

## REVIEWS

# Truly critical and honest appraisals of *The Guardian's* record as a guardian of power still needed

**Abstract:** A collection of essays, *Capitalism's Conscience—200 Years of the Guardian*, has been recently published. Edited by Des Freedman, professor of media and communications at Goldsmiths, University of London, the volume notes that *Guardian* editor Kath Viner promised that her newspaper would 'challenge the economic assumptions of the last three decades', 'challenge the powerful' and 'use clarity and imagination to build hope'. Freedman says the book 'seeks to examine these claims' (Freedman, 2021, p. x). The collection of essays, mostly contributed by media academics, is published by Pluto Press, which has published all three *Media Lens* books; most recently, *Propaganda Blitz*, in 2018. Several good reasons for not criticising a book published by one's own publisher can be found in Tolstoy's list, but the academic filtering of truth is a key issue that cries out for honest discussion. This essay by three prominent journalists critiques *Capitalism's Conscience* and concludes there is a pressing need for truly critical and honest appraisals of *The Guardian's* record as a guardian of power.

**Keywords:** Climate change, liberalism, neoliberalism, power, propaganda, reviews, *The Guardian*, United Kingdom

*Capitalism's Conscience: 200 Years of the Guardian*, edited by Des Freedman. London: Pluto Press. 2021, 320 pages. ISBN 9780745343341; 9780745343358

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Noam Chomsky, Leo Tolstoy had captured the essence of non-conspiratorial conformity:

One man does not assert the truth which he knows, because he feels himself bound to the people with whom he is engaged; another, because the truth might deprive him of the profitable position by which he maintains his family; a third, because he desires to attain reputation and authority, and then use them in the service of

LONG before 'the propaganda model' flew off Edward Herman's keyboard and into *Manufacturing Consent*, the book he co-authored with

mankind; a fourth, because he does not wish to destroy old sacred traditions; a fifth, because he has no desire to offend people; a sixth, because the expression of the truth would arouse persecution, and disturb the excellent social activity to which he has devoted himself. (Tolstoy, p.118)

There is nothing special about journalists in this regard—we are all aware, on some level, that in the land of the blind, the one-eyed truth-teller faces various kinds of crucifixion. It is tempting to affect blindness, to protect our ‘reputation and authority’, that we might use them, of course, ‘in the service of mankind’.

Academics are no different. In 2008, Terry Eagleton, formerly professor of English Literature at Manchester University, wrote:

By and large, academic institutions have shifted from being the accusers of corporate capitalism to being its accomplices. They are intellectual Tescos, churning out a commodity known as graduates rather than greengroceries. (Eagleton, 2008)

In 20 years of working on *Media Lens*, not much has left us disillusioned—we had no great illusions about journalism to begin with—but we have often been dismayed by the response of the ‘intellectual Tesco’.

In particular, it has been a thing of wonder for us to see how academics who support us privately, and even in public, treat our work in published articles and books. Typically, our 20 years

**Capitalism's  
Conscience**

**200 Years of  
the Guardian**

**Edited by Des Freedman**  
With essays by Gary Younge  
/ Victoria Brittain / Ghada  
Karmi / Hannah Hamad /  
Tom Mills / Natalie Fenton /  
Mike Berry / Matt Kennard  
/ Mark Curtis / Justin  
Schlosberg and others

**■ ■ A lively history and  
critique**  
Jonathan Steele

of detailed media analysis simply cease to exist. After openly supporting us for years, one academic—someone we considered a firm ally—wrote a book on our central theme, propaganda. Our work did receive a handful of mentions, all of them relegated to the footnotes. A different academic told us frankly that he had been advised to drop all mentions of Chomsky from his published articles and books—they would not be well-received.

We would be open to the possibility that our work just doesn't pass muster, but for the fact that academics have a track record, strong as twelve acres of garlic, of filtering out dissident facts and voices. In fact, it's the world's worst-kept secret that they do it to

‘play the game’, to stay ‘respectable’, to remain part of ‘mainstream’ debate.

### ***The Guardian*—‘More Than A Business’?**

Which brings us to the collection of essays, *Capitalism’s Conscience—200 Years of the Guardian*, edited by Des Freedman, professor of media and communications at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Freedman notes that *Guardian* editor Kath Viner promised that her newspaper would ‘challenge the economic assumptions of the last three decades’, ‘challenge the powerful’ and ‘use clarity and imagination to build hope’. His new book, says Freedman, ‘seeks to examine these claims’ (Freedman, 2021, p. x).

The collection of essays, mostly contributed by media academics, is published by Pluto Press, which has published all three Media Lens books; most recently, *Propaganda Blitz*, in 2018 (we have published several solo books with other publishers). Several good reasons for not criticising a book published by one’s own publisher can be found in Tolstoy’s list, but the academic filtering of truth is a key issue that cries out for honest discussion.

Despite our three books, 20 years of work focused heavily on the *Guardian*, and despite being mentioned and quoted (once) in the book, we were not told about *Capitalism’s Conscience* and were not invited to contribute.

*The Guardian’s* role is so appalling, so horrific that one is immediately surprised to see that the book contains contributions from some very ‘main-

stream’ former and current *Guardian* journalists, given that it purports to tell the unvarnished truth about the paper.

Chapter 3 was written by Gary Younge, formerly *The Guardian’s* editor-at-large and still a high-profile contributor. Chapter 4 was written by Victoria Brittain, who worked at *The Guardian* for more than 20 years as a foreign correspondent and then associate foreign editor. Younge and Brittain are the first two names under Freedman’s promoting the book’s contents on the front cover, which carries an approving comment from *Guardian* columnist and former chief foreign correspondent Jonathan Steele.

Freedman himself has a profile page on *The Guardian’s* website, last contributing in 2018. So does the author of Chapter 12, Tom Mills, who last wrote for *The Guardian* in January. We remember Mills from the distant past when he was a frequent poster on the *Media Lens* message board.

If this sounds a bit *Guardian*-friendly, Freedman tweeted the programme for Goldsmith University’s related, April 23-24 media conference, ‘Liberalism Inc: 200 Years of the Guardian’. Highlights included a keynote speech by former *Guardian* editor, Alan Rusbridger, titled: ‘More than a Business: 200 years of a newspaper which put purpose before profit’

On the same day, former *Guardian* comment editor, Becky Gardiner, chaired a discussion on ‘*The Guardian* and Feminism’.

Particularly given the editor, contributors and publisher, the title of the

book is troubling indeed: *Capitalism's Conscience—200 Years of the Guardian*.

Certainly we have no problem with the claim that *The Guardian* has been around for 200 years! At the very least, however, the title should read: *Capitalism's 'Conscience'?—200 Years of the Guardian*.

Has the looming collapse of the climate, the annihilation of species, the endless and merciless resource wars and mass-murdering sanctions devastating whole countries, not by now persuaded *all of us* that capitalism does not, indeed cannot, have a conscience? After Assange, Corbyn, Iraq, Libya and Syria, does anyone believe the corporate *Guardian* even pretends to act as a 'conscience' for anything? Canadian law professor Joel Bakan explains the bottom-line for *all* corporate executives:

The law forbids any motivation for their actions, whether to assist workers, improve the environment, or help consumers save money. They can do these things with their own money, as private citizens. As corporate officials, however, stewards of other people's money, they have no legal authority to pursue such goals as ends in themselves—only as means to serve the corporations own interests, which generally means to maximise the wealth of its shareholders. Corporate social responsibility is thus illegal—at least when its genuine. (Bakan, 2004)

If genuine social responsibility is illegal, it makes perfect sense that conscience is a threat to be stifled at every

turn. In the 1930s, political analyst Rudolf Rocker wrote:

It is certainly dangerous for a state when its citizens have a conscience; what it needs is men without conscience... men in whom the feeling of personal responsibility has been replaced by the automatic impulse to act in the interests of the state. (Rocker, 1978)

This is actually a key propaganda function of *The Guardian*. Even the suggestion that capitalism might have a conscience is a dangerous distortion of the truth, as is the suggestion that *The Guardian* might be involved in protecting an ethical dimension of capitalism. In his introduction, Freedman writes:

*The Guardian* is not a left-wing newspaper. It publishes left-wing columnists, is read by people on the left and has a reputation for identifying with left-wing positions. But it is not a title of the left; it is not affiliated to nor was it borne out of left-wing movements. (Freedman, 2021 p. viii)

One can debate the precise meaning of 'left-wing', but compare Freedman's assertion that *The Guardian* 'publishes left-wing columnists' with John Pilger's response (included, in full, later in this review):

The spaces allotted to independent journalists (myself included) have vanished. The dissent that was tolerated, even celebrated when I arrived in Fleet Street in the 1960s, has regressed to a metaphoric underground as liberal

capitalism sheds the last illusions of democracy. This is a seismic shift...

It is indeed a seismic shift that many of us have witnessed in our lifetimes – forget radically left-wing journalists, even independent journalists have disappeared from *The Guardian* and other media. Consider, after all, that superb, self-identifying Tory journalist, Peter Osborne, has recently described how ‘The mainstream British press and media is to all intents and purposes barred to me’. Freedman continues:

It has never been a consistent ally of socialist or anti-imperialist voices and has failed to perform for the left what titles like the *Mail* and the *Telegraph* have done for their constituencies on the right. (p. viii)

Never been ‘a consistent ally’? In light of *The Guardian’s* relentless and ongoing support for politically undead war criminal Tony Blair, its lethal propagandising for wars of aggression in Iraq, Libya and Syria, its lead role in undermining Jeremy Corbyn’s bid for power, its betrayal and demonisation of Assange, and so on... it is much more reasonable to view the *Guardian* as a bitter enemy of even mild left positions that has not only not performed ‘for the left’, but has most enthusiastically performed for established power.

The suggestion that the paper has ‘never been a consistent ally of socialist or anti-imperialist voices’ is a classic fudge aiming to appease the left with-

out overly alienating *The Guardian*. In fact, it reminds us strongly of the kind of apologetics that regularly appear in *The Guardian*—the US, we are sometimes told, has not been a ‘consistent ally’ of democracy around the world, and so on. Freedman continues of *The Guardian*:

Instead it is the home of a vigorous liberalism that consistently outrages voices to its right and, equally regularly, disappoints its critics on the left. (p. viii)

There is nothing ‘vigorous’ about the fake, marketised version of ‘liberalism’ peddled by *The Guardian*. In a 2011 interview, Julian Assange spoke from bitter personal experience:

There is a point I want to make about perceived moral institutions, such as the *Guardian* and *New York Times*. *The Guardian* has good people in it. It also has a coterie of people at the top who have other interests. ... What drives a paper like *The Guardian* or *New York Times* is not their inner moral values. It is simply that they have a market. In the UK, there is a market called ‘educated liberals’. Educated liberals want to buy a newspaper like *The Guardian* and therefore an institution arises to fulfil that market. ... What is in the newspaper is not a reflection of the values of the people in that institution, it is a reflection of the market demand.

Consider Freedman’s version of the truth with *The Guardian’s* treatment of Assange himself, of Corbyn, of ‘Jesus clown’ Russell Brand, of George Galloway, of Hugo Chavez, of Chomsky,

of us, of all dissidents. Rucker nailed a truth that has not changed in 100 years:

The state welcomes only those forms of cultural activity which help it to maintain its power. It persecutes with implacable hatred any activity which oversteps the limits set by it and calls its existence into question. It is, therefore, as senseless as it is mendacious to speak of a “state culture”; for it is precisely the state which lives in constant warfare with all higher forms of intellectual culture and always tries to avoid the creative will of culture... (Rucker, 1978, p. 85)

In reality, of course, *The Guardian's* ruthless, market-driven propaganda ‘consistently outrages’ voices to the left exactly as it outrages voices to the right. By now, only someone living in a *Guardian*-inspired fantasy world finds that *The Guardian* ‘disappoints’ when it attacks dissent and supports even the most cynically brutal wars of aggression.

### **Whitewashing wars of aggression**

*Guardian* output online and in print is vast, as is the range of issues covered. But an easy way to test for *Guardian* bias is to examine its performance on the US-UK’s wars of aggression. This is why we have always focused so much on the *Guardian's* performance on Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen.

Over the last 20 years, we have shown over and over again how *The Guardian*, while supposedly opposing the war on Iraq, in fact hit readers with

a propaganda blitz that sought to scare up war fever based on completely absurd, self-evidently fabricated US-UK claims on the supposed existence and threat of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Balance was not permitted—*The Guardian* simultaneously blanked as non-existent the crucial, highly credible testimony of UN weapons inspectors like Scott Ritter, who insisted his team had left Iraq ‘fundamentally disarmed’ of ‘90-95 percent’ of its WMD by December 1998, leaving only ‘harmless sludge’ (Ritter & Pitt, 2002, p. 23, 29). In their 12,366 articles mentioning Iraq in 2003, *The Guardian* and *Observer* mentioned Ritter a total of 17 times. *The Guardian* simply ignored testimony, literally available from all good bookshops, with the power to make a complete nonsense of its own and all other media discussions of the case for war.

Even more shocking, one might think, even after the great catastrophe in Iraq, *The Guardian* relentlessly propagandised for war by the same US-UK alliance on Libya and Syria in 2011 and thereafter. A typical example was supplied by senior *Guardian* columnist, later comment editor, Jonathan Freedland, who wrote an article on Libya entitled: ‘Though the risks are very real, the case for intervention remains strong.’ A *Guardian* leader quietly celebrated the results:

But it can now reasonably be said that in narrow military terms it worked, and that politically there was some retrospective justification for its advocates as the crowds poured into the streets of



Figure 1: *Guardian* output online and in print is vast, as is the range of issues covered. But an easy way to test for *Guardian* bias is to examine its performance on the US-UK's wars of aggression.

Tripoli to welcome the rebel convoys earlier this week.

A flood of similar and worse pro-‘intervention’ propaganda has issued forth from *The Guardian* on Syria. There has been relentless, laser-like focus on the crimes, real and imagined, of Assad and Putin. The West, we are to believe, has sinned only by its reluctance to be involved at all! An audacious reversal of the truth. Above all, lifting a page from the playbook of the great Iraq WMD scam, the focus has been on highly questionable claims of chemical weapons attacks. Clearly anticipating and agitating for war in April 2013, a *Guardian* editorial observed:

Yet this week has also been marked by further claims that Syria’s Bashar al-Assad has been doing precisely the thing that Mr Bush said so confidently, but so wrongly, was at imminent risk of being done by Saddam Hussein 10 years ago.

The editorial continued:

... UN member states and security council members also have less basis today for sitting on their hands than they did over Iraq. The UN has been ineffective over Syria, because Russia and China veto UN action. Partly as a consequence, at least 70,000 people have died while the world looks on and wrings its hands. It is not clear in moral terms why those thousands of deaths are not treated as a red line while chemical weapons use is.

How has *Capitalism’s Conscience* covered *The Guardian’s* complicity in these wars? The answer, which is available to anyone in the age of the word-searchable e-book, is that Libya and Syria are both mentioned once, in passing. The West’s attacks on Libya and Syria, much less *The Guardian’s* role in them, are not mentioned at all. The Saudi-UK war on Yemen is also unmentioned.

As for Iraq, the greatest foreign policy and mass media disaster of our time gets five mentions in passing in the book's 320 pages. Reference to *The Guardian's* propaganda role in the conflict is limited to one mention of unnamed *Guardian* 'columnists... who had championed the Iraq War in 2003 and even insisted that there were weapons of mass destruction'—a total of 19 words (p. 50).

In other words, *The Guardian's* very real responsibility for promoting catastrophic crimes that have left millions of human beings dead, injured and displaced, has been completely blanked by a collection of dissident writers published by our supposedly most radical publisher reviewing *The Guardian's* performance over the last 200 years. This is outrageous.

The book does find space to note that the paper 'has led the way in innovative design and formats, was the first British title to set up a reader's editor, established editions in the US and Australia and now champions a membership model with some one million people who have either signed up to the scheme or made a one-off contribution' (p. x), and so on. Freedman concludes his introduction:

*The Guardian* is read by many people on the Left but, as with liberal democracy more generally, it does not serve them consistently or adequately in the pursuit of radical social change. This book is an expression not simply of disappointment but of the conviction that we need a very different sort of media if we are to pursue a very different sort of society. (p. xiv)

If change begins anywhere, it begins with a rejection of the assertion that *The Guardian* 'does not serve' the Left or liberal democracy 'consistently or adequately in the pursuit of radical social change'. In reality, it consistently *attacks* the Left. In his chapter on Corbyn and anti-semitism, Justin Schlosberg is strongly critical of *The Guardian* but observes:

Perhaps above all, Corbyn's political ascendance coincided with that of Donald Trump in the US and other hard right leaders from Modi in India to Bolsonaro in Brazil. Against this backdrop—and especially in the context of Brexit—it is easy to understand how Corbyn's Labour and those sources defending it came to be perceived by journalists as the left front of populism—tending towards the extreme and intrinsically less credible than their 'moderate' political counterparts. (p. 200)

*Guardian* hostility to Corbyn was about fear of mild socialism challenging the state-corporate status quo, not fear of populism. Schlosberg concluded:

Ironically, in defence of its liberal values against the rise of populism, *The Guardian* appeared to disregard or undermine what has always been the very cornerstone of its liberalism: the sanctity of facts. (Freedman, 2021, p. 201)

The idea that 'the sanctity of facts' 'has always been the very cornerstone of its liberalism' will be welcome reading to *The Guardian* editors, but mystifying to anyone who reads the newspaper



with a critical mind. In Chapter 3, Gary Younge claims on Corbyn:

A range of studies have since shown that... *The Guardian* contained both more diverse opinions and more supportive opinions and coverage than virtually any other mainstream outlet. (Freedman, 2021, p. 52)

That isn't saying much. Remarkably, in support of his claim, Younge cites two studies: one from November 2015, just two months after Corbyn had been elected; the other from July 2016, ten months after Corbyn had been elected. Younge presumably missed the September 2018 study (Media Reform Coalition) cited by the late anthropologist and political commentator David Graeber when he tweeted in December 2019:

[A]s for the *Guardian*, we will never forget that during the 'Labour #anti-semitism controversy', they beat even the *Daily Mail* to include the largest percentage of false statements, pretty much every one, mysteriously, an accidental error to Labour's disadvantage.

Quite an achievement! The book does contain two excellent chapters by Alan MacLeod on *The Guardian's* coverage of Latin America, and by Matt Kennard and Mark Curtis on the paper's coverage of the UK security state. Both are discussed further below.

### **John Pilger responds**

*Guardian* columnist John Pilger was asked for his thoughts on *Capitalism's Conscience*. He responded:

Liberal journalism, such as *The Guardian's*, was always a loose extension of establishment power. But something has changed since the rise of Blairism. The spaces allotted to independent journalists (myself included) have vanished. The dissent that was tolerated, even celebrated when I arrived in Fleet Street in the 1960s, has regressed to a metaphoric underground as liberal capitalism sheds the last illusions of democracy.

This is a seismic shift, with *The Guardian* and the BBC—far more influential than those on the accredited right—policing the new 'groupthink', as Robert Parry called it, ensuring its politics and hypocrisies, its omissions and fabrications while pursuing the enemies of the new national security state.

Journalism students need to study this urgently if they are to understand that the true source of the contrivance known as 'fake news' is not merely social media, but a liberal 'mainstream' self-anointed with a false respectability that claims to challenge corrupt and war-mongering power but, in reality, courts and protects it, and colludes with it.

This is *The Guardian* today. Rid of those journalists it cannot control, the porous borders they once crossed long closed, *The Guardian* more than ever represents the world view of its hero, Blair, the 'mystical' lost leader the newspaper promoted with evangelical fervour and has since done its best to rehabilitate, a man responsible for human carnage beyond the imagination.

To its credit, Des Freedman's anthology includes a scattering of sharp

honesty, especially the chapters by Alan MacLeod, Mark Curtis and Matt Kennard. But the omissions are shocking: notably *The Guardian's* 'nuanced' (a favourite weasel word) support for the dismemberment of nations: from Yugoslavia to Syria, and for its immoral backing of the current MI6/CIA propaganda war against nuclear-armed powers Russia and China.

An example of this is a recent stream of US-sourced 'human rights' propaganda from Taiwan, much of it publicly discredited, that beckons war with China. This has yet to match the output of *The Guardian's* chief Rus-siaphobe, Luke Harding, who ensures that all evil leads to Vladimir Putin.

We are given scant idea how the people of these hellish places live and think, for they are the modern 'other'. That the Chinese, according to Harvard, Pew and numerous other studies, are the most contented human beings on earth is irrelevant, or to quote Harold Pinter, 'it didn't matter, it was of no interest'.

It was Harding and two others who claimed in *The Guardian* that Trump's campaign manager, Paul Manafort, had held secret talks with Julian Assange at the Ecuadorean embassy. Discredited by the former Ecuadorean consul Fidel Narvaez as 'fake' (and by those like myself who were subjected to the security screening at the embassy), the story was typical of the decade-long smear campaign against Assange.

The campaign was one of the low-est points in British journalism. While collecting the kudos, circulation, profit

and book and Hollywood deals for Assange's work, *The Guardian* played a pivotal role. Although Mark Curtis touches on the latter years, young journalists need to know the whole disgraceful saga and its significance in crushing those who challenge power from outside the liberal fence and refuse to join the 'club'.

The principal *Guardian* ringmaster was Alan Rusbridger, who was editor-in-chief for 20 years. (Rusbridger also oversaw *The Observer*, *The Guardian's* sister paper, which during the build-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 ran a rabid pro-war campaign that included fabrications about WMD for which its reporter, David Rose, later personally apologised—unlike his editors).

Rusbridger has lately re-invented himself as a media moralist. 'Only those with the highest professional and ethical standards,' he wrote in 2019, 'will rise above the oceans of mediocrity and malignity and survive.' While Rusbridger rises above the oceans to promote his new book on the ethics of 'proper news', Julian Assange, the truth telling journalist betrayed by *The Guardian*, remains in solitary confinement in Belmarsh prison.

Much of Freedman's anthology is the work of media academics, whose takeover of the training of journalists is relatively recent—well, it's within my own career. Some have done fine work, including Freedman himself. But the question begs: how have they and their colleagues changed the media for the better when so much of it has become an echo chamber of rapacious, mendacious

power? The craft of journalism deserves better (Pilger, 2021).

### **Jonathan Cook responds**

Former *Guardian* journalist Jonathan Cook was also asked to comment on the book:

With a few notable exceptions, the critical horizons of many of the contributors seem sadly limited for a book supposedly critically appraising *The Guardian*. Most rightly argue that the left should not trust the paper to advance its causes, and that throughout its long history the paper has hewn closely to variations of free market liberalism. But the book makes little effort to explain why that is the case, even in its section supposedly dealing directly with this issue: on what the book refers to as ‘political economy’. Only one contributor refers to the corporate nature of the media, when dealing with press regulation, and even then there is the implication that *The Guardian* stands outside that system.

The chapter on political economy charts *The Guardian*’s efforts to remain profitable and competitive against billionaire-owned rivals, but fails to make clear the impact that necessarily has on the paper’s ideological positions. There is no real effort to examine how *The Guardian*, like other corporate media, dare not regularly upset advertisers, given its economic dependency on their money. The book lacks a discussion of the inevitable conflict between *The Guardian*’s commercial needs and its professed commitment to the environment.

Nor does the book draw any meaningful conclusions from the fact that in the digital age *The Guardian* has chosen to chase after larger and wealthier liberal US audiences than can be found in the UK. It would seem relevant in considering *The Guardian*’s ever-greater focus on cultural issues and fashionable identity politics as an alternative to class politics and labour issues.

Similarly, the book offers no platform for whistleblowers who could have given a harsher insight into how the paper is run, or the obstacles placed in the way of reporters trying to break with *The Guardian*’s ideological framing of issues or its top-down editorial approach. Gary Younge provides some clues but his focus is narrow, he enjoyed an unusually independent position within the editorial team, and his continuing relationship with the paper means he is unlikely to speak as freely as he might otherwise.

Matt Kennard and Mark Curtis name some of the national security writers pushed out of the paper in recent years. Were any approached by the book’s editor to explain their experiences?

In my own specialist field, Ghada Karmi offers a fine perspective on the general failures in reporting fairly on Israel-Palestine, the role of the lobby and the tendency to prioritise Jewish and Israeli voices over Palestinian ones. But her assumption appears to be that *The Guardian*’s failure to offer Palestinians a proper hearing reflects a mix of the following: historical ignorance of the Palestinian case and a

romanticised view of Israel; the greater weight and centrality of the Israel lobby than the Palestinian lobby in UK society; and fears of being accused of antisemitism.

What this account of *The Guardian's* failure misses is Israel's crucial place in advancing Western foreign policy goals in the Middle East. The paper's siding with the West's major geopolitical interests in the Middle East is not a one-off, after all, as Alan MacLeod's chapter on *The Guardian's* even more woeful coverage of Latin American makes clear. There is a pattern of failure here that needs unpacking. Had it been done, it would have been much easier to explain the *Guardian's* leading role in the corporate media's campaign to put Israel—couched in terms of a supposed Labour antisemitism crisis—at the heart of assessing Jeremy Corbyn's suitability for being prime minister.

Again, it would have helped this section to have included a whistleblower, an insider familiar with the limitations of *The Guardian's* Israel-Palestine coverage. I and others—including Nafeez Ahmed, Antony Loewenstein and, more recently, Nathan Robinson—have all been at the sharp end of *The Guardian's* strict policing of its Israel-Palestine coverage. Nowhere are our experiences given a voice in a book claiming to deal with *The Guardian* critically (Cook, 2021).

## Conclusion

The rarely discussed truth is that academia plays a crucial role in reinforcing

'mainstream' journalism's filtering of truth, ensuring that discussion extends, as Chomsky says, 'this far and no further'. Media academics consistently exclude the most critical media activists in much the same way as corporate journalists.

It is obvious to us, for example, that John Pilger and Jonathan Cook have long been the UK's most powerful and qualified critics of *The Guardian*. Who can doubt that their inclusion would have massively strengthened *Capitalism's Conscience* and increased sales? Their exclusion invites a simple question: what other priorities were being served?

Did the editor and some of the contributors pull their punches, wittingly or otherwise, in order to seem less 'extreme', more 'reasonable'? Were they hoping not to burn bridges, so that publication in *The Guardian* might remain an option? Perhaps even that the book might be reviewed favourably by the newspaper itself? There is a pressing need for truly critical and honest appraisals of *The Guardian's* record as a guardian of power. This book, barring a couple of welcome exceptions, is not it.


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