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Discourses of Blame and Responsibility: U.S./Canadian Media Representations of Palestinian-Israeli Relations

Kurzfassung: Ziel der vorliegenden Untersuchung ist es, herauszufinden, ob zwischen den USA und Kanada tiefgreifende Unterschiede in der kulturellen Neigung und Haltung bezüglich internationaler Konflikte und Friedensbemühungen bestehen. Als Untersuchungsmaterial dienten Artikel einer amerikanischen und einer kanadischen Tageszeitung, die als Produkte der jeweiligen kulturellen Haltung mittels kritischer Diskursanalyse untersucht wurden.

Es fanden sich zwar Differenzen zwischen den beiden Ländern in der Intensität und Häufigkeit von pro-militärischen Äußerungen, aber für die Annahme grundlegender Differenzen in Werten und Ansichten konnten keine Belege gefunden werden.

Eher zeugen Ähnlichkeiten in Sprachstil und Stimmung in der Berichterstattung über politische Ereignisse in Israel und Palästina von gemeinsam geteilten Perspektiven in Bezug auf den Nahost-Konflikt.

Ein Vergleich über zwei Jahre kanadischer resp. amerikanischer Berichterstattung sowohl zu den Präsidentschafts- und Parlamentswahlen der Palästinenser als auch zu dem Rückzug Israels aus dem Gazastreifen, zeigt hohe Ähnlichkeit in der politischen Haltung beider Staaten. Als Vergleichsmaßstab dienten den Autoren fünf Dimensionen, auf welchen Palästinenser und Israelis sich in weitgehend dichotomer Weise gegenüber stellen lassen.

Handelte es sich bei dem Nachrichtenkontext um Wahlen oder den Rückzug aus besetztem Gebiet, wurden beide Parteien von den Medien dennoch als Aktivisten in einem "Negativ-Null-Summen-Spiel" dargestellt.

Die Autoren weisen darauf hin, dass die parteiische Darstellung in beiden Staaten, enge Rollen für beide Parteien etabliert, die Verantwortung den Palästinensern zuschreibt und diese unter Druck setzt, indem sie Möglichkeiten der Konfliktlösung ausschließlich auf palästinensischer Seite sucht.

Der vorliegende Kulturvergleich der medial übermittelten Einstellungen weist eher auf ein Zusammenwachsen als auf einen Unterschied der beiden Kulturen entlang der längsten ungesicherten Grenze der Welt hin.

Weiterhin zeugen die Ergebnisse – wie bereits frühere Befunde – von der Existenz eines "Kriegsjournalismus" in den Medien der westlichen Welt. In Nachrichtenkontexten, welche die Möglichkeit geboten hätten, bedeutsame Elemente des Friedensjournalismus im Sinne von Johan Galtung anzuwenden, wurden diese weder von den kanadischen noch von den amerikanischen Tageszeitungen umgesetzt. Im Gegenteil entschieden sich beide Zeitungen in diesen Fällen für die herkömmliche Methode einer polarisierenden Berichterstattung.

Abstract: To test the assumption of a deep cultural divide between Canada and the United States, the researchers employed critical discourse analysis to examine the texts of one U.S. and one Canadian newspaper as artifacts and productions of the two countries' cultural inclinations toward international conflict and peace. The authors found differences in the intensity and pervasiveness of pro-militaristic discourse in the two nations' media texts but did not find evidence to support the thesis that Canada and the United States are divided by profound and intractable distinctions of values, beliefs or cultures. Instead the two newspapers demonstrated a noteworthy similarity of language, tone and text that presented shared perspectives on distant political and electoral initiatives in Israel and Palestine.

Several strong similarities appeared across some two years of news coverage and political statements in Canada and the United States about the Palestinian parliamentary and presidential elections as well as the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Five familiar themes emerged to present Israelis and Palestinians in largely dichotomous and oppositional terms. When the news context was an election or a withdrawal from occupied territory, rather than military aggression, media nevertheless represented the two parties as engaged in a zero-sum game. The consistent narratives of "othering" established and re-enforced narrow roles for both parties, placed blame and responsibility, and charged Palestinians with the (often unilateral) obligation to resolve the conflict.

This media coverage demonstrates a convergence rather than a division of cultures across the longest undefended border in the world. These findings also support earlier work establishing the prevalence of "war journalism" in mainstream news coverage by the West. In news contexts that might have provided an opportunity to embrace significant components of Johan Galtung's concept of peace journalism, neither the Canadian nor the U.S. newspaper did so, choosing instead to rely upon the time-worn tactics of oppositional reporting.

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In the 21st Century, it is widely agreed that "the relationship between the United States and Canada is probably the closest and most extensive in the world" (U.S. Department of State, 2006). The two countries share the globe's longest undefended border (5,500 miles), which former U.S. President Ronald Reagan called "not a point of division but a meeting place between great and true friends" (1978). The countries have close bilateral ties in trade, investment, and international law and policy, and they often work closely on multilateral issues.

Despite the profound and enduring connections between the two nations, U.S. media and the public give scant attention to Canada or the two nations' relations (Husselbee & Stempel, 1997). Moreover, following the Bush administration's post-September 11, 2001, military initiatives against terrorism, political relations between the neighbors became increasingly "chilly" (U.S. Department of State, 2006; Connelly, 2004; Duff-Brown, 2006). Even as the countries strengthened security agreements on border patrols and customs, Canada refused to participate in the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Canada also led the U.S.-opposed establishment of an International Criminal Court for war crimes. Canada banned the use of anti-personnel landmines through its Ottawa Convention, which the U.S. refused to sign. And, in 2005, Canada chose not to participate directly in the U.S. missile defense program. In rare and pointed news coverage during this period, highly placed Canadian politicians sharply criticized President G.W. Bush, and FoxNews called Canadians "ignorant." At the same time, polls showed that only 25 percent of Canadian voters would have supported Bush's re-election (Connelly, 2004).

The schism between the two nations is also evident in international affairs. One area of increasing division between the two nations is in their attitudes and policies toward the Middle East. In 2005, for example, one poll indicated that the percentage of U.S. respondents with favorable opinions of Israel was 40 percent greater than the share of Canadians supporting Israel (Gallup Poll, 2005). Thus, while nearly 70 percent of U.S. respondents viewed Israel favorably, only half of the Canadians shared that sentiment. An equal number of Canadians sympathized with the Palestinians (Gallup Poll, 2005).

Within the context of long-term bi-lateral peace and amicability between Americans and Canadians, academics repeatedly have theorized and debated the existence of fundamental and intractable differences of values that might help explain such differences and frictions (Baer et al, 1990; Carroll, 2005; Lipset, 1986, 1990; Grabb et al, 2000). Starting in the 1960s, Seymour Lipset argued that despite their profound interconnections and interdependence, and in spite of their shared roots, Canadians and Americans operate from distinct value systems. He distinguished between the military, revolutionary, and conflict-oriented values of early U.S. colonists and the traditional, Loyalist roots of English-speaking settlers of Canada.

This study examines coverage of events in the Middle East by the news media of the two countries as a product and an artifact of their cultures. If Lipset's theory holds, then, we would expect to find greater support for Middle East bellicosity in the U.S. than in Canadian media coverage.

Media, Culture and Ideology

Because journalists selectively transmit information in ways that reinforce cultural assumptions and beliefs (Altheide, 1987; Donsbach, 2004; Gamson et. al, 1992; Hackett & Zhao, 2005; Howard et al, 2003; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Paletz & Entman, 1981; Sigal, 1973), the media are at the heart of cultural debates such as this. Media act as a site of ideological struggle to delineate the boundaries of "our" identity and culture and to produce a system of social meanings that naturalizes dominant discourses (Karim, 2000; Yep, 2001) and influences how people construct their reality (Bennett, 1983; Gurevitch & Levy, 1985; Parenti, 1993). Through sourcing, structure, and semantic traits, news reports tie together discrete bits of information to affix authority, morality, and causation within culturally resonant, coherent story lines (Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Grabb et al, 2000; Tuchman, 1978; VanDyk, 1988). By defining items as newsworthy and placing them in "stories," the media establish associations, evoke myths, and reinforce rituals (Barthes, 1977; Becker, 1995; Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gamson, et. al., 1992; Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980; Goffman, 1974; Iyengar, 1991; Kerbel, 1995; Kitzinger, 2000; McLeod & Hertog, 1992; Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Parenti, 1993; Patterson, 1993; Shoemaker, 1984; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

News stories *make* sense, meaning both that they construct sense and they embody commonsense, shared beliefs. The sense constructed within media is bounded by cultural values and power relationships. Thus, media under-represent non-elite perspectives and convey ethnocentric, nationalistic elite views that reflect government policies, legitimate the practices and ideas of the dominant social class, and reduce ideological threats to the status quo (Ashley & Olson, 1988; Brody, 1994; Brody & Shapiro, 1989; Domke, 1997; Edwards & Swenson, 1997; Hutcheson, 2003; Lee, 1997; Liebes, 2000; Mackuen, 1983; Mueller, 1971; Paletz & Entman, 1981; Schlesinger et al., 1984; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Snow & Bedford, 1992; Steuter, 1990; Wolfsfeld, 1997).

Here, we understand culture as "a signifying practice" (Hall, 1980) that produces social meanings that reflect "a particular social, political, and historical context" (Yep, 2001, p. 231; also Dunn, 1998; Kuzio, 2001). Culture as social process and communicative phenomenon derives from and creates a sense of difference and of belonging, a perception of ties and divisions, inclusions and exclusions, etc. (Connor, 1978; Geertz, 1963; Rosaldo, 1993; Smith, 1991; Triandafyllidou, 1998).

As such, culture is profoundly non-essentialist; it comprises "a complex set of shared beliefs, values and concepts which enables a group to make sense of its life and which provides it with directions for how to live" (Fay, 1996, p. 55). Culture consists of and constitutes ordered but "conflicting beliefs and rules which offer mixed, contested, and ambiguous messages" (Fay, 1996, p. 56). From this post-positivist perspective, culture serves as a tool of politics and is used to silence, exclude, and mark other cultures as different, inferior, and amoral (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Lazar & Lazar, 2004; Leudar et al, 2004). This boundary marking paradoxically serves to "maximize psychological security" within the in-group (Bloom, 1990, p. 71) while increasing the likelihood of conflict with the out-group it essentializes and demonizes (Barth, 1969; Benhabib, 1996; Merskin, 2004; Triandafyllidou, 1998).

The narrative conventions of journalism that place priority on drama escalate conflict and violence across "cultural divides" constructed by media's simplistic dualistic portrayals (Entman, 2004; Goldfarb, 2001; Hallin & Mancini, 1984; Hutcheson, 2003; Kielbowicz & Scherer, 1986; Lazar & Lazar, 2004; Liebes, 2000; Nohrstedt et al, 2000; Ottosen, 1995; Ross, 2003; Wolfsfeld, 2001, 2004). Accordingly, the media serve a strong nationalistic function by covering international relations from an ethnocentric position that "bear[s] a remarkable resemblance to many sentiments common in [the government's] foreign policy and, indeed, [the nation's] political culture" (Steuter, 1990, p. 274; see also Angus & Cook, 1984). Thus, one would anticipate that a Canadian/U.S. cultural divide would be reflected in broad national differences in media coverage deeply intermeshed with the ideological underpinnings of the distinct U.S. and Canadian national identities and their disparate principles, policies and values (Holquin, 1998; Schacter, 2003).

Yet many perceive "the mainstream North American media" or even "the Western media" as monolithic and undifferentiated (Suleiman, 2000, p. 26; Karim, 2000). In this light, virtually seamless North American media perpetuate "classically orientalist" (Said, 2002), bellicose, and jingoistic perspectives (Ismael & Measor, 2003). Nearly uniform media content and business practices across the U.S./Canadian border (Dowler, 2004) contribute to a "public void" and a "lack of media space" for anti-nationalistic or minority perspectives across North America (Lasn, 1999; see also Hackett, 1991). Some see Canadian media content as a transplant from the U.S. superpower (Ismael & Measor, 2003, pp. 7-8/19). Exclusionary and anti-Islamic practices prevail (Karim, 2000; Macarthur, 1992; Said, 1997; Shaheen, 1984, 1997) and perpetuate "reductive and racist notions" about the Middle East in media across North America.

Method

In this study, we chose to examine public discourse in Canada and the United States both as a reflection of such cultural issues and as a purveyor of peace or war. Here we explicitly wanted to examine whether media and government elites in the two nations differentially employed a discourse of war, with all of its conflict-escalating implications (Galtung & Fischer, 2004; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). More specifically, the research team examined the discourse in the United States and Canada surrounding events in the continuing conflict between Israel and Palestine. The events at the heart of this paper are: 1. the Israeli pull out from Gaza beginning Aug. 15, 2005, and 2. the Palestinian presidential election in January 2005 following Yasser Arafat's death and the Palestinian parliamentary elections in January 2006, which resulted in Hamas winning a majority of seats. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict was of particular interest because throughout its long history numerous occasions have provided opportunities for peaceful resolution. These occasions, including the events examined for this paper, also have provided opportunities for the media to cover a conflict in a more peace-oriented way.

This work employs cultural/critical discourse analysis to enter "one of the most well-known and longstanding arguments in comparative social analysis" (Baer et al, 1990, p. 693). In this study, we examine the texts of two geographically proximate North American metropolitan newspapers (one in Canada and one in the United States) and the statements of government elites in Canada and the United States as cultural artifacts to argue that the American/Canadian cultural divide (Lipset, 1986) is both insubstantial and strategic.

To examine the discourse in the two countries, we analyzed speeches by political elites and one newspaper from each country. *The Seattle Times* from the United States and *The Vancouver Sun* from Canada were chosen for their geographical proximity and similar circulation size. (Seattle, WA, and Vancouver, B.C., are roughly 100 miles apart. *The Seattle Times* circulates to almost 235,000 daily, while circulation at *The Vancouver Sun* is approximately 180,000 daily.) The group used critical discourse analysis to examine how political and media elites represented the two groups involved in the conflict. Critical cultural analysis or critical discourse analysis (CDA) attempts to make overt the power relationships performed through texts and to unpack the multiple and shifting ways in which "individuals and social or cultural groups define themselves and others" (Ylanne-McEwen & Coupland, 2000, p. 210). A primary goal of CDA is to make visible how "the overall habitat of meanings and practices in which we dwell is the outcome of the variously deliberate pursuit by a variety of actors of their own agendas, with different power and different social and spatial reach, and with foreseen or unanticipated consequences" (Hannerz, 1999). In doing this analysis, the group looked for noticeable differences in the identities constructed in the United States and Canada.

Analysis

Several strong similarities appeared across some two years of news coverage and political statements in Canada and U.S. about the two Palestinian elections and the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Five dominant, recurrent themes emerged in the political and news discourse. We identified themes of 'Israeli benevolence,' 'Palestinian opportunity,' 'Palestinian failure,' 'Palestinians as future threat,' and 'Israeli actions are justified.' These distinct themes present Israelis and Palestinians in largely dichotomous and oppositional terms; the two parties are engaged in a zero-sum game. Such narratives establish and re-enforce narrow roles for both parties, place blame and responsibility, and indicate the appropriate (often unilateral) solution to conflict.

Canadian and U.S. politicians and the media representing current events in the Middle East employed story lines and tactics typical of what Galtung describes as 'war journalism' (Galtung & Fischer, 2004). They also tended to adopt what Schafer (1999) called a securitization paradigm. This discursive strategy interprets most current issues in terms of security concerns about future threats and instability (Schafer, 1999; Smith, 2000). Because the future is inherently ambiguous, amorphous, colorless and indeterminate, future-based discourse offers optimal terrain to perform political and ideological work (Dunmire, 1997, 2005; Hebdige, 1993). Discursive strategies that attempt to map the future serve to "open up or close down particular lines of possibility" (Hebdige, 1993, p.275).

On occasion, both the media and government elites create a narrative in which peace is a possibility. Yet there is little evidence in any of these texts of more than occasional employment of the discursive tactics of peace (Galtung & Fischer, 2004). Even when texts present a situation in which peace *might* occur, the recommended solution generally requires one party to bend itself to the other's will in a win-lose game. Consensus, compromise and creative collaboration are not presented as realistic options. Often, steps forward by one party are discursively juxtaposed with retreats toward increased belligerence on the part of the other.

Israeli benevolence

One discursive thread in news and political texts emphasizes the actions of Israel, placing Israel in a dominant position of benevolent paternalism. Israel is represented as protective, providing aid and encouragement to the weaker, less capable, backward and, often, violent Palestinians. In media coverage of the Palestinian elections, for example, Israel is presented as an important actor, assuring that the process would be as free and fair as possible. The coverage presented Israel as making exemplary efforts to create favorable conditions for the Palestinian people to move freely within their country, ensuring everyone the opportunity to vote and encouraging smoothly operating Palestinian elections. Here, the Palestinian people are passive recipients of Israeli generosity.

Israeli paternalism is a theme in Palestinian election coverage. In one *Seattle Times* story, for example, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom is quoted as saying that "Israel will do everything it can in order to ease the conditions for the Palestinians to have their own elections" (Powell Wins, 2004). The same story, without attribution, stated that "Israeli officials said they also were considering ways to allow Palestinians living in East Jerusalem to vote, probably by mail" (Powell Wins, 2004). *The Vancouver Sun* also presented Israel as the force behind functioning Palestinian democracy. Thus, one *Sun* article noted that:

Despite the continuing violence, Israel said it remained committed to making the elections as free as possible. It is to increase the number of Israeli soldiers at checkpoints so Palestinians and election observers coming from Jerusalem will be able to enter the West Bank without delay. Under Operation Curtain Raiser, which is being conducted jointly with the Palestinian police, Israel will withdraw its troops from around West Bank and Gaza towns and cities so that the nearly 1.8 million voters can more easily go to the polls (Fisher, 2005a).

Here, Israel is portrayed as generous and conciliatory, supporting and facilitating Palestinian elections 'despite the continuing violence' of the Palestinian people against Israel. In this context, Palestinian violence stands unexplained and without context, appearing wholly irrational. This text presupposes that Israel has been a patient partner in the peace negotiations throughout (VanDijk, 1988). By focusing on Israeli actions, the text marginalizes and undermines the role of Palestinians in their own elections.

The discourse surrounding the elections presents peace as possible. While the elections are the proximate cause of this opportunity, it is not Palestinian initiative toward democracy but rather Israeli forbearance that provides the tenuous and contingent occasion for peace. Following the election, President G.W. Bush, for example, "expressed optimism that [the Abbas] election would lead to a renewed push for Mideast peace" (Alberts et al, 2005). The media and government elites attribute the opportunity for peace as much to external influences and chance as to any Palestinian design. In this way, the elections themselves do not constitute a step toward peace (see discussion below regarding the Hamas victory) but act rather as a call to Palestinians to demonstrate their commitment to peace through additional unstipulated actions. Beyond constructing Israel as merciful and benevolent, these texts place responsibility for current violence and for any future peace solely on the Palestinians.

On rare occasions, this dominant discourse was challenged. Thus, two months after the Palestinian election of Mahmoud Abbas, a public statement by Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Pierre Pettigrew portrayed a different Israel. He expressed Canada's disappointment with government-sanctioned Israeli settlements in the West Bank and called the building "inconsistent with international law" and "out of step" with Israeli/Palestinian cooperation (Pettigrew, 2005).

Palestinian opportunity

If Israelis are represented as cultivating the conditions for peace in the Middle East, then Palestinians are expected to take advantage of those opportunities and actually achieve peace. According to U.S. and Canadian media and political elites, the most recent opportunities for peace arose with the death of Yasser Arafat on November 11, 2004, and its associated presidential election and Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in August 2005. Thus, Arafat's death was not the loss of a beloved, if quixotic, Palestinian leader, but the precipitating event essential to renewing the peace process. In its coverage of the Palestinian presidential election, *The Seattle Times* quoted Ariel Sharon as saying "an opportunity has presented itself" in the region; Arafat's death prompted a new Israeli attitude that peace could be achieved (Powell Wins, 2004).

Government leaders in the United States, Canada, Israel, and other Western nations greeted the Palestinian election of President Mahmoud Abbas with a sense of optimism. The Prime Minister of Canada at the time, Paul Martin, called the election "a pivotal time in the Middle East. Canada joins the rest of the international community in urging Palestinians and Israelis to seize this moment and this momentum to work towards a comprehensive and lasting peace" (Alberts et al, 2005). Martin (Feb. 8, 2005) said the election marked "the beginning of a new era" in Israeli/Palestinian relations and an opportunity for increased Canadian "partnering" with the Palestinian government (Sept. 15, 2005).

The Sun coverage of the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza demonstrated the tendency for news media to represent peace as an opportunity awaiting Palestinian cooperation. In one example of unattributed text, *The Sun* reported that President Bush had "offered Palestinians an olive branch, stating that if they proved their commitment for peace by fighting terrorist organizations, Israel was ready to talk" (Fisher, 2005d). Throughout *The Sun's* Gaza coverage, peace hinges on correct behavior by recalcitrant Palestinians. For example, "the removal of Jewish settlers and Israeli forces from Gaza [is] a chance for Palestinian militants there to behave more reasonably" (Fisher, 2005c). As in the election coverage, selfless Israeli actions create occasions for Palestinians to seize opportunities for peace. Even in this context of Israeli occupation, Palestinians are defined as militants, Israelis as benevolent. Israeli withdrawal is not a righting of wrongs but a sacrifice intended to prompt Palestinians to move toward peace. Moreover, the placement of responsibility upon the Palestinians suggests their ultimate blameworthiness.

This same discourse appeared in comments and coverage following the death of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. Here President Bush is represented as pushing both the Palestinian people and their elected leader to "commit[] to democracy and ... stamp out corruption and terrorism." The improbability of such an outcome is indicated by Bush's statement that "the election *must*" establish the correct leadership and that "the U.S. would hold the new leader's 'feet to the fire' to ensure democracy and free elections prevailed" (Jones, 2004). The U.S. president believes Palestinians will squander this opportunity for peace unless pressured. The text asserts the paradoxical contention that an open, democratic election must arrive at a predetermined outcome aligned with U.S. interests (Tomlin et al, 1997). The threatening and ominous tone of the Bush pronouncement underlines the suggestion that the U.S. may become more directly involved to force correct Palestinian elections.

In this discourse, Palestinian actions can contribute to a regional peace only through an election that achieves the goals identified by Israel and the United States. Opportunities for peace are borne out of conciliation and tragic circumstance, not Palestinian commitment or resolve; they demarcate the centrality of Israeli and Western moves in this process. Media and elites assert that the Israeli/Western powers have dissolved the impediments for peace in the region, and the onus rests solely with the Palestinians. This focus on Palestinian behavior, embedded within this discourse and essential to the newspaper and elite accounts, takes a dramatic turn following Hamas' January 2006 electoral victories.

Two examples stand out in their reiteration of concern that this opportunity for peace is likely to, but should not, be squandered through Palestinian dereliction or malevolence. First, immediately following the vote, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expressed the contingent nature of U.S. support for the Palestinian elections. She said, "The Palestinian people have *apparently* voted for change, *but* we believe that their aspirations for peace and a peaceful life remain unchanged" (Rice, 2006b). According to Rice, "the positive" aspect of the election was "that the Palestinian people went to the polls in large numbers; they voted and they voted peacefully" (Rice, 2006c). The presupposed negatives, then, are that Palestinians are violent and will not vote, and when they do, they will elect someone the U.S. considers unacceptable and unlikely to fulfill "the obligations of a Palestinian government."

Canadian officials echoed the U.S. position. Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay (2006) withdrew from Canada's "full support" of the Palestinian government to a policy of critical review of "all funding," including "humanitarian aid," in

light of "the statements and actions of a new government." Similarly, newly elected Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2006) said "future assistance to any new Palestinian government will be reviewed ... on an ongoing basis."

Media texts and political statements in both Canada and the United States consistently established Palestinians as solely responsible for peace. The texts give little suggestion of the hope of such an outcome, undermining the opportunity for peace by consistently representing the Palestinians as likely to fail to seize this potential.

Palestinian failure

The discursive blaming of Palestinians for regional violence and the failure to achieve peace is most pronounced with respect to the coverage of the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Hamas's 2006 parliamentary election victory. The characterization of the radical, belligerent Palestinian is pervasive even in situations where Israeli and Western positions support Palestinian peace initiatives. Thus, when Israel withdraws from contested ground, Palestinians spurn the opportunity for peace and respond with violence. For example, one *Vancouver Sun* story reported that:

Despite the [Israeli] government's decision [to withdraw], or perhaps because of it, there has been a steady increase in the number of Palestinian attacks in and from Gaza in recent weeks. Radical Palestinian groups jockeying for power have claimed their attacks have "forced" Israel to leave Gaza. This has in turn given ammunition to those Israelis who oppose the withdrawal, who insist Sharon's fragile coalition government is giving in to terrorists. (Fisher, 2004a)

This text suggests that unnamed "radical Palestinians" are unconvinced by Israeli government concessions and believe Israel was "'forced' ... to leave Gaza" because of increased Palestinian attacks.

The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza is constructed as an act of peace returned with Palestinian violence. Radical Palestinian groups strategically employ Israeli acts of peace to justify violence and disavow Israeli victimization (Cohen, 2001). Palestinian violence is isolated and without context; it is fundamentally misdirected, purposeless. *The Sun* represents Palestinians as an irrational, unruly mob, turning guns against themselves as well, with "violent power struggles playing out in the streets of Gaza among militant groups, gangs and security forces vying to come out on top after the withdrawal" (Nessman, 2004b). This positioning of Palestinian violence provides Israelis with political and rhetorical resources to challenge conciliatory policies that give ground to the enemy.

In contrast to discourses of Palestinian strategic malevolence, Israeli hard-line responses to the Hamas victory are depicted as logical and neutral, the natural response to Palestinian action not an independent escalation of belligerence. During its coverage of the parliamentary election, for example, *The Times* reported that:

Hamas' victory virtually ruled out a resumption of stalled peace efforts, and could push Israel to take further unilateral moves to set its permanent borders, after last year's Gaza pullout.

In Israel, the Hamas victory is almost certain to give a boost in March elections to Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the hard-line conservative Likud bloc and an opponent of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

"The right wing in Israel will be the clear beneficiaries of these [Palestinian] elections," said David Makovsky, director of the Middle East peace project at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He predicted Netanyahu would launch a new campaign blaming the rise of Hamas on the decision by Sharon to withdraw from Gaza (Hamas Win, 2006).

Palestinians are constructed as acting against their own best interests and the interests of peace. The Israelis simply respond reasonably to the Palestinians' election of the 'wrong' party.

Texts describing Hamas's electoral gains slight context to depict monochromatic Palestinian behavior and forecast near-certain conflict. This coverage often alludes to and contrasts recent prospects for peace with a near-certain violent future. One vivid example points to "six months ago, [when] there was optimism" and violence had "dropped nearly to zero ... 'People felt we were getting into a new era and they would prosper,' [economic consultant Ali] Badwan says. 'But all of a sudden it crumbled like a sand castle on a beach'" (Murphy, 2006).

This metaphor suggests a wave of intemperate Palestinian votes crushing the fragile sandcastle of hope. The representation of violence as a natural and inevitable phenomenon ultimately destroys delicate prospects for peace (Galtung, & Fischer, 2004; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). *The Seattle Times* used another violent image to represent the Hamas victory; it sent a "shock wave throughout the Middle East on Thursday as Israeli and Arab leaders indicated that prospects for peace talks were bleak" (Hamas Win, 2006). Here the wave follows an explosive force, obliterating peace prospects and catapulting the region toward hopelessness. These waves of disappointment and failure recur throughout the discourses, consistently repressing anything but a hopeless future.

Palestinians as a Future Threat

Representations of Palestinians as a future threat pervade media and government elite discourses surrounding three significant potential steps toward peace—two democratic elections and withdrawal from contested territory. Reliance on securitization discourse contributes significantly to the overall representation of conflict in the region, emphasizing the problematization of the Palestinians, extending it into the future, and generalizing it beyond particulars. The discourse of threat casts the Palestinian/Israeli conflict as a "Palestinian" problem that projects a threat into the future. Characterizations of Palestinians as a future threat become salient within the context of prior Palestinian failures.

The representation of a Palestinian threat "functions in multiple ways to construe a particular version of future reality" (Dunmire, 2005, p. 481). Such representations can be found in coverage by *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Seattle Times* of the Gaza withdrawal and the Palestinian elections. Discursive strategies define a future reality to privilege a specific version of the present that reinforces Palestinians as the problem (Hebdige, 1993; Dunmire, 2005).

Coverage of the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza represents the withdrawal as a highly politically contested Israeli policy. The securitization discourse in these representations simultaneously articulates the Palestinians as a future threat and questions the wisdom of the withdrawal. The withdrawal is represented as the precondition for the emergence of an elevated Palestinian threat. *The Sun* reported inchoate "concern that Islamic militant opposition groups could try to seize power if Israel pulls out of the Gaza Strip" (Nessman, 2004a). Similarly, *The Seattle Times* stated in unattributed text that "weapons flowing through the tunnels are now being used ...to arm a future Hamas force that may try to take over the Gaza Strip" (Prusher, 2004). *The Sun* also repeatedly employed the term "chaos" to signify Palestinian infighting. One headline in *The Sun* reported, "chaos among rival factions feared if Israel does withdraw from Strip" (Barzak, 2004).

Coverage during the Palestinian elections provides additional examples of Palestinians as future threat. *The Vancouver Sun* reported that "two of Abbas's bodyguards were killed during about five minutes of wild shooting, which provided a *dark hint of what may lie ahead* during a campaign that many have predicted will be plagued by violence" (Fisher 2004b, emphasis added). Hamas often functions as a primary signifier of the Palestinian threat even if the party's political bid is unsuccessful and even when violence does not occur. For example, *The Seattle Times* reported that "even if support for Hamas is weaker, the group could undermine Arafat's successor" (Nissenbaum, 2004a). *The Vancouver Sun* coverage reported that

although there has been very little of the Palestinian-on-Palestinian violence that had been predicted, Hamas has demonstrated that it can undermine Abba's leadership any time it wants by sharply increasing the number of mortar and rocket attacks on Israeli troops and Jewish settlements" (Fisher, 2005a).

The pervasive future Palestinian threat provides discursive resources to justify pre-emptive Israeli military interventions to prevent harm to Israeli civilians. The threatening future serves to legitimize Israeli actions and undermine Palestinian claims of victimization. As Dunmire (2005) suggests, "this projection of the future represents an eventual or potential reality that functions in the present as a rationale for a more immediate course of action" (p. 484).

Israel's Actions are Justified

Justification of Israel's violent actions comes not only from previously stated claims of victimization and pre-emption. The justification also arises from a culture that negatively portrays the Palestinian perspective and marginalizes Palestinian voices. Such media representations support increasingly aggressive action by the Israeli government and people, against the Palestinians.

In one dramatic example, a *Vancouver Sun* story quoted Ariel Sharon, who said Arafat's "ideological basis was the murder of Jews and the destruction of Israel" (Edwards & Alberts, 2004). Another *Sun* reported that Hamas, which Canada and some other western countries branded a terrorist organization, had quickly announced an intention to avenge the deaths (Fisher, 2005e).

In a *Seattle Times* story, Benjamin Netanyahu invoked images of September 11th to link terrorism in the United States to the political struggles between Israel and Palestine. The story elaborated a bleak future reality: "'The state of Hamastan is being created before our eyes,' Netanyahu said, 'a satellite of Iran in the image of the Taliban.'" (Hamas Win, 2006).

The quote aligns Israel and the United States against an Arab/Muslim wave of terror. *The Times* not only presents this perspective but gives it prominence and credibility through direct quotation of Israeli elites early in stories, and through the application of noble and legitimating qualifiers to Israeli political actors. In contrast, no legitimating qualifications are applied to representatives of Hamas or the Palestinian territories when they are included in the discourse. Rather, *The Times* discredits Palestinian actors by challenging or denigrating their position or their motivations (see Fisher, 2006d; Hamas' Apparent, 2006; Hamas Win, 2006). This contributes to a representation of Palestinian elections as a step toward greater strife and terrorism.

However well Hamas actually fared in the elections, a strong showing of the radical Islamic party – which calls for the destruction of Israel – is represented as a seismic shift in Palestinian politics and a stiff challenge for the Jewish state, Canada, the United States and the European Union. As Carroll (2005) showed, certain political situations help frame the information around us. Similarly, Steuter (1990) demonstrated the tendency of the press to reiterate the dominant governmental protocol.

While Israeli Army Radio quoted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz to establish that Israel had not yet decided what its response to the dramatic Palestinian election results would be, *The New York Times* quoted Israel's acting prime minister, Ehud Olmert, saying, "I will not negotiate with a government that does not meet its most basic obligations – to fight terrorism." (Fisher, 2006b)

But Olmert, who was campaigning for Israel's own election, was quoted in the media as saying that Israel was very willing to assist the Palestinian Authority if it met its commitments to disarm terrorists. This same coverage portrayed Israel and the West as being in a quandary over what to do with democratically elected deputies from Hamas, which boasted scores of bloody terrorist attacks and refused to renounce violence (Fisher, 2006b).

These examples demonstrate the characterization that the Palestinians have brought violence and retribution upon themselves. This type of characterization comes not only from the Israeli people or Israeli government but echoes through the media and elite discourse in the U.S., Canada and the West.

'Our views on Hamas are very clear,' White House spokesman Scott McClellan told reporters. 'We do not deal with Hamas. Hamas is a terrorist organization. Under current circumstances I don't see any change in that.'

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said a western demand that Hamas be excluded from the cabinet unless it renounces violence, disarms and accepts Israel's right to exist was still 'operative' (Fisher, 2006b).

These characterizations of Palestinians recurrently justified specific Israeli acts of conflict. Thus, the *Vancouver Sun* reported: "The war on terror is not over, and will take place every day and in every place. It is the natural right of the Jewish nation, as it is the right of any peoples, to hunt down those who wish to exterminate them" (Edwards & Alberts, 2004).

Israel justified its refusal to transfer taxes and duties legally owed to the Palestinian Authority because "Olmert said his government could not tolerate 'a situation in which money transferred by the government of Israel will somehow end up in the control of murderous elements'" (Fisher, 2006c).

These examples characterize the Palestinian people and their acts in ways that limit Israeli responses to continued violence. These texts project an almost singular duty upon Israelis to fight Palestinian initiatives, especially those that condone terror and violence. In this context, conflict seems endless and peace impossible.

Lazar and Lazar (2004) noted the power of such justifications to perpetuate acts of terror, violence and conflict between two countries. Hallin (1986) would argue that such media coverage reflects the domestic government ideology of both the U.S. and Canada. Liebes (1992) also found that media supports distant violence that benefits the domestic government.

Conclusion

Through this research, we entered the debate about the relationships and differences between the United States and Canada and their media. In line with Ismael and Measor (2003), our findings show that discourses of the two nations represented the Palestinians and the Israelis in similar ways. This finding requires neither that the two countries share the same culture nor that each nation-state has a unitary and homogenous culture. Rather, our assertion is both more limited and more complex. We argue that, as the old adage holds, the exceptions prove the rule; much-touted differences between the Canadian and American cultures mask a deep and abiding shared set of values and assumptions about the West, about the Other, and about the role of these two North American allies in the world. We find, like Carroll (2005), that it is "political and social circumstances [that] shape the ways in which knowledge is created and received" (p. 9/10) and disseminated through the media.

The overriding narrative consistent in the elite discourse and the two papers throughout the various events ascribes legitimacy to Israeli actions while simultaneously de-legitimizing Palestinian moves within the framework of creating peace. Both papers and government officials represented the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as resolvable through reasonable Palestinian action. Discourses consistently established that the Israelis were doing everything they could to move the peace process forward. The onus rested upon the Palestinians to make the next move. Instead of moving forward and creating progress toward peace, however, the Palestinians were represented consistently as making poor decisions that squandered opportunities derailed the peace process and undermined their own interests. Failure to seize opportunities for peace constituted Palestinians as a future threat and justified Israeli "preemptive" aggression.

The discursive characterizations are by no means uniform or systematically homogeneous. The degree to which represen-

tations emphasized or increased the stridency and dualism within the overriding narrative differs among the two newspapers and the government elites. For example, *The Vancouver Sun* is more insistent and consistent than *The Seattle Times* in its evocation of these discourses.

Nonetheless, this study identifies a strongly consistent set of discourses across three political events, in two different papers, and in the discourse of political elites in both countries that challenges asserted fundamental cultural differences between Canada and the United States. This conclusion is limited by the relatively narrow scope of this study. Future research to explore these issues in greater detail and breadth will permit richer elaboration of potentially significant deviations from the overriding narrative and might reflect and constitute differences in the cultures of the Canada and the United States, their governments, and their newspapers.

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