across national, gender, and religious

lines. These moments break the binary of “victim” and “aggressor” and propose equivalence in grief, reframing the conflict in terms of shared voices of human loss, avoiding hierarchy and emphasizing parity. Ali Abu Awwad’s powerful statement, “Do not use us as an excuse. We are united,” acts as a narrative disruption, challenging the politicization of personal grief, asserting that reconciliation is already underway, not by leaders, but by those most affected by the violence. This moment marks a collective turning point in the documentary’s moral arc, shifting personal grief to public resistance through peace activism.

2) *Bethlehem, Occupied Palestinian Territories*

a. *Confronting Trauma and Redefining Justice*

Ali Abu Awwad’s visit to his wounded nephew, coupled with his brother’s killing, his own injury, and imprisonment, deepens the emotional gravity of the narrative. His voiceover, delivered over intimate visuals, confronts a recurring question: “How can you still do this after all you’ve been through?” It reframes justice not as revenge or forgiveness, but as a refusal to perpetuate hatred. Moreover, the sequence, culminating in the fade to black at 00:10:33, marks a turning point, combining observational realism with moral resistance, using blackout as a visual punctuation of trauma, and voiceover as an ethical stand. Awwad’s stance: “I don’t have to love Israelis to make peace with them” becomes a central thesis of the documentary’s moral inquiry, followed by a fade-in to signal a temporal or narrative transition.

b. *Tel Aviv, Israel: Bereaved Families Forum Vigil*

This segment constructs a counter-discourse that resists militaristic and vengeful scripts by centring empathy, care, and civic responsibility as a public activism reframing. During a demonstration, Robi’s interaction with the media during responding to a journalist’s question about the movement’s goals grounds the activism in maternal grief: “to prevent more mothers from suffering,” her struggle to find someone who speaks Italian, delivered with a touch of irony amidst the gravity of protest. Robi’s voiceover that follows: “one day he was killed ... all the things I was doing were insignificant,” frames her activism as an existential response, not a political strategy. This moment exemplifies narrative urgency (when private trauma transforms into public ethical responsibility). The final line, “if we can prevent a single death by speaking out, this will be worthwhile,” positions dialogue and visibility as acts of resistance. The scene blends vérité documentary style with affective voiceover, shows activism as embodied moral labour emerging from grief instead of abstract ideology.

c. *Televised Tensions: Narratives of Blame and Complexity*

During this segment (00:12:36 – 00:13:32), a televised roundtable show anchored by Oshrat Kotler (Channel 10, formerly Channel 2) features the founder of the BFF, providing a wider public sphere that introduces a new narrative vector. Survivors are not speaking within circles of mutual bereavement but are engaging with national media as a pivotal expansion in the protagonist’s journey. The founder’s measured response:

You're right to ask how parents can justify the awful actions of their children. But perhaps things aren't as simple as that. Perhaps we should ask ourselves: How did we push an entire population to laud and praise suicide bombers?
(Founder BFF, 00:12:57, *Encounter Point*)

Acts as a narrative inflection point, redirecting public accountability inward and complicating binary victim-perpetrator narratives. The host's framing question:

What we all see in the media is the approval, even delight, of Palestinian parents whose children sacrificed their lives and became martyrs. Is there something you're seeing that we aren't?
(Kotler, Channel 10 News, 00:12:36, *Encounter Point*)

Highlights cultural scripts that valorise martyrdom among Palestinian families. The founder's reply redirects the inquiry from the Palestinian agency to Israeli structural influences like occupation or social disenfranchisement, as a counter-discourse that places shared responsibility on broader socio-political contexts. Moreover, "what if what's pushing them has nothing to do with us? What if it's some kind of societal or cultural movement within the Arab or Muslim population...?" exemplify the discursive battleground at the heart of *Encounter Point*, where the struggle is not only for land or peace, but over narrative ownership. While families on both sides speak of loss and transformation, the anchor reasserts a collective distancing from responsibility that the documentary seeks to dismantle.

3) *The Turning Point: Debating Peace in the Ruins of Resistance*

a. *Bethlehem: Arab Society for Rehabilitation*

This segment (00:13:42 – 00:17:38) marks a pivotal shift in *Encounter Point*, where the thematic tone transitions from a volatile communal dialogue to an unfiltered and emotionally charged group discussion between Ali and other Palestinian civilians, wounded or bereaved. Under TDM, two competing discourses have been identified: victimhood vs. justice, and ethical resistance. The shared trauma of being maimed, bombed, or losing loved ones is the primary legitimizing rhetoric for rejecting dialogue, "why us?" and "there's no such thing as peace" showcase a collective narrative of abandonment and betrayal. Framing of Israeli violence is not as a military strategy, but as targeted aggression against unarmed civilians. In contrast, Ali Abu Awwad introduces a counter-discourse of moral resistance, invoking India's nonviolent liberation as a strategy that might offer dignity without compromising justice by saying, "I am resisting too... but the form of my resistance is different," challenges the group's normative expectations of violent retaliation, while appealing to a global moral audience.

The narrative constructs a polyphonic space (Bakhtin) where no voice is silenced (QNA), even those aggressively opposing Ali's philosophy, creating a narrative "crisis" in the documentary's moral arc. Ali's attempts to present nonviolence as a legitimate form of resistance clash with deeper intergenerational anger and hopelessness, echoed in: "Wake up. With Jews, there is no peace." The conversation becomes theological when Jalil invokes the Quran's respect for "the People of the Book," immediately rejected by another speaker, who snaps: "Don't feed me this holy book nonsense." This reflexive tension

underscores the documentary's refusal to simplify Palestinian identity as homogeneously resistant or devout. The rejection of sacred texts widens the schism between ideological foundations (faith, nationalism, memory) and realpolitik survival. Ali's assertion, "We have never been terrorists. But today you must convince the world that you are not," encapsulates the moral weight of the documentary: the demand for self-representation in a world that flattens identities into victim and aggressor, terrorist and martyr.

b. Black Old City Jerusalem: Sami Al Jundi's Turn from Retaliation to Reconciliation

The film uses a non-synchronous voiceover during the 00:18:00 to 00:23:50 segment as a rewriting resistance over ideological dogma. Sami, once imprisoned for his role in a premature bombing attempt at age 16, offers a deeply autobiographical narration rooted in trauma, familial loyalty, and displacement. The camera follows him through the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem (Hebrew: הרובע היהודי - HaRova HaYehudi), layered with irony and historic reversal: he was born here, expelled, and now returns as a visitor, symbolizing the physical and psychological dislocation central to the Palestinian experience. His mother's resistance, "I would rather die under the feet of the Jews than leave the old city", marks a complex form of rootedness and feminine agency, contrasting with the masculine-coded act of political violence. The pivot in this segment is intellectual and ethical: Sami's turn toward non-violent activism emerges not from abstract theory but through reading in prison, especially Mandela's reflections on love versus hate. The phrase, "When you read, your world widens", becomes a thesis for the film's larger moral message. The scene culminates in Sami organizing interpersonal peacebuilding. Invoking figures like Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Badshah Khan, yet asserting agency: "We should adopt what suits us... I do have a brain." This self-assertion marks a shift from inherited ideology to ethical authorship.

c. Dizengoff 1996: Grief beyond Borders

In this poignant segment (00:24:38–00:26:20), Israeli war veteran Tzvika Shahak recounts the death of his 14-year-old daughter Bat-Chen in the 1996 Tel Aviv Purim suicide bombing. His account, delivered with calm disbelief, through morgue identification and a final farewell kiss, reveals the intimate human cost of conflict. Grief here functions as a political witness, exposing both the exploitation of youth through ideological indoctrination and the perpetrator's manipulation as a coerced agent, as reflected in his observation, "someone drugged his brain," which shifts attention from revenge to systemic causality. Through visual silence, voiceover, and reflective framing, the documentary immerses viewers in Tzvika's psychological and emotional state. The aerial shot of the bombing site and close-up of Bat-Chen's gravestone, coinciding with her 14th birthday, intensify the profound, layered experience of loss and mourning.

d. From Mourning to Message: Civilian Grief as Collective Protest

The Bethlehem shooting of 12-year-old Christine Sa'adeh in 2003, mistaken for a militant target, transforms from a personal tragedy into a public act of resistance. Her father's account of the mistaken identity of three wanted Palestinians, the voiceover, "I kept asking the soldiers, why are you shooting at us? We are only civilians..." and the funeral procession merges private grief with civic activism, calling "Don't forget me, my friends." The father's

message to Israeli mothers connects personal loss to a broader call for ending the occupation, turning a moment of death into a plea for justice and coexistence:

And now my daughter. We know that you are in the company of other martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the pure soil of Palestine. From this city, I send a message to all Israeli mothers: if you want security, end occupation.
(George, 00:30:48, Jerusalem, *Encounter Point*)

Moreover, child martyrdom and sacred symbolism blend religious reverence with national mourning. The biblical quote, “Let the little children come to me...” and the Arabic inscription calling Bethlehem the “Cradle of Christ” evoke a spiritual sanctity around Christine’s death, making her image a collective martyrdom, honoured both by Christian and national narratives. When the voice in Jerusalem declares that “There are martyrs for religion, and there are martyrs for the nation, any child who is assassinated is considered a martyr,” it reinforces a cross-religious and cross-political sanctification of innocent lives lost in conflict.

4) *Transformative Encounters through Shared Mourning*

a. *Dialogues of the Bereaved – Grief as a Bridge, Not a Barrier*

Within the QNA and TDM frameworks, this segment reflects a pivotal discursive shift from isolated personal loss to interpersonal meaning-making across enemy lines. Through the dialogic narratives of George and Tzvika:

00:32:59 (George): At first, I thought it was a strange idea. But after thinking about it logically, I didn’t see any reason not to meet them and let them know our suffering.

00:33:21 (Tzvika): There were many things that touched me. We see that there are Palestinians who suffered a lot, who lost children, and still believe in the peace process and reconciliation. If we who have lost what is most precious can talk to each other, and look forward to a better future, then everyone else must do so, too.

(George & Tzvika, BFF Meeting Place, 00:32:41 – 00:33:21, *EP*)

Those who join the Bereaved Families Forum a year after their daughters’ deaths: the film shows how grief is re-signified, not as a tool for vengeance, but as a platform for mutual recognition and moral agency. George’s initial hesitation by his logical openness, and Tzvika’s reflection on shared suffering, reveal a transformation from private trauma to collective ethical action. The forum becomes a discursive site where national narratives are interrupted and reframed by intimate and personal testimony for a performative moment of resistance ethics, directly linked with “Ethical Agency over Ideological Dogma” of TDM coding.

b. Transformative Testimony within Contested Institutions

In this segment (00:33:53–00:36:52) at Holon High School, Israel, the narrative stages an intergenerational confrontation between personal grief and systemic militarism. Tzvika engages Yariv, who asserts, “If this ever happened to me, I wouldn’t get near anyone who belongs to the people that killed my daughter,” reflecting inherited animosity. Tzvika responds with reason and vulnerability: “We have tried all other options: we have occupied, we have won, and there is still no peace,” acknowledging pain while redirecting it toward socio-historical consciousness. Invoking Europe’s post-war reconciliation, he asserts, “It will happen. Whether you like it or not,” and reflects, “When I was their age, I used to think we should fight and kill all Arabs,” advocating a preventive ethic to disrupt cycles of violence.

[. . .] So I want to open up another way for them. Because it is important for them and us, and maybe these teenagers, who are about to enter the army, will treat Palestinians humanely. And maybe, this will prevent the creation of the next suicide bomber who would’ve caused more casualties on our side. Which would in turn create more casualties on their side, and so on.

(Tzvika, 00:36:02, High School Holon, *Encounter Point*)

c. Checkpoint of Peace: Assembling Trust across Barriers

During 00:36:56 to 00:39:42 at Windows: Channels for Communication, an Israeli-Palestinian youth organization, Rutie Atsmon, the Israeli director, explains their goal to hold a yearly joint assembly, a symbolic and logistical act of resistance through peaceful gathering, and says:

We planned to do it in a village very close to the checkpoint. Israelis are afraid to go into the territories, so we found a place only two minutes away. And Palestinians from different places could come.

At the meeting site in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Aziz Tanji, the Palestinian coordinator, expresses frustration in these words:

We are waiting for the Israelis to arrive. There is a lot to discuss. We are a joint organization working for the people, no matter if they are Israelis or Palestinians. We are working for peace, but the Israeli government is obstructing our activities. They have denied me a permit to enter Israel for over a year. Why? Do they think I am a terrorist? Do I look like a terrorist to you? Why then?

At Tulkarem checkpoint, around 9:35 a.m., logistical collapse ensues. Rutie calls out from another checkpoint:

Azizi! Israelis are not allowed to enter Irtakh. There’s a new army order, and there’s a big sign. So we have to go back to Jabara now, please, my friend.

Aziz, visibly stressed and defeated, continues:

They didn't let them in. We've got another problem now. People are already gathering here, you see? And I'm afraid the Israelis won't pass through the next checkpoint. If they don't come, no one here will ever come to another meeting. They will lose trust. Believe me, it is a problem.

Rutie later reflects, with honest vulnerability:

One of the things to try to explain to the Palestinians is the very deep guilt and fear of Israelis and Jews in general because of our history. We invite people to come to the Palestinian villages—to overcome the coping resort—you see there, what we do as Israelis to the Palestinians. Overcoming the fear is a very, very basic fact. We have to do these things because otherwise, Israel will not survive.”

5) *Shared Humanity Contested Borders*

a. *From Meeting Tactics to Legacy Ethics*

At 00:42:53, the group finally meets in Irtah, and a visible shift comes from tension to mutual recognition, but many Palestinians have left. The line “I have been looking hard for an Israeli who seeks peace” transitions the narrative into an empathic catharsis. When Ali (in BFF, Israel office) proposes that peace would come if everyone had to buy cigarettes from the other side, this moment uses humour to breach the ideological divide. This is a narrative “beat” where shared humanity is momentarily restored. As Robi takes part in interviews, challenging national narratives. The interviewer asks if she feels anger toward her son's killer. Her response, “Why was David guarding settlers?” shifts the lens from vengeance to structural complicity, questioning occupation itself, a moral dislocation, seeking systematic analysis, not individual blame. Robi's arc from bereaved mother to advocate for peace demonstrates identity reconstruction in post-trauma spaces. Her final testimony (“My whole life has been about reconciliation...”) anchors her activism in a transnational legacy of justice, tying her experience in apartheid-era South Africa to her current peace work, a narrative echo. This thematic discursive loop as historical continuity, while reads it as a closure through moral positioning of her personal but politicized grief, especially when she says, “The media and its side-taking process. But that does not serve any purpose. There is no pro-Palestinian, pro-Israeli for this pro-solution.”

b. *The Settler Tour and Robi's Zionist Reconciliation*

In this scene of 2 minutes and 46 seconds, a confrontation between grief-based peace narratives and settler-colonial ideology occurs. The settler's claim, “We have a historical and national right to this strip ... it is ours by Divine promise”, echoes a theocratic entitlement discourse, central to Israeli expansionist rhetoric. TDM reveals religious exceptionalism to normalize the erasure of Palestinian presence and land mythology. Robi's discomfort and interjection, “This sounds like South Africa” (three to four times), invokes a comparative memory politics, drawing parallels between apartheid's moral justifications and Zionist settlement logic. QNA reads this moment as a rupture in dialogic

civility that began as a tour to foster understanding but transforms into a discursive battlefield, where personal loss of a peace protagonist reclaims Zionism not through land but through moral dialogue and relational ethics in these words:

00:49:06 – (Female Israeli Settler). We built this place over many years. We have been here for 29 or 30 years. And we have done so much here. Can we just get up and leave as if this never existed and start all over again? How much money would it take for you to unearth your son's grave? My son is buried over there.

00:49:34 – (Robi, BFF Member). My name is Robi Damelin! I lost my son at a checkpoint by the Ofrah settlement. I think I am very Zionist. Maybe as Zionist as you. You may think that reconciliation sounds really eccentric, but it's not. It works.

(Israeli Settlement, Occupied Palestinian Territories, *EP*)

c. Hebron, Home, and the Struggle for Dialogue

During (00:50:01 – 00:58:39), the central tension lies in Ali Abu Awwad's efforts to introduce peace-based dialogue in Hebron city in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, scarred by deep settler-Palestinian conflict. Ali's bereavement legitimizes his voice, yet peace work is stigmatized as betrayal under settler dominance. His testimony, alongside a resident's endurance amid violence, frames emotional resistance and rootedness as survival and moral defiance. The ex-soldier's rejection of military service represents a rare, internal Israeli dissent at 01:05:17 in the Palestinian Community Center. His acknowledgment of the Palestinian non-violent movement reframes refusal as ethical solidarity, declaring it an internal Palestinian question.

Using Thematic Discourse Method (TDM), the film frames "normalization" as ideological betrayal, casting dialogue as surrender. Ali's endurance and attachment to his damaged home symbolize rootedness, while his advocacy for dialogue reframes non-violence as a disruptive political act that challenges enemy binaries and repositions the Forum as an ethical space rather than betrayal.

d. From Slogans to Sentience: Shlomo Zagman's Transitional Journey

In this reflective segment (01:12:35), Shlomo's transformation unfolds from a right-wing settler in Allon Shevut, who once viewed Palestinians only as labourers, to a critical figure shaped by encounters with religious leftists and his co-founding of the Movement for Realistic Religious Zionism. His shift generates personal and communal tension, revealing guilt, shame, and moral confrontation as he admits to systemic blindness and lack of meaningful contact with Palestinians. His meeting with Palestinian activist Ali Abu Awwad becomes a narrative pivot, bridging past violence through reciprocal vulnerability. The discourse reveals cognitive dissonance and moral awakening, particularly in his recognition of checkpoint injustice and human rights monitoring. The arrest of his friend's son's killer tests his commitment to reconciliation. His metaphor—"my position is a full page, but how do you make it a sticker?" rejects simplification, positioning him as a transitional subject pursuing dialogic resistance and ethical accountability.

e. Intertextual Closure and Poetic Resistance in the Final Sequence

The closing eight minutes collapse documentary realism into poetic narration. Robi's Letter operates as a symbolic intertext, forming a moral bridge between victim and perpetrator and opening space for ethical ambiguity and reconciliation. Textual fragments such as "Seeds of Peace closed" and "He has since left his corporate job..." function as narrative footnotes, situating the characters within broader sociopolitical aftermaths. The ending with Darwish's line, "Besiege your siege with your madness," alongside Ali's reflection, "sometimes you have to be crazy to keep on living," transforms the sequence into a meditation on absurdity, hope, and survival. Geographic markers, Newe Deqalim, Bethlehem Arab Society, Tulkarem Refugee Camp, and a Tel Aviv nightclub, become spatial indices of trauma and resilience. Sami's transition reflects de-institutionalized activism, while Shlomo at the fence exposes the myth of security: "It is a fiction." The fence becomes a metaphor for ideological partition. Ali and Yousef's exchange disrupts religious essentialism, while the intertextual montage (01:16:29–01:19:10) reveals policy failures. The final dedication, "let's go" (01:20:05), unites individual journeys into a collective ethic of non-violence, concluding at 01:20:03 with a non-diegetic dedication slide, "THIS FILM IS DEDICATED TO THE THOUSANDS OF PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS COMMITTED TO NON-VIOLENCE AS A MEANS OF ENDING THE CONFLICT AND BUILDING PEACE." a paratextual device that functions as an ethical epigraph, framing the documentary's political commitment to non-violence and shaping the viewer's interpretive horizon (Nichols, 2024).

RESULTS DISCUSSION

Encounter Point interweaves the themes of transformation (Bar-Tal et al., 2021), humanization (Steinberg, 2024, pp. 103–114), and grassroots activism (Kelman, 2004, pp. 61–74), and foregrounds local peace-building over elite diplomacy (Gawerc, 2006, p. 435; Bilali, 2024, p. 2). In contrast to ideologies that institutionalize segregation to legitimize violence, such as Nazism's racial supremacy (Burleigh & Wippermann, 1991, p. 21) and political Zionism's territorial policies (Pappé, 2006), the film exposes how fear, cognitive commitment, and emotional distancing sustain hatred (Banai & Mayer, 2025).

Compared to activist-driven *No Other Land* (Abraham et al., 2024), historically framed *The Tinderbox* (Mosely, 2024), governance-focused *Mayor* (Osit, 2020), and dramatized narratives such as *Farha* (Sallam, 2021) and *Gaza Mon Amour* (Nasser & Nasser, 2020), *Encounter Point* uniquely balances Israeli–Palestinian perspectives through relational peace-building. It operates as a counter-narrative within media and power discourse (Hovsepian, 2025, p. 243; Behm-Morawitz & Valerius, 2024, pp. 197–214), challenging state-centered propaganda (Chomsky; Ghosh, 2022, pp. 7–15) and Orientalist binaries (Altwaiji, 2023, p. 110; Said, 1978; Ahmad, 2023, pp. 266–275) sustained through disciplinary power (Wang, 2025, p. 5; Foucault, 1975).

Through testimonial, interpretivist methodologies (Jiménez-Figaroiti, 2024), the film resists militarized narratives by positioning alternative media as counter-hegemonic spaces (Spiegel et al., 2024, pp. 91–130). Its nonlinear, symbolic aesthetics mirror trauma and reconciliation cycles like "Thaw-era" cinema (Melbye, 2024, p. 144), while feminist peacebuilding critiques ethnic essentialism (Malešević, 2022, pp. 467–471). Finally, its exploration of identity, displacement, and reconciliation parallels Arab diasporic narratives focused on hybridity and marginalization (Al-Ashqar & Hossam, 2023, p. 1051; Kaldas &

Mattawa, 2009), collectively challenging Orientalist misrepresentation and affirming ethical recognition across historical divides (Ahmad, 2023, pp. 256–307; Cain & Harrison, 2004).

CONCLUSION

This documentary frames the 1967 war as the central flashpoint and implies that a return to pre-1967 borders offer a path to peace; however, it largely omits the deeper historical causes of resistance rooted in displacement and depopulation (Q1). By privileging a humanitarian, Western-inflected reconciliation narrative, the film simplifies structural asymmetries and geopolitical realities, including the strategic vulnerabilities such borders would impose (Q2). While it gestures toward the weight of historical memory, these tensions remain underdeveloped (Q3). Methodologically, the analysis reveals both the film’s conceptual power and its representational limits: it mobilizes emotional testimony to humanize suffering, yet at times privileges selective narrative arcs. Nevertheless, this documentary remains a vital contribution to peacebuilding media that emphasizes the emotional labor of reconciliation over ideological finality, not as resolution, but as a continual act of personal and collective imagination.

LIMITATIONS

In this research, the contextual meaning of intertexts, symbols, and discourses may vary based on geopolitical, cultural, or different religious interpretations, as real-world perceptions of peace narratives about the Israel-Palestinian conflict are not included.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The study demonstrates that peace documentaries function as potent tools in peace and conflict studies, engaging both emotionally and thematically. Thematic discourse methodology offers critical insight into the ideological and affective structures of politically sensitive media. Personal narratives in conflict media require careful scrutiny to ensure ethical representation and mitigate institutional bias. This framework is adaptable for cross-regional media analysis and global peace communication scholarship. Furthermore, the findings support the integration of critical media literacy in educational contexts, fostering reflective and responsible engagement with peace-oriented media.

BIODATA

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