

The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Comparative Analysis on the Language of Occupation

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Abstract: The Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the issue of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories have not been resolved since the 1940s. Despite efforts for reconciliation, the Israelis and Palestinians are yet to reach a final peace agreement. A wide variety of views and opinions have been expressed on the issue but it remains a question of how both Palestinian and Israeli societies have communicated on it. This paper analyzed the language discourse of 10 texts-2 speeches by the countries' political leaders, 4 online newspaper articles and 4 online articles written by Palestinian and Israeli writers. A comparison was then made on the discourses used by both parties. The study found that similar forms of racial discourse to justify their feelings of prejudice of each other were used in political speeches and online texts. While the discourse of power was obvious in the political speeches, the discourse of prejudice was amplified in the online newspapers and articles.

Key words: Racial Discourse • Ideology • Political Speech • Online Text

INTRODUCTION

Peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine and a resolution over the conflict between the two countries have been attempted over the years but to no avail. The media have presented many views and opinions on the matter but information on the racial discourse used by the Palestinian and Israeli societies when addressing the issue is still limited. Hence, this paper analyzed and compared the language discourse of 10 related English texts-2 speeches by the countries' political leaders, 4 online newspaper articles and 4 online articles written by Palestinian and Israeli writers.

[1] said that the ideology of communicators is often evident in their language discourse. Along with attitudes and intentions, speakers' underlying ideologies often result in racial discourse structures. [2: 351] defined racial discourse as "a form of discriminatory social practice that manifests itself in text, talk and communication." This discourse may have resided in speakers' long term memory as a result of previous experience, knowledge and

understanding. They are then produced to influence readers' or listeners' beliefs. As members of social groups, such embedded cognitive process and language structures are shared and exercised in a certain context that will then result in social power and inequality [3].

Racial discourse appears in informal communications, organizational dialogues and multimedia communications. These include scholarly publications, news reports and TV shows [2, 4, 5]. The characteristics of informal communication racist discourse tend to differ from the formal ones. In informal communication, there would be no constraint on speakers to be direct and to clearly enhance the negative aspects of the 'Other'. Impolite forms of address that explicitly express superior and lack of respect and active structures to focus on 'Others' as the 'Doer' will also be used [1, 5].

However, much racist discourse directed at dominated ethnic group tends to be subtle and indirect as any blatant form of verbal discrimination is generally found to be 'politically incorrect' [1]. In subtle racial discourse, discrimination or prejudice is often expressed

through a positive representation of ‘Ourselves’, combined with the negative portrayal of ‘Them’ [2]. The speakers also tend to include an ‘apparent’ or a ‘disclaimer’ such as “we have nothing against, but” as “a form of face-keeping and impression management”. In a formal context, passive structures are commonly used to focus on Events [1].

There are usually contextual constraints on the speakers to use racial discourse in organizational dialogues such as in Parliamentary Debates. This is because the dialogues are public and official. Self-control may be evident but argumentation will be an overall strategy to show positive self-representation and negative other-representation. In the arguments, generalizations from single cases are often made and statements of reversal racism such as “Not they, but we are the real victims...” are often used as a defensive manoeuvre to preserve a positive self-image [1, 4].

According to [6], racism tends to be prevalent and the issues are sometimes intensified in the media language discourse. The mainstream media tend to side with the powerful party whose ideology is adopted because it “partly follows the movement of the elite and popular forms of resentment against the ‘Other’ by emphasizing ‘Their’ negative characteristics and ‘Our’ good ones” [6:39]. The liberal media on the other hand, slightly differs from the mainstream media by occasionally admitting that ‘They’ also may be the victims. [6] and [7] mentioned that the media has the persuasive power to control ideological reproduction of the population at large as well as manufacturing public consent. The persuasive power of the media is particularly effective if its reporting is consistent with the interests of most readers.

Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- examine how the Palestinians communicate on the issue of occupation and the Israelis and
- investigate how the Israelis on the other hand, communicate on the issue of occupation and the Palestinians

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the purpose of this study, 10 English written texts were analysed and compared using [5]’s theory of racial discourse. The texts were:

- A political speech made by the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas.
- A political speech made by the Israel Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.
- 2 Palestinian online newspaper articles.
- 2 Israeli online newspaper articles.
- 2 online articles written by Jewish writers.
- 2 online articles written by Muslim writers.

Limitations of Study: Only 10 online written texts that were written in English were analyzed. Arabic texts were not included in this study.

RESULT

Racial Discourse in Political Speeches:

- Both leaders mainly focused on the use of ‘Us’ instead of ‘Them’. For instance:

“Our people in particular, our homeland, Palestine and our region, the Middle East, are facing dangerous problems that continue to push them into the corner of violence and conflict, wasting chance after chance to seriously address the issues faced by the peoples of the region and to attain comprehensive and genuine solutions. This is the result of the mentality of expansion and domination, which still controls the ideology and policies of Israel, the occupying Power, which continues to occupy our land and which has made non-compliance with resolutions of international legitimacy, including UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions its prevailing policy” [8].

“The same UN that cheered Israel as it left Gaza and promised to back our right of self-defense now accuses us-my people, my country-of war crimes. And for what? For acting responsibly in self-defense. What a travesty!” [9].

- The language discourse shows similar ideologies of protecting own rights and achieving peace. However, the discourse to discriminate the ‘Other’ was used differently by the political leaders. In contrast to the Palestinian leader, the Israeli leader was not so subtle in expressing his prejudice, despite the political context he was in. For example:

“This illegal blockade and aggression have resulted in the destruction of the infrastructure and productive capacity of Gaza and destroyed 25% of its homes and nearly 75% of its livelihoods, leading to widespread unemployment and dependence on international aid” [8]

Conversely, “Israel justly defended itself against terror. This biased and unjust report is a clear-cut test for all governments. Will you stand with Israel or will you stand with the terrorists?” and “That was no easy task because the terrorists were firing missiles from homes and schools, using mosques as weapons depots and ferreting explosives in ambulances. Israel, by contrast, tried to minimize casualties by urging Palestinian civilians to vacate the targeted areas” [9].

- The Palestinian leader used mostly positive self-presentation to gain support while the Israeli leader tended to use the negative other- presentation + positive self-presentation. To illustrate:

“Our people, despite the depth and extent of suffering they have endured, hold steadfast to their rights, their land and their national soil. At the same time, they are determined to restore national unity between the two parts of our homeland. We are exerting every effort to restore unity through dialogue and through the good, honorable efforts by brothers and friends, especially the Arab Republic of Egypt” and “In spite of all of this and despite the historic injustice that has been inflicted upon our people, their desire to achieve a just peace which guarantees the achievement of their national rights in freedom and independence has not and will not diminish and our wounded hands are still able to carry the olive branch from the rubble of the trees that the occupation uproots every day. Our people aspire to live in security, peace and stability on their Palestinian national soil to build the life and future of our generations” [8].

In contrast, “In 2005, hoping to advance peace, Israel unilaterally withdrew from every inch of Gaza. It dismantled 21 settlements and uprooted over 8,000 Israelis. We didn't get peace. Instead we got an Iranian backed terror base fifty miles from Tel Aviv. Life in Israeli towns and cities next to Gaza became a nightmare. You see, the Hamas rocket attacks not only continued, they increased tenfold. Again, the UN was silent” and “We are not strangers to this land. It is our homeland.

As deeply connected as we are to this land, we recognize that the Palestinians also live there and want a home of their own. We want to live side by side with them, two free peoples living in peace, prosperity and dignity. But we must have security. The Palestinians should have all the powers to govern themselves except those handful of powers that could endanger Israel” [9].

Racial Discourse in Online Newspapers: Palestinian newspapers displayed positive self-representation and negative other representation by linking the occupation to history, religion and abuse of rights. For example, in [10, 11]:

- On the path to achieve their goals, the Zionists fought six wars, killing and displacing Palestinians inside or even outside Palestine, who escaped to safety in Lebanon.
- Even if we endorse the belief of the Jews that the land was given to Ibrahim and his children, then the Arabs have a right to the land as well because Ismaceel (Ishmael), the second son of Abraham, is one of their great grandfathers.
- The Canaanites and Philistines, who accepted Christianity during the Byzantine era and subsequently Islam, are the same people who continued to inhabit the area until 1948 and for the last 4500 years.
- Millions of refugees, brutally uprooted from their ancestral homeland in order to create a "national homeland" for the followers of Judaism.
- Our people are not going to give up their inalienable rights just because present international conditions are not conducive to extricating our rights from the racist Israeli entity.
- They were savagely uprooted by Zionist gangs when the deformed brat known as Israel was born more than 60 years ago.
- Giving up the right of return under the brunt of international conditions is tantamount to committing fornication or adultery with our rights, especially the right of return.”
- Israeli newspapers also clearly enhanced the negative aspects of the ‘Other’ by linking them to state security, terrorism and the feeling of *Islamophobia*. For instance in [12] and [13]:

- Any Palestinian state would embolden and strengthen al Qaeda and other terrorist enemies of the United States. What once was a basically secular nationalist territorial dispute between Israel and its Arab neighbors has become a primary battlefield in a no-holds-barred international jihad. Failure to understand this could render moot all current U.S.-led counterterrorist operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and altogether mock both wars' objectives.
- Several of the Arab states are still preparing for war with Israel and that a new Arab state in Judea/Samaria/Gaza would open another hot border for the Jewish state.
- If "Palestine" should provide the essential incentive for an Arab/Islamic war against Israel, a war that would end with the actual use of nuclear weapons, it could wind up as "Armageddon."
- Once any such state was established, the predictable cycle of anti-Israel terrorism, Israeli blockade and Palestinian counter blockade would plainly accelerate.
- Any state of Palestine would quickly become a primary launching point for both "ordinary" terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, or mega-terrorism. Such terror-violence, in fact, could be directed not only at Israel, but also at the United States.
- We do not ask for your sympathy nor your money; we ask for the most basics of human rights. Replacing your crimes with other crimes will bring you neither peace nor prosperity. Make no mistake about it: you are complicit in this crime and history will not forgive.

Similarly, the Israeli writers used the same approach. For examples [16] and [17] wrote:

- Palestine was occupied for nearly 2,000 years. The only people who ever established a sovereign nation in this part of the world and a unique civilization, were cast out into the deserts of Arabia and the Ghettos of Europe, degraded and persecuted."
- The historic connection of the Jews to our land was almost universally recognized and understood by Christian and Muslim alike, though Christian replacement theology insisted that the inheritance of the land had been taken from the Jews as punishment.
- Our (and by "our" I mean all targets of Muslim extremist groups) enemies have repeatedly stated that their goal is to destroy us, to Islamicize the world. As long as we continue to consider our enemies "the misunderstood little boy next door," no matter how many times he drowns our kittens and sets our garage on fire, we will lose this battle.

Racial Discourse in Online Articles: The Palestinians writers clearly had less constraint in showing negative other representation, positive self-representation and admitted to be the victims of events. For examples [14] and [15] wrote:

- Thieves are always afraid of retribution, they're always worried; they're captivated with fear which is exactly how the average Israeli feels.
- Any person around the world has the right to defend his home and family when attacked, however, in the West a Palestinian does not have that right despite that his home and farms were stolen by Holocaust survivals.
- The right to defend anybody's home is one of the most basic of human rights, however, when a Palestinian defends his home, he becomes a "terrorist" automatically and any Israeli retaliation is justified. In the Western media, a Palestinian has one and only one right: to die silently.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis done in this study indicates that on the issue of the occupation of Palestinian territories, racism is delivered by both Palestinians and Israelis in both formal and informal contexts. Both parties generally used the same approach of creating a positive self-image of one-self and claiming to be the victim of the other by using the positive representation of 'Ourselves' and negative portrayal of 'Them'. This approach corroborates with the racial discourse explained by [1-7, 18].

However, the analysis shows that there is a possibility for a speaker to be direct in his verbal discrimination despite of him being in a formal organizational context. This is contrary to what was said by [1] that speakers usually have self-control and subtleness in such a context. This approach may have been deliberately applied to influence the listeners' beliefs, preserve a positive self-image and assert a social

power as explained by [3, 4]. The findings, however, support the literature such as [6, 7] in saying that racial discourse is more evident in the contexts of media than in formal contexts.

All in all, both Palestinians and Israelis delivered their ideology and prejudice towards each other using similar racial discourses of presenting negative 'other' and positive 'self'. The subtleness of the racial discourses used by both parties on each other and on the issue of occupation was largely determined by the context the message is delivered. It is suggested that unless these discourses are changed, the chances of resolving the conflict between the two countries will remain slim.

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